

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXII—No. 40

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Fourpence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

[Instead of our usual Editorial we are publishing the report on British Freethought delivered by the Editor to the Brussels Congress on Saturday, August 23.]

REPORT ON BRITISH FREETHOUGHT

Background

THE great French historian, Jules Michelet, has aptly remarked that, since the Reformation, the modern history of England has been "the history of an island." In religion and its social role we observe a situation in many respects totally dissimilar to that which exists upon the European continent. In England, and the same applies to other parts of the British Isles, the power of the Roman Catholic Church was broken at the era of the Reformation. Hence, the age-long conflict of the "Universal" Church and the modern national State, which has formed, historically, and still largely forms to-day the great dividing line in European society, has been absent in England since the sixteenth century. Consequently, in England, the dividing line in politics and, generally, in society, has not, as on the Continent, been decided by religion. Since the century of the First Elizabeth and Oliver Cromwell, the Church has been subordinate to the State, and "anti-clericalism," as understood and practised in European history, can hardly be said to exist.

Religion and English Society

Politically speaking, the inseparable alignment between "anti-clericalism" and the political "Left," as it exists upon the Continent, does not exist in Britain. However, specific religious influences have not been lacking in Britain. In the past the connection between the Established Church and Toryism was so close that Anglicanism has been not inaptly styled "the Tory Party at prayer." (It was, no doubt, to this connection that Karl Marx alluded in his famous aphorism, "the Church of England would rather lose the whole of the Thirty-nine Articles than one thirty-ninth of its income"!.) Similarly, the historic relations between the now almost defunct Liberal Party and the "Free" (non-Conformist) Churches was extremely close, whilst the present General Secretary of the Labour Party has declared that the peculiarly English brand of Socialism professed by his Party "owes more to Methodism than to Marx." Even the Communist Party does not take up a definite stand upon the religious question, and its best-known "fellow-traveller" is the "Red" Dean of the Metropolitan Church of Canterbury. In current British society, religion, though no longer practised with the fervour of Victorian days, is still intensely "respectable," and no politician or public man would attack it openly. For "respectability" still counts for much in England!

Current Religious Statistics

We are, fortunately, in a position to be able to cite authoritative statistics, compiled over half a century, on

the proportion of the population in England who regularly attend the church services of the various religious denominations. (In the other parts of the British Isles, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales, all Protestant strongholds of a largely Calvinistic character, the current influence of religious institutions is probably somewhat stronger). According to a series of sociological surveys compiled by the eminent sociologist, Mr. Seebohm Rowntree, who is himself a Quaker, the average attendance on Sundays at religious places of worship has fallen from about 31 per cent. in 1901, when Mr. Rowntree's first census was taken, to just under 13 per cent. in 1949, when his most recent figures were compiled.

Moreover, the incidence has shifted as between the various churches: in 1901, Anglicanism led easily, with Nonconformity a bad second, and Roman Catholicism as a negligible third; now, Nonconformity leads, whilst Roman Catholicism has almost caught up with Anglicanism for second place. Two features of special interest emerge from the above sociological survey: (a) *all* the churches, without exception, are losing ground, and membership, as and when compared with the total population; and (b) Roman Catholicism is gaining *relatively* in comparison with, and probably at the expense of the other churches.

The present state of Christianity in England

(We lack exact information on other parts of the British Isles.)

The present constitution of Great Britain is still fundamentally mediæval in its conception of the relations between Church and State. Despite its sharp internal divisions and its rapidly falling church membership, the "Church of England is still the Established Church and, as such, still has considerable power." It is officially represented in the House of Lords and has a close official connection with the State: at next year's Coronation the Anglican Primate, the Archbishop of Canterbury, will anoint Her Gracious Majesty, the Royal "Defender of the Faith," with the Holy Oil, just as if the Middle Ages were still in existence! However, the Anglican Church, historically, is the church of a class, of the landed squirearchy, for so long the effective ruler of England; in the present age of democracy and death-duties it is unlikely that such an anomalous position can long endure. A day must ultimately come when even politicians will realise that a church effectively representing perhaps five per cent. of the total English population is somewhat out of place as a *national* church.

Like Anglicanism, Nonconformity is a declining force, and its theological disintegration is, if possible, even more complete. Roman Catholicism, on the other hand, has greatly increased in numbers and, still more, in influence since the 19th century, when it was a negligible minority. It owes its modern revival partly to the Irish immigration, which has been continuous since the "hungry forties" (and the potato famines in Ireland); and partly to its superior organisation. In England, as elsewhere, it

tion (two and in some classes one lesson a week) given by the priests of the respective Churches as a part of school curricula. The rest of the instruction was strictly secular; there were no prayers. Masaryk and Benes had to sign many laws which, before the First War, they would have fought as reactionary. Compromises with Catholics disgusted many a former collaborator of Masaryk. The first President, however, who after being elected by the National Assembly went, in 1948, to the Prague Cathedral, was the present Communist President, Klement Gottwald. Willingly or unwillingly he stressed in this way that he is not a representative of the "Aristocracy of Mind," but of the lower classes of population who to a large extent, especially in rural areas, are still Catholics. There is, however, no substantial difference between the social convenience of Masaryk, Benes and Gottwald, of the Freethinkers and the Catholics. Almost all Czechs are of peasants' stock.

In the Second War the Czechoslovak intellectual élite whose influence in the nation was unique, was apart from those persecuted for racial reasons, the hardest hit group by Nazi persecution. Thousands were executed or lost their lives in concentration camps, tens of thousands were imprisoned and deported, Freemasons' lodges and Freethinkers' organisations and periodicals prohibited. Nor was the post-war confusion, with its demoralisation and nationalist hatred, favourable for the aims of Freethought. Very few actual attempts to eliminate the influence of Churches were done, the State attempting merely to subdue them, especially in Slovakia, and to secure their co-operation, in which it has been opposed more by Catholics than by the reformed Churches which has led to the restoration of the doubtful prestige of this Church even in the eyes of certain non-clerical elements. The general strengthening of collectivism as opposed to Masaryk's individualism is in some spheres also contradictory to the aims of Freethought, even if this collectivism is secular in nature and was required sometimes by the war and post-war conditions. The quite recent past, present situation and probable future developments are little known to the present author owing to the unfortunate division of Europe into two camps, which discontinued or limited considerably all cultural relations of Czechoslovakia with the Western world. Those Czech Freethinkers whom the momentous events of the last 15 years drove to or surprised in the West, have been finding that Masaryk's Czechoslovakia, its schools and Universities and culture in general abandoned to Hitler in 1938-39, were to a much greater extent imbued and inspired by Locke's, Hume's, Voltaire's, Comte's, Spencer's and B. Russell's ideas than the native countries of these thinkers, their schools and Universities, and—let us say—immigration authorities, landlords and employers seem to be. Rationalist ideas, however, are not dead in the West. May this article be a challenge to the rationalist groups in the West, and particularly to the great American Czech Freethought group, to do for their uprooted Czech adherents at least as much as certain Churches and sects are doing, often with official support, for theirs. Or shall, apart from a few professional politicians only the bigoted Czechs who happen to be in the West now, work normally? These latter are really grotesque successors of J. A. Comenius. T. G. Masaryk and other great Czech exiles of the past. Neither their own nor other nations will benefit much by their activities.

ARTHUR WILD.

THE STRAFFEN CASE

MR. C. H. NORMAN must be congratulated on his splendid article, a masterpiece of logic. He makes clear the Gilbertian reasoning shown by the judge in citing two murderous acts of an insane person to prove that the killer was sane on the third occasion!

Since Mr. Norman wrote, Straffen has been reprieved, and there have been many opinions published about the Home Secretary's decision. Mostly the sympathy is with Straffen. Let me say, unequivocally, speaking as a father and a grandfather, and a British citizen that I am disappointed that he is to be kept alive. I wish to goodness these "pity the poor murderer" sentimentalists had a spell in prison and asylum. Says Mr. Hugh Klare, secretary of the Howard League for Penal Reform: "The Home Secretary has, therefore, acted courageously as well as properly in reprieving a man who—though he did not come within the narrow and antiquated definition of insanity laid down by the McNaghten rules—was a certified mental defective as well as a psychopath. The community certainly has a right to be properly protected from such men as Straffen, but it would do grave injury to the British sense of justice and humanity if persons with no more than the mental capacity of children were put to death."

That final sentence clearly dodges the issue, and contains a mischievous innuendo. The British sense of justice and humanity does not yearn to put to death persons with no more than the mental capacity of little children. Living near me is a man called Charley. He is over fifty years of age, he is quite childish, but he has good humour, and has never done an unsocial act. We all humour him in his fancies, and his existence in freedom is a happy one. There is nothing wrong with British humanity in the case of a stricken brother. *But in the Straffen case, we are concerned with a miscreant who has murdered three dear little children.* The mothers of the little victims can have little interest in hair-splitting definitions of degrees of insanity; whether Straffen is now mad or sane or only psychopathic these are only academic points. What really matters is that a clever and crafty killer of little children is allowed to live.

Did the League make any protest about the escape of a dangerous character, a known killer of little children? Or is that outside the scope of "Penal Reform"?

In the year 1911, I was present at a public execution in Nantes. A ruffian had outraged and murdered a little girl. The child's father asked, and was permitted to witness the decapitation at close range. After the condemned man had *craché dans le panier*, a journalist spoke to the stern-faced parent, and said something about justice being done. No doubt, was his answer; that doesn't give me back my little one, *but it makes sure that Jules Grand will never kill another.*

Ah, but that was in France. We are "humanitarian" here. We are all being worked up into pity for poor Straffen. A special corps of attendants (surely not the same "screws" who let him escape?) will now dance attendance on the poor soul lest some old lag should give him the works.

Well, thank goodness, I am of French blood.

J. EFFEL.

It [the moon—Editor] is a world that is completely and utterly dead, a sterile mountainous waste on which during the heat of the day the sun blazes down with relentless fury, but where during the long night the cold is so intense that it far surpasses anything ever experienced on the earth.—SIR H. SPENCER JONES—*Life on Other Worlds.*

advances under the current cloak of "anti-Communism." Politically, Catholicism is working hard, and not without success, to "permeate" the non-Marxist British Labour Party.

Theological Disintegration

Outside the Roman Catholic Church, which, officially, at least, still retains her mediæval theology, the Christian Churches in England are in a state of complete theological disintegration. "Modernist" (semi-rationalist) views abound in all the Protestant Churches, and even the standards of orthodoxy are in a state of continuous flux. Inside the Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and "Modernist" views maintain an uneasy co-existence. In Nonconformist circles theology assumes an increasingly Unitarian character. Perhaps the most conspicuous feature in current English religion is the almost complete breakdown of the old Victorian Bibliolatry, which was practically universal in the days of Paine, Bradlaugh and the early pioneers of British Freethought. The overall picture of English theology is one of full decay which, apart from Roman Catholicism, the churches are doing little to arrest.

Current Superstitions

Outside Christianity, a number of superstitions still retain some degree of influence, Spiritualism maintains some degree of organisation, whilst astrology, to judge from its extensive vogue in the popular press, probably now has as many votaries as in the days of the ancient Chaldeans! When Christianity has finally quitted the scene, there will still be plenty of superstitions for Rationalism to combat. "Missions" of other religions, such as Islam and Buddhism, sent to "convert" England, do not seem to have met with much success, though the esoteric cult of Theosophy founded by Madame Blavatsky and popularised by the Englishwoman, Annie Besant, has since acquired a worldwide influence.

The Rationalist Movement in Britain

The organised movement of Rationalism in Britain is divided into a number of societies who approach the question from different angles. The *Rationalist Press Association* is primarily a publishing association. It produces much valuable literature and includes many leading intellectuals within its ranks. Conversely, the *National Secular Society* is, primarily, a propagandist body, though it also publishes on a more modest scale than the R.P.A. *The Ethical Union*, as its name implies, is primarily interested in the Rationalist approach to moral issues. In addition to these national bodies, there are a number of autonomous local bodies, such as the *Leicester Secular Society* and its Glasgow counterpart. In the past, the various Freethought bodies have not always been completely harmonious. To-day, fortunately, the most harmonious solidarity prevails amongst all sections of the Rationalist movement in Great Britain. May it long continue!

Future Prospects

Victorian England was, perhaps, the most religious country in, at any rate, the Protestant world. However, the Victorian age is now coming to an end in Britain, and the future for liberal ideas in Britain, even in the sphere of religion, appears undeniably bright. This seems to be indicated both by current religious statistics and, also, by the decline of the Churches in social influence,

as indicated, for example, by the recent secular re-marriage of Mr. Eden despite the fulminations of the Church. We have travelled far since the Victorian hey-day! The influence of secularist ideas is on the up-grade, and the number of British Rationalists cannot be judged by the relatively small membership of the organised Rationalist movement. Evolution progresses, even in the land which discovered it! The work of the great pioneers, of Paine, Owen and Bradlaugh, is now approaching fulfilment.

F. A. RIDLEY.

HISTORY OF THE FREETHOUGHT MOVEMENT IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

(Concluded from page 307)

AFTER the First War, the percentage of population still in the Roman Catholic Church sank rapidly from about 95 to 75 per cent. Many became members of various reformed Churches, many dissociated themselves openly with any Church. The number of these latter was given as about 850,000 out of the total 14,700,000 in the census of 1930. The great majority of them were genuine Freethinkers and other rationalists, the number of those who left the Church for other reasons being negligible. Moreover, there were Freethinkers and other enlightened elements who remained in various reformed Churches—T. G. Masaryk himself as a theist only occasionally inclining towards agnosticism was a kind of Protestant—or even such who nominally belonged still to Catholicism. In the main event of Freethinkers' Congress in Prague in 1935 the participation was 40,000. Freethinkers received many leading posts in State administration and the spirit of State education, which was almost universal, became secular. The Cremation Movement became widespread and propaganda for the instruction of secular morale to Freethinkers' children partly succeeded. Also Masonic organisation showed good progress. After successful activity in the 18th century it had been forbidden in the western part of Austria-Hungary almost uninterruptedly from 1792 to 1918 and only individual members had belonged to foreign lodges. On the other hand, there were also signs of stagnation and reasons for discontent.

Masaryk's party was not renewed after the First War. Its former members joined various other parties, but were often unable to prevent their drifting towards reaction. Moreover the party-political differences led sometimes to disputes among the "Non-Confessionals," by which name people who do not belong to any Church are called in Czechoslovakia. The secession of Communists from Social Democracy and the opposition of nationalist elements among national minorities and, no doubt, also the opportunism of many non-clericals led to the participation in the Government of the Czech People's Party concentrating the forces of political Catholicism. The Slovak People's Party, very important owing to the more backward cultural standard of Slovakia, led first by the priest Hlinka and later by the priest Tiso, finished entirely in fascist and Nazi waters. In 1939 Tiso became with Hitler's help the President of Slovakia and after the War he was executed as a war criminal. The presence of Catholic elements in the Government prevented, between the two Wars, a complete separation of the Church from the State, the most stressed item of Masaryk's pre-war programme. For children of parents who were in no Church, there was no religious instruction and only in the last years of the First Republic secular morale could be taught to them as a voluntary subject. Members of Churches could apply for the exemption of their children, but the majority of the nation still "enjoyed" strictly denominational religious instruc-

ACID DROPS

The R.C. Bishop of Southwark—we wonder, by the way, who made him a Bishop of an English diocese—let himself go the other day on the great Virgin Queen Elizabeth. "She was," he told a delighted R.C. audience, "one of the most infamous and miserable women in history, not excepting Jezebel." No one should be surprised at this attack, for Elizabeth I allowed the Roman Church to be hit so hard that for two centuries afterwards it couldn't raise its head in the country. When, under the infamous James II, it tried to, the British rightly kicked him out of the land for ever.

But the Bishop was quite silent about Mary I. Yet the two sisters were both worthy daughters of that murderous monster, Henry VIII. Mary burnt, tortured, and imprisoned thousands of "heretics" for heresy alone. And she slaughtered a 17-year-old girl—Lady Jane Grey—with savage brutality. Elizabeth burnt, tortured, and imprisoned Roman Catholics, though it is only fair to point out that some of them were certainly guilty of "high treason." And she slaughtered her rival, Mary Queen of Scots, after many years of imprisonment. In their different ways, both sisters were "infamous." Elizabeth's reign is only "glorious" because England, emerging from centuries of barbarism under the Roman Church, at last managed to get together such a galaxy of men like Drake, Raleigh, Bacon, Marlowe, Shakespeare, and many others in a single era. We never could understand what Elizabeth had to do with it.

Whether hope does or does not spring eternal in the human breast, the Bishop of Warrington seems to have plenty of optimism. He has just discovered that "there were a lot of people waiting to be asked to go to church." They were too timid, poor dears, to go alone. So bring a friend with you when you go to church. The good Bishop still finds it hard to understand that the people who don't go to church don't go because they are convinced that Christianity is untrue; or that the parson is talking a lot of rot; or because they are completely bored. We do not deny that in some small social way the Church can be of service to a few sections of the community. After all, it is huge organisation and it would be very surprising indeed if it did not fill some want on the part of the people who still are, as Carlyle said years ago, mostly fools.

In many small towns and villages the Church has a big hand in "culture," the vicar or the priest is "somebody," and often they help in many ways our social services. But Christianity is not primarily a "social" religion. It is there to prepare men for the life to come, to praise God Almighty continually, and to boost up Jesus Christ. Merely supporting Church concerts or Mother's Meetings is not good enough. You must believe—in miracles, angels, devils, hell, and heaven. That is what the Bishop wants but he does not put it quite so brutally.

That great, pious, national newspaper, the *Daily Mail*, has now come over on the side of the angels. It appears that a Mr. Macmorran, who is the Chancellor of the Diocese of Chichester, refused permission for an angel to be erected over the grave of a little girl. To her heart-broken parents the poor child was no doubt an angel and, even if Mr. Macmorran does not believe in angels or considers that marble angels are not quite good enough for these heavenly beings, we cannot see why he should have refused giving the parents a little comfort.

After all, angels have been erected in thousands over other graves even if they are apt very often to make one laugh aloud in a solemn cemetery; though some of the angels wrought by our very modern sculptors are even funnier than Victorian angels. However, the *Daily Mail* rebukes Mr. Macmorran, mostly because angels are referred to in the Bible. Hence they exist—nighties, wings and all. And when Mr. Macmorran says "the one thing you don't want to become is an angel," the *Daily Mail* angrily asks, "How do you know?" and hopes that the Chancellor will one day "find himself equipped with fine feathered pinions." Angels indeed! Doesn't the Bible say there *are* Angels?

THEATRE

"The Troublemakers," by George Bellak. Strand Theatre. THE subject of the witch hunts in America has been given such stark realism in this play that it is not surprising that the author has failed to get it produced in the States. For the play shows us American university life in an unfavourable light.

The principal character in the play is a student called Stanley Carr, in whose room a mob of students beat up and kill his room-mate. Carr, who has looked on in bewilderment and has done nothing to stop them, is against having the murder hushed up and wishes to expose it for what it is, but the others force Carr to keep quiet by threatening to drag him in as a guilty party with them.

Carr is twenty-eight and less irresponsible than his younger colleagues. He wants the crime to be brought home to them, and we watch his efforts against corruption and the struggle he has with his conscience.

The play is well written, but with no stars I am not sure that it will have the long run it deserves. Gene Lyons takes the longest part as Stanley Carr, and but for a slight monotony of delivery and in approach to the character he succeeds in drawing our sympathy. Thora Hird is the dead man's mother, and gives a very convincing performance. Stanley Carr, as the father, has one of the least interesting parts and makes little of it. Joseph Tomelty is passably good as the radical grandfather.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

UNMIXED BLESSINGS

Although we Christians know all men as brothers,

Altho' we love, alike, both rich and poor;

Altho' they're loving sons, and wives and mothers—

We've no connection with the church next door.

We have no use for discords and divisions,

We know such things send Unity to pot;

But still, because they ask for small revisions—

We've no connection with the other lot.

We pray (as they do) for Mankind's improvement,

We sing (as they do) hymns we all would choose;

Yet (each bound up in his own little movement),

We'd neither be found dead in t'other's pews.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE

To sum up the argument, the conditions needed for birth to be given to a planetary system may be so exceptional that amongst the vast number of stars in any one stellar Universe we may expect to find only a very few that have a family of planets, and amongst these families of planets there cannot be more than a small proportion where the conditions are suitable for life to exist. Life elsewhere in the Universe is therefore the exception and not the rule.—SIR H. SPENCER JONES—*Life on Other Worlds*.

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

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

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.

SUGAR PLUM

Our contemporary, *The Sunday Express*, has discovered the menace of political Catholicism in Britain. In its issue of September 21, 1952, it pointed out the existence of a solid Catholic block of about a million voters. Whilst these ostensibly vote in different political camps, on fundamentals of Catholic theology and "morals" they all vote in the manner laid down by ecclesiastical instructions in a way which is entirely different from any other Church and which constitutes political Catholicism as a serious threat to the hard-won civil and religious liberties of the British people. In Britain, where the political set-up differs sharply from that of the Continent, and where anti-clericalism of the European type is virtually non-existent, the Church penetrates all parties impartially, though its political activities seem to meet with more success in the Labour Party. The sinister activities of this local political "pressure group" of the "Black International" necessitate constant watching and exposure by Secularists.

Mr. F. A. Ridley, President of the *National Secular Society*, is speaking at Glasgow this Sunday, October 5, at McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, at 7 p.m. His subject is: "Secularism Faces the Future." An interesting and stimulating theme to be discussed by a Scottish audience with, no doubt, all the enthusiasm which they habitually display in intellectual matters. Glasgow has always been famous for its keen interest in advanced ideas of all shades. The *Glasgow Secular Society*, which has a history that dates back, we believe, to the beginning of the nineteenth century, recently reaffiliated to the N.S.S. We have no doubt that Mr. Ridley will receive the same enthusiastic welcome as did his predecessors, Mr. Cohen and Mr. Rosetti.

HOW TO GET AN AUDIENCE

THE large, brightly-coloured poster site in London's Oxford Street could not be missed. "The Heavens Are Telling," I read, "the splendours of God's colossal universe. Magnificent screen pictures filmed through the eyepiece of giant telescopes." Although the wording struck me as somewhat silly, I thought I would look out for the showing of the film at my local cinema.

Then I saw an advertisement in the *Evening Standard*. "The Heavens Are Telling" was to form part of three identical programmes at the Coliseum on Sunday,

September 21. "All seats free," it said, and announced an "Outstanding Musical Feature" in Ben Glanzer, Tenor.

My wife and I decided to go to the afternoon performance, advertised for 4-30. Getting to the theatre shortly after three, we joined the queue twenty yards or so from the entrance. By four o'clock, when the doors would normally have opened, we heard cries of "This way, ticket-holders only," but there was no movement in our queue. For the next half-hour a constant stream of ticket holders made their way to the doors, which were then closed. No announcement was made to the waiting crowd of some thousands, whom the advertising had attracted. There was some booing, and we went home to tea, thinking that the anonymous organisers of the show had shown no proper sense of responsibility towards the public.

Curiosity took us back at about eight o'clock, when people were coming out from the second house. This time there was no question of "ticket-holders only," and the waiting crowd surged in, we included. My free programme, like the advertisement, did not say who was running the affair, but I learned from it that "The Heavens Are Telling" did not come on until towards the end. Before it we were to have the organ, the choir, hymns, prayer, tenor solos, announcements and a collection.

Announcements included an apology to those who had waited a long time to get in and the information that, after the fiasco of the afternoon, the police had ruled that no more tickets be issued and that, with or without tickets, all should be admitted. So, unmoved by an eloquent prayer by a Mr. T. J. Bradley for God's blessing on the "offering," I passed along the plate when it came round, and, the next morning put my shilling in the Orphanage Box at the police station in Gray's Inn Road.

Having endured the preliminaries with patience, I heaved a sigh of relief when the screen was lowered, the lights were dimmed and a Mr. Vandeman came into the spotlight directed on the lecture-desk. At last for the film on astronomy that I and the other thousands had come to see! But, shades of my boyhood Band of Hope, instead of a film we were given a typical revivalist sermon accompanied by magic-lantern slides, black-and-white "stills" such as you find in every text-book on astronomy! According to the speaker, the astronomical distances that he quoted and the regular motions of the bodies he named proved that God loved me and all the other people in the Coliseum that night, and that, if we would only come to God, all our problems and worries would depart and we should have peace.

The next morning I telephoned the Manager of the Coliseum and protested that I and thousands of Londoners had been hoaxed by a misleading advertisement into coming to his hall. He disclaimed all responsibility and referred me to the sponsors of the affair, the Seventh Day Adventists. When I telephoned their offices I was told that their advertising had said nothing about a cinematograph show. He was quite right. Here are the exact words of the press advertisement: "The inspiration of a lifetime awaits you as George E. Vandeman, impressive and colourful speaker, unfolds the splendours of God's colossal universe. Hear him tell the captivating drama of the stars. See magnificent screen pictures of whirling worlds and blazing suns, recently filmed through the eyepiece of giant telescopes. Cancel all engagements to be present for this unforgettable night."

This, quite obviously *means* that the programme advertised consists of a revivalist preacher who, basing his appeal on astronomical phenomena, and illustrating his arguments by means of a magic-lantern and slide, will call upon those present to accept God's salvation. This, moreover, was

the meaning that brought Londoners to the Coliseum in such numbers that, not only was the theatre packed three times during the day, but many were unable to get in and went home disappointed.

The *Heavens Are Telling!*

P.V.M.

THE ANCIENT CULT OF MITHRAISM

THE celebrated Persian divinity Mithra was for a long period the outstanding rival of Christianity in the Imperial Roman dominions. Yet its existence was virtually ignored by the earlier historians of ancient Rome. Still, in Britain when our island was a Roman province for more than 300 years and, at a time, when Christianity apparently penetrated almost every part of its far-flung Empire, few, if any, memorials of that cult have survived in our land. Relics of Mithraism, however, have been found in Roman settlements. As the late John M. Robertson states in his second revised and expanded edition of his *Pagan Christs* (Watts, 1911): "There has been found, for instance, a Mithraic cave at Housesteads, in Northumberland, containing sculptures of Mithra worship, and an inscription: 'To the God, best and greatest, invincible Mithra, the Lord of Ages'; and another at Kichester, with the inscription: 'To the God the Sun, the invincible Mithra.'" London, Manchester, Chester, Oxford, York and other cities have all preserved Mithraic remains which also occur in Germany, France and Italy, indeed, in every region where Roman armies penetrated. Yet, what are now acknowledged as Mithraic monuments were misconceived even by eminent scholars of previous generations.

But direct knowledge of Mithraism is still scanty. Its earliest appearance is in the Sacred Books of the East. The Indian *Rig Veda* acclaims Mithra as "greater than the earth and the sky; he supports even all the gods." Apparently, he was the sun deified. Our chief source of information, however, is the *Zendavesta*, a Persian collection of a later date containing laws, litanies, hymns and prayers, but so much has perished by the hand of time and even deliberate destruction, that the evolution of Mithraism from antecedent cults and its precise teachings are difficult to trace.

Zoroastrianism in Persia is closely connected with Mithra. If Zoroaster was a religious reformer and not merely a legendary character, he occupies a high position as the purifier of a faith.

The cults of antiquity underwent so many changes that their modes of development are difficult to discern. Yet, it seems certain that subsequent to the Persian conquest of Babylon (538 B.C.), Mithraism emerges in the form in which it appears in Roman centuries and, it is fairly inferential, that the blending of Iranian Mazdeism with Chaldean astrology formed the Mithraic cult of Imperial Rome.

Through several centuries, the Mithraic religion evidently evolved into an ethical stage superior to that of most contemporary cults. In preceding ages, Mithra, or his predecessor, like gods in general were placated with sacrifices. But in historical times there is no sign of human sacrifice or sexual abnormalities. No reference to the god's amours is known, although there may have been instances of license among his devotees. Also, in the sacred scriptures of later days, Mithra is declared to be the apostle of righteousness. Originally, the sun itself, he afterwards becomes its symbol or spirit. As the beneficent lord of light and heat, he is venerated as all good, although he manifests malign aspects when the solar orb causes drought and distress. Ultimately, he is

deemed the mediator between good and evil—Ormazd and Ahriman. As Robertson cogently concludes, Mithra is worshipped "as a humane and beneficent God, nearer to man than the Great Spirit of Good, a Saviour, a Redeemer, eternally young, son of the Most High, and preserver of mankind from the Evil One. In brief, he is a Pagan Christ."

Herodotus asserts that the ancient Persians were adverse to images of their deities, but with the spread of Mithraism to lands where art was esteemed, statues of Mithra were erected like those of other divinities. Among other symbols he is represented as the slayer of the bull, but it is difficult to arrive at any conclusive interpretation of their meaning, although many conjectures have been advanced.

While Mithraism resembled in various ways other religions, it was unique in others. A cult conducted in caves, its deity was allegedly rock-born. In natural or artificially constructed caves the Mithraic priests celebrated the rites and mysteries of their cult. The rising sun was joyfully welcomed and in the darkness of night prayers were addressed to the divinity. As the week's opening day, Sunday was devoutly observed. As the Lord's Day it was deeply revered centuries before the advent of Christianity. Robertson notes that "the two chief Mithraic ceremonies or festivals, those of Christmas and Easter, the winter solstice and the vernal equinox, the birthday of the Sun God and the period of his sacrifice and his triumph. That Christmas is a solar festival of unknown antiquity, which the early Christians appropriated to their Christ in utter ignorance of the real time of his birth, is no longer denied by competent Christian scholars when they happen to allude to the subject." Easter again was the time when Mithra, Osiris and Horus, in company with many other divinities, were especially revered, while the priests of Osiris mourned, at the period of our Lent, until they recovered the god's scattered remains.

It is undeniable that Mithraism long preceded Christianity, and that the early Church appropriated its ceremonies, festivals and many of its teachings, seems equally unquestionable. So numerous are the resemblances between Mithraism and Catholicism that the early Fathers of the Church attributed these similarities to the wiles of Satan himself. Justin Martyr declared that the Christian Lord's Supper recorded in the New Testament had been imitated by wicked demons "in the mysteries of Mithraism, commanding the same thing to be done." For bread and a cup of water were consumed at an initiation ceremony of Mithraism.

Even more emphatic is Tertullian, who asserts that "the devil, by the mystery of his idols, imitates even the main parts of the divine mysteries. He also baptises his worshippers in water and makes them believe that this purifies them of their crimes." Again, Tertullian complains that "Mithra sets his mark on the forehead of his soldiers; he celebrates the oblation of bread; he offers an image of the resurrection . . . he limits his chief priest to a single marriage; he even has his virgins and his ascetics."

The supercession of Mithraism which followed the untimely death of the Emperor Julian, an ardent adherent of that cult, may, in some measure, be traced to the fact that he was fighting the Persians whose then chief religion was Mithraism. This cult had long been the creed of the legions, and warfare with Persia naturally contributed to the triumph of the Cross. Also, the threat of eternal torture after death to Pagans, and the widespread fear of

the impending day of doom, to succeed the second coming of the Lord; among other disconcerting factors conspired to establish the Galilean, cult, despite all the bitter antagonisms that long raged among the Christians themselves concerning Gnostic heresies and the discordant claims of the adherents of Athanasius and Arius.

T. F. PALMER.

AMERICA, SAVED FROM REVOLUTION?

Grace Carlson, Vice-Presidential Candidate for the Socialist Workers' Party (the official Trotskyist organisation in the United States), has seen the "light" in the middle of her campaign. She has now joined the Roman Catholic Church and abandoned Marxism. However, unlike most "converts," she has no intention of writing any books or acting as informer for the F.B.I. against her former comrades.

CORRESPONDENCE

A FREE PRESS?

SIR,—I have been deeply touched and, not to say the least, emotionally stirred with righteous indignation and sympathy by a letter which appeared in the correspondence columns of the July 13, 1952, issue of *The Freethinker*. The letter which I have reference to was captioned "Race Discrimination" and was signed by one Arthur Clarke. In the contents of his correspondence was a letter which he submitted for publication to thirteen newspapers, and which was rejected, supposedly, on the transparent excuse that it was "abusive" and "irrelevant," since it so clearly and definitely exposed the racist activities of an American priest, who is engaged in fostering racism, or anti-Negro activity, in England.

In the course of the letter, Mr. Clarke very pointedly and pertinently comments: "Personally my view is that we have no 'free Press,' but a priest-ridden Press." This is a commentary which applies, not only to the Press in England, but with greater force with reference to the American Press. Political issues and issues of foreign or domestic significance are aired in the American Press with greater or lesser vehemence and virulence and with all sides given more or less of a hearing, so to speak. However, such is not the case in the American Press when an issue arises in which the patent guilt of any church group, in the political arena or otherwise, is evident to observers who wish to publish their opinions concerning such activities. And to-day, as never before, the churches bring their pressure to bear in the fields of political activity, education, science, and civic functions. When a church group or an eminent cleric is designated as the wrong-doer, or the political power behind the scenes, immediately a hue and cry arises that that particular church or clergyman is being "persecuted," and immunity from criticism is demanded. All the while, however, it is the unquestioned and unwritten prerogative of all the sects and religious establishments to point the finger of scorn and contempt upon the "Godless" and the "unchurched" without, at the same time, giving them an opportunity to refute the unfounded slanders and misrepresentations. In the vast majority of cases when an American Rationalist or thinker wishes to refute a misrepresentation which has appeared in the American Press he is greeted by a united "conspiracy of silence" by the various editors when he wishes to voice his complaint against the deliberate distortions of the religiously indoctrinated. By and large, it can be safely said that religion, organised or unorganised, is the "sacred cow" of American journalism.

The instance which Mr. Clarke has cited is fraught with the most replete arguments that can be advanced for a Humanist ethic, or the ethics of a Secular Humanism. It exposes and brings out in the clear light of day that the tenet of the church that "all souls are equal in the sight of God" is nothing more than a hollow mockery and utter absurdity. For those who loudly expound and profess the need for eternal salvation are quite reluctant and even most unwilling to indulge in friendly intercourse with those whose complexions are a shade or more darker than their own. With all their supposed concern for the eternal salvation of the souls of others, their own human sympathies are warped and narrow by the very doctrine which they deem to be of inestimable value to others and themselves, ministering to the needs of the soul, regardless of wordly considerations.

Mr. Clarke should not feel daunted by the crusade of Father Peyton in England, for the Ultramontanes extend their tentacles into cultural work where their pernicious doctrines are keenly felt. The attitude of the Roman Catholic political machine to UNESCO and WHO (World Health Organisation) was disclosed by Fides Agency, the official news bulletin of the Vatican Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. In an article by Father Andre Retif, a Jesuit, the charge was made "that WHO is largely influenced by the Atheistic, materialist spirit of the Anglo-Saxon countries. Its

action threatens to encourage a vast Rationalist movement of the people—a thing which is making its appearance everywhere. . . ." "UNESCO," the same writer states, "still feels the effects of the philosophical tendencies impressed on it by Dr. Julian Huxley. He once wrote that it is no longer necessary to have recourse to a theological revelation or a metaphysical absolute in order to justify our moral code, and that Freud and Darwin suffice to give us a philosophical view of the world." Again the same writer charges to the effect that the present director general of WHO "personally professes Atheism." Of course, in his eyes, this is a crime of the deepest dye. All told, the diatribes of Father Retif is aimed at UNESCO and WHO for advocating birth control in the depressed areas of the world where the teeming populations live in the most abject poverty. Another source of irritation to the Jesuit writer is the educational efforts of UNESCO in competing with the missionary activities, which has always tried to control the minds and bodies of its victims.

The experience of Mr. Clarke should be of invaluable interest to those who doubt that an ecclesiastical censorship or theocratic autocracy would place trammels upon human thought and action. For those who have loudly decried the tendencies towards materialism and secularism, their basic tenet is that human reason is an unfit guide, even for human conduct. And they are still bound, as ever, to their medieval and dark age concepts that they are not duty-bound to keep good faith with Jews, heretics, infidels, and even show a distinct repugnance for Negroes, despite the fact they are acknowledged and recognised as Christians and "Children of God."—Yours, etc.,

LEON SPAIN.

OBITUARY

DR. NORMAN HAIRE

Th recent death of Dr. Norman Haire removes one of our foremost experts on Sex Education. It was a subject to which he devoted his life founding both the *Journal of Sex Education*, in which he expounded his views, and the Sex Education Society before which he lectured so brilliantly. Dr. Haire was a thorough-going Freethinker, and his lectures on the platform of the National Secular Society always drew a large audience. He also lectured abroad (in French and German) always with great success. Last winter a series of lectures arranged for the United States had to be cut short through a severe heart attack which later unfortunately terminated fatally.

As a medical man, Dr. Haire concentrated on Birth Control, specialising in surgery and sexology. In addition, he wrote, edited, and translated many books, among them being the *Encyclopedia of Sex Knowledge*, the *Encyclopedia of Sex Practice*, *Birth Control Methods*, and *Everyday Sex Problems*. Gifted with great practical knowledge and energy, his loss is a great one, almost impossible to replace. To his relatives and friends we extend our sincerest sympathy.

H. C.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- 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, Blitzed 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.
 Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, October 5, 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

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: P. V. MORRIS (General Secretary, N.S.S.), "Youth's Need for Freethought."
 Conway Discussion Circle.—Memorial Meeting in honour of JOHN DEWEY (1859-1952). Speakers, Prof. B. BLANSHARD, Prof. A. E. HEATH, Dr. ELSA WALTERS, Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE and Mr. HECTOR HAWTON. Chairman, Mr. J. REEVES, M.P. Tuesday, October 7, 1952, 7-30 p.m.: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C.1. Admission free.
 Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall St.).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY (President, N.S.S.), "Secularism Faces the Future."
 South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A., "The Future of Humanism."
 West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, W.1).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: L. EBURY, "Why Not Bible-Banging?"

REVIEW

"Must Man Wage War? The Biological Aspect" By
F. A. E. Crew (Thrift Books, Watts and Co., 1s.).

THERE was never a time when a work on war from the biological standpoint was more welcome. It was with a sense of pleasurable anticipation, therefore, that I took up this volume. When, however, I had read Mr. Crew's preface, ending with these words—"I, for one . . . cannot possibly assume that those who are our political leaders are wrong in so far as their actions are concerned," my anticipations turned to gloomy forebodings. This abject obedience to the Fuhrer-Prinzip and cynical admission to the "with my country right or wrong" approach is as divorced from biology or any form of science as anything well could be.

Mr. Crew's biological training compels him to recognise that all men show "antagonism and collaboration, extreme self-interest and supreme self-sacrifice . . . cruelty and kindness, love and hate," but he attributes this conflict in character to the course of history, "because at different times each of these had a survival value." Surely the biologist in Mr. Crew must admit that this conflict of social and anti-social traits is common to life throughout Nature, especially to gregarious animals, of which man is one; it is certainly not an acquired characteristic he has developed in the course of civilising himself.

Mr. Crew's reactionary outlook is exemplified in such phrases as "people are led into war because their leaders have a sufficient knowledge of a human society to be able to exploit the group mentality." Leaders, as Mr. Crew is pleased to call the chosen representatives of a people, are but the product of their time and society, and rise to the top because they most nearly reflect the group mentality and not because they are above or apart from it.

What is one to make of this—coming from a biologist? "War is made possible because the lives of so many individuals in a modern State are so grey and dull." What, biologically speaking, do these terms "grey" and "dull" mean? Is the author suggesting that the medieval serf or the Asiatic coolie have had lives of greater colour and variety? He goes on to tell us that war is welcomed by the people, because it "promises to bring drama, excitement and simplification into our lives." Now this really is nonsense, and cruel nonsense at that. How many conscripted young men will resent the bitter irony contained in this portrayal of war as the people's popular pastime!

Having thus revealed what he claims to be the origins of war, Mr. Crew blandly remarks that "the causes being known, prevention becomes possible." And the panacea for the World's ills is presented to us as "the complete transformation of the social inheritance and of the social structure." I was unaware that *any* of us could influence our heritage or re-write the pages of the past. As to social structure, this is mainly the reflection of economic conditions; indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a social order which has not evolved from the particular conditions of living of its people; any change in the social structure must follow, not precede, changes in its economic structure.

Dimly aware of this consequential, Mr. Crew talks of "national groups . . . deciding freely to attach their loyalties to an international organisation." Mr. Crew seems to think there is something sacrosanct in Nationalism, yet it is but a passing phase of society, like the feudal era before it or the classical slave society before that. And

to think that Nationalism will "un-nationalise" itself in order to join an international organisation is to disregard the lessons of history. Forms of society do not voluntarily give up the ghost: the new society "liquidates" the old, usually in violence! *Vide* the collapse of the Roman Empire into the Dark Ages, and of Feudalism before the march of the English and French Revolutions.

In the second and third sectors of his book Mr. Crew is more interesting and his contribution of more value. In his discussions on the incidence of disease in war, especially of nervous diseases, his remarks are very instructive. Of considerable interest, too, are his observations on population problems. It is a pity that he allows himself to be the sport of his emotions in the first forty pages of his book, especially his almost hysterical conviction in the "guilt" of Germany and Japan for the last war. Biology should have taught him that there are no guilty parties in a war, which is an event in the sequence of history, born of man's fears, needs and privations. Nor will the next war, if it occurs, be the "fault" of either party. Certainly Mr. Crew is right when he says the human social structure wants transforming, but it must start on the economic level, not on that of pious wishing. A more equitable distribution of the world's resources and a greater equality of reward for service would be a good start—and a sufficiently profound one!

P. C. KING.

KOREA: EPITAPH ON YOUNG SOLDIERS

They have relinquished their brief lease:

Their sojourn now is ended: they

Lie still within untimely peace:

They have no business with the day.

They have no business with the night:

For them the moon grows big in vain.

Death took and snatched them out of sight,

Life left them lying with the slain.

Why did they die? Ask of the land,

Ask of the noble wind that blows

Where Statesmen talk of Honour's stand

And Honour, fainting, holds its nose.

JOHN O'HARE.

GOD WAS NOT HIS FATHER

At a Press conference General Eisenhower declared that he was not the Messiah. His old father is extremely relieved.—*Pan* (Belgium).

The Literary Guide

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