

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXII--No. 37

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Fourpence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

INSTEAD of our usual editorial, we are, this week, giving a full report of the 30th International Congress of *The World-Union of Freethinkers*, held in Brussels, August 22--26.

The Brussels Congress

The 30th Congress of *The World-Union of Freethinkers* was held in Brussels from Friday, August 22, to Tuesday, August 26 last. The Congress was convened by the Executive Committee of the *World-Union*, to which most Freethought, Rationalist and Secularist organisations are affiliated. The meeting-place of the Congress was at the *Free University* in the Belgian capital, Brussels. Most national Freethought organisations were represented. The present writer, in his capacity as president of the *National Secular Society*, represented that organisation, which, along with the *Rationalist Press Association* and *The Ethical Union*, is affiliated to *The World-Union of Freethinkers*. Previous international congresses had been held in London (1938) and Rome (1949). By what can only be regarded as a most unfortunate coincidence, a Humanist Congress was held the same week in Amsterdam, in the adjacent country of the Netherlands. It is much to be hoped that such a quite unnecessary division of the international Freethought movement will be avoided in the future. Modern Rationalism has quite enough enemies to fight already, without needlessly dividing its forces.

The seat of the Congress, Brussels, is a beautiful city, rather similar to Paris, though smaller. It is situated in the Walloon, French-speaking part of Belgium, the traditional stronghold of Freethought and Socialism, in contradistinction to the Catholic and Conservative Flemings, who centre round the great seaport of Antwerp. (Whereas in Brussels the clerical profession is, as far as we could observe, inconspicuous, in Antwerp, to which we paid a brief visit after the Congress concluded, clerics appeared to be far more numerous and ostentatious.) The *Free University*, in the buildings of which our Congress was held, was founded in 1834, four years after the foundation of the Kingdom of Belgium as at present constituted, by Theodore Verhaegen, a celebrated Belgian Freemason and Freethinker. This university forms the anti-clerical antidote to the formerly all-powerful Catholic influence of the Church, still powerfully represented in Belgian higher education by the rival Catholic University of Louvain; the former rector of which, the late Cardinal Mercier, was nearly elected Pope in 1922; and where, as readers of his well-known book, *Twelve Years in a Monastery*, will, no doubt, remember that grand veteran of Freethought, Joseph McCabe, acquired that vast knowledge of theology and Church history of which he has since made such excellent and, from the point of view of the Church, no doubt, disconcerting use.

In opposition to Louvain, the *Free University* of Brussels has always been a militant centre of Freethought. Amongst its teaching professors is the celebrated Piccard,

the intrepid explorer both of the celestial stratosphere and of the ocean depths. The overwhelming majority of the students are Freethinkers, keen, intelligent and militant. They were most efficiently and eloquently represented at the Congress by an astonishing personality, M. Pierre Deleu, a law student, who combined an eloquence which should carry him far in his profession, with a superb black beard which gave him a remarkable resemblance to Jesus Christ as depicted by Leonardo da Vinci in his famous picture of *The Last Supper*! There was, however, we hasten to add, nothing Christian whatever about the speeches delivered at the Congress by this eloquent spokesman of the Belgian students.

With regard to the actual Congress itself, this commenced with a routine meeting on the Friday afternoon, reserved for mandated delegates, where the discussion was concerned solely with those details of routine business which are so much less spectacular, but often so much more important, than the more publicised speeches which occupy the plenary sessions of congresses. The outstanding feature, perhaps, of this administrative session was the apparently untiring assiduity and eloquence of the secretary of *The World-Union of Freethinkers*, Mlle. Pardon, who, for a quarter of a century past, has held her present office, and who, despite advancing years and a recent serious illness, insisted on personally welcoming the delegates from abroad at the railway station. A further administrative session was arranged for the following Monday morning.

The Congress proper was opened on Friday evening at 7.30 p.m. by a speech of welcome from the president of the Belgian *Federation des Libres Penseurs*, Senator Boulanger. The president of the *World-Union*, Mr. Charles Bradlaugh Bonner, replied in suitable terms. He subsequently took the chair and presided over a session of speeches of welcome to the Congress by the delegates of different nationalities. U.S.A., Ireland and New Zealand were represented amongst English-speaking lands. The U.S.A. was represented by the well-known American publicist, Mr. Woolsey Teller, co-editor of *The Truth-Seeker* and author of *The Atheism of Astronomy*. A truly heroic citizen of Eire, Mr. F. C. Edwards, represented "The Isle of Saints and Scholars" in this assembly of the theologically damned!

On the morning of Saturday, August 23, the proper business of Congress began with the various national reports presented by representative speakers. In addition to those more happy lands of the European Continent where Rationalism has long been fully acclimatised, reports from Ireland (Eire) and India indicated the tremendous obstacles which confront Freethought in lands where religion, be it Hinduism or Catholicism, still retains almost mediæval power. The report on Great Britain and on the prospects of British Freethought was presented by the present writer.

The latter part of Saturday and the whole of the Sunday session was taken up by erudite, and often

eloquent discourses upon contemporary themes of primary importance in the world of the mid-20th century. On Saturday the well-known French Freethinkers, outstanding personalities at this Congress, MM. J. Cotereau and André Lorulot—respectively, editor of our contemporary, *La Raison Militante*, and vice-president of the *World-Union*—read most comprehensive papers. M. Cotereau took as his proper theme the recent Papal encyclical, *Humani Generis*; whilst M. Lorulot took as his, the social revolution of our time. The present writer spoke immediately after both these eminent upholders of the French Freethought tradition; whilst, in both cases, an animated and informative discussion followed.

As throughout this conference, most of the speeches were delivered in French, and the few English speakers were at a definite disadvantage, including the present writer, who reads, but cannot speak, the French language. In this connection it must be stated that, whilst the bilingual president, Mr. Bonner, worked like a Trojan and performed prodigies of verbal dexterity in both languages, the official arrangements for translation—so necessary in an international congress of this kind—did not appear to be as efficient as in the London congress of 1938.

Upon Sunday, the discussions were continued. M. J. Rausch, of Holland, delivered an encyclopædic historical survey of the relations between Church and State, and was followed by M. P. Braun, of Belgium, editor of our contemporary, *La Pensee*; whilst, speaking in French—with an effortless elegance that left us poor islanders gasping!—the president, Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner, discoursed on the vastly important question of the mutual relations of Freethought and Youth. Conspicuous in the discussion which followed was a venerable Italian with a patriarchal beard who, with a wealth of gesticulation, delivered a burst of Latin eloquence which must, assuredly, have caused Cicero to stir enviously in his grave! The bulk of the speeches delivered were far too learned—and, also, long—to be adequately summarised in a brief report of this nature. We hope, however, shortly to publish at least abridged summaries of the more important speeches.

Sunday evening concluded with an official dinner in which food, drink and eloquence vied with each other. The American delegate, the only orator to express himself in English—a kind of Transatlantic “David Livingstone”!—delivered a witty speech which must have made the ghosts of the Pilgrim Fathers wish that they had never set sail.

This concluded the Congress proper. However, what was, perhaps, the most important actual business transacted at the Congress was performed at Monday's administrative session: the admission of the German Freethought societies to the *World-Union*. This was duly carried. The reaffiliation of the Czechs was referred back for further information. A telegram of congratulation was sent to the South American Congress for Secular Education in Montevideo (Uruguay). After a full discussion the next Congress was fixed for Luxemburg in September, 1954. The former executive committee was re-elected with three additions: representatives were added from Germany and Luxemburg; whilst the present writer succeeded Mr. H. J. Blackham as the representative of Great Britain and of the British Freethought movement on the executive committee of the *World-Union*.

Upon Monday afternoon the delegates paid floral tribute at the statues of the martyred Spanish Freethinker, Francesco Ferrer, and to the eminent Belgian Freethinkers, Paul Janson and Modeste Terwagne, the late

president of the *World-Union*. A reception by the representative of the Lord Mayor of Brussels followed, after which the delegates inspected the magnificent Town Hall, one of the finest buildings, surely, in Europe, with its priceless pictures and unique hand-woven tapestries of Brussels lace. We imagine that it would be difficult to remain a radical in such gorgeous surroundings, weighed down with the pomp of centuries.

The Brussels Congress of 1952 may, we think, be regarded as an outstanding success. Not only was it a fine gesture of international solidarity, but its deliberations indicated a keen awareness of the problems of the modern world and thus effectively refuted the charge of “Victorianism” which our critics sometimes advance against Freethought in general. We are confident that all who attended the 1952 Congress will look forward to its 1954 successor at Luxemburg and will join with us in hoping that the world-barometer will be set fair on and for that occasion.

F. A. RIDLEY.

HINDU MODERNISM

(Concluded from page 283)

IT is with the desire for survival that the leaders of Indian Modernism launched their campaign for religious, social, economic and political changes in the country. Looking back to the early years of Indian Renaissance it is remarkable to find prophets advancing views so much ahead of their times which, even to-day, the first weak imitation parliamentary Government in Free India under Pandit Nehru, can hardly think of materialising. The great Ram Mohun Roy, who founded the Brahmo Samaj Movement on 20th August, 1828, belonged to that period and that idealistic school of thought which produced a Waldo Emerson in America, a Giuseppe Mazzini in Italy, and a William Morris in England, who all viewed their own national problems with international eyes, who acted, spoke and wrote for humanity. While fully engaged in his bitter fight against caste divisions, idolatry and such other sources of division among the Hindus, Ram Mohun wrote as early as 1831 these words:—

“It is now generally admitted that not religion only but unbiased common sense as well as the accurate deductions of scientific research lead to the conclusions that all mankind are one great family of which numerous nations and tribes existing are only various branches. Hence enlightened men in all countries feel a wish to encourage and facilitate human intercourse in every manner by removing as far as possible all impediments to it in order to promote the reciprocal advantage and enjoyment of the whole human race.”

This world-wide vision, sense of human solidarity, faith in the self-sufficiency of human reason to solve all human problems, rejection of every religious authority and tradition that contradicted human reason, and every practice which was repugnant to moral sense and ethical principles, a passionate zeal for the emancipation of womenfolk from the bondage of *purda* and veil, from the slavery of kitchen and bedroom, a burning desire to raise the downtrodden, the lowly and the lost, were the salient features that we notice in the life and work of the leaders of Indian Modernism, men like Ram Mohun, Dayananda Saraswati, Rama Thirtha, P. C. Ray, Khesub Chunder Sen, Debendranath Tagore and Swami Vivekanada. The twentieth century heirs to their Modernism, men like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Shri Aurobindo,

Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan and others, are at pains to preserve what is specifically Indian culture and philosophy, while advocating sweeping social and religious reforms.

Hindu Modernism is tantamount to Indian Modernism, for the term "Hindu" does not connote sectarian or walled religious concepts, as it happens with the Semitic or Semiticised religions. The term "Hindu" means nothing more or less than what is meant when we use the words like "Greek" or "English." It has a national connotation more than religious. Hinduism is essentially a spirit, an angle of vision, an attitude every child born of India, who is consciously rooted in the cultural heritage of the country, has. Hinduism means Indianism. That is why the Indian Moslems who advocated two-nation theory and vivisected the country to get their separate homeland, the Indian Christians who look to Rome or Canterbury as their Mecca and ridiculously imitate the dress, speech and manners of their Christian co-religionists elsewhere, have no tap-root in the culture of the soil, and, as such, are exotic plants. It is such people who have opposed Hindu Modernism, at least to the same extent as the vested interests within Hinduism itself, especially the Brahmins, the priestly class and the high castes. It is therefore not surprising to see the leaders of Hindu Modernism thundering against the Brahmins, their priestly rituals, ceremonials, their blessing of the caste and out-caste system which is worse than the superstitions of the holy water and sacramentals and rituals and hypnotising pomp and pageantry of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Hindu society is more ready to accept the broad-based reforms of Indian Modernists than the Roman Church, as the Roman Church is more ready to accept the reforms and "heresies" of Catholic Modernists than the Anglican, Evangelical, Non-Conformist and other sects of Protestantism. This is because both Hinduism and Roman Catholicism have to cater to various intellectual levels, beginning from idolatry and priestcraft to the mysticism and intellectualism of an Eckhart, J. H. Newman or J. Lagrange. Hence there is more room for adaptability in such religions like Roman Catholicism than the Bible-bound Protestants, although they may proclaim it from the housetops that they form the "free Churches." This paradox is bound to be there. The dialectics of history demands it.

Hindu Modernism has metamorphosed but a microscopic minority of intellectuals and Rationalists in India. The broad masses are still unaffected by it. It is not until the vast bulk of the people are educated and the public opinion is aroused when they would voluntarily accept the programme and ideals of Hindu Modernism that we can say that Modernism has made Hindu society fit for survival. The light of modernism is likely to take roots in Hinduism rather than in the Catholic Church, perhaps after a revolution, if peaceful, progressive evolution fails to achieve it.

ANTHONY ELENJIMITTAM.

GOD AND JOE

ONE day last week God entered the Kremlin and, sitting down beside Stalin, said: "It's high time I had a good talk with you, Joe. You are getting too big for your boots."

Joe removed his pipe, and after gazing at his uninvited guest for a moment, replied: "I have not the slightest interest in the opinions of such an out-of-date anachronism as yourself."

With that Joe resumed his pipe, picked up his pen and made as if to proceed with his work.

"Don't be hasty, Joe," God continued amiably, "I am here to talk business, and I know that despite your brisk

manner, you are as ready to listen to a reasonable offer as any man. Tell me, are you still an Atheist, as a good Marxist should be?"

With some dignity Joe replied, "I am Marxism, and Marxism is the beginning and ending of wisdom, therefore the question of my belief in your existence does not arise."

"An answer worthy of myself," cried God. "You have all the attributes of a deity save one. You won't live long enough to make it worth while. What a pity that in fifty years' time all your work will have gone for nothing."

"Don't be too sure of that," said Joe.

"Oh, but I am. What can be more certain? Consider the work of your old friend and predecessor, Lenin. Things are very different in the Soviet Union from what he intended when he founded it. His ideas and aspirations were not continued after his death, you yourself saw to that. Then consider the great Karl Marx himself, and all that is practised and propagated in his name. How much of it would the great man recognise if he were alive to-day? The world is full of people crying up or crying down what they call Marxism, and not a handful of them really know what Marx taught. You yourself have so twisted the Marxist gospel that—"

"It's a lie," interrupted Joe. "Now in the first place. . ."

"Come, come, Joe. Let us be candid, we know each other. I am not blaming, but sympathising with you. I myself have twisted my own sacred scriptures, given new meanings to old words, suppressed whole chapters and generally trimmed them up to meet the new ideas of a changing world. You and I, Joe, have much in common, we should try to understand each other."

"Come to the point," said Joe.

"It is simply that I would have us form an alliance. You think you can get on without me, but you can't. All you autocratic rulers need a religion. Remember what Marx said about 'the opium of the people'? Your people would be all the better for a good shot in the arm now and then."

"You, my ally?" queried Joe. "Are you proposing to ditch the old man of Rome?"

"Well, not altogether. He still has his uses, and will do anything I tell him. It will be something like the agreement I reached with Henry VIII of England, when I—"

"I'm not interested in English history."

"Karl Marx was," observed God gently. "Never mind, let me put it another way. I've been on the earth a lot longer than you, and I will be here for a long while yet. You are getting an old man, Joe, do a deal with me. By using the Patriarch of Moscow as a figurehead we can build a Church of Russia that will. . ."

"I'm not interested," Joe silenced God with a contemptuous wave of the hand. "I have all the religion I want, thank you. I've deified Karl Marx, and he makes a better God for me than you ever would. Then my old friend, Lenin, I have had him embalmed and put in a glass case so that people won't have to believe in his immortality, they can see for themselves. As for myself, I have already become the third person of a Communist Trinity, and I'll guarantee we three will constitute a religion that will outlast anything you can cook up."

God smiled sardonically. "So you think you can beat me with the ghost of Karl Marx, the stuffed corpse of Lenin, and your own overblown vanity? You haven't a hope." Rising to his feet, God prepared to leave. "I see it's no use arguing with you now, but I'll be back, I'll be back."

L. HANGER.

ACID DROPS

All the "Church Times" could do in defence of its silly diatribe against the "principle" (as it calls it) of divorced persons re-marrying is to state that it was enunciating the doctrine of the whole of the Christian Church—not just that of "an Anglo-Catholic minority in the Church." This is unmitigated nonsense, as many letters by Churchmen sent to our national press abundantly proved. The *Church Times* really admits this when it says: "The world takes another view because to the world the Gospel is always a stumbling block and an offence." Here we are in complete agreement. The "Gospel" is so silly that it really is an offence to intelligence. How many people these days with even a smattering of scientific knowledge—except the small minority of Anglo-Catholics and, of course, the all-believing followers of Rome, believe in the Gospel's Heaven and Hell, in its Devils and Angels?

Few sermons are so unintentionally funny as many of those delivered by "liberal" Christians in the United States. A Dr. Preston Bradley gave one recently in Chicago on "The Necessity of Faith." And here again we are in full agreement with the lecturer. To believe at all, you simply must have "faith." As he rightly points out: "Take all of God you can comprehend, and don't worry about the rest. Let the theologians argue that out. . . . Don't say to God, 'You answer me this. You answer me that. . . .' Why, that will end in disaster. . . . You let the tide sweep into your life and it will be different." In other words, shut your eyes, don't for Heaven's sake, think, swallow everything given to you, and not only will God come into your life but you will have the inestimable pleasure of helping to keep parsons of all creeds in a good job.

However difficult our own Methodists find it to keep going, in America they seek publicity almost as blatantly as Roman Catholics and are very proud that, in 1951, their 386 churches increased their membership by 8,573—which, to blatant infidels like ourselves, seems rather poor going. The increase is probably due to the children of the members. At a recent Conference in the U.S.A., the Rev. G. A. Olds attacked what he called "idol worship"—probably hiding under these words the Roman Church, which is, anyway, far more powerful in the U.S.A. than the Methodist Church.

"The fruits of idol worship," he declared, "are self-deception, which plays man for the fool in deceiving him into thinking that what he creates could ever save him. Second is self-abasement. Third is self-destruction, which plays him out by turning the power he seeks upon himself, and thereby destroys himself." This stupid rigmarole comes well from a man who believes in the Trinity, in the Bible as the "inerrant" word of God, in the Virgin Birth, in the guilt of the race of Adam, in eternal salvation providing you believe in Christ and are baptised, and of course in "bodily resurrection." For sheer childish credulity there are few "Articles of Faith" quite so silly as those of Baptists.

People like Mr. G. N. M. Tyrrell, once President of the Society for Psychical Research and a stout upholder of Poltergeists, those naughty spirits so very fond of throwing about household and other articles, will be sorely disappointed at the sequel to some of their alleged activities in a Lancashire hotel recently. Glasses were smashed, bottles of beer broken—an awful sacrilege—

and many similar happenings took place without anybody seeing the mischievous spirits.

Unfortunately, our prosaic police, who have so little imagination where subnormal happenings are concerned, discovered that it was all due to one of the barmaids, who also admitted being responsible in three other hotels where she had been employed. But does this prove that there are no Poltergeists? Perish the thought! No well-instructed Spiritualist would ever give up such a striking proof of the reality of survival, and the annihilation of Materialism. Ask Mr. Tyrrell.

THEATRE

"Cymbeline," by William Shakespeare. The Open Air Theatre.

THIS is one of Shakespeare's rarely produced plays, and it is when we become acquainted with it in a production (and a good one) that we realise the great bard could have his weaker periods of inspiration. The public are selective, and the Shakespearean plays most often produced are doubtless those that are best and most favoured.

It is an attractive sight to see costumed figures before floodlit trees, something that needs only be seen once to give a lasting visual memory.

It is unfortunate that Mary Kerridge, whose performance is not without merit, could not rise to the greater moments in the part of Imogen, for we are not given to feel that here is a girl so wretched—as she stands before Pisanio—that she would take her own life. Leslie French is at the top of his form as Pisanio, Basil Hoskins makes a valiant Posthumus, and Tristan Rawson gave a certain power to Cymbeline. However, my impression was that Raymond Rollett—who played the banished lord, Belarius—would have been better cast in Tristan Rawson's place. His performance as Belarius was noteworthy.

For all this, though Shakespeare's language saves him every time, the play is involved, unconvincing and has a pantomimish dénouement of some length. In fact, right beside me a fellow remarked that even Shakespeare could write nonsense.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

FAIR SHARES

Communists and Catholics wage furious but friendly warfare in the streets, cafés, schools and shops.

"The coal merchant is a great rogue," said my neighbour, the prie-Dieu keeper of the Church. "He is a member of the Communist cell," she whispers. "The other day he came and said to me:

"'No coal for a church bug like you'."

"Bug?" I answer. "I am a Republican, just the same as you."

He raised his eyes to the figure of my Saint Joseph holding the Infant Jesus, up there on the corner of my room. "'Who's that, then,'" he said. "'Isn't it Saint Joseph?'"

"Yes, it's Saint Joseph," I said, "the Patron Saint of Communists."

"The Patron Saint of Communists?"

"Yes. Didn't he share his wife with the Holy Ghost?"

(Therese Lavauden: "Portrait of a Provençal Village," *The Cornhill Magazine*, Autumn, 1947.)

Hell is by no means the place this world of fools suppose it to be, but on the contrary, it is quite an agreeable place.—Joseph Smith, 1844.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

G. F. LAWS.—Would it be possible for you to type your contributions or have them copied? Your handwriting is extremely difficult.

ALDERMAN DAN EVANS, J.P.—We cannot answer your question re Evan Roberts off-hand. We shall publish your letter shortly and hope that one of our readers may be able to provide the answer.

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.

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 Secretary of the N.S.S. at this 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.

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.

"JESUS THE UNKNOWN"

II

WHATEVER Dr. Inge himself may have thought of the problem of Jesus, he recommends Merezhkovsky's *Jesus the Unknown* primarily because of its "spirituality, strange beauty and originality." And certainly for those who like incoherency, angry declamation, and rhetoric, intermingled with plenty of religious "mysticism," Merezhkovsky will be hard to beat.

For him, the New Testament is the most wonderful book ever written—he quotes from Lagrange's *Evangiles*, "The Gospel stands, not on a level with, not even above, all human books, but *outside* them, it is of an entirely *different nature*." But one can say this only because pretty nearly all Lagrange's readers, perhaps including both Lagrange and Merezhkovsky themselves, have never read, or hardly know the similar books written of other religions. Egypt and India can produce exactly the same kind dealing with their religions as the Gospels; and if Merezhkovsky had been obliged to bolster up the *Book of the Dead* of the Egyptians, or the *Bhagavat-Gita* of the Hindus, he could have cited the passage from Lagrange with equal fervour.

In one passage, Merezhkovsky tells us that he has read and re-read the New Testament and "so has humanity read and re-read it." In fact, "humanity" will ask, "What did I do on earth?" and the answer will be, "I read the Book." Yet only a few lines lower down on the same page, the brilliant author tells us, just as confidently, that the Gospel "is the least read of books, the least known." I have never read any author who can so cleverly and so completely contradict himself almost in the same sentence. It reminds me of the Inspired Word. You can be fairly sure that whatever Matthew or Luke says about something, John will say the exact opposite.

Merezhkovsky is just as certain that Jesus was unknown in 1932 (when he was writing his book) as he was in A.D. 32. Yet nobody who reads the Gospels (without bothering about the exact date) and believes them could possibly say that Jesus was unknown in Palestine in A.D. 32. His wonderful miracles were the talk of the town—according to the Gospels. Unfortunately, people—like Dr. Inge, for example—are less and less disposed to trust the Gospels; for if there is one thing pretty certainly known as the result of the intense study of the New Testament during the past

150 years, it is that the Gospels, in the form we have them, were quite unknown before the year 150. Anything may have been written and believed by the early Christians—whoever they were, for nobody knows—and believed in also by people with the mystical mentality of Merezhkovsky. I can say with confidence that had the Church backed up the Apocryphal Gospels, he would have just as stoutly defended them. So would Dr. Barnes and Dr. Inge—with reservations, of course, the same reservations they give for the Canonical Gospels.

Naturally, as Merezhkovsky believes every word in the Gospels, he has no use for those of us who put Jesus in exactly the same category as other gods—as Jupiter or Apollo, for instance. And he proceeds, in my opinion, very laboriously and very stupidly to put us right.

First of all, he throws completely overboard Renan's *Life of Jesus* and has nothing but contempt for Strauss whom he accuses of suffering from "mythomania." He hoped that Strauss had been forgotten by this time, just as Dupuis and Volney are forgotten—but here the hope is only a hope. Strauss is certainly not forgotten—indeed, it will take the Church another 100 years to come up to him; when it does, it will have the then Dean Inge and Bishop Barnes claiming him as "one of them" by quoting the passage in which Strauss after completely dislodging every incident in the life of Jesus into fairyland or mythology still stoutly maintaining his belief in Jesus. As for Dupuis and Volney—apart from some of their conclusions recognised as mistaken because they had not the necessary instruments for proper historical research—they are as alive as ever. Dupuis, in particular, showed an astonishing insight into the making of religion when man was emerging from the comparatively unknown into history.

I fully expected Merezhkovsky to refer to the "absurd" claim that Jesus was "invented" by the Apostles. How could a group of "unlearned and ignorant men," he scornfully asks, invent such a sublime story? How could they, indeed? But the unlearned and ignorant men are as much an invention as is Jesus. I fail to see why Jesus and his troupe of followers could not be invented. Most of the stories connected with him and them were current all over the then known world and any book on comparative religions and mythology gives details. Was not a Virgin Birth a commonplace? Why, it was even said of Plato who was not a God. The story of the Dying Saviour was even more commonplace, and a God or Son of God always had his ignorant followers who never properly understood him.

Needless to add, Merezhkovsky, after a lot of more or less silly and angry rhetoric, gives us the "classic" witnesses for the actual existence of Jesus as if these witnesses had never been questioned or put out of court. We get the testimony of Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius. As they all mention Jesus, that settles it—he must have lived. It *must* have been Jesus Christ himself who led the tumult in Rome in the reign of Claudius—leading a lot of Jews to revolt! I thought that Suetonius had long since been given up as a witness, but he will be trotted out for many years yet. Although Pliny and Tacitus are always quoted as perfect witnesses for a God called Christ, they would never be quoted, of course, for the actual existence of a God called Jupiter or Osiris. Then there is Josephus, the great "standby" of all Christians, Jews, and reverent Rationalists, who never never would give up Jesus of Nazareth. Even if one of the passages in the Jewish historian is given up as about the rankest forgery conceivable, there is always the other one which is bound to be genuine. We can imagine Christians forging one passage, but never two.

We are informed that the Talmud has no doubt whatever that Jesus, that is, Jesus of Nazareth, "performed miracles." He stole the name of Jahve, tattooed himself with it, and, so the Talmud says, followed by the all-believing Merezhkovsky, was still performing miracles at the beginning of the second century. He was then hanged which, according to our Russian author, really means crucified. And what does this prove? Why, of course, that "Jesus lived." All these witnesses, we are told, "hated" Jesus, so he must have lived.

Then there is Trypho the Jew in his talk with Justin Martyr. Merezhkovsky quotes Trypho as saying that "Jesus the Galilean was the founder of a godless and illegal heresy. We crucified him, and the disciples stole his body and deceived the people saying that he had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven." No chapter and verse whatever is given for this statement and it is the first time that I have come across it. I do not for a moment believe that Trypho said it—it may have been Justin. In any case, Trypho distinctly says that the whole story of Jesus was "invented" by Christians and that particular passage is, of course, not alluded to in *Jesus the Unknown*.

Paul is Merezhkovsky's final witness and he has the audacity to assert that from the Epistles one could write a short life of Jesus; and the strength of this "witness" is so great that "if we had no other" we would still know more about Jesus than many other historic persons.

I can only say here that I have rarely read a more elementary discussion of the historicity of Jesus. I stand aghast that this sort of childish "criticism" could ever have passed the acute mind of Dr. Inge. He must have roared with laughter at the religious naïveté of Merezhkovsky—a naïveté for which there is really no excuse. In a final article I shall deal with a little more of his vast ignorance.

H. CUTNER.

"THE THING"

American Anti-Freethinking Film

THE Editor, in remarking last week that war and the fear of war are the greatest enemies to Freethinking, might have had in mind this latest product of Hollywood. For this pseudo-scientific story is plain propaganda to boost the American armed forces and the principle of hitting first and asking afterwards—the appeal, in short, to brute force over reason.

Briefly, the story describes the arrival of a flying saucer at an American observation post in the Arctic Circle, and we are treated to caustic remarks about sceptical officialdom, which insists in attributing all such phenomena to natural causes (this with the obvious aim, on the part of the author, to build up faith in this new superstition). The saucer comes to grief, its only survivor being an outsize vegetable, which the colony dig out of the ice and transport back to the camp. This vegetable "from another world" is revealed as feeding on blood, having as little consideration for humanity as humanity has for vegetables, able to move about, and for the rest behaving much as other movie actors who take these sinister character parts. Apart from a couple of glimpses of him moving down murky passages, the life circle of the mammoth manger-wurzel is left almost entirely to our imagination. Setting fire to it by pouring paraffin over it does not hurt it any more than plunking bullets through it, though firing it by electrocution does Mr. Thing in. Why? Only "another world" knows, perhaps; certainly not the authors or producers.

The significance of this film is its definite attack on all scientific work and its portrayal of the scientist as anti-social and irresponsible, while at the same time elevating

the uniformed thug into the master of our destinies. Apart from a few observations on plants which acquire their modicum of nitrates and other minerals by catching and feeding on animal life, biology is conspicuous by its absence.

If, out of this farrago of highly unscientific twaddle, we pick its main idea, namely, an extra-terrestrial vegetable, intelligent, mobile and inimical to human welfare, the submission amounts to nothing newer than a weed, spreading dangerously to the social detriment. Wells did the theme much better in his *War of the Worlds* with his red Martian weed. Our biologists and botanists are, in point of fact, daily wrestling with just such problems. The usual and often highly successful method of tackling the menace is by the inoculation of a virus into the plant, or marshalling an attack upon it by some form of insect life with the view to compass its destruction. Thus, 60,000,000 acres of good grazing land in Australia were overrun by the *opuntia* (prickly pear); the introduction of the larva of the *cartoblastis* effectually rid Australia of its "Thing," the anti-social prickly pear. The first step in such research is generally to make a "culture" of the plant, in order to study its habits and learn how to cope with it. Yet this endeavour by the scientist in the story was exposed by the military commander as his most heinous crime! He should have struck first and used his brains afterwards!

The whole colony, civil and military, is depicted as under the autocratic sway of the Captain of a visiting airplane. No one else has anything to say. Not only does he not consult the scientific staff, but refuses to listen to them even. He doesn't consult; he only gives orders—the perfect Fascist set-up! As this would be a bit too much even for the uncritical cinema audience, the author has to portray the scientist as a stupid, irrational neurotic, who prattles about Thought and making sentimental friendship appeals. The whole film is designed and planned to show contempt for scientific learning and distrust of the rational approach, while lauding the heroic qualities of the military man, who kills or enchains anything he doesn't understand.

It is advertised as "for adults only." Why, I do not know. It is not horrific and would hardly keep a child of five awake at night. The only thing I found horrific about it, was the thought it engendered in my mind of a world dominated by the brutal minds and violent instincts of the authors and producers of this film. From them and such as them, good Lord deliver us!

P. C. KING.

Footnote.—It was my intention to review this film in a forthcoming issue of *The Freethinker*, but in view of the brilliant article by Mr. King, who has expressed so succinctly my own views and reactions to this dangerous piece of American propaganda, I have great pleasure in endorsing wholeheartedly his observations. The preoccupation of the United States with pseudo-science films and "flying saucers" is to my mind indicative of the cultural vacuum and intellectual hysteria now current in the U.S. building up to a war psychosis.—

J. MARTIN ALEXANDER.

Martin Harris offered his naked toe to a five-foot black snake in the road, and when it refused to bite him proclaimed an apostolic victory over the serpent. When he repeated the experiment with another snake and got a severe bite on the ankle, the company jeered uproariously at his lack of faith, and Joseph publicly upbraided him for making a mockery of the Lord's gift. (*The Life of Joseph Smith, The Mormon Prophet*, by Fawn M. Bridie, 1945.)

CORRESPONDENCE

"DON'T FORGET HE TOLD YOU SO"

SIR,—May I be allowed to thank Mr. Keith for his charmingly expressed letter? Some readers may have declined to believe me when I said that this was the kind of thing with which the office was bombarded whenever I touched upon Malthus. So here is the proof. Incidentally "in proudly telling us so," Mr. Keith, I'm sure unwittingly, is providing justification for those who so recently—and in past years—were exhibiting their superiority in slave camps, summary executions and torture as well as the flowers that bloom in the spring, tra-la.—Yours, etc.,

H. CUTNER.

THE STRAFFEN CASE

SIR,—Mr. Norman's article is admirable and correct, and it is courageous in *The Freethinker* to give it space.

I believe myself a freethinker, but I couldn't care less by what means they put it out of the power of persons like Straffen to create agony and misery on his small victims and their innocent relatives.—Yours, etc.,

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

MR. SLOAN REPLIES

SIR,—Mr. Alfred D. Corrick chooses to pour cold water on recent researches into the history of inventions in Russia prior to 1917. He asserts, quite incorrectly, that the Russian case that Popov was the inventor of radio before Marconi is a myth, though this claim has been checked and substantiated internationally.

Having followed closely publications in the Soviet Union I am aware—unlike Mr. Corrick—of the enormous amount of research that has gone into these claims. What Mr. Corrick should bear in mind is the fact that because of the reactionary character of the Tsarist Russian Government, and the comparatively low level of development of Russian capitalism, much scientific work and many inventions were achieved there but were not *patented* before work of a similar type had been *patented* in the Western capitalist countries.

It is only now, with a Government interested in establishing an accurate history of technique in Russia, that facts are being brought to light showing the wealth of inventions under Tsarism which were never fully recognised at the time because of the backwardness of the Tsarist regime.

To bring the story completely up to date, I notice in the *News Chronicle* on August 15 that Ritchie Calder described in some detail a "Giant with feet of power" which is now being produced by Ransome & Rapier of Ipswich. Reading the story in the *News Chronicle* this might be a description of a new *British* invention. It happens, however, that the mechanism described by Ritchie Calder is almost an exact replica of the "Walking Excavator" which is already in wide use in the Soviet Union on the big construction sites.

In a few years' time I can imagine Mr. Corrick jeering at a Russian claim that they invented the Walking Excavator and using as evidence an article in the *News Chronicle* which described a similar invention being produced by Ransome & Rapier!

It is utterly ridiculous, of course, to suggest that the Russians claim to have invented everything. What they are doing, however, is to carry out extensive research into the history of technical developments in Russia before 1917—a job which nobody bothered to do under Tsarism—and are bringing to light some vitally important documents which I would have thought would have been welcomed by the sort of scientific mind that one expects to patronise *The Freethinker*.

With regard to the purge; this is already ancient history. I thought that at least one anti-Soviet lie which had been finally nailed in its coffin during the Second World War was the lie that the Moscow trials did not reveal the discovery and punishment of a very real conspiracy worked out in collaboration with the Hitlerites.

I am interested at the way in which Mr. Corrick quotes absolutely without question the assertions of a writer whose statements are obviously extremely biased and whose statistics, if correct, would mean the rapid dying out of the population of the Soviet Union.—Yours, etc.,

PAT SLOAN.

"CHRISTIAN" NAMES

SIR,—Further to P.V.M.'s remarks on this subject: On my monthly pension form, and all the various other forms official and commercial, that pass through my hands, I have always made a point of conspicuously drawing an ink cancelling line through the word *Christian*.

Probably at least two persons notice this cancellation each time and one hopes that this simple action may perhaps sometimes plant the germ of an idea on fertile soil. The fundamental purpose of education is, to my mind, to induce people to *think*, rather than merely stuff their heads with, largely, useless knowledge.—Yours, etc.,

M. C. B.

"DOPE"

SIR,—In June 29 issue "Grace Matson" says: "Freethinkers should refuse to allow their minds to be dulled by any of the 'Dope' that is so freely distributed by Press, pulpit and radio." How can this be done? What power have we to control thoughts? What appears true, we must accept as such, however false it be.

She also says in closing words: "Let nothing and nobody bar our way to understanding." A formidable bar to understanding is the "Iron Curtain." How can we lift it?—Yours, etc.,

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

MAD AND MUDDLED

Religion leaves a slimy smear
Over the human brain;
It thrives on ignorance and fear
And overwork and strain;
A pious mind is never clear,
A mind devout insane.

B. S.

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING,
5th SEPTEMBER

Present: Mr. F. A. Ridley (in the Chair), Messrs. Griffiths, Johnson, Hornibrook, Woodley, Tiley, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Barker, Gibbins, and the Secretary.

Twenty-three new members were accepted for the Parent, Glasgow, Manchester, West London, North London, and Kingston Branches. A letter from Mr. and Mrs. Cohen thanking the Society for a greetings telegram sent to the late President on his 84th birthday was read.

Arrangements were put in hand for meetings at the Conway Hall in the autumn and New Year, and it was also decided to see if other meetings could be run in co-operation with sympathetic organisations. Mr. Clayton sent in a report of 20 outdoor meetings, including two debates, at which he had represented the Society between July 21 and August 24, and his energy and resourcefulness were highly commended.

The President reported on his visit to the Brussels Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers as the Society's delegate, and announced that he had been elected to the Executive Committee of the World Union to represent Great Britain, on which honour he was warmly congratulated by the Executive, on the proposal of Mr. W. Griffiths, seconded by Mr. R. Johnson.

At the suggestion of Mr. Ridley it was decided to consider at the next meeting ways and means to form new branches of the Society in view of its steadily rising membership.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

MR. J. CLAYTON'S Lectures.—Friday, September 12, 7 p.m., Hapton. Saturday, September 13, 6 p.m., Great Harwood. Sunday, September 14, 6-45 p.m., Burnley Market.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday evening, 7-30 p.m.: H. DAY.

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Plattfields).—Every Sunday, 3 p.m.; (St. Mary's Gate, Blitized Site), every Sunday, 8 p.m.; (Alexandra Park Gate), every Wednesday, 8 p.m.; (Deansgate Bomb Site), every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: L. EBURY. (Highbury Corner), Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: L. EBURY.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, September 13, 7-30 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, 6 p.m.: Messrs. WOOD and O'NEILL.

INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, September 14, 11 a.m.: ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A., "Christian Morals and Rationalism."

DAD'S DILEMMA

CRUELTY to children, said Christ, was a punishable offence. Without specifying the penalty he hinted that the offender would be better off in the sea with a millstone round his neck.

Nevertheless the Catholic Youth Leaders do not seem to be in that position. They appear generally to find life the same mixture of disappointment, frustration and rare ecstasy as we others.

Although brought up for awhile at a Catholic school, I was spared the horrors of indoctrination in the Faith. Whilst the nuns were getting (I was seven years old myself) the daily promise of Hell-fire we horrid Protestants were given a stiff portion of P.T. to protest about. But I know something of what the Faithful suffered.

Later I was spiritually inoculated at an English day and Methodist Sunday School. Opinion as to the objectivity of Hell was, in my day, divided among the Methodists. And whilst I was never unduly impressed by the true awfulness of the Devil, I still remember the feeling of slight relief with which I learnt that he was more of a myth than a menace. Luckily I had a sensible and somewhat sceptical father. My religious training, in all, may have done me less harm than usual.

Now I have "four of my own" nice kids—I fancy—and happy. Particularly the youngest who is not yet at school.

She is particularly happy because she fears nothing, man or animal. She approaches strange dogs, as she approaches strange men, with innocent unconcern. She tempts me to think it a pity the whole world is not so disarming.

The others are not quite so fearless and, by the same token, not quite so happy. And that is because they go to school. Fear and God came into their life at the same time. All three of them showed signs of increasing nervousness and ill-ease as soon as the well-meaning Faith-mongers got to work upon them. From that time they began to lay awake nights, instead of sleeping. And no longer would they trust themselves alone in the dark.

God figured increasingly in their questions and their conversation. They would threaten me with his wrath if ever I displeased them. And they feared it themselves. He was watching. The fact that he was love was nothing, for children do not know what love is. But the fact that he was hidden away somewhere keeping an eye on them, when no one else was meant a great deal.

I could shield them from educational religious cant by special application. But this does more harm than good. We are social animals, and our worst ill is separation from the herd. And this ill we feel most keenly in our infancy. A father to-day keeps Freud always at his elbow.

So we don't separate them. We let them absorb the primitive clap-trap. But we could counteract it. We could tell them the truth as it is known to us, and whilst permitting the poison, we could supply the antidote.

The first drawback here is that we are up against authority. To a young child, "Teacher" is wisdom in person. Teacher is knowledge, and what teacher doesn't know, isn't knowledge. Nor is there any chance that teacher might be wrong.

Still, Father could conquer this difficulty. He could point out the fallibility of mortal authority. He could destroy an omnipresent god by destroying his omniscient witness, the teacher.

But here again loss would outweigh gain. Argument would create conflict. Teacher is enthroned in the child's mind and can only be removed to the child's peril. Teacher and parent fighting each could wreak almost as much harm in a growing mind as parent fighting parent.

So that is the dilemma. The young mind has to be poisoned or wrecked. I think the poisoning the least harmful. Minds can and do fight clear of religious phobias. For the time being the young Lovelocks must have their share of Adam, Eve, Noah and the vengeful all-seeing god.

That is because they are Protestants. And the Protestant god and the Protestant devil are small beer. What if they were Catholics? If their young minds were being warped and broken with the cruellest threats and curses of medieval demonology, would I, as Catholics do, let them suffer on to expiate my own sins and unworthiness? Or would some vestige of humanity and normal feeling urge me to their rescue and my own.

I pray to the great god that isn't that I should have that vestige of normality and decency, under those circumstances. And that I might beseech a little for my fellow Catholics.

BISSETT LOVELOCK.

DAY AFTER LAST

I dreamt of the Great Final Summons,
The loud trumpet-note thundered out;
They sorted the ripe and the rum 'uns,
They missed me, because I was out.
How dread to be in the wrong place!
In dark doubt to be fixed and frozen;
Missed in the last day's long chase,
Not to be One of the Chosen!
Horrid to be marked as "missing,"
"Q" on the Final Report;
Because, things that matter dismissing,
I'd gone to see "Super" and "Short."
It's human to be with the happy,
With the merry mob sometimes to mix;
I'm just a gregarious chappie,
So the judgment found me in the "flicks."
The sinners I sat with were smiling,
I shared in their sweet, soothing mirth;
For a small space, the world's woes beguiling
(Though, it might be, the last day of earth).
But I heard a great voice from the entry,
In tones which might tremors beget;
To the usher—the cinema's sentry—
"I say—aren't there any seats yet?"

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

IS GOD A GENTLEMAN?

When Somerset Maugham was a young and bashful novelist, he was the guest of Augustus Hare in his family seat. Augustus conducted family prayers for the household, including the servants. When Maugham discovered that he had deleted many lines of the prayer book, he inquired the reason.

"I've crossed out all the passages in glorification of God," said Augustus. "God is certainly a gentleman, and no gentleman cares to be praised to his face. It is tactless, impertinent and vulgar. I think all this fulsome adulation must be highly offensive to him."

GOD AND THE UNIVERSE. By Chapman Cohen. A Criticism of Professors Huxley, Eddington, Jeans and Einstein. Price, cloth 4s. 3d.; postage 3d.; paper 2s. 6d.; postage 2d.

THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL CHRIST. By Gerald Massey. What Christianity owes to Ancient Egypt. Price 1s.; postage 2d.