

The Freethinker

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A RECENT RADIO PROGRAMME was rather unusual. The World Council of Churches (an international body which represents most Protestant denominations in this country) broadcast a report on the shocking conditions in the Portuguese Colony of Angola in South West Africa. It is now generally known that this colony is the theatre of a particularly ferocious internal conflict, one which stems from the African revolution against the European regime.

A number of Christian (mostly Protestant) speakers, successively described conditions in Angola, and all, without exception, demanded an immediate cessation of the apparently ruthless operations conducted by the Portuguese military authorities against the Negro revolt. It appeared that recent events had disturbed the "Christian conscience" to such an extent that the World Council of Churches had demanded, and had obtained, an interview with the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Home, presumably to induce that Minister (who has recently returned from Lisbon), to put pressure on our oldest ally to modify the ferocity of the repressive measures taken by Dr. Salazar's subordinates in Angola. I would suggest that this broadcast is of great social interest from several points of view, and by no means only to Christians.

Angola and Africa

From the general run of information that has reached this country in recent months, it would appear that the conflict in Angola has been marked by acts of extreme cruelty on both sides, but chiefly on the part of the Portuguese Colonial administration, which naturally disposes of much heavier armaments than do the Angola guerrillas in the jungle. Systematic devastation, often by the most atrocious means, napalm bombing, etc., appears to be the normal routine of the Portuguese army. Nor does there seem to be much doubt that the patriarchal type of Colonial administration still conducted by the oldest Imperialism to occupy African soil—Portugal has been established in Angola since the 16th century—is outmoded, inefficient and often extremely brutal in its methods; or that the aborigines native to Angola have substantially justified reasons for resentment, redress and reform. In any case, politically speaking, Africa is in the throes of a social and racial revolution of continental dimensions, and this has now awakened the negro serfs of the clerical-fascist regime of Dr. Salazar. Confronted with this racial war, and with the often ferocious repression to which it gives rise, Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, and in particular the local African missions of the Churches, find themselves faced with the urgent need for some drastic change in their traditional strategy and tactics in formerly colonial lands, without which, they are doomed to disappear along with the now fast-disappearing colonial regimes themselves.

Christian Missions and Colonial Imperialism

Humanity is, very fortunately, not confined to any particular cult or creed. Hence, one must respect the present

initiative of the World Council of Churches which aims to put an end to the appalling atrocities practised in Angola; atrocities only too reminiscent of the now legendary horrors committed earlier in this century by the Belgian satellites of the late King Leopold "the Unloved", in the neighbouring Congo. The only criticism that is perhaps permissible is that it is rather late in the day, since colonialism and its excesses are not new in Africa. That

shrewd old cynic, the late Dean Inge, once remarked that the present-day zeal of Christian Socialists for the hard lot of the workers would have been more impressive if the Christian Churches had taken an interest in social reform

before the workers got the vote. Similarly, the Christian missionaries in Africa (and elsewhere) might surely have discovered and denounced the manifest and manifold evils attendant upon colonial subjugation before the present tremendous growth of African nationalism had put Africa on the political map. For in past centuries, far from deprecating colonial conquest and its habitual excesses, Christian missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, have, so to speak, marched ahead of the encroaching Imperialists. For was it not the Borgia Pope Alexander VI, who (1493) divided the then newly-discovered colonial world between Spain and Portugal? And it was with the blessing and active support of the Catholic Church that the Spaniards conquered, and ruthlessly exploited America, whilst simultaneously, the Portuguese plundered India and occupied Angola, where they still remain with the blessing and world-wide support of the Vatican for the pious regime of the present Portuguese Dictator, that ex-pupil of the Jesuits, Dr. Salazar. (Has not Heaven itself indicated its marked approval for Catholic Portugal by the recent appearances of the Virgin at Fatima?). Whilst in the field of Protestant missions, it will perhaps be sufficient to recall here the interesting fact that the second Opium War (1854-5) against China was caused by the high-handed policy of Sir John Bowring, which ended in a Treaty of Peace that laid it down *inter alia* that (a) opium was to be freely sold in China—to the ruin of Chinese bodies—and (b) that the Gospel was to be freely preached in all parts of the Celestial Empire—to the salvation of Chinese souls! Sir John, then British consul-general in Canton was a famous hymn-writer and author of *A Memorial Volume of Sacred Poetry*. Many similar examples could be given.

Christian Missions and the Racial Question

However, all that was a long time ago. The present century has seen startling manifestations of what a modern publicist has aptly termed the "Rising Tide of Colour". First in Asia, then in Africa, now in Latin America, the revolt against Colonial Imperialism is spreading like the proverbial house on fire. Into the political implications of this racial war, this is not the place to enter, but it is surely evident that certain actions of Christian missions in the past, both those mentioned above and other more recent ones, of active collaboration between colonialist

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Christian Missions and the African Revolution

By F. A. RIDLEY

regimes and the Gospel, are scarcely calculated to endear the religion of their former oppressors to the new, acutely anti-colonialist regimes in Asia, Africa and the Americas. The major problem before Christian missions in these continents today, is to live down their imperialist past, and in particular to acclimatise Christianity to racial traditions and to social cultures which often differ widely from those customary among the white races. One would probably be justified in adding that, failure to achieve a transformation along such lines, will mark the end of Christianity as a missionary religion, for it will give way inevitably either to more adaptable religions such as Islam (which is now said to be making rapid headway in Africa), or to local racial cults such as the Negro Christianity with the exclusively black Christ.

The Christian Dilemma

The current dilemma of Christian missions is indicated for example, by the remarkable success of Protestant missions in Latin America, where Catholicism has had

a monopoly since the Spanish Conquest, and where the Church herself has long been the exploiter-in-chief. In present-day China, the bitter memories of imperialist exploitation in the past, and of the role of the missionaries both Protestant and Catholic, has led to the effective exclusion of both the Catholic successors of the Jesuits and of the Protestant successors of Sir John Bowring of pious—opium—memory. Whilst in Africa, the (white) Christ of the missionaries, is evidently on the way out to be presently succeeded by Islam or the black Christ or Atheism (at present said to be growing rapidly amongst the educated classes in the new post-colonialist Africa)! What are the Christian missions going to do about this situation? In Angola they—or at least the Protestant missions—appear to be making a serious effort to dissociate themselves from the declining colonialist regime. But the problem goes far beyond Angola: it is an African, even a world-wide one, for white religions cannot now long hope to survive white rule in the secular sphere.

Father Myerscough and the North East Martyrs

By I. S. LOW

THE MID-20TH CENTURY has many oddities; one of the strangest is the fact that the Roman Catholic priest has become romantic. Novelists like Graham Greene depict him fleeing through tropical forests and across mountain ranges from persecuting governments, at the same time filled with fear of the Divine Wrath—a blend of Orestes and the Scarlet Pimpernel. One of the most interesting of this type of book is *The Martyrs of Durham and the North East* by Fr. Myerscough (John S. Burns & Sons, Glasgow) telling the story of how priests and other Catholics in this region were hunted, imprisoned and killed by the Tudor governments.

"How great must have been their faith" one feels, "suffering so much for their religion". But when one reads Fr. Myerscough's book one begins to wonder if they had so much faith after all.

For many of them, at one time or another, forsook the Catholic religion! Some like Fr. Ackricke of Richmond even took lucrative posts with the wicked State Church. Fr. Myerscough says that they repented; but the moment of repentance was the Rising of the North—the rebellion of the Northern nobles in 1569, one of whose objects was to restore the Catholic religion as the official faith. Repentance then was obviously a good business proposition.

But even if they were martyrs very few were "of Durham". They came from Kent, London, Norfolk, Lancashire, Cumberland, Cornwall, Westmorland, Herefordshire, Northampton (one from Lancashire had the appropriate name of Cotton!). One even came from Scotland—at that time a foreign country.

Does this matter? Yes it does. It throws a revealing light on the whole business. Fr. Myerscough admits that the laws against priests were mainly against priests ordained abroad. Those not so ordained had a certain amount of freedom. In other words, the "martyrs" were persecuted not because of their religion but because they were looked upon as agents of enemy powers. Fr. Myerscough makes this clear when he tells how a certain Robert Bickerdike refused to answer when asked at his trial if he would fight for the King of Spain if that monarch invaded England.

One can realise this fact even more clearly when one remembers that most of the priests were trained at

Douai—the great Jesuit base for the Catholic re-conquest of England.

When one can check his facts one is not impressed by Fr. Myerscough as a historian. He praises the fire and success of the leadership of Thomas Percy in the Rising of the North. Other historians condemn the wavering incompetence of this Earl's "leadership" in no uncertain terms.

Among the few Northumbrian martyrs Fr. Myerscough mentions the Erringtons of Linnels near Gorbridge—wherever Gorbridge may be! (There is a beautiful little village called Corbridge near Hexham and Linnels in Northumberland; the fact that the misspelling occurs twice in the book at widely-separated places casts doubt on the knowledge of the locality of someone connected with the publication!)

If Fr. Myerscough had wanted to show priests in a heretic light he should have avoided showing them in situations nearly comic. One of these priests has to make a hurried exit from a certain building—and falls into a pond of muddy water! (The priest's name was Hart—As pants the Hart for cooling streams?—I think not.)

But this book is not funny. With approval Fr. Myerscough quotes one of the martyrs as saying that England could only be restored to the faith by bloodshed. The good Father comments ominously that this statement might be more appropriate to the present (1956 publication) than one might think. And should any Catholic reader object that the martyr in question made his statement meaning that he intended to sacrifice his own life for the Faith, may I ask whether Fr. Myerscough or anyone else believes that Catholics in present day Britain are likely to undergo martyrdom?

No-one wants to excuse persecution today. But when the Catholic Church, which has probably a worse record of persecuting people for their opinions than any other body, starts publishing romantic propaganda about the persecution of its own members, the non-Catholic reader is entitled to hear the other side. And supporters of freedom should hear it.

In his foreword to the book the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle says that Fr. Myerscough's sources of information are out of print and so not easily obtainable. Not checkable either!

Eight Religious Scientists

By COLIN McCALL

AN AMERICAN FRIEND has sent me an article from the *New York Journal-American* (Sunday, June 11th) purporting to give "5 Reasons Why Scientists Believe in God". These "reasons", assembled by Arthur Greenspan from statements by "eight of the nation's outstanding men of science", are: 1. The universe was created in an orderly, intelligent manner by a Supreme Being; 2. God is the source of all strength and inspiration; 3. Religion offers a code of ethics for mankind; 4. Science helps man achieve faith; and 5. There is no conflict between scientific discovery and religious faith. "For many years", says Mr. Greenspan, "scientists were generally believed to be atheists. Yet today, in the Scientific Sixties, when science is almost a way of life, this theory is no longer valid". It is no longer valid because, from the answers to the question, "Do scientists believe in God?", "one basic concept shows up clearly: Some Divine Power, beyond control of man, has shaped the universe".

Had Mr. Greenspan followed the example of Professor James H. Leuba and questioned 1,000 American scientists chosen at random, and arranged the answers statistically, it might have been of some value. Instead, not only is there no attempt at statistical presentation, there is a deliberate selection of men known for their religious beliefs. Mr. Greenspan admits this when he says, "Most of these scientific men first stated their feelings on this subject years ago. None have since seen any reason to change their views". It would be simple, I should think, to match the eight names with comparable ones of unbelieving scientists—certainly it would in Britain—but that wouldn't get us very far. It is not *what* the man believes that is important, but *why*. Let us look, then, at the five reasons listed above.

Four men, Dr. Werner von Braun, the rocket expert, Dr. Kirtley F. Mather, Professor Emeritus of Geology at Harvard University, Dr. William F. G. Swann, Director Emeritus of the Franklin Institute's Bartol Research Foundation at Philadelphia, and Dr. Edmund W. Sinnott, Dean Emeritus of the Yale Graduate School, all see some sort of "order" in the universe. I only wish I could see some sort of order in their statements on the matter. Take this by Dr. von Braun:

Anything as well ordered and perfectly created as is our earth and universe must have a Maker, a master designer. Anything so orderly, so perfect, so precisely balanced, so majestic as this creation can only be the product of a Divine Idea. There must be a Maker; there can be no other way. The "musts", "can only be", and "can be no other", make it a most foolishly dogmatic assertion. And the whole thing is tautological. Having already said that the earth and universe were created, and indeed calling them the "creation", Dr. von Braun then concludes, "There must be a Maker". Reduced to essentials, his argument is: the world was created, therefore it must have a Creator. Empirically, of course, the statement is unsupported. We can all give numerous examples to show lack of perfection and balance in this world. An earthquake will serve. Hardly "orderly", "perfect", or "precisely balanced", I should say, and if "majestic", only to a perverted eye.

Dr. von Braun never meets the basic objection to the design argument: that to prove design you must know intent. Nor does Dr. Swann who, "viewing the universe as a whole . . . cannot escape the fact that it is of intelligent design". Recovering from the initial shock of learning

that anyone could view "the universe as a whole", one reads then about "the failure to comprehend completely the universe which fills men of science with awe", and one wonders how Dr. Swann succeeded where all others failed. What vision, what comprehension he must have! "A marvellous thing about the universe" for this comprehensive viewer though, "is the apparent simplicity of its fundamental design". (What those last two words mean, I don't know.) It is, he says, "the simplicity of the perfect genius", but he doesn't elucidate.

Dr. Mather is almost as well acquainted with the universe as Dr. Swann. "Very evidently", for him, "the administration (of the universe) is involved in a programme of organisation", which "has proceeded in much the same way as would an intelligent, persevering and purposeful person". "You somehow belong to an administration of that sort," Dr. Mather tells me, but I assume he means *he* does.

I have no quarrel with Dr. Sinnott's description of science as "a persistent attempt to discover underlying regularities among the complex events in nature", but he is soon contrasting randomness and orderliness without appreciating that they are relative terms. "Order," he tells us, "suggests purpose" and, "As Sir James Jeans puts it, 'The universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine'." To which there is only one retort: what does "a great thought"—or even a little thought—look like?

For Nobel Prize-winning physicist Dr. Arthur H. Compton (writing on the second of the five reasons), "The true God is the goal which is found of real worth . . . the spirit that inspires his [man's] actions—that which gives him aspiration and purpose . . ." and "The false God is the desire which, when attained, does not bring satisfaction . . .". Neither of which is very tangible. Dr. Compton would probably call himself a Christian, but his religion (at least as expressed in this contribution) would seem to be largely ethical. Dr. James R. Killian Jr., Chairman of the Corporation of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is a declared Protestant, who considers faith in a divine power to be "fundamental to the health of any organised society" (reason 3), and finds it "profoundly reassuring" that "a body of unalterable law governs the universe" (reason 4). This misconception of a "lawgiver" can be found in several of the contributions and, strangely enough, it is Roman Catholic Dr. Victor F. Hess, Nobel Prize physicist of Fordham University, who corrects it. It is physicists, as he points out, who "formulate the so-called 'laws' of physics". But Dr. Hess doesn't really intend this as a correction of his fellow-contributors; he is concerned with showing unpredictability in a radium atom, and the reality of miracles. Must a scientist doubt the latter? he asks. "As a scientist I answer emphatically: No." This makes it my turn to correct Dr. Hess, He hasn't given us a scientific answer, but a Roman Catholic one.

Last, as first, is Dr. von Braun, still seeing "beauty and order" in God's creation", and admiring it "in humility" (reason 5). And I suppose it is good to know that he can be humble about something. After his dogmatic opening statement I was inclined to doubt it. What I still doubt is that these "eight outstanding men of science" are capable of scientific *thinking*. If they are, their contributions to the *New York Journal-American* belie it.

This Believing World

The enthronement (or is it "translation"?) of a new Archbishop of Canterbury was in the past only seen by comparatively few people; but Dr. Ramsey was very lucky in having his "election" televised so that millions of people could now see the ceremony. But was he really so lucky? Most of the proceedings were simply boring, particularly the Tudor-English "readings" which were as preposterously medieval as everything else. If the Bible had to be put into modern English, why not the rest of the wearisome twaddle which these Christian participants are obliged to suffer?

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For our part, Dr. Ramsey appeared to be, if not bored, at least unhappy. Not a smile was allowed to show his excessive joy at being made the hundredth Archbishop of Canterbury—the equal or almost the equal of the Pope. And in his brief speech we had the same dear old clichés which no doubt served his ninety-nine predecessors—"... the times are urgent and the days are evil". Did a Pope or an Archbishop ever have it otherwise? In any case, even if true, what can Dr. Ramsey do about it?

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We note with some amusement that "Psychic News" refers to Mrs. Eileen Garrett (is it for the 153rd time?) as "justly famous for her mediumship in the R101 case", and we agree that she is justly famous for it. The late Harry Price sat with her after the ill-fated airship was destroyed and, as his secretary could not make head or tale of the gibberish resulting, he concocted (or made up or invented) the story that she had contacted the unfortunate commander of the airship. It was a complete hoax, and in one of his autobiographies Harry Price admitted the "spirit" of the dead man did not "return". But any story about Mrs. Garrett reads well—as do so many of the impostures manufactured by mediums.

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Our weekly contemporary "Today" (June 24th) gave us an article describing what life will be like in the year 2000 AD, and though it claims that what will actually happen leaves George Orwell and H. G. Wells far behind, the book which describes a similar Utopia was not by these famous writers, but Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. In it you get almost the same dreams—all perfect of course—which will bring the usual "pie in the sky" hopes down to our earth. Unfortunately, Bellamy forgot the enormous rise in population bound to come in a perfect world, and his book faded out just like a dream.

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In the "Today" article it appears that "five per cent of the world's population will have emigrated into space by 2000 AD, taking with them no doubt our atmosphere, as well as our schools, hospitals, theatres, and so on. Well, there certainly will be plenty of room for a rapidly increasing population in "space"; but what about religion? Will a united Christianity dominate everybody with its central seat always in the Vatican? Will our Lord be worshipped in Venus—or what? *Today* gives no answer.

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The Rev. Frank Martin—hailed by the now defunct *Sunday Dispatch* as the Fighting Parson—claimed in one of its last numbers that "Now what we need is a Common Faith" meaning by "we" perhaps himself, and by "Faith", Christianity. He tells us that the "splintering" of Christendom is "not concerned with doctrine", but with "social, economic, and political" reasons. This is, of course, sheer nonsense. Do Protestants believe in the "Assump-

tion" of Mary, or in "Purgatory", for example? Do they believe a biscuit can be turned into the literal body of Christ at a word from a priest? These things are *doctrines*.

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In the meantime, the Roman Church headed here by Cardinal Godfrey wants everybody, even non-Catholics, to pray for a miracle to happen—a miracle which will cure a theological student of blindness. It may be very irrelevant to say so, but this looks to us as a mere publicity stunt for his Church. The student had already been to Lourdes and of course was *not* cured there; and failures at Lourdes are particularly bad publicity for Rome. Calling for prayers in this way means not only free columns about it in national journals—like the *Sunday Express* for June 18th—but interviews, etc., on the radio and TV. Better be attacked than be ignored is a very useful slogan for the Roman Church.

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Back to the English Church. We are told that shortage of women "hits the Church"—that is, "more than 100 parishes cannot get the female staff they need". And what is the cause? Why, that girls have better prospects of marriage than "face a long training for a career". Working for the sake of Jesus hasn't a chance where wedding-bells are anywhere near. It's all very saddening—but why not make some of the ladies who are very religious, bishops, or at least vicars? Why not dangle the hope that even Canterbury is not absolutely impossible for them? Women love the Church so much that they really ought to have the chance to "boss" it sometimes.

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As they are fully conforming Christians we are not surprised that the Queen and her husband had Dr. Billy Graham and his wife to tea. We are pretty certain they would never have asked Charles Darwin or—Heaven forbid!—Charles Bradlaugh. It just shows what a thorough belief in an Oriental religion will do for one of its advocates. Still, Darwin and Bradlaugh have their renown emblazoned in the World's Hall of Fame: as for the Rev. Billy—has he done anything whatever worth while by which he will really be remembered?

DEATH OF AUSTRIAN FREETHOUGHT LEADER
FRANZ RONZAL, who was for many years Chairman of the Austrian League of Freethinkers, died recently at the age of 88. Even as a young schoolteacher, under the Monarchy, he did outstanding work for Freethought in that predominantly Catholic country, and when, from June 1933 till the end of the second world war, his public life was interrupted first by the black, later by the brown brand of Fascism, like others, he continued his activities underground.

After 1945, he began, with a few remaining friends, to rebuild the Austrian League of Freethinkers. He also served for 15 years as mayor of Eichgraben near Vienna.

Old age and illness finally forced Ronzal's resignations, but in March this year, the Austrian Freethinkers elected him Honorary President. He was a man held in high esteem, not only by his many colleagues but also by many of his opponents, and in launching a "Franz Ronzal Memorial Fund", Austrian Secularists hope to keep alive the memory of this stalwart and well-loved Freethinker.

W.S.

NEXT WEEK

UNDER THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

By GABRIEL COCA (Spain)

THE FREETHINKER

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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. (Platt Fields), Sundays, 3 p.m.: Messrs. G. H. MILLS and G. A. WOODCOCK.

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INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street), Sunday, July 16th, 6.45 p.m.: D. H. TRIBE, "Consistory Courts and Bryn Thomas".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, July 16th, 11 a.m.: DR. D. STARK MURRAY, "Achieving 'the Normal' in Health".

Notes and News

THE VATICAN admitted recently that a "disturbing number" of Italian and French priests are leaving the Church (*Sunday Express*, 25/6/61) and that the drift has become such a problem that some bishops have set up centres for the care of "wayward" priests. The *Sunday Express* quoted Protestant sources suggesting that 5,000 Italian priests and more than 1,000 French priests have left the Roman Catholic Church in the past 15 years.

LACK OF PRIESTS is also a grave problem in Latin America, as Austrian author Eric von Kuchnelt-Leddihn reminded readers of the American Catholic magazine, *The Commonweal* (23/6/61). The latest figures showed a need for 140,000 additional priests due to "the scarcity of vocations and the large number of apostasies", he said. Indeed, the Church in Latin America was "in a very critical situation", for which "we too readily blame the native clergy, the arrogant foreigners, egoistic American films", etc., but "we should look for the real culprits in those much higher quarters who have known about the situation in Latin America for decades and have done nothing". Did Mr. Kuchnelt-Leddihn mean the Vatican?

THE MERMAID THEATRE is to present the London premiere of Sean O'Casey's *The Bishop's Bonfire*, on Wednesday, July 26th. The author tells us that it shows "an aspect of Irish life—the terrible fear of the sight of a lover and his lass among the rye or half-hidden in the bracken,

in a dance at the cross-roads, or walking together down a country road or lane; a land where Chastity has become one of the worst vices" and "the Roman Catholic Bishops are *ipso facto* the Government of the country".

A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD BOY who appeared before Nuneaton magistrates alleging that he had been bitten on the ankle by a dog, said that he did not know what a Bible was (*Leicester Evening Mail*, 29/6/61). The magistrates heard his evidence unsworn.

WE REPORTED in these columns on February 17th, that the Secretary of the National Secular Society was following up the case of a girl who absconded from a hostel managed by nuns because—she told the Willesden Juvenile Court—"I can't stand nuns", and yet was sent to an approved school run by nuns. "It would be contrary to practice", says the Home Office, "to furnish details of the girl's delinquencies and previous circumstances, but the Secretary of State has caused inquiries to be made and is informed that the girl has settled down well at her school, and takes a full and intelligent part in religious observances. It is open to her to make a request to be transferred to a different school, but she has made no such request".

AS A RESULT of a decision taken at its Annual General Meeting on May 31st, South Place Ethical Society has discontinued the practice of hymn-singing at the Sunday morning meetings in the Conway Hall, London.

"UNSUITABLE FOR PEAK SHOWING," "a controversial and delicate subject"; "could cause offence to many sections of the population". These are some of the excuses given to *The People's TV* critic, Kenneth Baily, when he inquired why the Granada documentary programme on birth control, "The Pill", was cancelled by Southern, Westward, Anglia and Ulster ITV stations. The programme had been passed by the Independent Television Authority and announced by all ITV stations, but people living in the four regions mentioned were not allowed to see it. "Why this last-minute fear"? There is little doubt that this is another example of timidity towards the Roman Catholic Church. Ulster's reference to "offence to many sections of the population" should in fact read, "offence to Roman Catholics". "The programme included an RC priest explaining the RC attitude to birth control", said Mr. Baily, so "Why couldn't Ulster's RCs be allowed to decide things for themselves"? But the more important question is, why should others be denied an educational programme for fear of offending an intolerant religious minority?

"WE HAVE HAD a lot of trouble over religious difficulties," said a sister at Selly Oak Hospital, Birmingham, when giving evidence in the High Court case where a mother of six children alleged negligence and breach of contract by a surgeon in an operation for sterilisation (*Birmingham Mail*, 5/7/61). "It was equally distressing for Catholics and non-Catholics", continued Sister Florence Davis. "We have even had interference from priests. A Catholic nurse would refuse to admit a patient if she knew she was to be sterilised. It was dreadful and it still goes on". It is dreadful, and it shouldn't be allowed to go on any longer. Far too much concession is made to the Roman Catholic "conscience". The first duty of nurses (Catholic or non-Catholic) is to nursing. As for priests, their job is to visit patients who want to see them and mind their own business about the rest. In fact, one of the major tasks facing man today is to tell the priest to mind his own business.

“Five Lives”

By H. CUTNER

(Concluded from page 215)

NOBODY WORKED HARDER for Bradlaugh than Annie Besant did when he tried to enter Parliament, and her “Parliamentary Jottings” and Bradlaugh’s “Rough Notes” were avidly read by the Secularists of the day. Full reports of the many meetings held all over the country which appeared in the *National Reformer* prove how Bradlaugh’s determined efforts to get into Parliament had roused the country.

And one of his many supporters was Dr. Edward B. Aveling, a brilliant scientist and lecturer, as well as a passionate orator. Aveling played a big part in the Free-thought Movement of the day, but his private character deteriorated so much that J. M. Robertson does not mention him in his monumental *History of Freethought*. He “married” Eleanor Marx, became a convinced Marxist, and eventually passed into—some people would call—well-merited obscurity. But he was a great friend of Annie Besant all the same.

It must be candidly owned that if Foote did not like Annie, she was never particularly impressed by his FREETHINKER which Mr. Nethercot calls “a small ribald weekly”—it was really at the time a monthly—and neither she nor Bradlaugh liked the “Comic Bible Sketches”—the humour of which incidentally never appealed to me either when I examined the early volumes for myself. But Mr. Nethercot gives an excellent summary of the early days of THE FREETHINKER and especially of Foote’s trial for blasphemy. The curious thing about this is that Annie Besant did help Foote in every way then, “but she was not long to continue to admire Foote’s particular methods of martyrdom”.

In the meantime, the *National Reformer* began to take “an immense interest in the East” particularly in Buddhism; and when Annie brought out her magazine *Our Corner*, which became famous for publishing George Bernard Shaw’s early novels, it also showed some concern for the occult, especially Spiritualism. All this is fully related in Mr. Nethercot’s book.

But Annie Besant began then to enter her “fourth” life, that in the world of Socialism. She had long noted the appalling poverty of millions of the “lower classes”, the slums they lived in, and the derisory wages so many worked for. In her attempt at improving Dr. Knowlton’s *Fruits of Philosophy*, she dealt with the way birth control could or might improve their lot, and her *Law of Population* had a great circulation. But she found that it was not enough. She heard the famous debate between Bradlaugh and Hyndman (who, by the way, saw in Bradlaugh “the most formidable and imposing platform figure in the country”). The debate “Will Socialism Benefit the English People?” was a great success, and Hyndman admitted that “according to the reaction of the audience and most of the newspapers, Bradlaugh had the better of him”. But of course in the long run, it would be Hyndman whose ideas would gain the day. The debate took place in 1884, and it certainly impressed Annie Besant—though by no means at first.

In any case, she began to see in Bernard Shaw something more than a “hanger-on” on the Socialist fringe, and her thoughts turned to Socialism; so much so indeed that the Socialist journal, *Justice*, gleefully claimed that “Mrs. Besant is finding it necessary to turn Socialist; but does not like anyone to tell her so”. She made up her mind however, became a Socialist in 1885, and joined the

Fabian Society which then had so many prominent members—Hubert Bland, John Burns, Stewart Headlam, William Morris, the Webbs, and many others equally well known. It was a great blow to Bradlaugh, always an aggressive anti-Socialist, but he loyally allowed her to continue writing for his journal.

Again Annie rode in triumph her new-found philosophy in the company of so many famous men, especially as she was considered by Bernard Shaw “as the greatest orator in England, and possibly in Europe”.

Here again one should turn to Mr. Nethercot’s sparkling pages for an account of all Annie’s activities on behalf of Socialism. Her debate with Foote in 1887 “Is Socialism Sound?” is only casually referred to in the *Five Lives*, but it still has some very interesting points on both sides. From the rather mild Socialism of the Fabians, Annie went to the Social Democrats and their left wing tactics, but she did not always have it her own way, and in particular disliked the scathing criticism of W. P. Ball in his *Mrs. Besant’s Socialism*. Ball later proved himself a keen Secularist, and wrote a great deal for THE FREETHINKER. He helped Foote to compile the *Bible Handbook*, an invaluable work for all Freethinkers, especially those brought up on the Bible who may have lingering doubts about its “inspiration”. But it should be recorded here that there was not just one Socialist camp then, but several, and these were not ready to work harmoniously with each other. Mr. Nethercot must have gone to immense pains to learn the various points of view of Quelch, Morris, Hyndman, Bland and the rest to give us such an informative chapter on Annie’s “fourth” life.

Her “fifth” was easily the most unexpected of them all. Thousands of us have worked our way from religion to Freethought, but it would take a lot more than Madame Blavatsky’s masterpiece, *The Secret Doctrine*, to turn us into Theosophists, after being unrepentant Freethinkers. But there is no doubt that the riddles still unsolved in our Materialist philosophy began to trouble her, and after reading the work she was absolutely certain that she had at last found the key to all the Mysteries. It was W. T. Stead who gave Annie the two volumes of *The Secret Doctrine* to review, and they completely bowled her over. Perhaps she had already been toying with “occultism” of one kind or another long before this—for Theosophy was not something new in 1888. Mme. Blavatsky had established it as far back as 1875 in America. Annie was deeply interested in the book and later met the author, and under the spell of that not-so-glamorous personality, she succumbed. At the time, there was a rather damning report of Mme. Blavatsky’s activities in India by Richard Hodgson for the Society for Psychical Research—though I have always thought that if the two “witnesses”, the Coulobms, who were supposed to be Blavatsky’s friends, had not “double crossed her” Hodgson would not have so easily triumphed. He was just as credulous as any Theosophist or Spiritualist.

Annie Besant’s subsequent activities as a Theosophist would require a volume, not a mere article to detail. Her relapse into “supernaturalism” deeply hurt Bradlaugh, and with him the members of the National Secular Society. They could perhaps understand her Socialism—but the mixture of Hindu and Oriental nonsense which she now swallowed was a little too much for most level-headed people. Annie herself once called some articles in the

Theosophical Magazine *Lucifer* "ravings". In any case, Foote wrote a scathing pamphlet, *Mrs. Besant's Theosophy*, which brought a very little known reply by Blavatsky herself, *The Thersites of Freethought*, a clever attack on Foote who did not at all like it. It "betrays" he said, "a dreadful ill temper". All readers must settle for themselves which of the two "won". However, just as Annie had soaked herself in Atheism, Socialism, and Malthusianism, so she wallowed thenceforth in the mysteries of the Occult, called Theosophy; though it must be confessed her path to this particular "philosophy" was never a rosy one.

Mr. Nethercot omits little in his accounts of Foote and Bradlaugh and Aveling as they touched on the life of Annie Besant; but I cannot deal with it all here. He is not afraid to admit that THE FREETHINKER still carries "the proud caption 'Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote'". If the reader wants a short, lucid, and authoritative account of The Theosophical Society, he will find it in the *Five Lives*. All its prominent personalities are described without bias.

Even the famous "Hail and Farewell" address given by Annie Besant to the NSS in 1891 is fully described. In it she claimed that in sixteen and a half years her hearers had never known her tell a lie. She assured them that she had heard from Mme. Blavatsky (then dead) in letters in her own handwriting. Alas, when she discovered later that the letters had really been written by W. Q. Judge, one of the most eminent of Theosophists, she did not return to the NSS and admit her "mistake". A full account of this particular meeting is of historical interest in the story of the National Secular Society.

But in spite of all, Annie Besant was a remarkable woman, even though she appears to have walked so much behind a succession of men—Thomas Scott, Charles Bradlaugh, Dr. Aveling, George Bernard Shaw, W. T. Stead, Colonel Olcott., C. W. Leadbeater, and perhaps only one woman, H. P. Blavatsky. Mr. Nethercot's book is a brilliant study of Annie Besant who died, almost forgotten in 1933.

Catholic Charity

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

MR. FITZGERALD was a prosperous Catholic lawyer, a widower with two small sons, his wife having died some three months before this story opens. Returning one evening from his office, he found on the hall table amongst the day's mail, a letter to his late wife addressed in a woman's handwriting and postmarked from a country town in another State. Neither he nor his wife had ever opened each other's letters and now she had gone he decided not to alter this habit. He would put the letter in his office safe until he might, from another source, get some clue to its contents. He felt that neither he nor his wife had any connection with the town from which the letter came; at least she had never mentioned any in the four years of their married life.

A month later another identical letter came and Fitzgerald decided to get to the root of the matter; he opened both letters. They contained bills for the upkeep of a girl named Margaret with a short report on her health and the state of her wardrobe. All this was a complete mystery to him. Next weekend he drove the 80-odd miles to see his mother-in-law and showed her the letters. The old lady was at first hostile and evasive but on being pressed in a kindly way she confessed that her daughter had had a love affair with a local bank manager. When she had told him she was pregnant the bank manager asked his

wife for a divorce; but she refused. Being a Catholic her daughter did not seek an abortion and when her baby was born she boarded the little girl out with a kindly widow in a far-off town in the country.

As I knew her, Fitzgerald's wife was a gentle dignified young woman of great unaffected charm and some beauty. The story was a bad shock to the husband. However he went to the child's foster-mother, settled all expenses and brought the girl to his home. She was aged 8 at the time, and though healthy enough seemed to need more and better food, and especially proper parental affection. It was clear, however, that she had been kindly treated but that her life had been a little blank. She settled happily into her new home and was loved by her little brothers and loved them and her new father. As she brightened out of her timid ways and became a gay little girl, Fitzgerald sent her to the Convent high school where his sister's two children attended.

This sister was a very devout Catholic and the Rosary was repeated every night in her home before bedtime. When she heard Margaret's story from her stepbrother, she uttered all the stock wails of outraged purity. But when she heard that Margaret was associating with her own precious pair of girls at school, her sanctimonious rage flowed over all and sundry with the force of Niagara. She telephoned her brother that he must not send his "illegitimate brat" to mix at school with her brood, and she told the nuns that if Margaret stayed at the school she would take her children away and induce her friends to do the same. The sisters who naturally preferred the support of wealthy snobs to a little charity, succumbed and asked Fitzgerald to remove his child, who by this time had formed affectionate ties with other little girls. These were ruthlessly torn apart when he did the bidding of the holy nuns.

Catholic Christian charity is a very tender flower, and wilts and withers easily under the scorching all-destroying wind of outraged Catholic hypocrisy. But of course the Christian Bible orders that the sins of the parents must be visited on the child.

Curiously enough Fitzgerald remained a devout Catholic.

For the Love of God

By A. R. WILLIAMS

ENTERING HIS STUDY ON Saturday night the Reverend Aubrey Melve sat down intending to compose a sermon for the morrow. Drawing a sheet of paper to him he wrote "For the love of God".

Looking at the words a wrinkle of distaste curled his lips as he murmured "No. It's too often a popular oath, like For the love of Christ! neither taken seriously nor with any depth of meaning attached to it".

He wrote again "The love of God", and after hesitation added "Which passeth all understanding".

For some time he looked at the words, then said "I never fully realised before what an ambiguous proposition that is. It may mean either God's love for us or our love for God. Both are equally beyond comprehension".

He smiled as he recalled the passage from the Athanasian Creed "The Father incomprehensible; the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. Yet there are not three incomprehensibles but one incomprehensible".

A cynical friend of his had added pertly but also pertinently "That's why you know so much about him".

"Far too true to be pleasant" admitted the Reverend Aubrey Melve sadly shaking his head. "It's well for me

the congregation sits silent, and no individuals rise to question my string of dogmatic platitudes. Their love for God may be merely conditioned by our repetition to them of their duty to do so. Like advertising agents we build a demand upon the parrotlike tendency of common people to repeat without resistance or scepticism statements made to them enough times. On the other hand God's love for them could be received by them with large and intense interrogation. They could name to me all the great catastrophes of nature, which I call God's creation, thereby playing into the hands of the unbeliever, who points out the creatures of prey, germs, viruses, injurious bacteria, poisons and parasites which constitute so much of that creation, to the hurt of the supposed summit of creation, man; beside the cruelties of ecclesiastical and civil authority.

"Publicly I talk of God's cosmic plan, of his infinite understanding and mercy, of our faith being necessary as well as sufficient to accept God's will as ours; beside our abysmal ignorance of his purpose. Privately I concede nothing of the sort. But I must live, so must continue to preach orthodox theology and metaphysics to draw my stipend which is so necessary for the comfortable existence of myself and my wife".

The Reverend Aubrey Melve wrote again "God is Love". "That is my theme for tomorrow, to be impressed upon my congregation by every trick of rhetoric and persuasion. Do I believe it myself? No. I doubt if any sane parson does. The theory of the Almightyness of God destroys his validity. If Almighty he is callous to the needs of his creatures; if not Almighty he is not God. And an Almighty Being does not need thousands of us daily proclaiming his power. If conscious of his omnipotence he would show it and safeguard it directly".

Once more the parson wrote "God so loved the world". After pause he added "That he gave his only begotten Son".

He murmured "I find it more and more difficult to put the doctrine of Incarnation and Atonement to a materially minded congregation. It is too abstract and abstruse for their human concepts. For us priests anthropologists have ruined our case. Their investigations into dying gods and blood sacrifices have left it doubtful if Christ is unique. Many will say more than doubtful; certain that he is only one of a long series of magical and mythical devices".

CORRESPONDENCE

SUBSTITUTES

Religion is as much a behaviour pattern as a set of beliefs. It is a habit, a complex of conditioned reflexes. A person may be intellectually converted from his previous beliefs yet still retain the emotional behaviour pattern, and in times of stress or doubt this pattern may re-assert itself in spite of avowed convictions. The way to break a bad habit is not to suppress it by an effort of the will but to redirect it. Substitute a good habit for a bad, at least until the causes of the original habit have so weakened that no substitute is necessary. Such a process forms a bulwark against emotional back-sliding until the convert is emotionally, as well as intellectually, emancipated. Many people may not need such a support, but for those who do may I suggest Reality, the Universe, for this is a non-human, but also non-supernatural, concept that may be worshipped without intellectual qualms. It is a good compromise to use until the need for any extra-human entity fades away. What are you to label yourself now that you are no longer a Christian or what-have-you? Why not a "philosopher"? This word gives you a title and attitude to life while leaving the intellectual field wide open.

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What is the Authority on which you rely now that the old one has proved unsatisfactory? Why not Reason and Science as Pope and Bible respectively? D. L. HUMPHRIES (Australia).

THREE Rs

Here, in South Africa, children get over their "three Rs" alright, but the three Rs of the adults are a different kettle of fish. Millions are swayed by Race or Religion, or both, but few have recourse to the most important one, Reason. Religion results from an old and widespread affliction for which I coined the word "gullibilharzia". I have always remembered a definition in Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*, viz. "Faith, n. Belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel". W. H. CILLIERS (S. Africa).

DO YOU REMEMBER?

Unless I dreamt it, when Dr. Billy Graham met the Bishops at Church House, Deans Yard, Westminster on a previous visit, he said that to believe (just what, I can't remember) was "intellectual suicide, but it worked". It was reported in the daily press at the time. Can anyone recall what it was, please?

H. FIDDIAN.

IRISH IMMIGRATION

As an ex-Catholic of British descent I am glad to learn that immigration has freed many Eireans from the grip of Rome; yet I don't think it can be ignored that the growth of Romanism in our land is due almost entirely to this immigration. All I said about controlling the Irish influx on grounds of their social defects was, I think, amply verified by *The People's* article of June 25th. and I therefore deny that my letter was nasty or inaccurate. I agree with the views expressed in Mr. Hendren's admirable letter.

FRANCIS SOATER.

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