

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXI—No. 41

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Secularism and the General Election

A GENERAL Election has, as such, little enough to do with *Free Thought* or, indeed, perhaps, with thought of any kind. For it is not only in lands which formally acknowledge dictatorial regimes that the "still small voice" of individual thought is steam-rollered and crushed into inarticulate silence. In our modern mass-democracies—in which the current emphasis is so often upon the *second* syllable!—an identical process too often also takes place. For, as the European sociologists, Michels and Ostrogowski, long ago predicted in their classical works upon the evolution of the party machine in recent times, effective political thinking is now done in and by the caucus rather than by the free unfettered opinions of the instructed individual. Whilst to the growing power of impersonal organisations must also be added the virtual omnipotence of money. For modern politics more and more approximates to Big Business, and Big Business requires money—and plenty of it—to make the wheels go round. In which last connection, the medieval power of privilege has been largely superseded by the modern power of plutocracy. To be sure, in a modern democracy there is only too much truth in Anatole France's classic observation: "in all countries money rules; but in a democracy nothing else does." Without the current financial backing of the "City" on the one hand and of the Trade Unions on the other, neither Mr. Churchill nor Mr. Attlee would cut much of a figure in public life in 1951.

Whilst, however, the Secular Movement as such has neither the mass-membership nor the plutocratic where-withal to enable it to play a major role upon the contemporary stage of national politics, yet its influence as a minority "pressure-group" ought not to be underestimated. The legislation passed during the last eighty years since Bradlaugh's days witnesses to the considerable influence exercised by Secularism as an organised force and, perhaps, still more, as an effective current of critical thought. One may also relevantly add, particularly in view of some current opinions recently manifested in our correspondence columns, that there is no necessary antithesis between the role of a Secularist and a concurrent political role. The biography of the founder of organised Secularism in Britain, Charles Bradlaugh himself, is proof enough of this last statement.

Without invading the controversial domain of party-politics—where, no doubt, our readers are ranged in quite a variety of camps—there are, none the less, a number of matters of concern to Freethinkers and Secularists as such, upon which it ought to be possible for all Secularists to act together, whatever may be their differences in other respects, and, we may add, now is the time to do so in what everything indicates will be a closely-contested election in which politicians are likely to be particularly susceptible to the consistent suggestions of "pressure groups" like the N.S.S. and kindred bodies. For, with

rare exceptions, politicians are not the creators of ideas—far from being such, the art of the *successful* politician consists in being a man of his own time, not of the past or future. In relation to current political practice, ideas are imports, not exports!

What are the points which Secularists can agree in pressing upon candidates of all parties? Several such stand out the proverbial mile, conspicuous amongst which are the iniquitous "Blasphemy" Laws, that still standing monument of medieval intolerance imposed in the incongruous atmosphere of a modern society by the "dead hand" of organised religion. Equally absurd, to-day, on democratic principles to which all parties pay at least lip-service, is the official establishment of the shrinking rump of Anglicanism—the effective Church of about four per cent. of the total population—as the State-Church with a position still specially privileged and parliamentary representation in the House of Lords; and, if it is high time that an end is put to this now outmoded Tudor anomaly, equally necessary is it to terminate the new anomaly so glaringly represented in and by the daily (and nightly) practice of the B.B.C. In an age and land such as is ours where, to judge from recent authoritative statistics, the large majority of the adult population has now parted company with all forms of organised Christianity, it is, again on the elementary democratic logic so persistently invoked by the politicians—of all shades—themselves, utterly monstrous that large sums of public money should be spent, and large amounts of public time wasted on the air putting over, often in grotesque forms, the partisan doctrines of what is now beyond question a small and ever-dwindling religious minority.

It is not the business of a governmental department like the B.B.C., any more than it is the business of the government itself, to undertake the "conversion" of these islands to Christianity—with, to add insult to injury, the proceeds of taxes mostly drawn from non- or even anti-Christian pockets. Indeed, it is now high time, and a general election is just *the* time, to raise the whole question of the mutual relationship of Church and State. Queen Anne and also Queen Elizabeth have now been dead quite a while, and the present still surviving Tudor-Stuart set-up has long been hopelessly outmoded. In the 16th century it may have been a fact that England was a Christian land; to-day, as even honest Christians admit, the whole supposition is simply a pious fiction—perhaps fraud would actually be the more accurate expression.

The time has now surely come to introduce into practical politics the classical Continental Secularist slogan: "The Free Church in the Free State." It is, indeed, already realised in the contemporary constitutions of the two greatest world-powers of our era: U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. However much divided by economic theory both the American and Russian revolutions eventuated in Secular states where all forms of ideology, religious and anti-religious alike, enjoy complete equality before the Law. Such, indeed, is the only enlightened modern polity. It is,

indeed, high time that the Middle Ages ended in Great Britain!

Such represent the most obvious targets for Secularist "pressure" to aim at achieving in our time. Beyond which lies a whole congeries of questions, ranging from the compulsory religious education of children in schools—that outrageous capitulation to religious reaction in the 1944 Education Act—to that bastard offspring of religious obscurantism and legal hypocrisy, our present Divorce Laws. Nor must we forget that other pressure-groups also exist, with the Roman Catholic Church well to the fore, which are at present "turning on the political heat" in favour of their own medieval solutions. "The price of liberty is—still—eternal vigilance."

At present it seems unlikely that Secularism will become a mass-movement, at least for a long time to come its effective role will be that of an advanced minority. Perhaps in a distant future politics, too, may become entirely rational. That day is not yet. "The Age of Miracles is past."

F. A. RIDLEY.

RELIGION IN THE 1830's

II

THE principle that the State possessed the right to control the administration of Church endowments and to devote what it deemed excessive to purposes of social service, was generally accepted by Parliament. The Radical leader in the Commons, Joseph Hume and the Irish agitator, O'Connell himself, accepted this compromise as provisional, although both adhered to the policy of complete disestablishment and disendowment as the only logical solution of the problem of religious equality.

A Bill for the reform of the Irish Church was presented to Parliament in 1833, which condemned the enormous number of Anglican clergy in an island predominantly Catholic. It was proposed that ten of the 22 Irish Sees were to be united with other Sees. All deans and chapters were to be abolished where no cure of souls existed. The income of the Irish Primate was to be reduced and, wherever no service had been conducted within the preceding three years; Commissioners to be appointed by the Bill were authorised to prevent the appointment of any incumbent.

The Bill also proposed the abolition of the Church cess, a local Church rate utilised for the maintenance of the services. This impost was to be replaced by a graduated charge on clerical incomes, and it was presumed that a more efficient management would lessen the expenditure provided by the cess, and thus furnish a fund for increasing the stipends of the poorer pastors, or for the erection of new churches.

While the provisions of the Bill were being considered by the Cabinet, prior to its introduction into the Commons, Lord John Russell recommended "the suppression of all parishes in which the members of the Establishment were non-existent or a mere handful, and the application of the funds thus obtained to the furtherance of popular education. He was supported by Lord Althorp and Lord Durham. But he had been defeated by the determined opposition of Stanley, who was upheld by Lord Grey and the majority of the ministers. Lord John had taken the matter so much to heart, that he was on the verge of tendering his resignation on the very eve of the General Election." He was ultimately persuaded to remain in the Ministry, although, as Halevy testifies: "The King's Speech had set the seal on his failure: there was no questioning of diminishing the endowments of the

Church, but only of a more equitable and more judicious distribution of these endowments."

The Bill, if amended to secure Conservative support, both in the Commons and Lords, became law, but it created considerable excitement and heralded the decline of an anti-clericalism which had arisen in England as the aftermath of the Parisian revolution in 1830.

The English High Churchmen became alarmed with the secular spirit prevalent in the early 30's, and the Rev. H. J. Rose, with the cordial support of the Archbishop of Canterbury, conducted a campaign for the High Church party. Visiting Oxford in 1832, he became intimate with Percival, Hurrell Froude, the sceptical historian's brother, and other zealots, and he and they prepared a plan for the Church's safety.

They regarded John Keble as their real leader, as he aspired to elevate the High Church by introducing poetry and romantic piety into its propaganda, and adopting the methods so successfully employed by Wesley in an earlier generation. Keble's collection of sacred verse—the *Christian Year*, which appeared in 1827, had enjoyed a very wide circulation and now, in a stormy sermon delivered at St. Mary's, Oxford, he denounced the Irish Church measure as a dire repudiation "of the sovereignty of God" and an act of "national apostasy." Another High Churchman, then comparatively unknown, had previously aroused indignation and interest by his devastating deliverances. This cleric was J. H. Newman, then a fervid evangelical whose views had been somewhat enlarged by the teachings of Whately, although he never adopted that logician's latitudinarianism. Also, Newman became one of Sir Robert Peel's most unsparing antagonists, when that statesman sought re-election for Oxford University, as a protest against his support of Catholic emancipation. For Newman hotly contended that his then adored Anglican Church had been shamefully humiliated. Plain speaking, he said, was called for and, in a letter to his sister, the future Roman Cardinal asserted that: "If times are troublous, Oxford will want hot-headed men, and such I mean to be, and I am in my place."

Various schemes were propounded by the champions of the High Church, and they then decided to issue a series of tracts, each writer being responsible for his own publication. In the first of these, it was contended that the Church of England was the only genuine Christian denomination, for the Roman Church had been corrupt ever "since the Council of Trent," while the Protestant Dissenters "were equally corrupt and doomed sooner or later to fall a prey to Socinianism."

A document containing seven thousand clerical signatures, was addressed to the English Primate, which stressed the urgent need for co-operative action "that may tend to revive the discipline of ancient times; strengthen the connection between the bishops, clergy and people and promote the purity, the efficiency and the unity of the Church." As this project threatened to lessen the authority of the bishops, it was coldly received in episcopal circles, but it was eagerly accepted by the lower clergy and laymen. Another address, bearing the signatures of laymen was presented to the Primate which contained 230,000 householder's autographs.

But as the Tractarian Movement developed, marked Romanist tendencies emerged, until, after the issue of Newman's Tract 90 and his subsequent conversion to Catholicism, other erstwhile Anglican devotees followed his regrettable example and were joyfully received into the Roman communion.

Meanwhile, the Nonconformists were also anxious to strengthen their position. Their claims had been ignored by the reformed Parliament and their indignation increased when the Anglican clergy appealed to the civil Courts against the reduction of their tithes. Anticlericalism revived among tenant farmers and Dissenting agricultural labourers, and the disestablishment of the State Church was again requested. Dissenters and their adherents assembled in Manchester and other provincial cities and petitioned the Government to release them "from any sort of obligation to contribute towards the cost of Anglican worship, their right to be buried in the churchyards by their own ministers, free access to the Universities, the right to be married in their own chapels, a secular State observing neutrality towards all creeds." These were their main grievancies. At public meetings a clear demand for disestablishment prevailed and, at least in the leading industrial areas, the Nonconformists of all shades certainly outnumbered the Anglicans. In the cause of civil and religious liberty, the Radical and Irish spokesmen, Hume and O'Connell cordially advocated the Dissenter's claims.

Coleridge and Greville, among others, were convinced that the attack on the Church by a formidable combination of Freethinkers, Catholics and Dissenters would spell her doom. But general opinion identified the agitation as more Irish and Romanist than Protestant, and the movement for Church reform declined. This was evident when eminent Radicals lost their seats in the election of 1837, when the abstention of many Nonconformist voters signalled the break-up of the composite party previously pledged to the disestablishment of the Anglican Church.

T. F. PALMER.

ARE ALL RELIGIONS EQUALLY FALSE ?

THE Editor has asked Mr. Ebury to write an article on the subject that all religions are equally false, and asks how Dr. Barnes's god of evolution can be as false as an Aztec cannibal's. I hope both will forgive my impertinence if I have a stir at the pudding.

I think Mr. Ebury's phrase that "Barnes only becomes rational in so far as he rejects the supernatural, i.e., the religions," is an answer in itself, but more can be said "about it and about."

I heard a debate with a young lady of the Catholic Truth persuasion on the existence of God, and it made me realise more deeply than ever how insincere this argument from design is. She sought to prove her god by the immutable laws of so-called creation, the sun, moon and stars that never vary, the strange insect that is so adapted to preserve its life at the expense of the tree on which it lives. It did not seem to occur to her that such a god is useless to man, he could not alter, be cajoled by prayers, he is tied by his own immutable laws. He could not change the course of the volcanic lava, though it were engulfing children who were praying to him; he could not bring the monsoon rain to India, though millions were perishing from drought. He is worthless to man, and incompatible with other attributes they seek to ascribe to him.

This is the god of Dr. Barnes also, the god of evolution, the god who ordained the extinction of millions of species, of still more millions of individual life: the god who cannot break by one iota the laws which bind him. This is the rational religion that Mr. Ridley speaks about, the scientific religion.

I remember a black man telling me of his tribe; they pray to their wooden god for rain or sunshine, it does not come: "they knock spiffen out of his earholes and make

themselves another." I could almost make an argument that theirs was the rational religion.

The Aztec cannibal feels that his enemy has qualities of courage and strength and he desires to partake of those qualities, so he eats his fallen enemy. Dr. Barnes wishes to partake of the meek spirit of Christ, so he blesses a bit of bread and a drop of wine and eats and supps that; is he being more rational?

The Aztec lived in an age when science was unknown, his religion was in part an attempt to explain the mysteries of nature: Barnes lives in an age when science has thrown her light on most of the obscure riddles of the universe, that he still believes is evidence of prejudice and stupidity. I almost feel that I must add cowardice, for he is sheltering behind a facade of scientific evolution to impress the pseudo-intellectuals, and I suspect to save his own intellectual faculties from an internal conflict.

No, we must face up to the fact that there are no degrees of falsity. A thing is not more false because it is bigger or less false because it is smaller. A thing is true when there is a correspondence between thought and reality. There is no god, not even a tiny little pimple of a god. There is neither the anthropomorphic long-whiskered Jehovah, nor the cloudy amorphous creator with a divine son and divine passion thrown in to still further cloud the issue, they are all of them false, all equally false.

EVA EBURY.

[We never at any time stated that there was such a thing as a "rational religion." *The Freethinker* is still edited by an Atheist! What we did say was that some religions actually involve more falsehood than others—a totally different proposition.—EDITOR.]

EARLY BATHE

O'er the black nab the stars turned pale;
More luminous the sleeping sea
Of wavelets grey; a rising gale
Ruffled their gaudy imag'ry.
Loosing the straining waters, free
To strike and grind, with sounding roar,
Upon the rocks and shingly shore;
Gulls screamed and wheeled—incessantly.

Then, when the sun his first dart sent,
I picked a pool, rock-bound, to swim,
And sport with that dour element:
In those black depths, that abyss dim,
On oozy bed, as charnel grim,
Dread ocean hides strange fantasies—
Odd uncouth shapes, Hell's mysteries—
Horror things one scarce dare dream!

His unplumb'd caverns are to man
Like air and sunshine unto those
Dwellers in sea-woods, darker than
The darkest night land-forest knows,
Yet sweeter than May-wind, that blows
O'er violets, to things o' th' Deep:
Sea-lilies sway; in grisly sleep
Lurks octopus—O grim repose!

Joy lies within the sense that tells—
It has no universal form:
Rats fatten in dank dungeon cells;
Sweet-throated "storm-cocks" love the storm
That chills the lark; no general norm
Is found in motley Nature, and
Corruption best delights the worm:
Give each his choice, and me dry land.

A. SLATER.

ACID DROPS

It may be news to our readers, but it is none the less a fact, that the Church of England has a dignitary with the grandiose title, "Bishop of Southern Europe." When a former holder of this august position was once presented to Pope Leo the 13th at the Vatican, His Holiness greeted his visitor with the accurate information: "I think that I am in your lordship's diocese."

Everything under the sun changes—even the Church of Rome! For the Pope has actually sent a telegram to the Queen praying for the King's recovery from his present illness, and yet it is an indisputable historical fact that the present Hanoverian dynasty owes its tenure of the British throne solely to the fear of Popery and of a Stuart restoration of Catholicism. Nor was it so very long ago either that every English king took an oath at his coronation denouncing the Pope and all his works.

In a recent dispatch to the *Observer*, Mr. Philip Toynbee tells its readers that in Persia, "the carpets are still knotted in the cruel and antique way, little girls of five knotting and knotting through the long day for about six shillings a week." Mr. Toynbee then goes on to tell us: "because Isfahan is the religious capital of Persia its richer citizens confidently assure a visitor that there can be no communist danger from its pious workers." Apparently, it is not only in Christian lands that "religion is the opium of the people."

Not long ago, we had occasions to read one of the most famous of ancient works of fiction, Lucian of Samosata's *True History*. In this fascinating work the hero gets landed on the moon, where he finds the men in the moon at war with the citizens of the sun over the right to colonise the evening star. Here, it strikes us, is an idea which we respectfully submit to all potential warmongers. Let's start a "Hundred years war" against the moon, which won't hurt anyone, since no one can get there—yet. At the same time, it will keep the armament programme in full blast for a century, thus ensuring "full employment" without arousing national animosities, besides giving the clergy something to pray for—the conversion of the man in the moon and similar moonshine!

A Report by the Middlesex County Council on the popularity of books borrowed from two of its libraries says that "there was little demand for religious works." Such a depressing fact should force our religious leaders into furious activity, though we doubt whether a reputed suggestion by a member of the Lord's Day Observance Society that all public libraries should consist of nothing but religious works will be received with applause.

All the same, the B.B.C. is doing its utmost for religion. As the Rev. F. House points out in the *Radio Times*, "The most notable development in religious broadcasting will be the introduction of the new B.B.C. Hymn Book for the Daily Service and other studio broadcasts," and no doubt its sale will overwhelm the good old Hymns Ancient and Modern, which used to adorn so many of our side tables and which was always ready to form a convenient stand for a hot teapot.

We note also from the *Radio Times* that there are going to be a number of talks on Tuesday evenings to discuss some of the difficulties "which arise when we try to apply

the Christian Faith to our daily work." What good the miracles of Jesus could do to a dustman, a miner, or a jockey is difficult to see, but it is rather a pity that "some of the difficulties" of the Christian Faith are not allowed to be discussed on the air by competent Freethinkers. What a hullabaloo there would be all over the country if a reasoned argument attacking the credibility and the authenticity of Christianity was allowed to penetrate millions of homes! And yet that will be the case—one day.

It was quite amusing to find that "the B.B.C. critics" who dispute so pleasantly every Sunday morning had very little good to say of the broadcast on "William Temple: A True Man of God" which was specially designed to allow listeners to see what a true man of God really was like. All parsons and priests are men of God, some more and some less, we suppose, but what there was in Temple to make him more so was certainly not shown in the broadcast. In fact, we challenge anybody to say what in actual fact constitutes a man of God. Calling him so does not. Perhaps the only true ones were those filthy, unkempt hermits and monks who lived on herbs and water and never washed, and whose Divine Doings are faithfully recorded in the *Lives of the Saints*. But even the B.B.C. is unlikely to make heroes of them!

Christians always find it easy to "debunk" other religions, so one need not be surprised to find Dr. Leslie Weatherhead slamming Lourdes, Christian Science, and Spiritualism—with certain reservations—and being almost blind to the nonsense of his own. He does, however, make one good point and that is that even if the above three religions can or do produce some "cures," "a man with the toothache doesn't pray, he goes to a dentist." We wonder how Christian Scientists and Spiritualists will answer that one?

"Hats on" is now the rule again in the government of the State of Israel. The Prime Minister, Mr. Ben Gurion, is a Socialist and reputedly an Atheist. However, his last government, prior to the recent general election, depended upon the parliamentary support of the rabbinical "religious bloc." Hence, Mr. Ben Gurion conformed with orthodox Judaism by wearing his hat at Cabinet meetings. Since the election he has been carrying on an interim government without the aid of the rabbis; so, we are informed, off came his hat in the council chamber. Now, Ben Gurion has just formed another coalition government which includes the "religious bloc" again. So, we presume, the prime minister will again put on his hat, as the Talmud enjoins. Politics in Israel must be even trickier than nearer home!

Mr. Beverley Nichols is not quite right in his recent *Sunday Chronicle* article that the *National Reformer* was prosecuted for "blasphemy and sedition." All the Government wanted was "sureties in the sum of £400 against the appearance of blasphemy and sedition" in its columns. And the Government eventually lost the case! Mr. Nichols is no doubt confusing this with the prosecution of G. W. Foote and *The Freethinker* for blasphemy in 1882-3—but he may as well get his facts right. Incidentally, we understand that Mr. Nichols believes in the Resurrection on the "evidence"—and not on Faith. We wonder whether he would be prepared to discuss this "evidence" in our pages? So far it has eluded us.

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
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TO CORRESPONDENTS

- T. OWEN.—Your letter appears to us irrelevant.
- J. MATSON.—We agree with your views—but our space is so very limited.
- G. L. JEPSON.—Thanks for article. We believe that the Rationalist Press Association (Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C. 4) can guarantee any cremation. Why not contact them?
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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

As some readers are aware, Mr. H. Cutner is writing the biography of G. W. Foote, and he would be greatly obliged if any reader can help him with any information which would add to its value in the shape of letters or incidents. One of Foote's most valued correspondents was George Meredith, and if any reader knows of the existence of letters which passed between them, would he be good enough to communicate with Mr. Cutner.

In this connection it may be added that Prof. Cline, of Texas University, is preparing a complete edition of the letters of Meredith, and letters to Foote should be added. As far as we are aware, none has so far appeared—perhaps the mutual admiration Foote and Meredith had for each other was suppressed in the interests of the great novelist's reputation. That he should admire the work of such an aggressive Atheist as G. W. Foote may not at all have been to the liking of his heirs and trustees. But no edition of Meredith's letters could be complete without the many he wrote to Foote. Are they still in existence?

Upon Sunday last, October 7, the West London Branch, N.S.S., staged an original, not to say unique demonstration. Mr. F. A. Hornibrook, President of the Branch, is well known both to readers of *The Freethinker* and upon secular platforms up and down the country. He is, in addition a leading authority upon physical culture, ranging from "The culture of the abdomen"—the title of his best-known book—to "The noble art of boxing." Before a crowded audience at "The Laurie Arms," Edgware Road, London, W., Mr. Hornibrook gave a personal exhibition of physical culture, including native dances to the accompaniment of the gramophone, and interspersed with wise and witty remarks by the mobile lecturer. An unique evening, we may truly add, was spent by all. If the learned lecturer's advice is duly followed we may soon expect the West London Branch, N.S.S., to contain not only brains but also to be the beef of the Secularist Movement. The "Church Militant" had better take care!

The Freethinker Fund

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

is now open

Mr. Beverley Nichol's article in last week's *Sunday Chronicle* on "The Soul of an Atheist," contains an interview with Mr. R. H. Rosetti which should interest our readers. He will lecture for the Manchester Branch, N.S.S., in the Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints, to-day (October 14) on "What is Civilisation?" The lecture begins at 7 p.m. Admission free.

Will those who sent messages of condolence to the widow and relatives of the late Arthur Charles Rosetti kindly accept this form of acknowledgment. They all have been greatly appreciated, especially the fine tributes to his personality and work for Freethought. Such messages help to soothe the sorrow of a great loss.

Those of our readers who are interested in the Shakespeare problem should go to the debate between Mr. John Brophy, the well-known novelist, and Mr. William Kent, who needs no introduction here, to be held at the City Literary Institute, just off Drury Lane, at 3 p.m. next Saturday, October 13. Mr. Kent, of course, is an authority on the Oxford authorship of the plays. Mr. Brophy is an orthodox Shakespearean.

THE BIOGRAPHY OF A GHOST-HUNTER

UNDER this title, Mr. Paul Tabori has written an extremely interesting biography of the late Harry Price (Athenium Press, London, 1950) who, for forty years, figured so prominently as England's champion spook-hunter.

Always anxious to get at the truth, Price appears to have offended both sides—the believers and the unbelievers. He exposed Mrs. Duncan when that great medium convinced so many confirmed Spiritualists that cheese cloth, which could be bought at any draper's, was veritable ectoplasm; he exposed those arrant frauds, William Hope and Mrs. Deane—the former he caught out "switching" the photographic plates Price brought to test his "spirit" photography—and he got into a furious controversy with Sir. A. Conan Doyle who, naturally, believed in Hope's psychic powers as well as in those of Mrs. Deane. This lady produced a wonderful photograph of a scene on Armistice Day with the spirits of our dead soldiers hovering over the Cenotaph. She was not in the least upset when one of the newspapers found out that the dead soldiers were really taken from a crowd of living footballers. On the other hand, he challenged the famous "magic" family, the Maskelynes, to produce, under similar conditions, the phenomena which attended the seances of Rudi Schneider. Of course, when Rudi was caught with an arm free which had previously been inescapably bound, Price was forced to believe, as Mr. Tabori records, "that Rudi had cheated or tried to cheat." Thus the Spiritualists were offended and the un-

believers were offended, and this seems to have been a rather unfortunate way of getting at the truth.

Readers will understand, when I first read the book, why I turned to the pages in which Mr. Tabori deals with the famous case of the R.101 airship. I was glad to see that he at least was not afraid to mention this journal. He says: "In 1949-50 the Irwin case was renewed in a violent dispute in the pages of *The Freethinker* and *Psychic News*. The tale was re-told, honestly and sympathetically, by Ian Coster in *The Leader*, May, 1950." I think Mr. Tabori might have pointed out why there was a "violent dispute." And I feel it only right to say that I also dispute Mr. Tabori's account of the seance in which Mrs. Garrett is alleged by him to have given "a highly technical, rapid description of what was the matter with the airship, its construction and features." He admits that "this information was given at such speed that Price's secretary sometimes found it difficult to keep pace with the delivery." As this was certainly the case, it should prove interesting how the secretary managed to report anything so highly technical as the terms used in the construction of an airship—in fact, any shorthand typist would readily admit that one has to be very conversant with the shorthand forms of a particular technical language before being able to take down a report which included a mass of them. In the articles I wrote for this journal, I made a point of this, and I challenged Spiritualists to bring the proof that Price's secretary got down the kind of rapidly delivered and incoherent mutterings which came from Mrs. Garrett. The reply I got from Mrs. Goldney of the S.P.R. was that the secretary, Miss Beenham, was almost in tears because she thought she would be unable to transcribe *any* of her shorthand notes. The *published* reports of the seance were *made up*, and I am greatly surprised that Mr. Tabori, who claims that he is not a Spiritualist, should have given what I consider to be a misleading account of the R.101 affair.

There is one way in which it can be cleared up once and for all and that is, the production of Miss Beenham's shorthand notes, and the typed script she made from them—and there is no other way. I venture categorically to say that if these were produced they would clearly show that there was a great difference between the report as published and the report as taken down. And Mr. Tabori takes good care to omit from his own account that Harry Price said quite clearly that it was *not* the discarnate spirit of the unfortunate Commander Irwin which came through, which proves how little he believed in "survival" and this seance.

At the same seance, Sir A. Conan Doyle "came through," and Price had a long talk with him. Mrs. Garrett was not "consciously cheating," thought Price, but she may have picked up "emanations from the brain of the *living* Doyle which had in some way become crystallised"—an explanation which is as good as any other, for once again it shows that Price did not believe in survival. Even Lady Doyle, a medium herself, "was sceptical about the whole thing" though she "praised Mrs. Garrett's work."

Apart from all this, I can heartily recommend Mr. Tabori's most entertaining and well documented work. It must make most Spiritualists furious for, in spite of over forty years of "ghost hunting," Price was never converted to the belief that "all the millions now living will never die" (to add two words to a famous slogan).

He was certainly "shaken" more than once, and never

could explain some of the seances he investigated like that one where "Rosalie" materialised. She was a child of six who had died in her mother's arms and later "returned." At the seance held (as always) "under test conditions" with Rosalie's mother and some friends present, Price saw the "spirit" of the little girl quite distinctly and even held her in his arms—a feat similar to that described by Sir William Crookes who held the spirit form of Katie King in *his* arms—and even kissed her. Except when she said "yes," Rosalie did not reply to some questions asked by Price and "in about fifteen minutes Rosalie had gone." Needless to say, when he published the account in one of his books "it caused a very considerable sensation." And after a careful examination, Mr. Tabori comes to the conclusion that "the riddle of Rosalie must remain unsolved for ever." The reason for this is that the witnesses of the seance appear to have completely disappeared; and if I were asked my opinion I feel like saying that I doubt the whole story. Even Prof. Joad had to tell Price, "I do not think anything would persuade me that this had in fact really occurred."

Two of the sensational stories in which Price played a big part are detailed in full by Mr. Tabori—the Talking Mongoose, and the one which gave some wonderful copy to newspapers all over the world, when Price and Prof. Joad went to the Brocken in the Harz Mountains in Germany, to try out a Magical Ritual in which a goat could be changed into a beautiful youth if a maiden pure in heart was present. The Ritual was carefully followed and nothing happened, of course. It is true Price later claimed that he only did it to show that these magical rites were nonsense but "the Brocken excursion did Harry Price's prestige a good deal of harm," and he was ridiculed and jeered at for a long time afterwards. As for the Talking Mongoose—which knew several languages and could read one's thoughts—he never saw it, and after the way in which Price was completely hoaxed about it, I am rather surprised that Mr. Tabori should claim that "in the psychological sense, at least, it still remains a mystery." The real mystery is that anybody should have thought here was something worth investigating. It makes me wonder if Price would have investigated the story of Cinderella and her talking wolf.

There is such a lot of interest in this book that I can only send any reader to it if he wants to read about credulity in its most childish form. The chapter, "No Bed of Roses," ought certainly to be studied by all who feel that there may be something in Spiritualism—they will certainly see "in that way lies madness"; and more and more that, in scientific Materialism, lies sanity.

H. CUTNER.

CORRESPONDENCE

PRAYER

SIR,—Almost world-wide prayers for the King's recovery causes one to ask whether the civilised world will ever be rid of superstition.—Yours, etc.,

T. G. KIRKBY.

IS THERE A HELL?

SIR,—Will you allow me to thank Mr. J. Henshaw for his letter and to explain that I had not read the review by Mr. Ivor Brown in the *Observer of English Life and Leisure*. It will be obvious therefore that Mr. Henshaw's charge that I was "rather unfair to the *Observer*" is misconceived.

I made it clear in my letter to *The Freethinker* that I was criticising a correspondent in the *Observer* for contending that "No Catholic priest dare assert that anyone is actually burning in hell—

fire, far less that anyone will so burn." I pointed out that I had written to the *Observer* to the effect that the existence of hell and its residents was an integral part of Christianity, and quoted Roman Catholic writers who support the belief in the burning of people in the actual fire of hell.

Personally, I was disappointed that a discussion on the subject of hell was refused in the *Observer*.—Yours, etc.,

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

CHRISTIAN NAZIS

SIR,—*The Standard*, a Roman Catholic weekly published in Dublin, reported on September 7 that most of the 21 Nazis convicted at Nuremberg trials "repented their sins and returned to their Christian faiths" before going to prison or the gallows. "When offered the eternal verities," continued the report, "most of the defendants were able to come to their moral senses and repent."

It is difficult to see in what way their acceptance of the Nazi philosophy, supported as it was by Cardinal Pacelli, now Pope, constituted a sin or made it incumbent on them to abandon the Catholic or Christian faith. Even their brutal excesses, committed under the orders of Hitler, could be no more reprehensible in the eyes of civilised humanity, than were those carried out with the approval of the R.C. Church itself in the past, and more recently in Spain. Certainly that devout Roman Catholic Mr. de Valera was not conscious of any sin committed by the Nazis when he sent his message of condolence on the death of Hitler to the authors of Buchenwald.

The report further stated that only two of the Catholic defendants, General Alfred Jodl and Julius Streicher, refused spiritual counsel, although professing belief in God. No doubt they remembered the sort of gratitude exhibited by the Church, when after receiving 20 million lire and the restoration of the "temporal power" from Mussolini, she hastened, as soon as she saw defeat was at hand, to leave the sinking ship of fascism, and pose as the friend of democracy.—Yours, etc.,

JOHN McMANUS.

WHAT IS A FREETHINKER?

SIR,—As a member of the Rationalist Press Association, I am interested in the above question.

It is raised by Mr. A. Yates in the course of his jejune rebuke of Mr. Du Cann's brilliance over "Saint Bernard Shaw." Mr. Yates thinks "Freethinker" a mere synonym for "Atheist."

Scholarship, however, is heavily on the side of Mr. Du Cann's usage of the word. The first use of the word in English was in 1692 in S. Smith's pamphlet "The Religious Imposter, dedicated to Dr. Solomons and the rest of the new Religious Freethinkers. Printed in the 1st year of Grace and Freethinking." Thereafter it was the Deistic (not the Atheistic) rejectors of Christianity who so described themselves and were so described.

The New Standard English Dictionary (Vol. 1) in 1947 thus defines Freethinker—"one who rejects authority or inspiration in religion" and freethought as "thought irrespected by conventional rules, opinions or dogmas, . . . especially in matters of morals or religion." NOT as Atheism!

Educated speakers and writers both in the British Commonwealth and U.S.A. use the word "Freethinker" in the above wide meaning, and not as merely a synonym for "Atheist." The plain fact is that an Atheist is always a Freethinker, but a Freethinker may not be an Atheist at all and may be a Deist, and Mr. Yates is quite wrong.—Yours, etc.,

MICHAEL ANGEL.

"A RUSTLE IN PHILOSOPHY"

SIR,—I do not think I have read with so much pleasure any article by your contributor, J. Effel, as the one under the above heading in your issue of September 9, 1951.

In it he makes a realistic stand for peace against the sophistries of those who, like Russell, blow hot one day and cold the next.

There are many of those idols with feet of clay about to-day who, having put their hand to the plough, find the going hard and try to escape amidst a cloud of words which to-day make confusion worse confounded.

J. Effel strips the tinsel from these golden cuffs, leaves them stark naked, and shows us that if we take these people seriously, we show a mental weakness.

At one time the Irish had a song which went:—

"For years and years we've cried and prayed

For pity to the Lord,

A newer saviour now we've found,

That saviour is the Sword."

Many forget that peace has to be fought for, and in a metaphorical manner your contributor, J. Effel, uses the sword well, and seems not unacquainted with the rapier also. I like his realism, his lack of beating about the bush, his calling a spade a spade. I look forward to his future contributions to your valuable periodical with pleasant anticipation.—Yours, etc.,

BILL SPARK.

OBITUARY

Arthur Charles Rosetti

By the death of Arthur Charles Rosetti, only brother of Mr. R. H. Rosetti, the Freethought Movement in this country has lost one of its most loyal, enthusiastic and trusted champions. He collapsed with an internal haemorrhage on September 28, was taken to the Sutton & Cheam General Hospital where, after a blood transfusion, he died on September 30, in his 69th year. His Freethought work began with the West Ham Branch, N.S.S., later he moved to Manchester and joined the local branch. He became Branch Librarian and then President. Returning to London for business reasons, he joined the Kingston Branch, N.S.S., and remained a member until his death. He was elected to the London Executive in 1930, was a Director of the Secular Society Limited, and elected to the new Board of the G. W. Foote Company Limited. In each of those offices his loss will be keenly felt by his colleagues for his judgment, integrity, enthusiasm and friendship. He was a regular reader of *The Freethinker* and faithfully served the Freethought Movement for nearly half a century. The cremation took place at the South London Crematorium, Streatham Vale, London, S.W., on October 4, where, before an assembly of relatives, representatives of the Executive N.S.S., and London Branches, the Secular Society Limited and friends, a Secular Service was read by Mr. R. H. Rosetti. Our sympathy is with his widow and surviving members of the family. It may not be out of place here to quote from a tribute from Manchester which says: "He has lived, he has loved, he has served, and nobly served his fellows, and he has gone. We mourn deeply but we are glad that we knew him."

R. H. R.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: J. SHARPLES; 7 p.m., J. CLAYTON. Mr. J. CLAYTON's engagements: Padiham, Friday, October 12, 7-30 p.m.; Haslingden, Sunday, 2-45 p.m.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: J. W. BARKER.

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

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: L. EBURY and W. G. FRASER.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, October 13, 6-30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

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

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

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: E. STOCKDALE, "A Clear Head or a Pure Heart?"

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 16, 7 p.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, B.A., "Can We Still be Rationalists?"

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: J. P. MORRISON, "How the Wind Blows."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. R. BARNES, "UNO and Politics To-day."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Coun. W. G. E. DYER, "The Price of Nationalised Transport."

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. R. H. ROSETTI (President of the N.S.S.), "What is Civilisation?"

South London Branch N.S.S. (London and Brighton Hotel, Queen's Road, Peckham).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. GEORGE JACKSON, "Communism and Freedom."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, October 14, 11 a.m.: Prof. J. C. FLUGEL, D.Sc., "Psycho-Analysis and Psychology."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: Debate, L. EBURY and T. SARGANT, "The Contribution of Christianity, Good or Bad."

FURNISHED room required by young Barbadian lady with baby girl. Husband at sea. London suburb preferred.—Box 777.

ON FAITH

FAITH is a term which has been used in various senses and applications to suit the requirements of business people, religious propagandists and political enthusiasts. *Faith* (Middle English, *feyth*) has its root in the Latin *fidere*=to trust. It is in this latter sense that it is employed in social and business life to indicate trust that is based on rational experience. Business man A has faith in B because he has found that B is a reliable person in his transactions with his fellows. This kind of faith is trust that has solid foundations in commercial relationships. Similarly, when crossing a bridge, one trusts to the stability of the structure because the experience of several years has proved that it will sustain the weight of many passengers and heavy vehicles. On the contrary, the trust which is reposed in persons such as politicians is usually misplaced because in order to gain the suffrages of the people they make all sorts of rash promises which they cannot or do not intend to implement.

In religion the term *Faith* has a special signification; it means the acceptance of undemonstrated propositions. Certain doctrines are propounded, and if people do not receive them without question direful punitive consequences will be their fate. There must be simple, unquestioning childlike faith. Ratiocination must not be allowed the slightest scope. What is accepted by faith may be either true or false. There is no criterion by which to form a judgment. "Theirs not to reason why." The exercise of such credulity is reminiscent of the unsuspecting countryman who took his wife on a holiday to London. When they arrived at their hotel the man proposed that they should have a look round the neighbourhood before retiring. The wife asked to be excused as she felt very tired after their long journey, so the man went out alone. When he returned he exclaimed, "London is a mighty wonderful place, and the people are most obliging. A man in the Strand offered to regulate my gold watch for nothing, and he is going to bring it back to the hotel tomorrow!"

One is placed in great perplexity when being adjured to exercise theological faith. Many and self-contradictory are the numerous religions in the world. Most of their propagandists threaten dreadful penalties if their doctrines are not swallowed holus-bolus without reflection. Only believe! It would be terrible to be tortured for ever and ever in a lake of fire which is never quenched! What is one to do when confronted by a mass of mutually antagonistic teachings? Is one to accept the whole lot on the chance that one of them might be right and thus escape the awful consequences? A pretty mental muddle would be the result of such an acceptance. Rather should one retort, "A plague on all your cathedrals, churches, chapels, tabernacles, Bethels, shrines and mosques!"

A favourite plea employed by theologians is that Faith is higher than Reason; therefore we should exercise Faith and ignore the dictates of Reason. Such talk is the quintessence of stultiloquy. To say that something is higher than something else implies a comparison. A comparison can be made only by employing the rational faculty. Qualities and functions must be juxtaposed to discover where they agree and where they differ. What a pitiable object is a theologian who uses his reason as hard as he can and for all it is worth to prove that Reason is an unreliable function and that it should be subordinated to some nebulous mental exercise called Faith! A further

result of this theological self-stultification is that one cannot discuss with a man who denies the supremacy of Reason, because the faith-monger himself cannot even begin to argue, and it requires at least two persons to enter into an argument. An argument is composed of propositions, and these propositions are combined in syllogisms. Throughout the process of syllogising the subjects and predicates of these propositions have to be carefully examined to determine whether they agree or differ in their connotations, and then these subjects and predicates, as major and minor terms, must be compared with a middle term in order to make an inference to the conclusion. Truly an exercise of the rational faculty is here required in argumentation, whether or not the disputants be acquainted with the technicalities of logical doctrine.

There seems to be no more suitable conclusions to this disquisition on Faith than a reference to the classical schoolboy howler, "Faith is that which enables you to believe what you know to be untrue."

R. de M.

THEATRE

"Tamburlaine the Great" by Christopher Marlowe

In this play, Tamburlaine (given at the Old Vic Theatre), the Mongolian potentate who conquered, tortured and slew one king after another, is depicted as a barbarous and cruel ruffian.

It is not difficult to find a spark of cruelty in all of us, but in most cases the sadistic urge is satisfied by an emotional phase which can be brought about by witnessing, acting in or writing a play of this kind. So we may deduct that Marlowe had a powerful inner streak of cruelty, which—through Donald Wolfitt—was transmitted to the audience. The effect was that, after witnessing the cruelest play I have seen, I came away feeling strongly nauseated.

The construction of the play is poor, for it consists of a monotonous repetition of one conquest after another, in which the enemy monarch is tortured to death. It seems that Tamburlaine's thirst for blood cannot be quenched, for he slaughters the Virgins of Damascus who submit themselves to him as a peace offering. When his Queen Zenocrate dies, only the razing of the town by fire can appease him in his grief and anger against the deity to whom he will not submit.

He has three sons, two of whom are warriors and loved by him, but the third is a coward—a kind of conscientious objector—and he slays him with his own hand.

Apart from Tamburlaine, there is little in the characterisation, but we can enjoy the performances of Jill Balcon as Zenocrate, and Margaret Rawlings as Zabina, wife of the Turkish Emperor. Donald Wolfitt's performance is one that proves how admirably such a part suits him and how much he likes such a role.

But what really saves the play is Tyrone Guthrie's imaginative and detailed production, in which he has done much to alleviate the monotony. It must also be admitted—and who could deny it?—that the fine verse of the play is its saving grace.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

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