

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXI—No. 27

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

An Insult to Democracy

RECENTLY there appeared in this country a general statistical and social survey compiled by the veteran Quaker sociologist, Mr. Seebohm Rowntree and by Commander Lavers, entitled *English Life and Leisure* (Longmans, 15s.). We have not yet had the opportunity to consult this weighty survey at first hand, but several instructive reviews have already appeared, notably one in the *London Observer*. Much space in these reviews is devoted to the religious aspect of contemporary English "Life and Leisure." The figures given in this "Survey" are both startling and significant. We propose to comment upon them in the ensuing paragraphs; in particular, upon one aspect, that relating to the current position of "The Church of England by Law Established" as therein disclosed.

The figures quoted here indicate strikingly the current decline of Anglicanism, not only absolutely but even relatively in proportion to other Christian churches. In which respect, a comparison with an earlier survey issued by Mr. Rowntree, as far back as 1901, is particularly illuminating. In the statistics of church-going compiled by Mr. Rowntree in 1901, the Anglican Church led easily, with the Nonconformists a bad second and a numerically far inferior number of Roman Catholics.

The figures are startling. Between 1901 and 1948 the proportion of the adult population who attended church fell from 35.5 per cent. to 13 per cent. Whereas, to-day, whilst both Anglicans and Nonconformists have declined sharply in church-attendance in actual relation to the total population, the number of Nonconformist chapel-goers is actually greater than the attendance of the Established Church. Worse still from the point of view of Anglicanism, the Roman Catholic Church, a numerically insignificant and unpopular religious minority in the 19th century, can now attract congregations only ten per cent less than the once omnipotent "Church of England." Between 1901 and 1948 the percentage of church-goers who were Roman Catholics rose from 13.8 to 31.1. "How are the mighty fallen!"

Our authors illustrate this section of their thesis with some comparative church-going statistics from the City of York: an illustration which, or so one would have thought, was singularly favourable to the Anglican communion; since York is an ancient ecclesiastical centre, a cathedral city, and the seat of an Anglican Archbishopric. Yet what do we actually find? Whilst the total population of York has increased between 1901 and 1949 (the date of the latest figures), from 48,000 to 78,000, yet the actual figures of Anglican Church attendance have gone down from 7,453 to 3,384 during this self-same period. Whilst during the same period, Free Church attendance fell from 6,447 to 3,514. Whilst, to add insult to injury, the Roman Catholic Church has, over the same period of time, actually increased its own church-attendance from 2,360 to 3,703, an absolute increase, whilst still a relative decline in

proportion to the increased population of York throughout the past half-century.

Incidentally, in this last connection, the *Observer* review—the review of a Tory journal, not, we understand, particularly hostile to the Roman Catholic Church—roundly declares that even this limited success on the part of Catholicism has only been gained by the unsparing use of "religious terrorism": the phrase is that of the Editor of the *Observer*, Mr. Ivor Brown himself. This Catholic "religious terrorism" does not shrink from threats of everlasting hell-fire against possible seceders from the jurisdiction of the Vatican to even Protestant churches, of which "terrorism," an actual example, is given by the authors, Messrs. Rowntree and Lavers.

The learned authors—both, it would appear, themselves Christians of a non-denominational character—summarise their often startling researches with conclusions, the importance and, from the religious standpoint, gravity of which it is hardly possible to exaggerate: "it is inconceivable to us," they declare, "that the Protestant Churches will ever again become a dominant force in the life of the nation." Whilst though Rome is the one church that is, actually, making some headway, our authors hold that, what they describe as its "totalitarian" methods—which, presumably include the "religious terrorism" complained of by the Editor of the *Observer*—will ultimately defeat it. Actually, the only possible future for Christianity in England that our authors can foresee is a kind of non-dogmatic, predominantly non-ecclesiastical Christianity, presumably somewhat similar to the present-day Unitarians or Quakers.

These conclusions are of the greatest importance, in particular, as we need hardly stress, to secularist critics of organised religion. We shall return to their broader implications in future issues of *The Freethinker*, when we have had an opportunity of actually perusing this latest sociological survey instead of, as at present, being compelled to rely upon the inadequate medium of newspaper reviews. Here, however, we propose to make a few concluding observations upon one result of our author's summary, which, indeed, stands out the proverbial mile from their statistical survey: we refer to the fantastic anomaly represented by the present decline of Anglicanism, of "the Church of England by Law Established."

The anomaly is, indeed, stupendous! At its weekly services our "National Church" can actually muster a percentage of about four or, at the most, five per cent. of the total English population, and even this modest figure is continually diminishing: shade of Queen Elizabeth! These figures, we submit, constitute an irresistible argument for the immediate Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Established Church, not only upon secularist but upon the most elementary democratic principles. Why in Heaven's name, in a land supposedly "made safe for Democracy," should the Church of an insignificant and continually diminishing minority of 4.5 per cent. enjoy State endowments, a socially privileged

position, and parliamentary representation in the House of Lords? Echo—and common sense—answer “Why”? Nor is the question at issue merely an academic one. Both the endowments and the social prestige of a State-Church represent assets of considerable value. Nor is the direct and permanent representation of the Established Church in the Upper House by 26 Bishops to be regarded as a negligible political factor.

Time was when “The Church of England” actually was what its name implied. From the end of the 16th to the end of the 19th century it probably did command the support or, at least, the acquiescence of a majority of the English people. But that time is now past; it would seem, irrevocably. To-day, the Established Church is merely a grotesque anomaly. The secular principle of “The Free Church in the Free State” is a fundamental principle accepted—despite their otherwise opposing ideologies—by both the world-powers of our era, U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. It is high time England followed suit! For, to pass off the shrinking rump of Anglicanism as the authentic “National Church” of the English people is not merely to repudiate reason and to deny logic; it also constitutes a gross and direct insult to the most elementary principles of Democracy themselves.

F. A. RIDLEY.

A PRE-EMINENT VICTORIAN POET

CHARLES TENNYSON'S biography of his grandfather: *Alfred Tennyson* (New York, Macmillan, 1949, 30s.), is a discriminating study which possesses the outstanding advantage of its author's access to letters and other documents hitherto unprinted. Also, it is no mere eulogy but a candid confession of the truth.

The poet's grandfather, G. C. Tennyson, was a successful solicitor who became a man of extensive property. His married life was congenial, although his pious wife was deeply concerned by her husband's “complete worldliness and lack of religious belief.” To him, his family was much more than of local importance, while he considered his eldest son incompetent as head of the Tennysons. He, therefore, thrust him into the Church, for whose ministry he had no liking, while his heterodoxy made him refuse to recite the Athanasian Creed, or accept the theory of eternal punishment. He wedded, however, and became the parent of twelve children, Alfred, the future poet, being born in 1809. The small stipends of his benefices were insufficient to supply the needs of a large family. The worried clergyman suffered severely and sought relief from his anxieties in intoxicating beverages. On bad terms with his father, and afflicted with melancholy, from which other members of the Tennyson family suffered, the clergyman's fondness for drink made miserable the conditions of the rectory. This unhappiness of the home was intensified by the mother's frigid piety, and the boy Alfred's adolescence was made mournful by the egoistic moralisings of his Calvinistic Aunt Mary. “Some of her sayings,” notes our author, “Alfred used to repeat with grim amusement in after years. She would weep with emotion at the infinite goodness of God. ‘Has he not,’ she would exclaim, ‘damned most of my friends? But *me, me*, He has picked out for eternal salvation, *me* who am no better than my neighbours.’ It seemed that she included Alfred among the goats. ‘Alfred, Alfred,’ she said to him one day, ‘When I look at you I think of the words of Holy Scripture, “Depart from me, ye accursed, into everlasting fire.”’”

Alfred's early school experiences proved distasteful, but

later, at Trinity College, Cambridge, his affectionate friendship with Arthur Hallam began. At Trinity a group known as the Apostles was formed. “Very significant,” observes our biographer, “are the minutes of the Apostles quoted in Hallam Tennyson's *Memoir*. These show Alfred voting ‘No’ to the questions: ‘Have Shelley's poems an immoral tendency?’ and ‘Is an intelligible First Cause deducible from the phenomena of the Universe?’ Significant also is the reference to a suggestion put forward by him at some Trinity discussion that ‘the development of the human body might possibly be traced from the radiated, vermicular, molloscous and vertebrate organisms.’ This suggests that . . . he had already arrived at some apprehension of the theory of evolution nearly 30 years before the publication of *The Origin of Species* and 40 years before that of *The Descent of Man*.”

As an undergraduate, Alfred composed poetry and was awarded the Chancellor's Gold Medal at Cambridge for his *Timbuctoo*. But earlier in 1826, *Poems by Two Brothers*, appeared anonymously, to which Alfred and his brothers Charles and Frederick, contributed. Immature as some of these were, Alfred's gave promise of brilliant things to come. Still, in 1831, Alfred left the University without taking a degree.

Alfred's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, were then favourably reviewed by Arthur Hallam, but in 1832 “Christopher North” [Prof. Wilson], while admitting Tennyson's genius, trounced the verses very severely in *Blackwood's Magazine*. The poet, ever sensitive to depreciation, was stung to resentment and Wilson was infuriated when paid back in his own coin. He apparently encouraged other reviewers to disparage the poems. As a result, Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* found only a few, if fit purchasers, although they were decidedly superior to those published in 1830, and are now prized as some of his most beautiful compositions.

The sudden and unexpected death of Arthur Hallam proved a grievous shock to Tennyson, if to this we owe *In Memoriam*, one of the finest poems in our language. Meanwhile, Tennyson's work won high regard in America and at home he became intimate with J. S. Mill, Gladstone, Stanley, Carlyle, Thackeray, Spedding and other leading intellectuals then living.

In 1842, Moxon published two volumes of Alfred's poems. The critics were still censorious, but public appreciation grew greater and the poetry was praised by men so eminent as Dickens, FitzGerald of Omar fame, Rogers, Macready, and many others. Moreover, arrangements were made for publication in the U.S., Ticknor offering 150 dollars for the copyright. “This,” states our biographer, “they were under no legal obligation to do, for there was as yet no copyright agreement between the two countries. Alfred was deeply appreciative of Ticknor's action which was probably the first example of payment by an American publisher to a British author.”

Unfortunately, the little money that the poet possessed had been invested in an enterprise that became insolvent. This was a shattering blow, for the restricted sale of his writings, despite their *succès d'estime*, promised little likelihood of his gaining a living from his pen. Family discords intensified Tennyson's troubles, and he was so despondent that not only his health but his very life was endangered. Efforts were made to obtain him the laureateship, but the post had previously been promised to Wordsworth. Later, however, he was granted a Civil List Pension. This grant was anonymously condemned by Bulwer Lytton in scornful and sarcastic terms to which Tennyson very effectively replied. The reviewers now no longer

vituperated the poet, and Lytton found scarcely any sympathy or support in the Press.

Fortunately, Tennyson later recovered part of his lost money. His circle of admirers increased and, in company with Moxon, his generous publisher, he visited the Continent. Bailey's *Festus*, now nearly forgotten, was issued, and won Alfred's appreciation. Public approval of his own poetry increased, but his health was poor and he was deeply depressed. Still, he penned the *Princess* which was coldly received by the critics, and even his close friend FitzGerald expressed his disappointment despite the care Tennyson lavished in its composition. Nonetheless, the poem proved popular and its sales exceeded all his earlier works.

After long grief and pain, the year 1850 brought the poet not only a happy marriage but the establishment of his eminence as an elegiac writer. *In Memoriam* appeared anonymously, although our author suspects that "Moxon took care to let literary London know who was in fact the author of the poem, but many reviews were written in ignorance of this." The Press notices were gratifying, although the majority of critics mistakenly opined that the work would never become popular. Still, 5,000 copies were published and soon sold and, "in a few months no less than 60,000 copies had passed into circulation."

As Tennyson's biographer candidly states the poem is not orthodox. It "does not assert or even imply any of the main doctrines of the Christian faith . . . and was attacked by some as definitely un-Christian. . . . Moreover, though *In Memoriam* reaches a conclusion of serenity and hope, this is so vague and metaphysical that, in spite of the sincere and beautiful language in which it is expressed, it might easily have seemed unsatisfying in comparison with the pathos and passion of the earlier sections." Still, in stanza iv of section vi we find:—

"O mother, praying God will save
Thy sailor—while thy head is bow'd
His heavy-shotted hammock shroud
Drops in his vast and wandering grave."

Tennyson followed with deep concern the development of science and philosophy. "Nor," we read, "was this revolutionary movement confined to the scientific field. The Higher Criticism, initiated in Germany, had undermined the authority of the Scriptures and the theory of universal causation, elaborated by J. S. Mill in his famous *Logic* (1843) threatened the basic ideas of free will, divine creation and the responsibility of the creature to the Creator—in fact much of what had been regarded as the essential foundation of the Christian faith."

Maud appeared in 1855 and was adversely received by the reviewers, and it mystified many of Tennyson's most fervent disciples. Its subjective character may make it obscure. Yet, it is a wonderful work of art and it ever remained its author's favourite poem. The Brownings praised it and strove to comfort the distracted poet who, in addition to abusive reviews, was the recipient of anonymous and other communications of a despicable character.

To some extent scared by the scepticism sustained by the message of Mill and Spencer, the poet turned to the Arthurian legends to, if possible, revive a romantic past. It is the fashion to belittle the *Idylls of the King*, but they possess many merits. Tennyson was most anxious to confirm Theism and the belief in a future life, but his mind was uncertain to the last. For his many discussions with Tyndall, Huxley, George Eliot, Carlyle, FitzGerald, Jowett and other Victorian intellectuals served to strengthen his doubts and difficulties to the day of his death.

T. F. PALMER.

UNITARIANISM TO-DAY

FROM time to time remarks have been published in the columns of this journal (mainly in the "Acid Drops" column) which seem to suggest that there is a considerable degree of misunderstanding in the minds of many Free-thinkers as to the exact position taken up in this twentieth century by Unitarians. For that reason I think a few lines might be given to a booklet just issued by the Lindsey Press at a shilling. It is *Unitarian Christianity and the Twentieth Century*, and its author is Dr. S. H. Mellone, one of the most respected scholars in the Unitarian Movement. Actually, it is an extensively revised version of a booklet originally issued in 1925; but it states, as far as I can judge, the attitude which would be taken up by most thoughtful Unitarians at this mid-century time.

Dr. Mellone admits that we are in the midst of a vast movement of change in religious life, a movement the beginnings of which quite certainly date back to the Reformation, and the end of which no living man can with any certainty foresee. And he stresses that Unitarianism, as a religion, believes in the spirit of free, fearless inquiry, no matter where it may lead. At the same time, he adds, most Unitarians would hold that there is a religious feeling in the heart of man, which may well exist under various systems and forms of doctrinal belief.

I will not attempt further to summarise what Dr. Mellone has to say. His booklet is closely argued, and deserves to be considered at length by all who would wish to appreciate the value of Unitarianism to-day. At any rate, I think that all Freethinkers and Rationalists who have come to distrust the more authoritarian of religions should admit that here, at any rate, is a form of religious belief which merits more consideration than most. Dr. Mellone, in fact, has done something which some of us would have considered almost impossible—he has written a pamphlet on religious questions which is readable and provocative, and which at the same time can be appreciated even by many who would not share the author's ideas.

J.R.

THIRTY-EIGHTH

Fighting for a Parallel,
Not a Corridor;
Carnage without parallel,
But, after all, it's War.
As forth and back the columns move,
Some great High Principle they prove,
That has been proved before.

And what is that High Principle?
I really do not know.
It is not yet invincible,
For still the blood doth flow.
The troops now moving through the dust
(Or mud) know hunger, thirst and lust,
And wounds, and death, and woe.

While dead unburied lie, and stink,
And men of typhoid die,
Our Welfare State at home must shrink,
And prices go sky-high;
The Fascist rubs his bloody hands,
And Freedom's rule in many lands
Is shortly due to die.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

ACID DROPS

Although, in the main, the teaching of history and science in our schools and universities has played havoc with religion, it would be a mistake to imagine that it does so always and everywhere. In the Fundamentalist weekly, the *Life of Faith*, we still get the dear old spinsters for whom every comma in the Bible comes from God—like a Miss Iris Clark, B.A., who bitterly attacks the theory of evolution because it disagrees with Genesis, and because Jesus Christ “is the source of *all* life. With the Bible.” shrilly cries Miss Clark, “we have firm ground beneath our feet,” and no doubt she really believes this, and all the other religious twaddle she was taught. It is good to think, however, even the Churches draw the line at people like Miss Clark.

We always thought that the pure, simple message of God and Christ was couched in such easy language that anybody, even the veriest infant, could understand it as given in the Bible. But this is not so, according to the Rev. A. T. Dale, speaking recently at a joint meeting of the Sunday School Union and the Bible Reading Association, for he insists that “the Bible is a difficult book.” The ordinary reader, it appears, must “master the story of the Bible,” and then to read it “as the word of God.” Jesus was, of course, “the supreme artist.” We are in thorough agreement. As soon as you see that the Bible is the Word of God, you will believe in it and Christianity. It is only the Devil who says—what if you don't believe the Bible is the Word of God? Answer: You will be damned for evermore—and serves you right.

Canon J. L. Edwards has received the shock of his life. He has found out that, in spite of the Education Act and the whole might of the Church on the side of genuine religious education, there is always the danger “of a misguided form of religious education”; and he instances teachers in our grammar schools who actually insist that “sacraments were not really an integral part of our Christian faith.” This is truly awful, and we sympathise with the worthy Canon. What a pity that the punishment of boiling oil or worse has been banished, otherwise these dreadful heretical teachers could be shown what's what!

Now that we are “compelled” to do this and that by law, it is time, says the Rev. G. F. Braithwaite, to make church-going compulsory. Why not? “If church-going was made compulsory,” he blandly points out in the true religious spirit, “millions of people might grumble”—so what? A large proportion would soon find out the inestimable “treasure” of true religion, “the knowledge and practice of Christianity.” Mr. Braithwaite wants to make “compulsory church-going” a “top priority,” but what is he going to do with the “damned” people who obstinately won't be “compelled?” There can be only one answer. Let's call in our true Roman Catholic friends and reintroduce the Inquisition!

Trust a Bishop for up-to-date views on getting religion back to the people. Recently, the Bishop of Bradford suggested that a revival could be “stimulated” on a more intimate scale by our vicars getting small groups of people for prayer first, and then starting a discussion on the “Christian witness” among young and old afterwards. The vicars must be very enthusiastic for “enthusiasm is infectious.” With plenty of enthusiasm, people will lose their pagan apathy and recall God, the Saviour, Hell, Devils, and Miracles, and all will be well once again in

the Church. We wonder whether Dr. Blunt has ever really mixed with people? Does he really think that the mass of people these days can ever again get enthusiastic even about *prayers*, let alone Devils? Is he not aware that praying in the usual parsonic voice so beloved by the B.B.C. causes roars of riotous laughter?

At the Annual Meeting of the National Sunday School Union and International Bible Reading Association, Dr. James Keely said, “Christianity cannot really be taught. It can only be caught from those who themselves are alive with God.” In other words it is like a contagious disease.

The Rev. E. H. Robertson, Assistant Head of Religious Broadcasting, speaking at Moor Park College, Farnham, on the new charter of the B.B.C. emphasised that while other departments had to be impartial, “his own department made no pretensions of impartiality.” Thank you, Reverend Sir, for your clear presentation of Christians in action. Anybody but a Christian would be ashamed to make such a statement of policy concerning a department kept going by public subscriptions and in which he held a responsible position.

A Mr. Unwin of Blyth, Northumberland, affirms that “one's enlistment in the army does not make one a soldier, any more than one's baptism makes one a Christian.” We would like to hear the comments of the sergeant-major on the first part of the statement, failing which, we would advise Mr. Unwin to consult the “King's Regulations.” Personally, we always understood that as far as the second part is concerned, baptism was supposed to make one “a child of God and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven,” which, or so we were led to believe, was the same as becoming a Christian. If, as Mr. Unwin declares, the above is not the case, then, surely, the clergy ought to be prosecuted for taking money under false pretences.

Our contemporary, the *Oldham Evening Chronicle and Standard* has discovered what is wrong with the church music department of the Oldham Festival celebrations. In its own expressive words: “The trouble is manpower shortage.” Women, we learn, are volunteering their services in large numbers, but the “manpower shortage” is so great that a male choir has had to be dispensed with altogether which is just too bad! However, it is not the first time that the Christian Church has had to depend upon the support of the feminine sex. It was, after all, a woman, Mary Magdalene, who actually started Christianity by “seeing” Jesus after he had risen from the dead.

“True Communism,” writes a Christian correspondent, “is Heaven on earth, spiritually speaking.” However, “True Communism” is not the same as Russian Communism by a long way, which is “a caricature and a falsehood.” The genuine article will only be realised when we have all “passed on,” an assurance which will surely make everyone happy, both Communists and anti-Communists, alike. It certainly looks at present as if we shall all have “passed on” before Communist and anti-Communist politicians can agree upon a common conference agenda. Perhaps the same difficulties will not apply when we have “True Communism”—after we have “passed on.”

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C.1.
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- J. H. JOHNSON.—Many thanks for article. It will appear.
 J. ROWLAND.—Thanks for contributions. Will appear later.
 J. MATSON.—We regret delay in publishing not only your article, but many others—our space is now limited.
 H. SUPKA.—There appears to be no *recent* work dealing exclusively with Agnosticism, but there are quite a number published some years ago which have not dated. You will find Agnosticism discussed in the works of T. H. Huxley; and, if you can obtain it, in the *Trial of Theism*, by G. J. Holyoake. There are also the works of Chapman Cohen, *Theism or Atheism, A Grammar of Freethought*, and the two pamphlets *Agnosticism or . . . ?* and *Atheism* (price 2d. each). You might read *Force and Matter*, by Buchner, with advantage.
 W. E. RICHARDSON.—We note that you now agree that Mr. W. A. Vaughan was quite right in his references to Mr. Campbell-Everden, and that you "tender your sincere apology" to him.
 Will correspondents kindly note to address all communications in connection with "The Freethinker" to: "The Editor," and not to any particular person. Of course, private communications can be sent to any contributor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, giving as long notice as possible.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 19s. 2d.; half-year, 9s. 7d.; three months, 4s. 11d.

The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), COMMON SENSE (U.S.A.), THE LIBERAL (U.S.A.), THE VOICE OF FREEDOM (U.S.A., German and English), PROGRESSIVE WORLD (U.S.A.), THE NEW ZEALAND RATIONALIST, THE RATIONALIST (Australia), DER FRIEDENKER (Switzerland), DON BASILIO (Italy).

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

SUGAR PLUMS

Readers living in the Hampstead and North London areas will be interested to learn that a debate has been arranged at mid-day (12 o'clock) on Sunday, July 15, at White Stone Pond, Hampstead. The subject to be debated will be "Christianity versus Atheism," and the respective protagonists of Christianity and Atheism will be Mr. Tom Sargant, Labour candidate for Hendon Central, formerly of *Commonwealth*, versus Mr. Len Ebury, Vice-President, N.S.S., and Chairman of North London Branch. We are sure that this clash between two such experienced speakers will attract a numerous and interested audience.

The Birmingham Branch is arranging what promises to be an enjoyable Coach Tour of the Cotswolds on Sunday, July 15, starting at 2 p.m. from the Hall of Memory, Evesham. Winchcombe, Stanway, Teddington, etc., will be visited. The coach fare is 10s. 6d. Choice of tea at 1s. 6d. and 4s. For those wishing to join the party it is essential that the following details be sent at once to Mr. T. C. Millington, 95, Wentworth Road, Birmingham, 17, with number of coach seats required, with deposit, 2s. per seat, and the choice of tea. Late applications make a lot of extra work for the organisers.

The Freethinker Fund

Cheques and Postal Orders should be addressed to

THE FREETHINKER
41 Gray's Inn Rd., London, W.C.1.

To find space for the numerous articles awaiting publication we shall acknowledge all contributions by post instead of printing lists.

is now open

Between July 14 and 28 inclusive, only matters of pressing importance will be dealt with at the offices of the N.S.S. It will be helpful if details needing attention can be forwarded before those dates.

An old friend of our movement who never misses an opportunity to get the Freethought point of view in his local Press, laments the neglect of such opportunities by other Freethinkers all over the country. We agree, so many Freethinkers are too shy to express their opinions in the Press, or in public, and in that way help religious folk to believe we are very small in numbers, and encourage newspaper editors to treat us roughly. So many letters from Christians get inserted because there are more of them, and the occasional letter from a Freethinker can be safely ignored or abridged.

Provincial readers visiting London are cordially invited to introduce themselves at the offices of the National Secular Society and Pioneer Press, at 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Gray's Inn Road is practically at the exit to Chancery Lane Underground Station, and No. 41 is about 500 yards up the road.

BYRON AND THE BRAND OF CAIN

BYRON died on April 19, 1824, while aiding the Greeks in a war of liberation from the Turks. His short and not particularly happy life was spent in a desperate and intense search for Truth and Happiness. Happiness he found only a cloak for misery, and Truth rooted in shifting sands. For Victorian critics he was the leader of the Satanic School, to his own contemporaries "mad, bad and dangerous to know." Posterity places him with Wordsworth and Shelley in the front rank of the English Romantic poets. We Rationalists may read him with interest and profit.

Much of his work shows a deep and earnest concern for what mankind has been pleased to term *ultimates*, and a reluctance to warm his spirit at the flames of conventional religion.

At twenty years of age, in a letter to a friend, Charles Dallas, Byron raises a problem which we shall see fully developed in *Cain*, published eleven years later. The letter reads:—

I believe truth the prime attribute of the Deity and death an eternal sleep, at least of the body. Three years later, 1813, in a letter to William Gifford he writes:—

I am no Bigot to Infidelity, and did not expect that because I doubted the immortality of man, I should be charged with denying the existence of a God. It was the comparative insignificance of *ourselves* and *our world* when placed in competition with the mighty whole of which it is an atom that first led me to imagine that our pretensions to eternity might be over-rated.

How similar is Cain's speech:—

. . . And, gazing on eternity, methought
I had borrowed more by a few drops of ages
From its immensity: But now I feel
My littleness again. Well said the spirit
That I was nothing.

His letter to Gifford continues:—

This, and being early disgusted with a Calvinistic
Scotch school where I was cudgelled to church for
the first ten years of my life, affected me with a
malady; for after all it is, I believe, a disease of the
mind as much as other kinds of hypochondria.

Byron did not rejoice in his rationality. He chose it,
not for the pleasure it brought him, but because Truth
was his God and the rational method its only way of
attainment. And in the end, because he believed that
practice must follow theory, he met an untimely death in
Greece.

Drinkwater, discussing Byron's "mystery poems," of
which Cain is one, writes in his *Life of Byron*:—

A great deal has been made of the significance of
the "mystery" poems, but it is precisely in
significance that they are lacking. The philosophical
bent that Byron discovered in them seems to us to
be far the least important aspect of his work, and
he is a writer who can afford to write off a bad debt.

Byron has a great many bad debts, but I doubt if we
can number *Cain* among them. To me there seems
little doubt that Byron's whole outlook on life was bound
up with his religious principles; and the correspondence
between Cain's remarks and those of Byron in his letters
indicates that for the most part in *Cain* Byron speaks
through the mouth of his hero. The disbeliever can of
course quote Byron's letter to Moore after *Cain* was
published and had evoked a violent reaction.

With respect to "Religion" can I never convince
you that I have no such opinion as the characters in
that drama which seems to have frightened every-
body. . . . I am no enemy to religion, but the con-
trary. As a proof I am educating my natural
daughter as a strict Catholic in a convent in Romagna;
for I think people can never have *enough* religion if
they are to have any.

The last statement of course cancels the first one. Viewed
quite rationally, if Allegra were to remain in Italy and to
to be well adjusted in a Roman Catholic society, it were
better that she became a Catholic. Byron knew only
too well the ostracism and isolation of an independent
mind.

The question of the significance of *Cain* and its re-
flection of Byron's fundamental beliefs is answered when
we compare a letter of his to Hodgson in 1811 with an
excerpt from *Cain*, published in 1821. The letter reads
in part:—

. . . the basis of your religion is injustice; the Son
of God, the *pure*, the *immaculate*, the *innocent* is
sacrificed for the guilty.

Addressing Lucifer, Cain ponders the same paradox.

Why do I exist?

Why are thou wretched? Why are all things so?

Ev'n he who made us must be, as the maker
Of things unhappy! To produce destruction
Can surely never be the task of joy.

And yet my sire says he's omnipotent:

Then why is evil—he being good? I asked

This question of my father; and he said

Because this evil only was the path

To good. Strange good, that must arise from out

Its deadly opposite.

Nor can Cain comprehend the necessity of Abel's
sacrifice of the lamb.

His!

His pleasure! What was his high pleasure in
The fumes of scorching flesh and smoking blood,
To the pain of the bleating mothers, which
Still yearn for their dead offspring? or the pangs
Of the sad ignorant victims underneath
Thy pious knife?

Byron's intellect abhors the complete unreasonableness
of such manifestations of a religion, supposedly (and he
believes properly) based on *love* and *kindliness*. He
rejects the belief and, being incapable of replacing it, he
find no happiness:

Sorrow is knowledge; they who know the most
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal Truth,
The Tree of Knowledge is not that of life.

What value in half knowledge?

It was a lying tree—for we know nothing.

At least it *promised knowledge* at the price

Of death—but knowledge still: but what knows man?

If youth were not such a perishable commodity the
prolonged search for truth might more often be realised.
I do not believe that Byron ever reached the age of
"discretion." In a post script to one of his letters he
indicates his awareness and abhorance of this change.

I almost rejoice when one I love dies young, for
I could never bear to see them old or altered.

PAUL M. RODDICK.

CHRISTIAN CHRONOLOGY

(a) THE ORIGINS OF CHRONOLOGY

THE time at which the year began varied amongst the
peoples of antiquity. Some, for example, the Persians,
Assyrians, and Egyptians, dating it from the autumnal
equinox, whilst the Greeks, up to the time of Meton
(432 B.C.), dated their year from the winter solstice—that
is, from the shortest day of the year. The Jewish civil
year began at the autumnal equinox, but their sacred year
was reckoned from the vernal equinox. The Romans were
the first to count from the First of January. The "Julian"
Calendar was drawn up by Julius Cæsar, 47 B.C., which
assigned to the year 365 days, with a leap-year every
fourth year. The first "Julian" year began on January 1,
46 B.C. The First of January was not, however, adopted
by other nations until modern times. In France, it was
adopted in 1563, in Scotland in 1600, and in England in
1752. Prior to the "Julian" Calendar, most early races—
viz., Jews, Egyptians, etc.—calculated in lunar weeks of
seven days. (The "Julian" Calendar itself was based on
the Greek science of Alexandria.)

(b) PRE-CHRISTIAN CHRONOLOGIES

The best-known pre-Christian chronologies were; the
Babylonian, which dated from the reign of King
Nabonassar, computed as equivalent to our 747 B.C.; the
Hellene (Greek), which dated from the first "Olympiad,"
that is, from the first Olympic Games at which the victor's
name was recorded, a date generally held to correspond
with our 776 B.C.; the Roman, which dated from "the
foundation of the City" ("ab urbe condita"), the tradi-
tional date of which was 753 B.C. There were also two
chronologies of, respectively, Syrian and Jewish origin
which were widely used in the ancient world and in the
early Christian Church prior to the sixth century A.D.:
the era of Pompey—named after the Roman general of
that name, the rival of Julius Caesar—which dated from
our 66 B.C.; and the era of Bostra (a town in Syria), which
dated from our A.D. 105.

(c) CHRISTIAN CHRONOLOGIES

Prior to the sixth century at earliest, there was no distinctive Christian chronology in existence, nor was the date of Christ's birth officially defined by the Church: the early Christians used one or other of the above chronologies. As regards the birth of Christ, the oldest tradition seems to have been that he was born in the Spring and that he was nearly 50 when he was crucified under Pontius Pilate: e.g., this was the view of the Church-Father, Irenaeus (c. A.D. 180), and of the author of our Fourth Gospel, according to which computation Jesus must have been born about 20 B.C. The author of "John" actually refers to a Jewish festival equivalent to our December 25, but says nothing about Jesus having been born on that date. The date, December 25, the feast of the winter solstice in the current calendar, was originally the birthday of the Sun-God Mithra, the major rival of Early Christianity: the Mithraist emperor, Aurelian (270-275), proclaimed December 25, "the Birthday of the Unconquered Sun," as a Roman public holiday in A.D. 274. Gradually, after their victory in the fourth century, the Christian Churches came to take over this date as that of the Birth of Christ.

(d) OUR PRESENT CHRONOLOGY

This was traditionally drawn up in Rome by the Abbot of a Roman monastery, Dionysius ("The Little"), under orders from the then Pope, towards the end of the sixth century. By comparing the computations of his predecessors, he arrived at our A.D. 1, and he dated the year from the Annunciation upon March 25, nine months before the Birth of Christ, when Mary "conceived by the Holy Ghost." March 25 remained the first day of the Christian year down to modern times (cp. section (a) above). The chronology of Dionysius was, at first, a local usage confined to Rome, but it spread to Gaul and Britain about A.D. 800 and ultimately was accepted as the official chronology of the entire Christian world.

(e) THE "GREGORIAN" CALENDAR

In 1582, Pope Gregory the 13th revised the traditional "Julian" Calendar by adding ten days. He further enacted that, to prevent irregularities, every 100th year should not be counted a leap-year, excepting, however, every 400th, beginning with A.D. 2000. Roman Catholic nations at once accepted the "Gregorian" Calendar: the Protestant nations only conformed gradually: England in 1752—after riots and shouts of, "Give us back our eleven days!"—and Russia after the 1917 Revolution, when a gap of thirteen days separated the old "Julian" Calendar from the reformed "Gregorian" one. However, the opening of the ecclesiastical year upon March 25 has now universally given way to the Julian date of January 1.

F. A. R.

CORRESPONDENCE

WITCHCRAFT

SIR,—Here are two authoritative statements in support of my contention, which Mr. Cutner challenges, that disbelief in witchcraft was widespread amongst the educated classes in the eighteenth century.

"The reign of law had established its hold on men's imaginations, making such things as magic and sorcery incredible. In 1700 the mental outlook of educated men was completely modern; in 1600, except for a very few, it was still largely medieval." (Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*.)

"Popular superstition on this subject was almost as gross as ever, but the gentry were now predisposed to be sceptical . . . in 1736, greatly to the indignation of many simple folk, Parliament repealed the already obsolete law that condemned a witch to die." (Trevelyan, *English Social History*.)

Parliament would hardly have declared that witchcraft as such, was no longer a crime, if it had believed that witches could raise tempests, destroy cattle, etc. It seems clear that Wesley's opinion was that of a conservative-minded minority.—Yours, etc., D. BEAR.

THE N.S.S. AND COMMUNISM

SIR,—Although not a member of the N.S.S., I have for a number of years read *The Freethinker*, and it was thus that I came to attend my first Freethought meeting, this year's Annual N.S.S. Demonstration.

Unlike Mr. S. H. J. Smith I would not describe as a torrent the current of Communist propaganda which infused the arguments of a majority of the speakers at the Demonstration. I would, however, like to give my support to Mr. Smith, and state that I agree with all else that he has said. The Communist Party's operations of late have consisted almost exclusively of a smear campaign against the United States of America, a distorted and exaggerated barrage of propaganda designed to show nothing but the worst side of a great and complex nation. The choice sample to which we were subjected at the Demonstration became almost predictable in its slavish following of the "party line."

In reply to the first letter of this correspondence, Mr. J. W. Barker pointed out that the Demonstration was the first that Mr. Smith had attended, and that like myself he may have known little of the speakers or the N.S.S. I should not have thought lack of such knowledge a hindrance to an intelligent understanding of the speakers' words, for surely the view obtained from the "gate" is more wide than that seen when one is already half way up the "garden path."

Mr. F. A. Hornibrook's cry that "There is not a single Communist on the Executive" takes a lot of swallowing until it is remembered that the same can also be said of the House of Commons. Also his suggestion that Mr. Smith believed the speakers to be Communists because they used the word Communism is weak. I can recall but one speaker using the word Communism—having spent 20 minutes comparing the joys of Communism with the evils of Wall Street Capitalism, he added that he was "of course only using Communism as an example!"

The speech which surprised me more than any other was that made by the Chairman, Mr. Rosetti. He began, following the lead given him by the other speakers, by passing a few derogatory remarks about America. He then proceeded to deliver what was in my opinion a quite unnecessary attack on the members of the public at that time viewing the South Bank Illuminations, which he inaccurately referred to as coloured lights. This he then followed with a reference to "people with egg-shaped heads." Of the existence of such heads he left us in no doubt, but the relationship of such to Freethought I found it difficult to comprehend.

In closing I should like to mention the Demonstration's audience. On their lack of numbers I shall not dwell, but I consider the almost complete absence of the younger generation a point of great significance.—Yours, etc.,

G. C. AUGER.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

Blackburn Market Place.—Sunday, July 8, 7 p.m.: JACK CLAYTON. Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park, Bradford).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK.

Also Lectures at Platt Fields, Sunday, 3 p.m.; Alexandra Park Gates, Wednesday, 8 p.m.; St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site, Sunday, 8 p.m.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: L. EBURY and W. G. FRASER. Sunday Evening, 7-30 p.m. (Highbury Corner): L. EBURY and W. G. FRASER. Friday evening, July 13, 8 p.m. (South Hill Park), J. M. ALEXANDER and W. G. FRASER.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, July 7, 7 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A. SAMMS.

South London and Lewisham Branch (Brockwell Park).—6-30 p.m.: J. BARKER.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: C. E. WOOD.

INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, July 8, Prof. G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.O.: "The Passing of Empire."

WANTED by middle-aged couple, with child 12 years, furnished rooms. Can any Freethinkers help? In London, if possible. Old Freethought speaker.—Box 102, c/o The Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

THE WARFARE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION

(Continued from page 239)

I SHOULD, however, explain that there has been considerable scope for the Roman Church to fulfil her function of exercising the authority which, as recognised both by the Tridentine and Vatican Councils, she claims to have from God of interpreting the true meaning of the scriptures, but this function must obviously be understood only to apply to those cases where there is any reasonable doubt as to the true meaning of any part of the scriptures. For example, it is a recognised fact that it is the Hebrew usage sometimes to compress an indefinite period of time, even capable of being of considerable length, into a "day" for the purpose of giving it special prominence (see the remarks of Dr. S. R. Driver, D.D., in his work, *The Book of Genesis*, Methuen, at that part of it where he comments on Ch. II, v. 4 (b)).

Consequently, it would probably be quite possible for the Roman Church to define without any risk of contradicting the Tridentine and Vatican decrees the word "day" occurring in the first chapter of Genesis as meaning an indefinite period of time which might possibly extend even to hundreds of millions of years. Presumably, she might even define the word "day" in this way in spite of the fact that it is the opinion of almost all Hebrew scholars of repute, including Dr. Driver, that the word "day" in Chapter I in the context obviously means an ordinary day of twenty-four hours, because of the words "and the evening and the morning" used in connection with each particular "day" of the creation, the events of which had just been described. As a matter of fact, it is most improbable that the Roman Church would ever take the trouble to define this word "day," because she must know that modern science claims to have knocked the bottom out of that first chapter, no matter how this word is defined.

Where, however, the meaning of any part of the scriptures is perfectly clear and is not susceptible of any doubt whatsoever, then the Roman Church could not possibly dare to declare that the obvious meaning was wrong and that there was really another meaning. For example, Ch. I, v. 16, of Genesis describes the making of the sun, moon and stars on the fourth "day." It would hardly be possible for the Church ever to define that verse as meaning that the sun, moon and stars were in reality made on another "day," for instance, on the first "day" when light was supposed to have been created, and to declare that for the word "fourth" one should read "first."

I should like also to explain that side by side with the scriptures the Roman Church depends for her teaching upon what the same decree of the Tridentine Council as that from which I have quoted calls: "the unwritten traditions which received from the mouth of Christ himself or from the apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down even to us transmitted as it were from hand to hand." These features of, first of all, the sole authority of interpreting the scriptures, and secondly, of receiving sacred truths by means of tradition, distinguish the teaching of the Roman Church from that of the Protestant religions which rely for it solely upon the Bible as interpreted by each individual as he or she thinks fit; but this distinction makes no difference to the proposition which I think I have conclusively proved, namely, that the Roman Church teaches that God is the author of every word of her Bible.

Before I conclude this part of this article I should like to fire a parting shot at Mr. Preece. In his last article of April 1, he wrote: "But Buller's assertion that the Vatican must declare that 'every word of the Book of Genesis has God for its author' shows that he is confusing Roman Catholic with Protestant theology." I feel fully convinced that most readers will agree with me when I say that I have proved that Mr. Preece in writing this did not understand what he was writing about.

J. H. G. BULLER, LL.B.

WHAT USE RELIGION?

(*Voice of Freedom*, publication of the *Freie Gemeinde*, Milwaukee, U.S.A., printed a German poem by Ludwig Thoma, entitled "Das alte Lied." The following is a translation):—

The good old country's in a mess.
Whom can we squeeze, whom may we press?
All patriots call upon the nation:
You've got a public obligation!
But who, they wonder, is to shoulder
In fact the big taxation boulder?—
Who else but he: Poor Little Man
Who's always toil'd as toil he can.
So what?—He can work harder still
Since sweat in any case he will.
And for the rest, God may avail him
That health and strength won't ever fail him.
The rulers blunder for salvation
They've got the Man in humble station.
May he live long to see the day!
He who has means would never pay.

P. G. R.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ "THRIFTS" for the THRIFTY!

At last!—your own library at a negligible cost. The new THRIFT BOOKS at only ONE SHILLING each—amazing value!

A Further Four Titles

5. GETTING TO KNOW ENGLISH LITERATURE T. G. Williams

The former principal of London's "City Lit." introduces the ordinary reader to the classics, and gives expert advice on books worth reading.

6. FINDING OUT ABOUT ATOMIC ENERGY Dr. J. L. Michiels

The vital facts about atomic energy, including chapters on the Atom Bomb and the Hydrogen Bomb. *Diagrams.*

7. A SHORT HISTORY OF OUR OWN TIMES (1919-1950)

Esmond Wright
Concise, authoritative, up to date and very readable: the story of the tremendous years between 1919 and the present Korean War.

8. A SIGNPOST TO MATHEMATICS A. H. Read

Tells how a mathematician thinks, and of the basic principles that guide him, and shows how mathematics is alive and constantly developing. *Diagrams.*

each 1/- net

Obtainable from all Bookshops and Bookstalls

C. A. WATTS & CO. LTD.
5 Johnson's Court, Fleet St., London E.C.4

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★