

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXII—No. 18

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Fourpence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Catholic Action in British Politics

AN article consisting of three paragraphs by "Our Labour Correspondent" which recently appeared in the august columns of *The Times*, is we submit, of considerable current interest and importance to Secularists. It is so for two reasons: it signally emphasises the implacably hostile attitude taken up by the most powerful of the Christian Churches to the vital question of population "planning," a necessity in our increasingly overcrowded world; and it again emphasises a point already dealt with in this column, the subtle penetration of English politics and, in particular, of Labour politics, by the current activities of *Catholic Action*.

Both these important aspects of contemporary sociology are so aptly illustrated in this *Times* report that we regard the document as worth quoting in full. It appeared in our contemporary under the heading "Roman Catholic Criticism of Labour Pamphlet":—

"An attack on a Labour Party discussion pamphlet, on the ground that it advocates family limitations as one answer to unemployment in India, is contained in the April issue of *The Catholic Worker*, which circulates among Roman Catholic trade unionists.

The pamphlet referred to is *Fifty Million Unemployed*, by the party's research adviser, Mr. Michael Young. On the whole, says the article, it is an excellent pamphlet, but it gives no consideration to Christian and to Hindu opinion which will be offended by the suggestion of family limitation. The article says that no thought was given to the adverse effects on British Catholics of publishing such a proposal, and it must be made very clear to Labour Party leaders that this view is not a Labour Party view. [Our italics.]

Even though Mr. Young meant well, he is playing with fire, and he and the Labour Party might well be seriously burnt. Apathy on the part of Labour Party members and supporters may allow party headquarters to get away with this. *Catholics interested in the future of Labour must act now.* [Our italics.]

We have no hesitation in describing the above paragraphs in *The Catholic Worker* as the most bare-faced assertion of clerical interference in British politics which we have so far encountered. That they can appear without any critical comment at all in a paper of the still unique standing of *The Times* is itself an ominous sign of the times—in every sense of the word. In the 19th century such an arrogant claim to interfere in the domestic politics of an independent and officially Protestant State, would have provoked the most violent indignation. Today, it passes without comment—even in that bulwark, hitherto, of Protestant orthodoxy. But, then, we, also, must not forget that *The Times*, too, has changed with the times! It now possesses a Roman Catholic editor; its

first, we believe. Certainly, the appointment of a "Papist" as editor of the sacrosanct *Times* in the Protestant England of Queen Victoria would itself have almost been enough to cause a minor revolution!

In previous issues of this column we have indicated and, as far as our limited space permits, analysed the current political activities of the Church of Rome in this country. We make, herewith, no excuse for returning to this theme, since those who consider that preoccupation with the present activities of the Roman Catholic Church indicates an obsession, show, thereby, that they demonstrate very little acquaintance with the actual position and activities of that Church in the contemporary world. For Rome, to-day, is actively engaged in launching a new "Counter-Reformation," the final object of which is world-power. Her primary instrument for this purpose is *Catholic Action*, political Catholicism, which discharges in the mid-20th century a similar rôle to that played by the Jesuits in the earlier "Counter-Reformation" of the 16th century. Whilst Britain is not—yet, at any rate—a major interest of the Vatican, the present political and social activities of the British version of *Catholic Action* fit into the general frame-work of its world-strategy.

In the above connection it is relevant to recall a recent observation of a leading member of the Catholic hierarchy in England, Archbishop Downey, of Liverpool, on which we commented at the time. His Grace indicated that the present virtually even balance between the Tory and Labour Parties, as indicated in the last two General Elections, gives Catholics a, perhaps, decisive influence in tipping the political scales in any issue with which their Church is particularly concerned. *The Times* citation from *The Catholic Worker* quoted above affords the clearest application of this policy that we have so far seen; either the Labour Party and, presumably, the next Labour Government, will "toe the (Catholic) line" and banish any reference to "Eugenics" from its literature and legislation, or the, perhaps, decisive Catholic vote will be flung into the electoral scale against it. It is political blackmail exercised by an astutely-led, well-organised minority "pressure-group." It is, however, the kind of blackmail to which politicians are particularly sensitive—particularly, we may add, democratic politicians—with a capital D! The agitation for State-aid to Catholic schools has already demonstrated effectively what can be done along such lines.

The precise question on which *The Catholic Worker* has chosen to lecture Mr. Michael Young and his Transport House colleagues also has its special danger. For it is, perhaps, in its practical ethics even more than in its speculative theology, that "The Catholic Church against the 20th century" manifests itself in the most glaring fashion. For the fact is that, whatever may be the case in the future under a more advanced type of social organisation, the present-day world is faced with immediate danger and ultimate disaster unless and until it does something drastic to check its at present unbear-

able and ever-increasing pressure of population on the means available for current subsistence.

Indeed, to add insult to injury, India, the land discussed by Mr. Young in the passages in his pamphlet to which *The Catholic Worker* took exception, represents probably the most overcrowded country in our contemporary world: a fact specially emphasised by the *Indian Rationalist Association* in the resolutions already reproduced in these columns. In fact, so terrible are the present conditions of the masses in the Asiatic sub-continent that anyone who advocates a continuation of the present unchecked increase of population by several millions per annum must be regarded as either mentally perverted or actively malevolent. Moreover, if India is a long way off and a place inhabited by heathens who "bow down to wood and stone," even here in professedly Christian England, with fifty million inhabitants nourished with increasing difficulty on the dwindling proceeds of a vanishing export trade and a vanished empire, we—and *The Catholic Worker*—are heading for heavy weather unless something is done pretty soon about the population question.

Accordingly, on both secularist and political grounds, we think that it is high time that *Catholic Action*, the political instrument of a totalitarian foreign power, was told to mind its own business and to leave British affairs to be decided in a democratic manner by the majority of the British people and by their duly-elected representatives.

F. A. RIDLEY.

"BRITONS EVER SHALL BE——"

YOU have heard it said—and indeed sung—by them of old time: "Britons never, never, never shall be slaves." But I say unto you: Britons ever shall be slaves. For it is bred in their blood and bones. And how can you expect a race of slaves, pre-destined to that damnation, to be a nation of Freethinkers?

It is all very well to declare with the great Lord Mansfield whose classic Court judgment established the proposition amongst us that slavery cannot exist in England. That to-day is a pure lie—whatever it may have been in the days of George the Third.

We Britons are slaves to our God, our Neighbour, our Government (which is our terrestrial God), the Inland Revenue, the Local Authorities, the Electricity Board, the Gas Board, the Transport Board, the Water Board—and all the rest of the established robbers who legally prey on our purses, our time and our patience. As if these oppressors are too few, the average Briton enslaves himself to his habits such as tobacco, a wife, children, alcoholic liquor, a newspaper, a wireless-set and a few other afflictions which he takes on as possible consolations in his miserable existence.

All this is the grievous and lamentable truth too unpalatable for most folk. It is also extremely laughable—and it is made more so by the fact that the average British slave does not perceive his pitiable condition. He thinks he is wearing a ring or a bracelet when he is handcuffed and in chains. He calls himself not a miserable prisoner but "a law-abiding and respectable" free man, poor wretch.

Few of us, however, can afford to be free. Livelihood alone suffices to enchain most of us. Our lot forbids and circumscribes our virtues and our vices. For it is not only the poet Gray's "rude forefathers of the hamlet" who are fettered by circumstance. Governments of whatever political complexion by their actions and spoliations,

amounting directly and indirectly to three-quarters of a man's life in terms of money, keep the ordinary Briton in a miserable economic servitude. This slavery he calls "political freedom" because he may vote only for Tweedledum or Tweedledee who equally denounce the Communism they really profess under the disguising labels of Conservatism or Socialism and indeed practise by means of delayed-action and half-measures.

The dead Briton is better off than the live one. But not much. By an Inheritance Act, his estate must still support such parasites as his wife and his (other) Government. He is lucky if the graveyard where he lies is not turned into a garden or a playground; his gravestone uprooted and broken and his corpse removed to a common grave. And his reputation may be defamed with impunity.

In such an environment as modern life in Britain to-day where, withal, shall the Freethinker in Britain "cleanse his way," as the Psalmist has it? How shall he live? Robert Burns's "glorious privilege of being independent" is not easy when one must live amongst the herd. But money in our capitalistic society is the one great liberator. Iago's advice "Put money in thy purse" is the best advice that can be given—and therefore it is never taught in schools and universities nor by our spiritual pastors and masters. It is not told in Gath nor published in the streets of Askalon. But a few sharp-witted ones find it out for themselves.

With sufficient money one may live in hotels, instead of a taxed and rated house, become a citizen of the world (if not of the universe) instead of a citizen of one wretched little barbarous island. With sufficient money one can think and act as, when, and where one pleases instead of as one must. Samuel Butler and Bernard Shaw well understood this truth which ought to be the heritage of every young child. A moneyed man who knows how to employ his weapon of gold is no longer the slave and milch-cow of Governments, national or local, or both. (But let him take care how he uses his money. For instance it is paradoxical that in Britain a man can often live more cheaply in a landlord's house than he could in his own).

Of course, it must be admitted that there is an irresistible tendency in human nature in general, not merely in British nature, to enslave oneself. Slavery not freedom is in the nature of things. When Jean-Jacques Rousseau cried: "Man is born free. But everywhere he is in chains" he deceived himself and his readers. Man is born the prisoner of heredity, the powerless automaton of his individual body and mind. As if that were not enough disability, he must instantly set out enslaving himself to Authority, to his own imagination, to his individual fellows and to whatever else will impose upon him. Of all humanity outside African and Asiatic races, probably the British and Germans are the most easily enslaved.

It may be argued, that though Britons are economic and political slaves, they may still be freethinkers. "Thought is free" people say. This is a questionable doctrine, however, for thought is frequently hide-bound or worse. Nor am I disposed to concede that the slave can, and will think freely. (You may, of course, quote Epictetus and *Æsop* against me but two brilliant exceptions do not make a rule.) The converse is more likely. In spite of Lovelace, stone walls may make a prison and iron bars a cage even for "minds innocent and quiet." You must possess your life in order to possess your soul. Unless a man is the captain of himself, I do not see how he can think freely in the widest sense in all fields of thought. He may, indeed, acquire a leaven of freethinking notions in the sphere of

religion or politics or social behaviour or science—but these are only a part, even if an important part, of entire freedom of thought.

Only in a very restricted and limited sense can we be free, even in thought, conditioned as we are by the imperfect state of our knowledge, our mental capacity and other factors. Complete freedom of the mind is not to be attained by humanity. As the poet said: "Angels alone that soar above enjoy such liberty," and we are now told that there are no more angels above than there are fairies here below. Freedom then is a chimera as well as an ideal—and still the most desirable of attainable things in thought, word and deed.

No longer does Britannia rule the waves of the sea—if she ever did, even in the days of Blake or the beloved Nelson. Certainly she does not rule the waves of her thought. She is no nation of freethinkers; quite the contrary, she is a race of slavish non-thinkers. The conclusion seems to be that the individual Briton should liberate both his mind and his life so far as he can. For most Britons that cannot be very far.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

RELIGION AND RATIONALISM

IN a sense, religion is unimportant. We have a certain number of instincts that make social life possible and this is all man has ever had of religion or ever will have, delude himself how he may. It is the prostitution of these instincts to subserve vested interest that is important and that these columns frequently debate.

These instincts are chiefly a belief in fair play (or in justice), a "love of peace and quiet," an occasional desire to be helpful to his fellow-man, and a semi-parental interest in children other than his own. He has numerous instincts other than these tending to preserve his own well-being and that of his family.

The chief of these is fear or the instinct associated therewith (strictly, no doubt, fear is an emotion and the instinct is the urge to react to it). This instinct is strongest when it encounters tribulation and is able to ascribe it to the activities of purposive forces of a non-human kind. To propitiate these Man has recourse to mystic formulæ. And this is the beginning of prostituted religion. Indeed, except that with time these mystic formulæ claim a special property in community instincts, this is probably the whole story of prostituted religion.

These mystic formulæ build up an organisation and a tradition and when these become too fantastic for the intellectual stomach of the times, bodies are formed to combat them. They vary in name but are rationalist in nature, it being assumed, quite falsely in actual fact, that to combat Unreason is in itself to be reasonable.

As Religion and reason rarely have much in common once traditional belief holds sway and as all human understanding appears to be organised on a causal basis, Religion seeks justification in authority and inspiration. And rationalism quite arbitrarily tends to deny the value of these sources of information.

In denying the value of Authority, the rationalist is, of course, denying only the value of authorities. Some authorities, that is, the ones he doesn't like. The rationalist loves to confound the Religionist by means of Galileo, Newton and Einstein. And this he does, in the case of most rationalists, because he has read the arguments of these men and has found their conclusions justified by their premises under a system of logic which he has studied and approved. But, however small, there is still a minority of rationalists who have not done this but believe any

statement credibly attributed to these men, whom they treat as authoritative.

The moral of this is not that Moses was right, but that mankind must have Authority and should where possible investigate it as fully as time permits.

It is pointless to deny the value of inspiration. Even used in a religious sense of divine revelation. For if a man has truthful information which he could not have obtained by normal methods or by inference therefrom, that information is revealed or inspired. Nothing is more pointless than for one man to cry "God told me" and for us intellectual colanders, to shout in unison "Yah!"

In two spheres of human being, inspiration is all-powerful. Firstly in matters of instinct. Little is known of instinctive action, indeed, it was once claimed that instinct played little part in conditioning human activity, the intention being to abolish, later, that "little part" and shelve a vexing problem. But the little part stayed unabolished and we may as well admit that in vast spheres of human, and in all animal, behaviour, instinct is paramount.

Instinctive action is the result of revelation. Perhaps it is hard to swallow but a few gulps must be taken, for this conclusion is unavoidable. Animals act instinctively because something (we needn't bother with what it is; we couldn't bother with it even if we wished) tells them that this is the correct way to behave. And the "something" is almost invariably right (intellect is refinement of instinct designed to correct the occasional error). Man and animals mate, fight for their wives, and rear their families not because it is in any way advantageous to them to do so—the opposite is the case—but because it is "revealed" that their race will not otherwise persist. There is no other logical way of regarding it, especially if it be remembered that the feeling of satisfaction that follows adequate instinctive behaviour is in the nature of a reward rather than an inducement.

A more obvious source of inspiration is in the realm of art. Here the inspiration may or may not be divine, but it is obviously revelation. There is no known method of producing a masterpiece and there are no sets of rules to guide the production. It is true that an artist is usually a craftsman. But it is not essential. And no perfection of craft will ever turn any craftsman into an artist. You can say, if you wish to be fanciful, that God draws the line of a masterpiece. If not, you can call it inspiration. But you cannot deny its validity. And it defies analysis.

One is apt to be cross with men who sit around in the sun with their eyes telling themselves that God is very like them. But one can often feel a little superior to people who go around with two-foot rules claiming that God doesn't exist because they have measured space and it doesn't contain Him.

BISSETT LOVELOCK.

THE SAME OLD RACKET

The open-air platforms of London have been recently diversified by a picturesque and extremely heterodox theological free-lance, the Reverend Bertram Peake, a Free Church minister. Despite the fact that he wears a clerical collar, Mr. Peake appears to be a modernist of a very advanced character whose critical comments on Christianity leave many "reverent rationalists" far behind. On a Sunday afternoon, a few weeks ago, our Reverend—but not reverent—rationalist found himself in the Hyde Park audience of the well-known Methodist preacher, Dr. Donald Soper, of Tower Hill and B.B.C. fame. At question time, Reverend Peake asked Reverend Soper a question of an obviously heretical character, which consorted strangely with his clerical garb. Dr. Soper turned sharply on this wolf in sheep's clothing: "Are you a minister of the Gospel?" "Yes," answered the Mr. Peake, "I am in the same racket as you, Doctor."

ACID DROPS

Proof of the futility of prayer is afforded by the Anglican Church's failure to induce the heavenly authorities to stop war and rumours of war. Sunday after Sunday hundreds of priests in the Church of England have said the line: "Give peace in our time, O Lord." They have repeated that request at both morning and evening services long before 1900, and the congregations have responded unthinkingly "Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only Thou, O God." Since that year the Boer war and two world wars to end war have taken place, and to-day the nations are most apprehensive about the future, whether there will be another conflict on an even greater scale. Only an establishment subsidised by the State would have the audacity to continue its activities after half a century of ineffective propaganda.

Now that Easter is disposed of, Christians have turned their attention to that great and noble Champion of Christendom—St. George for Merrie England. In the *Radio Times*, Mr. Collin Brooks vigorously contests Emerson's well-known description of the Saint—a swindling army contractor who was eventually lynched by a mob, "as he deserved," adds Emerson. Mr. Brooks contends, as do all the modern champions of St. George, that Emerson completely confused two people. This George of Cappadocia was not the brave and chivalrous young Christian whose exploits with a Dragon and a Princess fired the imagination of Richard Coeur de Lion and Edward III as well as, for example, Mr. Brooks.

The legend of St. George was first put into writing in the tenth century, though Jerome mentions him as a martyr; and, of course, modern writers, who shy as much at the Dragon story as they do about Jesus and the Devil, claim that the fearsome monster was really just an allegory for "evil." After all, other saints, like St. Michael, St. Margaret, St. Sylvester, and St. Martha, all fought Dragons. The "Princess" probably stands for "truth" just as in Spenser's *Fairie Queene*, Una stands for truth. St. George is supposed to have died for his Christian Faith, but whether this is true or not there is no evidence whatever to show. We are content to leave the truth of the legend to be fought out between Gibbon and Emerson on the one side, and people like Mr. Brooks on the other.

The former editor of the *Hibbert Journal*, G. S. Spinks, with E. L. Allen and James Parkes, has published a history of religion in Britain since 1900, and a mournful account it appears to be. According to the review in *The Times Literary Supplement*, "the most significant event of the half-century has been the rise and fall of Liberal Protestantism." This was the attempt to strip Christianity of all, or nearly all, things "supernatural," and make Jesus "a Liberal Protestant figure" with his religion "one of ethical piety." It made Jesus, in short, a kind of super-Sunday-School Teacher. This idea did not take on, and people like Schweitzer, Barth and Von Hugel did their utmost to bring in a more "transcendental" religion something like Kierkegaard's "unseen reality."

Unfortunately, Dr. Spinks and his colleagues, we are told, refer to Barth and Von Hugel "not without good ground as a great blight," for "the discontinuity which Barthians preach between God and man, revelation and reason, presents a deadly challenge to Christian humanism." Of course, Dr. Spinks with almost unbelievable optimism, is now certain that religion is once again coming into its own, it is "more consciously seeking to permeate the secular

world." He may not yet know it but he will in time—the people who are trying to permeate the "secular" world generally end up by becoming Secularists themselves. It is we who are making converts to Freethought, not vice versa.

Our contemporary, "Picture Post," gave in a recent number, portraits of 46 "new Elizabethans" and there was not a single parson or priest or bishop among them. This is shocking ingratitude when one considers the tremendous importance of Christianity in our daily life. We were given politicians, actors and actresses, novelists, composers, historians, artists, and so on, but not a solitary man of God! What are we coming to? One could understand it of *The Freethinker*, but *Picture Post* . . . !

The Lord's Day Observance Society has not been particularly active these days, but its far-seeing members have just discovered that if you follow its behest, you can have Easter "once a week!" The Resurrection of Christ "was so momentous an event that the Church has observed it on the first day of every week." So bang goes the Biblical Sabbath Day, as well as the Lord's reasons for keeping it holy. But, apart from the L.D.O.S., does anyone want to keep Easter every week? In fact, do many people want to keep Sunday as a Sabbath day? Do they even want either—a Sabbath Day or a Lord's Day?

THEATRE

"The Other Heart." By James Forsyth. The Old Vic Theatre.

MUCH as I regret to say it, this is a dull and boring play about one of the famous love stories in history. If truly capably dealt with, it could have been interesting and entertaining.

Mr. Forsyth, unlike a playwright who knows his task, has made his leading character—that of François Villon—an unsympathetic rogue. The man's mouth is filled with forceful, poetical verbosity which flows out like the song of a canary and is equally meaningless. We are so out of sympathy with him that we can feel no pathos at his miserable death. All the skill that Alan Badel could muster, could not overcome these defects in writing. Irene Worth struggled equally unsuccessfully with the part of Catherine de Vausselles, who never really came to life. Marie Ney's performance as her maid is something to be long remembered, for she has a charm of her own and seems to understand the relation of her small part to the play. Paul Rogers added to his good performances as William Villon, and there were further good performances from John Horsley, Douglas Wilmer and Douglas Campbell.

Michael Langham, who produced, has taken the play at far too slow a pace, which has added to its dullness. What we need from the Old Vic is something of a brighter and brisker nature, for this—which is the first new play they have staged in seven years—is hardly representative of the modern English playwright. After all, we look to the Old Vic as the home and one of the mainstays of English drama, so let it be good.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

VOW OF SILENCE

We're vowed to a silence pious,
Tho' clever at grimace and grin;
But one thing's been sent to try us—
We can't get the telephone in.

A. E. C.

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C.1.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

Would Mr. W. E. Huxley be good enough to send us his address.

We have received several letters at this office regarding the pamphlet, *The British Worker in Retreat—1938-52*, which was reviewed recently in our columns by "J.B." This pamphlet, as stated in our review, can be obtained from its author, Mr. C. H. Norman, 84-86, Chancery Lane, London, W.C.2.

In our first "Sugar Plum" in last week's issue, the sentence, "a local minister who had complained of his life on £10 a week and a free-lance as a 'hell of penury'," should have read "a free manse."—EDITOR.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s.; half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

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.

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.

SUGAR PLUMS

The South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. are concluding their winter indoor session at "The London and Brighton Hotel," Queen's Road, Peckham, S.E., on Sunday, May 4. The concluding session will take the form of a friendly discussion, participated in by the audience, between two active members of the N.S.S., Mr. Len Ebury and Mr. F. A. Ridley, who will again discuss the question whether all religions are *equally* false. We regard it as in the best tradition of Freethought that differences of opinion between Freethinkers should be thrashed out in public. The Chair at this concluding session will be taken by Mr. E. W. Shaw, President of the South London and Lewisham Branch.

Those who wish to attend the International Congress at Brussels on August 22-26, and wish to benefit by the special allocation allowed by the Bank of England Foreign Exchange Control must register with Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, 4, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4, charge 2s. 6d. It is possible that the registration may also give reduced rates on the Belgian Railways. The Cité Estudiantine has been completely booked so he is looking for a hotel off the Avenue Louise for the British Party.

Sunday, April 20, witnessed the end of a most successful winter session held by the West London Branch, N.S.S., at "The Laurie Arms," Edgware Road, W. The final lecture in this very varied series was to have been delivered by Mr. T. M. Mosley, Secretary, Nottingham Branch, N.S.S., but an unfortunate accident to work prevented Mr. Mosley from making the journey to London. His place was taken at short notice by the Editor of *The Freethinker*, Mr. F. A. Ridley, who lectured on "The Evolution of Atheism." Prior to the start of the lecture, the Chairman, Mr. F. A. Hornibrook, moved that a message of sympathy should be sent to Mr. Mosley; a proposal which was unanimously carried.

In the course of his lecture Mr. Ridley traced the historic evolution of Atheism from ancient Greece and India down to the present time. He emphasised that the hand of Christian censorship had lain heavily on both the theory and practice of Atheism. For example, the classical literature which had survived, such as the writings of Plato, was favourable to Christian doctrine whilst the great materialist philosophers of antiquity have only survived in fragments by accident. In modern times, atheism was still hampered by the social ostracism attached to the name, hence the popularity of such ambiguous terms as "agnostic," "pantheist," etc., etc., which were more respectable.

The lecturer referred to the importance of modern mass-movements of a political character since the French Revolution which have been atheistic in their philosophical outlook. The lecturer concluded by a brief examination of the implications of Atheism: Is the "Idea of God sufficiently definite to be disproved, or does Atheism simply refer to gods in their historical connection?" The lecture was followed by an animated discussion which covered a very wide range, to which Mr. Ridley replied in some detail.

PROTESTANTISM IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY POLAND

IT appears paradoxical that present day Poland, one of the most Catholic communities in Europe, was the scene of a striking Reformation movement during the sixteenth century. Its near neighbourhood of Lutheran Germany doubtlessly inclined the landed interests and city dwellers to welcome a movement which tended to curtail ecclesiastical domination and economic power in Polish domains. As Dr. Fox states, in his instructive survey: *The Reformation in Poland in the Cambridge History of Poland to 1696* (C.U.P. 1950, 42s.), the Lutheran protest spread extensively throughout the land. "The first Polish city," he notes, "to feel its influence was the important commercial city of Danzig. In less than a year from the posting of Luther's theses on the door of the castle church of Wittenberg his doctrines were championed in Danzig. The man who began to preach them publicly was James Knade, a monk and preacher at St. Peter and St. Paul. Knade renounced his monastic vows, married . . . and fearlessly opposing Rome and Romanism, advocated ecclesiastical reforms." He was a popular and highly esteemed preacher and his apostacy was deeply resented by the Church. He was arrested and imprisoned, but shortly afterwards released and exiled from the city. Protected by a rural magnate, he resumed his activities near Torun without further restraint. A few years later, in 1522, the Protestant agitation in Danzig had grown too powerful for repression. Still, as usual, the Reformers were weakened by discord. The upper classes favoured moderate improvements, while Hegge, the radical leader, demanded major reforms both in doctrine and in observances.

The radical party, however, soon became predominant and swept away what they deemed idolatry and, as Dr. Fox observes, under radical pressure "the conservative city government issued a proclamation freeing all monks and nuns from their monastic vows, forbidding new candidates to enter any monastic order and restraining all monks from preaching, hearing confessions, soliciting contributions, and visiting homes." Again, in 1525, the radical section established a popular administration which

dissolved all monastic institutions, suppressed Romanist modes of worship, confiscated Church property and appointed Protestant preachers. These social and religious changes constituted a revolution.

But these proceedings were too drastic for endurance. The clericals appealed for assistance to the Catholic King, Sigismund I, who despatched to Danzig a Commission of Inquiry deputed to restore the overthrown authorities and regain order, and when the rebellious Danzigans refused to submit, the King himself arrived with a military force, seized and beheaded 15 revolutionary leaders, and restored the Catholic form of worship. Yet, the Protestant movement proved too strong to be easily ended and by 1540, the Reformation in Danzig was temporarily established.

In other Western Prussian centres the Reformation spread rapidly, but the importation of Luther's writings was penalised by confiscation of property and banishment. Yet, East Prussia, whose ruler had accepted Lutheranism soon became an asylum for heretics and a publishing centre for Polish Protestant literature.

In Mazovia the new doctrines made slight impression, and the death penalty was imposed on those who possessed or perused Luther's works or expounded his doctrines. But in Great Poland, heresy was favoured and protected by many of the most potent aristocrats. Certainly, Great Poland was contiguous to Saxony and Wittenberg and was thus readily influenced by Luther, but its ruler endeavoured to silence the heresy proclaimed there. But it had powerful friends, and their support was reinforced by the appearance of the Bohemian Brethren who had been driven from their native land. So, in 1557, they had thirty churches in Great Poland and several of the leading families there had been converted to their creed.

At Cracow in Little Poland, heresy had increased. Lutheranism was openly expressed and the Reformer's books were widely circulated, despite the censorship and risk of punishment. Heretical priests and booksellers were constantly prosecuted, but all repressive measures proved unavailing. As Fox testifies: "The new ideas invaded even the King's court, and found followers among those nearest to the King and Queen. Justus Decius, the King's private secretary was an admirer of the Reformation and knew Luther personally." Even the Queen's confessor favoured the Reformation.

Many of the clergy themselves preferred negotiation rather than persecution of the innovators and, where sterner methods were adopted, the heretics grew bolder and more numerous, until the ecclesiastics obtained a royal edict forbidding nobles sending their sons to seminaries tainted with Protestantism. Persecution reached its apex in 1539 when the Bishop of Cracow ordered the incineration of a woman aged eighty, because she refused to adore the eucharistic Host. This horrible infliction was duly consummated.

Between 1540-48 German Lutheranism was reinforced by Genevan Calvinism and many aristocratic Polish families joined this non-German cult. The corruptions of Catholicism became widely discussed and the need for clerical reform more and more insisted on. In consequence, the higher clergy were gravely alarmed. Their concern was more social and economic than theological, for their rich revenues were threatened. Rey, the father of Polish literature, ridiculed in the vernacular the pretensions of the Catholic clergy and deeply deplored the superstitions of the peasantry and workers who made up the mass of the population—and cherished the supposition that the prompt payment of tithes was essential to salva-

tion. Rey advocated the new doctrines with reservation in the first instance, but later most unmistakably.

A Protestant catechism in the Polish language also appeared and then a Polish version of the Gospels was subsequently published in Königsberg. To stifle the heresies then circulated a royal mandate was issued declaring that: "Whosoever dared to import, sell, buy, possess or read such books was to be punished by death."

Still, the Protestant cause prospered and, during the succeeding reign, several eminent Catholics embraced Calvinism. All attempts at repression failed and between 1548-73 the reformers were in the ascendant. The new King, Sigismund II, although a Catholic, was not intolerant. He was friendly with heretics and perused their publications. In alarm, the Pope sent a legate to secure the King's orthodoxy, but with scanty success. For a section of the lower clergy openly preached Calvinism, while priests took wives. Rome's primacy was denied; clerical celibacy denounced; the cup was taken in communion and when the Professor of Hebrew at Cracow University was arrested for repudiating the Trinity, he found refuge at Dubieck and resumed his teaching there unmolested.

Calvinists were elected to important ministerial posts and a Protestant became President of the Diet. Also it seems: "Protestantism was legally recognised, receiving full freedom of worship and the legal right to all church property already in Protestant hands." Pope Paul IV was requested to sanction far-reaching reforms, but he only agreed to the calling of a National Council, to which he was strongly opposed and had no intention whatever of assembling.

The Reformers founded schools and strengthened their organisation, but they differed in opinion and practice and, by 1573, their powers were spent. In fact, the illiterate peasantry were never emancipated from their traditional Christian and even Pagan beliefs. The Reformation's main support had ever been confined to the town population and the upper classes of the community and, with the Jesuit propaganda of the coming Counter-Reformation, with the Jesuit controlled education, such as it was, the Poles relapsed into the orthodox beliefs from which they had been partially rescued. But with this we hope to deal in a later article.

T. F. PALMER.

THE RHYTHM OF THE COSMOS

(Continued from page 130)

The logical view of the origin and evolution of religious thought is corroborated by the various definitions of religion given by recognised authorities on the subject. Herbert Spencer defines religion as "the recognition of a mystery pressing for interpretation." "Mystery" and "interpretation" are the key words. Ever since the dawn of civilisation, man has been trying to interpret the mysteries of nature. The effort presupposes that the mysteries can be interpreted. Instinctive rationalism is the basis of that assumption. So defined, religion differs essentially little from science, which also proposes to explain the mysteries of nature. Only, for science, mysteries are as yet unknown relations and functions of nature, which are still to be discovered, known and explained. Explanation can be hypothetical as well as empirical; religious interpretation of the mysteries of nature, however, is imaginary. The Gods of the natural religion or the Supreme Being of monotheism are analogous to the hypothesis of science. Thus conceived.

religion is a backward stage of science—of the human quest for knowledge and truth. Essentially, it is a rational system of thought, limited by the inadequacy of positive knowledge. When the available store of knowledge is not sufficient for setting up theoretically verifiable working hypotheses, human spirit thirsting for knowledge necessarily falls back on imagination. The result is religion.

The unknown relations and functions of nature are declared to be beyond the reach of human intelligence; they are determined by imaginary powers, who or which are not essentially different from man, because the latter can enter into relation with them. All the processes of nature, which envelop human existence, are determined; but man does not know how; therefore, he must depend on powers which are supposed to run the mechanism of the world.

Frazer defines religion as the "propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man, which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and human life. The gods of natural religion were propitiated by sacrifice; prayer in higher forms of religion serves the same purpose." The point of the definition is that the basic assumption of religious thought, whether polytheistic or monotheistic, is that nature is a law-governed system; the laws may be given by superior powers, but, inasmuch as they govern human life, and direct the course of nature, in the context of which human life is lived, they can be discovered. Therefore, Max Muller defined religion as "a department of thought." Belief and thought are not identical functions of the human brain. Thinking is a rational process.

Turning to the effective definitions of religion, one must accept Schleiermacher's as the most representative: "Religion is a feeling of absolute dependence upon God." How did the feeling develop? And how was the idea of an Almighty God conceived? The conception of an idea is again a rational process. The starting point of the evolution of the idea of God was the instinctive urge to discover the causes of natural phenomena; eventually, the various superhuman agencies controlling the diverse phenomena of nature were traced to one supreme power. The metaphysical concept of a Final Cause is also a rational notion. Because, it excludes miracles, something coming out of nothing, which are the characteristic features of religious belief. The feeling of absolute dependence results from the experience that man cannot influence the processes of nature, which go in their own way, presumably according to their own laws. In that state of helplessness, man imagines a Supreme Being as the creator and the ruler of the world. Having thus imagined the Final Cause, either anthropomorphically or mystically, man subordinates himself to its effects. He does not surrender to an esoteric faith, but to his innate rationalism.

The feeling of dependence is not coincident with religion; it precedes religion and gives birth to it. The feeling that the microcosm (man) is dependent on the imperious laws of the macrocosm (the physical Universe) is a secular feeling—a thoroughly rationalist view. That is the relation between religion and science, and it is a causal relation. Increasing knowledge of the relations and functions of nature progressively makes the feeling less poignant. In the absence of that knowledge, the feeling of dependence, born of experience gets hold of the mind of man. He escapes the nemesis of the death instinct by completely surrendering himself to a saviour of his own imagination.

The most significant point of the corollary to Schleiermacher's fideist rationalism is that absolute dependence on God represents the urge for freedom. Man wants to know nature, because knowledge will give him the power to be free from her tyranny. Having failed to attain that secular object, man of the pre-scientific era surrenders to an Almighty God, hoping for deliverance with His help or by His Grace. Religion thus, after all, is an expression of man's struggle against nature. There is nothing supernatural in it.

The urge underlying religious sentiment is not surrender but desire. The surrender to God is motivated by the desire for deliverance. Will is an integral part of consciousness. It is not an irrational impulse. The religious sentiment of absolute surrender to God is, in the last analysis, an intelligent act—an act committed with a purpose, believing that it will produce the desired result.

M. N. ROY.

(To be continued)

CORRESPONDENCE

QUOTATION AND MISQUOTATION

SIR,—I note that Mr. Cutner no longer says that I attribute the prophecies of the Second Coming in the Gospels to Jews.

As the point on which I challenged him was his allegation that I had said they were actually uttered by Jesus, I think I may now leave your readers to judge between his accuracy and mine, merely remarking that it is a pity some people think so much in epithet and so little in argument.—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

OBITUARY

Sydney Hucknall

The Nottingham Branch has experienced a sad loss in the death of the Treasurer, Mr. Sydney Hucknall. Taken ill on Friday, April 18, he was taken to the hospital and despite oxygen treatment died on the Saturday morning, the 19th. He helped to found the Branch and was a real stalwart of Secularism. A Cremation took place at Wiford Hill, on Tuesday, April 22, and in the absence of the undersigned the Secular rite was read by Mr. A. J. Statham (R.P.A.), the Vice-President of the "Cosmopolitan Debating Society." Mr. Hucknall, leaves a widow and two sons. He was 64 years of age.

T. M. MOSLEY.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: FRANK ROTHWELL, A Lecture.
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday evening, 7 p.m.: HAROLD DAY and others.
- 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: F. A. RIDLEY and G. STEED.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, May 3, 7 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

INDOOR

- South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: Prof. T. H. PEAR, M.A., B.Sc., "Etiquette, Manners and Goodwill."
- South London and Lewisham Branch (London and Brighton Hotel, Queen's Road, Peckham).—Sunday, May 4, 7-30 p.m.: Discussion: "Are All Religions Equally False?" F. A. RIDLEY and L. EBURY.

THERE ARE NO CHRISTIANS. By C. G. L. Du Cann.
Price 6d.; postage 1½d.

MORE ROMAN SCANDALS

QUO VADIS goes on for two and three-quarter hours, and took how many million dollars to make? And yet nobody has bothered to look up the date of *Ab Urbe Condita*. Rome has lasted for a thousand years says the victorious commander of the 14th Legion in the familiar nasal drawl: but it hasn't. The film, opening in 64 A.D., ends on the verge of the year of the Three Emperors (68 A.D.), some 831 years after the founding of the city.

"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." Apart from this minor inaccuracy, Hollywood never has any sense of history. Whether it be the Empire of the Aztecs or the Rome of Nero, it's not much different. Shot in Italy, the scenes of the Campanian countryside in "Quo Vadis," rather than giving authenticity to the film, are rendered unreal by the artificial sets. The religious episodes are frankly embarrassing. Both St. Peter (stereotyped venerable patriarch) and Our Lord, the latter with his back to the camera, presumably to satisfy the Lord Chamberlain, appear in conventional settings reminiscent of the sentimental magic lantern slides and Bible pictures of our childhood. At the other end of the scale the scenes of pagan corruption and debauchery have nothing of the bizarre, unorthodox Hellenistic nature delineated by Samuel Dill, and in the pages of the "Satyricon," but are those of modern America. The House of Imperial Women might be a beauty parlour in Fifth Avenue, or a high-class "high-spot" where gangsters relegate their "floozyes."

As the film hams its way along, it is relieved by some good acting, which in British hands might have formed the basis of a good film (compare Olivier's "Fire Over England"). Well played are the parts of Petronius (author of the "Satyricon"), an ancient Christianised senator, and St. Paul. The latter effectively symbolises the subtle Oriental religions which were to undermine, like wood the death-watch beetle, the Roman social fabric; although not, as the stentorian commentator bellows out at the beginning, to conquer it, for the process was reversed in the fourth century when the Constantinian settlement marked the triumph of Rome over the original principles of Christianity. Peter Ustinov's characterisation of the "Beast with Seven Horns" is also well done. The attitudes and demise of this eccentric Princeps, after the failure of his dramatic town-planning scheme, irresistibly evoke the fake Imperial postures and end of a latter-day Italian tyrant. "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."

A. P. PERRIN, B.A.

THE CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

MR. J. ROWLAND in *The Freethinker* of January 13, 1952, recommended in the strongest terms possible a recently published booklet *The British Tradition* (Mowbrays, 1951), a series of broadcasts by Christian apologists. I use the expression apologists deliberately, for after reading their contributions I know of no other words by which to describe them. In studying their contributions one has to remind oneself that the speakers are leading representatives of the case they are supporting and not merely a chance lot of irresponsible hot-gospellers from their Little Bethels, whose historical and other bragging one can discount on the grounds of ignorance and lack of educational opportunities. The Rationalist who would probably have missed this book has much to thank J.R. for recommending it, and I hope that all interested will read it, and if they fail to agree with J.R. that: "it is not easy to dispute the findings of these contributors" they will at

least know what is the best that its supporters can say about the history of their faith, and its influence, particularly when it was all-powerful and had for backing the full strength of the civil power to enforce its observance. Moreover, in perusing this latest apology, one is struck by the naivete, not to say lack of humour of the writers, who seem blissfully unconscious of the fact that the persecution by one dominant section of all other Christians who dared to differ from them in any way, and the struggles of the oppressed to hold their own views and to carry on their own rituals, and to calmly represent this as proof that Christianity has played a leading part in the fight for toleration is to the non-Christian anything but an unanswerable argument.

Yet this is what Dr. Cocks, Principal of Western College, Bristol, on "Christianity and Toleration," has to say: "We take toleration for granted, but three or four hundred years ago things were very different." He then points out that it was a crime to worship otherwise than as the State ordered and that most Englishmen were opposed to toleration and then goes on to say in explanation of the cause of their attitude: "Suppose you and I were quite sure not only that our particular creed is true, but that everybody who thinks differently from us is necessarily wrong and going straight to Hell, do you think we should believe in toleration?" and follows this up by the statement of the then view that Church and State are one, and that the man that rebels against the Church is not only a heretic but a traitor. "This was the situation in which the first English Nonconformists found themselves in the latter years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth . . . they were no traitors, they were heartily loyal to Elizabeth as their Queen . . . while they gladly prayed for her they refused to use the Prayer Book. . . . For these crimes they were imprisoned or driven into exile; and some of them were hanged." Further on, Cromwell's spirit of tolerance is praised, this is recorded as ". . . a picture of true tolerance? Another name for it is Christian love. . . ." The early Nonconformists left this legacy of tolerance to the enrichment of our British heritage. The Humanist will receive this testimonial to the contribution of Christianity to the cause of Toleration with less enthusiasm than its author intends, remembering that only Christians were included in its scope, and will not forget the sufferings inflicted on non-Christians by these pioneers of toleration whenever the opportunity occurred. On this subject of toleration as of the others touched on, one is forcibly reminded of Cobbett's remark that a leading characteristic of parsons is cheek, for not only are these constant quarrels between the various sections of Christians referred to without shame, but even with pride, for instance, in the article, "Christianity and Parliament," Canon Smyth, of Westminster, after referring to the fact that one party of Christians celebrated their victory over another kind of Christian in St. Margaret's, Westminster, on September 25, 1643, and that their opponents celebrated their military victory over the others eight years later in the same church, explains as follows: "Each in its way stood fundamentally for the same thing. Each was an affirmation of the Sovereignty of God in the affairs of men."

JAMES H. MATSON.

(To be concluded)

WILL YOU RISE FROM THE DEAD? By C. G. L. Du Cann. An inquiry into the evidence of resurrection. Price 9d.; postage 1½d.