

# The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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ABOUT the beginning of the Christian Era the Roman writer, Seneca, proclaimed that, "Out of Africa something new may always be expected." The "Africa" to which the Roman author alluded was, in fact, merely the northern fringe of what then and for long after, remained a "Dark Continent" to the non-African world. It is, in fact, only in the present century that the mystery of the "Dark Continent" has been completely explored. Even in the closing decades of the last century intrepid explorers braved the wilds and the horrors of the unknown: whilst a whole tribe of popular novelists, with Rider Haggard of hallowed memory at their head, filled both the geographical blanks on the map of Africa and, also, their own pockets, with hair-raising "yarns" of lost treasures and romantic empires marooned amid the trackless African forests and deserts.

To-day, however, when virtually the whole former "Dark Continent" has been opened up to the light of day and, in the administrative sphere, has been more or less effectually partitioned amongst the white races, the problems that confront the world are less romantic but much more complicated than those which confronted Allan Quartermain and his hardly less famous companions when they set out in search of "King Solomon's Mines." For it is still true, as Seneca wrote nineteen centuries ago, that Africa is always producing "something new."

A contemporary sociologist has recently reminded us that "racism is *the* superstition of the twentieth century." In its most dogmatic and flamboyant form the doctrine of "racism," the secular version of "The Chosen Race," has been represented most conspicuously by the late unlamented "Third Reich" of Hitler and its Shintoist Japanese ally and Oriental counterpart. However, as we have had occasion to indicate before in this column, the racist dogma is far older than the twentieth century. The "Chosen Race" of Israel has practised the racist creed since the days of Ezra two thousand odd years ago; as we have suggested here before, a detailed comparison of *The Book of Ezra* and *Mein Kampf*, respectively, the Old and New Testaments of the racist religion, yields results of startling similarity. Whilst in "Aryan" India—where, incidentally, the Swastika originated—and in its ancient caste-divided civilisation, a society ultimately based upon "the superstition of race" existed long before the twentieth century and, indeed, long before Ezra or even the, perhaps, mythical Moses.

Race, however, as that eminent American anthropologist and sociologist, the late Prof. Ruth Benedict has appropriately reminded us, is not the same thing as "racism." For, whilst "racism," the dogma of the natural supremacy inherent in its bloodstream, of one "chosen" race, be it Hindu, Jew, or German, over all others, is an unquestionably misleading superstition, race, contrarily, is a fact, and one that gives rise to some of the most perplexing problems of our modern world. For whilst there does not,

if we may put it that way, seem to be any congenital inferiority in potential power between one race and another, it would be absurd to deny that there are, and always have been very great inequalities in their historical evolution and in their consequent present attainments as between various races and racial cultures. It is this undeniable fact that constitutes the scientific problem, political, social, and economic, of race, as distinct from the purely unscientific assumptions of tribal mythology which represent the sole stock-in-trade of "The Chosen Race"—"Herrenvolk" dogmas of Ezra-Hitler and company.

At the present time, the middle of the twentieth century, the storm-centre of the racial question has shifted from Europe and Asia to Africa. For the moment, at least, Nazi mythology is as dead as the Nazi empire. Whilst in Japan, the former Shintoist god, the Mikado, has been converted by atomic pressure from a deity into an ordinary mortal. Neither of the dominant ideologies in the older continents, Communism and Catholicism, is racist in outlook: both are cosmopolitan creeds. The current "cold war" between East and West is a war of interests and ideologies, not a war of races.

It is in Africa, and on a smaller scale with relation to men of African blood in the Americas, that the racial problem to-day assumes urgent and menacing forms. For, in relation to the "Dark Continent," the historic process has remained on a much more primitive level than has been the case in the rest of the Old World. Life has not been kind to the Negro races. An appalling climate, in which disease is endemic and multifarious, accentuated in modern times by the appalling depredations of the slave-trade carried on for centuries by Arab raiders on land and by the maritime incursions of European dealers in "black ivory," have combined to retard the development of Africa. Outside, at least, the pages of Rider Haggard, Pierre Benoit and their kind, no advanced civilisation or really high culture seems ever to have arisen on the soil of Negro Africa. In the more advanced areas, such as Benin, Dahomey, and Basutoland, Negro States arose which attained, perhaps, the level of the semi-civilised Germanic States which succeeded the Roman Empire: the approximate level attained by the England of the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy. A few individual Negroes have, indeed, indicated authentic signs of greatness. For example, the Zulu, Chaka, "The Black Napoleon," was one of the world's great captains; Benin produced a considerable native art: whilst it is a white biographer who has described the European-trained but full-blooded Negro, Toussaint L'Ouverture, not inappropriately as "the greatest political leader thrown up by the French Revolution."

The existence of such exceptional individuals amongst the Black races is of great scientific value. For it effectively disproves the racist theory, whether held by Nazis yesterday or by Malan and company to-day, that the Negro is, *inevitably and by nature*, congenitally inferior to other

## VIEWS and OPINIONS

### "Out of Africa"

By F. A. RIDLEY

more advanced races. However, the gulf of centuries still separates the Negro races from the more advanced, because of more fortunately circumstanced civilisations that have evolved elsewhere in the Old World. This is so, in particular since we live in a technical age. It is the backwardness of Negro technology which, to-day, dooms the Negro races to economic and, accordingly, political impotence. "In Africa," remarked a world-famous Negro leader to the present writer, "they can hardly manufacture a nail without foreign assistance." One must, we fear, add that, whilst such a state of things continues, the Negro races seem doomed to an indefinite subjection in the harsh contemporary world of power-politics.

To-day in South Africa, to-morrow, perhaps, in the rest of the African continent, we seem to be heading inexorably for a terrible racial war. This is so, in particular, in those parts of the insalubrious continent in which Europeans can live permanently. Nor are the terms of any solution in sight, even in terms of violence. For the Negroes—to

resolve the basic problem into its elemental factors—lack the weapons to overcome and expel the Whites—hence "Mau-Mau" and its current epidemics of assassinations as an ineffective substitute for an at present hopeless armed rising; whilst the Whites cannot exterminate the Negro Labour Force upon which they must continue to depend for their continued economic existence. Socially, no method has heretofore been discovered by which the two races can co-exist in any other than a "master-race" relationship.

The racial problem, now centred in Africa, is one of the gravest of our era; ranking in that respect with war, and overpopulation. It is a problem of vital concern to Humanity in general and, we may add, to secularists in particular, since here it is difficult to distinguish politics from superstition. If Mankind wishes to avoid one of the most fearful racial conflicts in all recorded history, "something new" will again have to come "out of Africa"—and soon.

## The Way of Dictators

By F. C. EDWARDS

THE Papal Nuncio to Ireland, the Most Rev. Dr. Gerald Patrick O'Hara, has now achieved the distinction of emulating Russian tactics by walking out of a meeting in Dublin when faced with the possibility of answering facts.

On Friday, October 31 last, he was a guest at a meeting of the International Affairs Association held in Dublin's famous Shelbourne Hotel, and amongst the company were the following: The Swedish Minister, Mr. Folke Wennerberg; Mr. Harold Osterberg, the Danish Consul-General; Mr. Cloyce H. Huston, the United States Chargé d'Affaires; and Mr. Michael MacWhite, former Irish Minister to Washington and Rome, who is President of the Association, together with a large number of Catholic priests.

Mr. Peadar O'Curry, Editor of the Dublin Catholic weekly, *The Standard*, read a paper on "Yugo-Slavia, the Pattern of Persecution," and it was previously announced by the Chairman, Mr. John O'Brien, that there would be no questions or discussion following the vote of thanks to the speaker. At the end of the paper, however, Mr. Owen Sheehy-Skeffington, supported by Mr. James Crosbie, pressed for a discussion on the ground that Mr. O'Curry was capable of answering any questions that might be put. After a vote by show of hands, the Chairman allowed the discussion, whereupon an honest Protestant, Mr. Hubert Butler, intervened to ask the speaker if he was aware that the first accusations against the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia were made by the Orthodox Church and not by the Communists. He was proceeding to read a few lines from *The Martyrdom of the Serbs*, published in 1943 in Chicago by the Serbian Orthodox Church in America, and which had a preface by the Anglican Bishop of New York, Dr. Manning, when the explosion occurred. He had got as far as saying that Archbishop Stepinac, Primate of Croatia, was "the dupe of a gang" who had persecuted the Orthodox Christians in Yugoslavia when the Pope's envoy rose and left the meeting amid a deadly silence. Immediately the Chairman sprang to his feet and said he would not allow any further discussion. It is significant to note that after an initial report of the incident in the Irish papers not one word about the matter has since appeared, but a Government spokesman is reported as having said that: "It is a most deplorable incident, offering as it does an insult to the

Dean of the Diplomatic Corps in Dublin, and the Government will discuss the matter at their next meeting."

Since then the officials of the Association have been tumbling over themselves to call on His Excellency to apologise and to dissociate themselves from Mr. Butler's statement. They have issued warnings about what will happen to the person or persons who introduced Mr. Butler to the meeting and they have, of course, stated that they know Mr. Butler's quotations are unfounded.

It is important to note that Mr. Hubert Butler is an Irishman who has lived in Yugoslavia and he is well known to be moderate and factual in his views. He felt that as the Association was a "fact-finding" organisation on the lines of Chatham House in London, he was anxious to state what he knew about Yugoslavia, and he has said that he had no wish to insult the Catholic Church. He took no sides with Communism but he realised that much of Mr. O'Curry's talk was marred by grave omissions. His view was that he could not, without hypocrisy or cowardice, be silent, and that if the people in Ireland were not to lose the liberties of speech which the Yugoslavs have lost under Tito, they must exercise them.

Mr. Butler has struck a blow for freedom in the Roman Catholic dominated Republic of Ireland, and he has proved that freedom of expression concerning religion is only permitted when it does not conflict with the policy of the Church. It is obviously ridiculous to have a "fact-finding" study of Yugoslavia if certain unpalatable facts are to be ignored. Even if the Chicago-published book was not a model of complete objectivity, it should not be beyond the powers of His Excellency and the brilliant gathering to distinguish the truth from, perhaps, the distortions of terror, but more important than the truth is this horrible affront to the Holy See's representative in a country which is one of his last remaining strongholds.

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### Laisser Faire

With wonder and marvel parading,  
He'd mend Miserere and moan.  
Perhaps the Lord thought He was aiding—  
But it's nice now He leaves things alone.

A. E. C.

# Straffen, the Law and the Freethinker

By G. WHIT LIBBY

AT no small convenience to his argument, Mr. J. Effel, in his article on the Straffen case (page 315), ignores the central factor in the controversy, and confuses himself in the two secondary, but still important, features therein; but then, Mr. Effel speaks as a father, and a grandfather, and a British citizen, no doubt fortifying his position by his unique occupation of this worthy viewpoint. Being Mr. Effel, and a British citizen to boot, has conferred upon his lucky descendants obvious advantages not bestowed by the accident of birth upon the wretched youth Straffen, who, regarded undoubtedly by some as unfortunate, now can be classed, following Mr. Effel's publication of his personal disappointment at Straffen's continued existence, as doubly under the cloud of misfortune.

Don't blame Mr. Effel for abandoning reason for emotion. He is in excellent company. The recent broadcast of Town Forum from Stockholm showed as much. Sir Andrew McFadyean, Patrick Gordon Walker, Sir Miles Thomas and Dr. Eric Ashby, as a panel of speakers, must have convinced the enlightened people of Sweden time and again of the peculiarities of the British. It may have occurred to some that the selection of speakers, to say nothing of the views, was hardly representative of opinion in this country. The Straffen question was posed in simple terms: "How is it possible in a British court to try a man for a crime after he has been judged unfit to plead to a similar crime?" Like Mr. Effel, the panel of speakers, all eminent men, all displaying the same eager and pathetic desire to dodge the central factor in the argument, in their scarcely plausible and painfully hypocritical answers, displayed equally the doubtful Christian virtue of desire for revenge. At best, it was saddening that the Swedish people were encouraged to accept these statements as the recognised views of a people that has many admirers in Sweden.

There would appear to be three overlapping features in the Straffen controversy. They are: (a) How far is it possible in a unique legal case for the Law to be perverted to suit Authority? (b) How much latitude may be accorded in modern times to the ingrained but unfortunate desire for revenge in its perpetual conflict with the humaner trends? and (c) How far does this particular case strengthen the argument in favour of capital punishment?

It will not be possible to go too deeply into all the factors, so do not conclude that the question is settled in this short article.

The point (a) was admirably dealt with by Mr. Norman and is the point of the question asked at Stockholm, a point skilfully ignored by the speakers' panel, who, however, were anything but skilful in their answers. It might be appropriate here to mention in relation to this point that this is the third case in this generation in which the Law has closed its eyes to Justice, while keeping them watchfully open on the broader question of revenge. In both previous cases the prisoners were hanged, it being maintained by many that in one the alleged murderer was innocent. Mr. Effel should note that only the widespread uneasiness of the people (some of whom may perchance have been fathers or grandfathers or even British citizens) led the Home Secretary to prevent a hanging so unanimously clamoured for by the emotionally unstable. The most important pre-requisite of

justice is not merely that justice shall be done; it must be apparent to all that it be done. Even in Sweden, where so many people are not British citizens, there was disquiet about the case. Certainly, justice was barely apparent, although the viciousness of revenge was. For the benefit of Mr. Effel's emotionally biased judgment, it should be stressed that the concept of justice has nothing whatever, strange as it may seem, to do with the *type* of crime committed.

Mr. Effel is of the opinion that the potential murderer should be destroyed. His article sponsors no other conclusion. As all men are potential murderers, the selective field narrows somewhat, unless of course Mr. Effel would exclude himself.

Factors (b) and (c) answer themselves to humane thinkers. Mr. Effel need feel little shame at holding his views. He continues in good company. There is no Christian living who would not applaud him. "Revenge, and away with humane treatment for criminals," is the cry of the Christian. Punishment for crime, which but for the fine work of the Howard League of Penal Reform would be more savage and revengeful, has come to be regarded for what it really is, stripped of all hypocritical disguise, only through the work of those who have tried to substitute reason for emotion.

The second Straffen trial gave the impression of being motivated by desire for revenge against the prisoner for having dared to escape detention. It is all too easy to argue that if detention fails in one important case it fails all round. The incredible blunder of Authority was not an automatic demand for the vengeful slaying of Straffen. His erstwhile gaolers to-day must be painfully aware that the third murder was preventable.

What is to be made of Mr. Effel's claim that Straffen is a "clever and crafty killer"? Not even Sherlock Holmes' all too elementary-minded stooge could have missed the dreadful "clue" provided by Straffen for his hunters. Only ridiculous and melodramatic exaggeration could thus categorise so stupid, so insanely stupid, an escaping criminal. The murder in its blind stupidity and wantonness, matches the "alertness" of Straffen's keepers. Not the one without the other.

Mr. Effel should flatter himself. The decline of nineteenth century "materialism" makes it possible that his emotional unreason finds expression in the *Freethinker*, of all places. Those who in the past struggled to sweeten a dogma-poisoned air, who looked for finer things from man than did their Christian contemporaries, are to-day reaping poor reward. The unrushing return of the worldwide rule of violence, of hate, in mid-twentieth century, threatens the age of reason. In their modern setting, the views of Mr. Effel wear an air of credibility almost impossible to deny.

I will end on a personal note, a thing I do not altogether like in an argument intended to be objective. With my mixed English, Welsh, Scottish and Spanish ancestry, I am unable to share either Mr. Effel's admiration for the guillotine, or his pride in his French blood. However, I can be appreciative of the comforting knowledge that I saw the light in a country that while not yet sufficiently adult to put an end to barbarity in its dealings with murderers, was at least mature enough as to abolish, before I was born, the degradation of public executions.

## Acid Drops

Our contemporary, "The Literary Guide," publishes an interesting communication from Miss Ethel Mannin, the novelist, strongly repudiating any suggestion that she is about to join the Roman Church, which she regards as "anti-life" (on marriage and birth control), and "superstitious to a degree and debasing of all that is fine and good and worthwhile in Christian doctrine." Apart from this, she "admires a good deal in the Christian doctrine" though she is "not even convinced of the historicity of Jesus."

But surely Miss Mannin is herself to blame for this belief that she had wandered back to the Christian fold? She once wrote a book called *Christianity or Chaos* (she now admits that it was "wrongly titled"), in which we were all urged to get back to the true religion of Jesus as the only antidote to "chaos." It was very unfavourably reviewed in these columns, and brought a protest from Miss Mannin who accused us of wrongly quoting her. This was quite untrue, of course, but no one reading the book would have imagined that its author was not even sure of the historical existence of her Hero. Still, it is a relief to her, no doubt, not to be coupled with some of the other back-sliding novelists—like Evelyn Waugh or Graham Greene.

There is a Catholic writer, a Trappist called Thomas Merton, who for some reason or other gets into the news. His latest lucubration is an attack on Rationalists, accusing them of "an act of faith" in their rejection of miracles. It appears, we are told that miracles do not happen, and then, when one *does* happen, we say that this is quite impossible because we were told not to believe in them. That Catholics believe this twaddle is understandable, but it is surprising to learn that there are actually Rationalists who agree with Merton.

The truth is that, as no one has ever produced a scrap of evidence that any miracle has ever taken place, Free-thinkers are quite right in saying they never happen. It is not a question of faith at all but of *evidence*. The greatest attested miracle of modern times is "Fatima" in which the sun and the stars danced round the heavens, and every Catholic (especially converts) believes it all took place exactly as recounted. If we Freethinkers are aghast at the superstition and credulity of all Catholics who believe in "Fatima," have we not reason to be?

A little handbill was pushed into our hand the other day with the frightening title, "Where is this World Heading?" To answer it, a gentleman of the name of Clay was appointed by the "Watch Tower Society," and no doubt he duly impressed his hearers later in a lecture. The one point we noticed particularly was that the handbill never mentioned "Jehovah's Witnesses," a playful degree of shyness not always characteristic of this august body. We are not sure where this world of ours is heading to, but it will do so irrespective of the farrago of nonsense churned out either by Jehovah or his Witnesses or both.

And talking about Chaos, the B.B.C. expert on the existence of God, Chaplain Austin Farrer told his school listeners that the usual translation in English of that God-inspired work, Genesis, was a little wrong. The proof that God existed was that he made the Universe out of Chaos,

and if that does not prove his existence, nothing else would—or at least, it was an unanswerable proof. Mr. Farrer seemed a little confused over the existence of Evil side by side with a beautiful God, but then that was a Mystery which he, alas, could not solve. Still, even the fact of Evil proved that there was a Perfect God.

The Course of True Coronations are not expected to run always smooth, and already a little row has taken place between a vicar and an alderman. The vicar of Pulloxhill wanted a meeting to be held in the village hall to talk about the water supply; the alderman wanted, at the same time, to talk about the Coronation; but as the vicar had the key to the hall, the alderman had to hold forth outside. The alderman was furious at this slight to the Queen, and the vicar's condemnation of the water supply was defeated. The alderman is not giving in to this "challenge to authority," and the vicar's comment was: "It is typical of the place." But how refreshing all this is from the solemn discussions interminably taking place on the Coronation!

## Theatre

"Dead Secret." By Michael Clayton Hutton. St. James's Theatre.

FRENCH playwrights since the war have made several experiments by writing comedy into a serious subject. For instance, *Les Parents Terribles (Intimate Relations)* and *Lucienne et le Boucher* serve as two examples. Something similar has been attempted in this play, but in spite of this and the successes that crowned the French plays. I feel that such combinations as regarding murder in a comedy vein are contrary to correct artistic principles and good taste.

However, here we have our comedy in two acts which are reasonably well written, but what we learn about Ian Hunter (who takes the part of the murderer) is hard to accept when expressed in such a light spirit and from one of such sympathetic personality. We are highly amused by Hugh Wakefield who, as an ex-policeman, knows who the murderer is and accepts his silence at the cost of a good home in the house of Ian Hunter and his wife, played by Sophie Stewart. The only other character is Joyce Heron who, as a guest of the married couple, has not a great deal to do with the play. Then in Act III the serious business of planning to kill the ex-policeman leaves comedy behind, and the play might still have finished reasonably plausibly had not the author treated the last scene as if all his characters had suddenly turned mad. So my advice to you for an enjoyable evening is to sit through the play till Act III, Scene I, and when the curtain comes down on that scene walk out. Your own conclusions as to how the play should end are bound to be better than the author's.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

JESUS was God or man—there is no middle course. Those who accept his godhead are logical in making him the object of their daily worship; but if he is once regarded as a man, it will be found the world has far more pressing tasks than to "reconceive" one of the many figures that crowd the galleries of history. Nor is the "reconception" easy, even if possible. Mrs. Humphrey Ward is very unfamiliar with historical criticism, or she strangely misreads its results, when she declares that "we may now discern the true features of Jesus of Nazareth." Another female writer, George Eliot, who was far better informed, stated the real truth in one of her letters, when she asserted that the materials for a biography of Jesus do not exist. We go a step farther and affirm that a character once surrounded with mythology, and infused with the miraculous, is lost for ever.

# THE FREETHINKER

41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1.  
Telephone: Holborn 2601.

## To Correspondents

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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.

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.

## 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: F. A. RIDLEY.

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

### INDOOR

Friday, December 5, 8 p.m., University House, Victoria Park Square, E. 2 (near Bethnal Green Station). — Debate: "That Christianity has brought more unhappiness and strife into the world than it has contentment and peace." Aff.: F. A. RIDLEY. Neg.: T. E. UTLEY.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: G. L. COLEBROOKE, "The Menace of the Pigmy Mind."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, December 9, 7 p.m.: Prof. T. H. PEAR, M.A., "Classes in English Society."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM (Sec., Ethical Union), "A Philosophy for Secularists."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street). — Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: WILL NALLY, M.P., "The State and the Gambling Industry."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1). — Sunday, 11 a.m.: ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A., "Do Great Men Make History?"

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1). — Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: G. H. TAYLOR, "Types of Materialism."

## Sugar Plums

Many happy returns to our veteran poet, critic, and militant champion of Freethought, Bayard Simmons! On Tuesday, December 9, Mr. Simmons attains the age of 70, "the three-score years and ten" which, according to the Biblical psalmist, represent the normal human expectation of life. However, thanks to modern science, this ancient wisdom is already somewhat superannuated, and we trust that our Freethought poet will be with us, and appearing regularly in our columns, for many years yet.

Though known chiefly to our readers as a poet, Mr. Simmons is a citizen of the world; he was closely associated with both the founders of the British Labour Movement—when Labour was less respectable than it is nowadays!—and with the militant Suffragette Movement

for Women's Rights. To-day, however, Mr. Simmons is, we believe, disillusioned with politics and politicians. He sees that, to-day, until mankind can learn to *think* freely, political panaceas remain superficial and of little permanent benefit to mankind. It is, consequently, in the Freethought Movement that Mr. Simmons finds the best hope for Humanity to-day. We feel confident that all our readers will join with us in hearty congratulations and best wishes to this splendid veteran and many-sided Humanist upon his seventieth birthday.

Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, president of *The World-Union of Freethinkers*, reminds us that the illustrious Italian philosopher and humanist, Benedetto Croce, whose recent death has been deplored throughout the civilised world, was a supporter of the *World-Union* and sent a fraternal message to its 1938 London Congress, despite the fact that he was then living under a Fascist regime which, of course, banned Freethought altogether. Signor Croce was one of the last survivors of a great generation of Liberal, Humanist and anti-clerical thinkers. With his death, the cause of human progress has lost a powerful advocate.

Our correspondent, Mr. Victor E. Neuburg (403, Nether Street, Finchley, N.3), asks us to insert the following request:—

"With the consent of Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner, I am collecting material with a view to writing a full-length study of Charles Bradlaugh. I should be most grateful for any scrap of information, however trivial it might seem, particularly from older Freethinkers who might have memories of Bradlaugh from their youth. Personal reminiscences, records, letters would be greatly appreciated. If any material could be loaned, it would be returned intact as soon as scrutinised. May I say again that no information of this nature would be too trivial to pass on, and also that I trust to the traditional goodwill of Freethinkers."

We hope that our readers will respond.

## Thirty Pieces of Copper

For thirty pieces of copper he laid the lash on,  
Received the customary fee of half-a-crown;  
A thorough job of work performed in English fashion;  
Methodically, coolly, with no trace of passion,  
He swung the cat for twelve good strokes, then laid it down.  
Hands washed, he filled his pipe, and took his half-day off,  
And down the country lanes he wandered for a while;  
Indifferent to others' pain was he, as a Romanoff,  
For at the letters in the papers he would scoff;  
These fool humanitarians only made him smile.  
The day was hot, so soon he sought the woodland shade,  
Where down he lay and slept, to toss in troubled dreams;  
He saw again the quivering flesh that he had flayed,  
He saw once more the livid lips that cursed and prayed,  
And once again he heard those sobs, and prayers, and screams.

His vision changed; he dreamed he stood on Tower Hill,  
Where trembling to the block a hapless victim came;  
He heard the headsman, ere he worked his mortal ill,  
Ask for forgiveness from the man that he must kill;  
Our warder for the first time felt a sense of shame.  
Not shame for flogging men in stone and iron cages  
(That which the judges order surely must be right),  
But burning shame, that through his dream now rages,  
To think that fellow in the Middle Ages  
In asking pardon had been more polite.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

## A Debate: Does our Age need Christianity?

THE Students' Union of Queen Mary College staged a debate on Thursday afternoon, November 20, on the motion "That the Age in which we live no longer needs Christianity," and invited the President of the N.S.S. to propose and the Rev. Father Christie, S.J. of Farm Street Church to oppose this motion. Each was to have the support of a seconder from the membership of the Union.

Called on by a businesslike Chairman, Mr. D. S. Urch, Mr. Ridley opened by saying that the wording of the motion was not his and was an unfortunate one in suggesting that the proposer might hold that some previous age *had* needed Christianity, a suggestion that was far from the truth in his particular case. He used the brief time at his disposal to argue that this present age did not need Christianity for two reasons, it was not true and it was not useful, giving instances to substantiate both of them. He quoted the rabbinical dictum that "what was true in the New Testament wasn't new and what was new wasn't true."

Father Christie spoke somewhat longer than the opener, and with considerable eloquence, making a marked impression on the audience by asserting that spirit is our highest gift, enabling us to place value on beauty and love; that our civilisation is a Christian thing, providing our objective standard; that a materialist philosophy has brought danger to human personality; this, together with Agnosticism and Secularism, was the fifth column of society; salvation lay in recognising the personality of Christ as the highest human manifestation of divine love.

Miss Pamela Russell supported Mr. Ridley with a logical statement of Atheism, showing an unusual grasp of the position in one so young. She classed Christianity as just one of many religions, having a collection of supernatural beliefs which were no longer tenable in a scientific age, and an ethical system whose best features predated the founding of the religion. Then Mr. Dennis Wood stated that he would give first his prepared speech in support of Father Christie and then his answers to points raised by the pro-

poser and seconder of the motion. He was concerned at the moral laxity of the age, affirmed his personal certainty that Christianity restrained the evil propensities of all God's children and, when the chairman ruled his time to be up, concluded on the note that "Materialism is not a very good position to hold." The meeting was then thrown open for discussion, but little was added by those who took part to anything put forward by the four main speakers. To the "personal witness" of two students who testified that Christianity kept them from sin, a third (saying he was a Jew) added the opinion that, if Christianity were to die out, mankind would generally revert to sexual perversions as practised in ancient Athens!

Father Christie then spoke again, to the effect that the debate had exposed the essential pessimism of materialism. Only concede that man had an immortal soul, and we had a basis on which to stand up for what is right. The present age needed Christianity because mankind desperately needed an optimistic faith. Winding up, Mr. Ridley corrected Father Christie's claim that St. Augustine and St. Gregory of Nyssa were evolutionists long before Darwin. Their theory that the first man, instead of being created finished, developed from a germ created by God, involved no change of species and, therefore, had no connection with biological evolution at all. He also corrected Mr. Wood's statement that Karl Marx had read no history prior to the fourteenth century, with the information that Marx had gained his Doctorate of Philosophy at Berlin University with a thesis on Epicurus who lived in the third and fourth centuries B.C. He said that his criticism of Christianity as not being true and as the cause of divisions in a world that, above all, needed unity to solve its problems, had not been touched by the opponents of the motion. His speech was warmly applauded by an audience that had shown itself to be very little acquainted with the Freethought case.

When put to the vote, the motion was lost, 40 voting for it and 95 against.

P. V. M.

## The Congress on Humanism

By H. CUTNER

IT was a pity that this Congress clashed in date with the International Freethought Congress this year, but readers who would like particulars of the proceedings will find them nearly fully reported in a Special Number of *The Plain View*—the number for November—which can be had from 4a, Inverness Place, Queensway, London, W.2.

Speaking, of course, for myself alone, I cannot say that I am particularly enamoured of this word "Humanism" which now appears to be co-opted by anybody and everybody. While Christianity was so dismally proclaiming that this world was only vouchsafed us as a preparation for the next—after death, the original Faith of Christ Jesus and his most fervent disciples—and true Christians spent most of their time praying to God Almighty not to send them to Hell, there was some justification for those of us who were appalled, at such hopeless credulity, to use the word which simply meant that happiness could only be found in this world in contact with our fellow beings. For us, death ended all.

But Humanism is a word which can now be used by any "reformer." Surely the Roman Catholic Father Damien was a "Humanist"? Is not Albert Schweitzer a "Humanist"? Have we the right to deny the title, say, to Dean Inge or Bishop Barnes or a hundred-and-one

thorough believers in some religion—to say nothing of those people who are sincerely convinced that the masses can only achieve happiness in *this* world under some form of totalitarianism?

Moreover, I deprecate adding to the number of current religions. Most Humanists I know are as solemn as any Christian. And reading through this number of *The Plain View*, I have found nothing to make me alter my position in the least.

On the very first page it is admitted that the Congress failed to tell the world "in so many words what Humanism really is." It is not to be identified with "science and democracy." In fact "in more ways than one, science may destroy Humanism; in more ways than one, democracy may stultify Humanism," we are told. And because of this Les Amis de la Liberté, "a strong French group of intellectuals withdrew at the end of the Congress."

The writer of "Reflections on the Congress" insists that "it cannot be enough to affirm and defend personal freedom" for "such a demand is helplessly exposed to the criticisms of Marxists and Catholics." Only by using science intelligently and creatively "can Marxism and Catholicism be proved to be wrong." I am, of course, fully in agreement with this—but I still cannot see why

some Marxists and some Catholics at least are not to be called Humanists.

Professor Julian Huxley was the President of the Congress, and his paper, "Evolutionary Humanism" was bound to be a fine one. He is sure that "the humanist movement could exercise some of the functions of a religion in the modern world," for "the present age takes an almost abnormal interest in religion" including in the term "not only religions in the narrow sense, established churches and sects, new versions of old theologies, synthetic creeds, but also organised pseudo-religions like militant Communism, or Fascism and other versions of nationalist or racial devotion. . . ." And Professor Huxley feels that "the world is undoubtedly in need of a new religion."—a feeling which I at least, cannot share. We have been deluged with religions, and it would be a good thing, I think, if all religions, including the pseudo ones referred to, were completely swept away. In any case, "Humanists have a high task before them."

The word religion for Professor Huxley means "an organised system of ideas and emotions which relate man to his destiny, beyond and above the practical affairs of every day, transcending the present and the existing systems of law and social structure." He does not think that any "synthetic" system will succeed, but he sees in Communism "a serious candidate for the title of a world religion." Needless to say, Professor Huxley works out his ideas bravely and lucidly, and his contribution to the

problem of Humanism must be studied by all who have the future welfare of our people at heart. It is not merely critical but constructive with "the facts and principles of evolution" taking first place.

Professor Barbara Wootton's address "The Contribution of Science to Democracy" was, like the President's, a fine one, and it is a great pity that space forbids me to summarise it as it should be summarised. She never minimised "the difficulties which science is making for democracy," but she thought pessimism "unjustified and only temporary."

Professor Friess, who is Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University, contributed "Needs of a Greater Humanity." Professor Koretz, of Vienna, one entitled "Against Mediocrity" and Professor Dreikurs, of Chicago, one on "The Programme of Humanism." This was also the subject of Dr. van Praag; while Mr. M. L. Burnet talked on "The Need for Democratic Initiative." All these make excellent articles full of valuable matter—but whether "ethical humanism" is going to solve our grave problems or provide a substitute for religions like Christianity as its promoters hope is a very debatable question.

As always, *The Plain View* is well printed, and all readers of *The Freethinker* will find this number packed with provocative suggestions—and attempts at the solution of many difficulties facing our troubled world.

## Bernard Shaw's Spirit

By E. W. NEWTON

IN an article in the current *Reynolds News* investigation into Spiritualism we are told how the spirit of Bernard Shaw manifested itself to a medium three days after his death and on several other occasions. The method used was the common one of automatic writing, and a wealth of material in the distinctive Shavian style was produced, to say nothing of a signature with strong resemblances to Shaw's own.

The theory of automatic writing is that it is produced by the spirit consciously taking control of those muscles of the medium's hand and arm that are used in writing, and also presumably the connecting nerves and brain tracks that direct them. No darkness is necessary; the medium is perfectly conscious and merely sits with pen poised over paper waiting for any spirits who may be in the neighbourhood to take over and express themselves.

Apart from the obvious comment that it seems to be only the famous who "come through" so promptly after death, as if eager to confer distinction upon the fortunate medium who bags them, there are several points of interest in the account of Shaw's appearance. He came through, it appears, abruptly in the middle of a seance. The writing changed suddenly and the words "Is that Patch?" appeared on the paper (Patch was Shaw's secretary). The writing went on: "Woman, drive that tormenting nurse away. She is hand in glove with the doctor trying to keep me alive. I want to die. . . ." The inference is that Shaw did not know he was dead and indeed he later expressed his belief that he was in his bed at Ayot, dreaming.

Now all this is very interesting. Shaw thinks he is in bed at home; he addresses remarks to his secretary, seemingly without surprise at finding that he now has to write what would normally be spoken. He shows no concern

at this sudden loss of his vocal powers. Moreover, before he could write at all, he must have hunted out a medium who was at that moment practising automatic writing, kicked out the spirit possessing her at the time (for we are told that the pen was already writing before Shaw appeared), and then deliberately taken control of the medium's hand and set to work. A spirit with this determination and purpose could hardly have been unaware of his true circumstances. Yet according to the account he did not know where he was; he could apparently see clearly enough to write legibly, yet not sufficiently to appreciate his changed surroundings. It takes a rather farcical interchange of remarks to convince him that he is indeed dead.

Where does all this lead us? If it was the spirit of Bernard Shaw communicating then he must have been well aware that he was dead and must have been indulging in deliberate deception when he denied it. If it was not Shaw, then the deceit is still more flagrant. Cases of this kind, of course, do not perturb the spiritualists. They are quite ready to admit that malicious spirits may stage impersonations even to the extent of a passable imitation of a writer's style and a laudable attempt at his signature. The signature is reproduced in *Reynolds News* together with a genuine specimen, and is quite obviously intended to imitate Shaw's writing, though equally obviously there are several important discrepancies. Here again, the spiritualist may plead the limitations of the method of automatic writing as cramping the true handwriting of the spirit.

In this case, too, "Shaw" has cleverly forestalled any future test of his identity by announcing that he finds his memory greatly impaired and so presumably unable to stand up to a rigorous questioning on matters known only to the real Shaw and his intimates.

## The Egyptian Origins of Christianity

ON Sunday, November 23, an interested audience at the "Laurie Arms" (headquarters of the W. London Branch N.S.S.) heard a lecture on the fascinating theme "The Egyptian Origins of Christianity" from Mr. J. Martin Alexander. In a clear and lucid style he showed the development of Egyptian civilisation from the late Stone Age of 10,000 B.C. onwards and pointed out that the Nile Valley was, because of its natural isolation, a social laboratory without parallel anywhere in the world. There, religion developed from the primitive totemistic, animistic forms to the highest, including the Messianic doctrine, and monotheistic ideas, nearly two thousand years before the Hebrews appeared on the stage of History. Mr. Alexander said there were three main Egyptian sources of Christian concepts.

- (1) The Messianic, Monotheistic doctrine, adopted by the Jews;
- (2) The idea of the sacrificial god, the Trinity and much of the Christian ritual;
- (3) The mystery cults that formed the earliest Christian communities.

The Jews were never in Egypt as a race, though individual Jews had contact with Egyptian culture, and indeed many of the Old Testament writings were of Egyptian origin. "The Song of the Harp Player," inscribed on a tomb of the eleventh dynasty, expresses many ideas later copied by the prophets. The Book of Job is a translation of "The Dialogue of An Unhappy Man," written a thousand years before. The Proverbs also are a rendering of "The Wisdom of Amenemope."

In the "Book of the Dead," we find the origins of the Trinity; The Judgment of the Dead; the Ever-Dying, Ever-Resurrected Saviour God; and the Christian Hell.

Mr. Alexander said that Egyptian ideology was of entirely native African origin, and developed from within, the old theories of orthodox archæology, whereby cultural advances were "explained" by invasions from mysterious, unspecified areas are not tenable in the light of modern knowledge.

A number of questions, some of a highly technical character, evincing a keen interest in the subject, were asked, and a fruitful discussion ensued, to which Mr. Alexander replied.

In the unavoidable absence of Mr. Hornibrook, the chair was admirably filled by Mr. G. H. Taylor. R. E. S.

## Correspondence

### INVENTIONS—NOW CYMRIC SPELLING

SIR,—Your Welsh correspondent was so hasty in writing his letter of October 26 that he did not verify his references, and wrongly spelt the names of the inventors Stephenson and Trevithick.

When I pointed this out, stating that I was a Cornishman and knew Trevithick's descendants, instead of accepting my correction he invents a ridiculous excuse, viz., that he always spells Stephenson's name with a "v" because it sounds better (is he tone deaf?) and he writes Trevithick in another form because of some deficiency in the Cymric language.

Then because he is conscious of the weakness of his case, he assures us that I have not shed my tribal instincts and regards my tribalism as a mental form of atavism, from which, however, he is quite free. But, apparently, he did not realise that the pedantry he ascribes to me is all his own, and his use of the Cymric language is quite a tribal characteristic.

And so careless of the type is the citizen of the world that he says he is not disrespectful to the present-day Trevethicks. This is a new variation. I wonder if he knows that it is bad manners to call people out of their names, and especially names that are household words.

My own name has nothing to do with the case, but has only

been brought in by Mr. Varney to show his learning in the Cymric language. It is well known ever since the days of the Star Chamber, and eminent philologists have explained it. I assure your readers who may be under Mr. Varney's spell that his explanation is entirely wrong.

But sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, and I claim as much right as Mr. Varney to spell names as I choose. So, wielding my trusty fountain pen and with Dogberry's challenge in mind, I now will that in future my opponent's name be *Varneigh*.—Yours, etc.,  
R. R. PRYNNE.

### INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

SIR,—I was pleased to see that among the resolutions passed at the 30th International Freethought Congress there was one agreeing that "a universal language such as Esperanto can facilitate international relations and understanding."

The resolution in these terms is a truism which few would dispute, but it will be of very little value unless members implement it by learning and encouraging the use of the language.

The benefits which will arise when Esperanto comes into general use are likely to be very substantial and those who realise this should be prepared to join in the movement which is seeking to bring it about.

To any of your readers who accept this view, but don't know what to do about it, I suggest that they can make their first contact with the movement by addressing an inquiry to the Secretary of the British Esperanto Association, 140, Holland Park Avenue, London, W.11.—Yours, etc.,  
B. SEYMOUR WHIDBORNE.

### SOME SUGGESTIONS

SIR,—May I offer you my congratulations on the new format of *The Freethinker*. I find its modern appearance much more pleasing to the eye. Is there any hope of a return to the alternate issues of 12 pages, as in previous years? Surely it would be worth another fund to make this possible.

I must, however, say that I am disappointed to see that in to-day's issue you are devoting so little space to articles on freethought and religion. To-day, over a page for an article on law and a lot of space for theatre and cinema.

May I once again, as a young freethinker (26), say how much enjoyment and profit I gain from *The Freethinker*.—Yours, etc.,  
ALAN E. WOODFORD.

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1953

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