

The Freethinker

Volume LXXIX—No. 38

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

AS MOST READERS KNOW, the 33rd Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers took place in the Free University of Brussels from September 4th to 8th. How best to convey the diverse experiences of a British delegate to that Congress? That is my difficulty. The last few days have made a remarkable impression upon me, and I only wish I could communicate it to you. It is, of course, impossible, but I must try.

There have been moving ceremonies at monuments to Francisco Ferrer, Paul Janson, Minister of State and great Belgian Freethinker, and Theodore Verhaegen, founder of the University. There have been stirring speeches by Freethinkers from many countries; carefully composed, clearly-reasoned papers by academic men; there has been the delightful (and at times slightly deafening) anarchy of the Lorca Spanish Republican Club, to which all Freethinkers have been invited; where a new portrait of the poet was unveiled, and where the Spanish spirit has not been destroyed by Franco. These, and many other elements have combined to make September 1959 memorable for me — and for hundreds of others.

Common Ideal

First, of course, the International Congress is an assembly of men and women with a common ideal; an ideal that they think is the most important in the world: the liberation of the human mind. The Congress is a proclamation of the determination to fight superstition and supernaturalism, to eradicate religion from the minds of men; to destroy the power of the Churches and the priesthood and to assert the power of human reason to determine human destiny.

It is a reunion. Here one meets old friends, the people from other countries who — because of that common ideal — are close to you. Always, though, there are, encouragingly, many new faces; friends of the future. For there is an amity and a cordiality about the International Congresses. There is seriousness, of course, and concentration on the many problems before us; there is solemnity and sadness — at the loss of old friends and old Freethinkers; at the condition of countries like Spain, Portugal and, increasingly, alas, France! It is right that there should be these more serious moods; indeed it is essential, if work is to be done. But it is right, too, that there should be friendliness; and there is: it diffuses everything. It is difficult to appreciate the atmosphere unless one has taken part in a Congress; it is even more difficult to write about the recognition of familiar faces, introductions to new members, handshakes, discussions, meals and drinks together. There is a thorough interchange of views on several levels, which is remarkably satisfying and stimulating. But that satisfaction, that stimulation, cannot be conveyed to the reader. Speeches, prepared and extempore: these can be read (and, I'm glad to say, several will be available to FREETHINKER readers) but it is not quite the same as hearing them delivered.

Oratory

André Lorulot, for example, speaking in front of the Ferrer memorial; his words uplifting as the symbolic statue itself, with its human figure, as it seems, thrusting the torch ever higher. Lorulot, best loved of French Freethinkers; self-educated, and now a great educator; loved as Chapman Cohen was in England; moving his audience — a vast crowd — as I have never seen an audience moved before.

Lorulot was at his magnificent best: the superb but sincere orator, who brought lumps into our throats, but inspired us with the spirit of Ferrer and Freethought. Then Madame Sol Ferrer (daughter of the Spanish martyr), herself moved almost to tears, reading a

greetings telegram from the Spanish Republican Minister of Justice in Exile in Domingo: speaking of the deep impression that the demonstration had made on her. She, in turn, making a deep impression on us.

And what a demonstration! It was impossible to know how many took part in the procession. Probably 600; representatives of Freethought from many countries: from all over Europe (including Poland) from Canada, U.S.A., South America, Africa and New Zealand. Representatives of Spain — the real Spain, not the detested Franco regime — and of the Anarchist and Masonic movements: all united to honour a great man and a great Freethinker, Francisco Ferrer, born a hundred years ago and shot fifty years ago.

The Procession

The great procession was headed by President Charles Bradlaugh Bonner, flanked by Mme. Ferrer and her daughter, Dr. Olga Ferrer of Buffalo University, and followed by the General Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers. Numerous Freethought and allied banners, and the Spanish Republican flag, were conspicuous as we moved off from the Place du Grand Sablon (traditional gathering point) and, after paying homage with dipped banners and a wreath to the outstanding Belgian Minister of State and Freethinker, Paul Janson (who died in 1913), passed through the Grand Place (the beautiful market square of Brussels) dipping flags again at the plaque to the 16th century martyrs to Philip II of Spain; then on to the Ferrer memorial itself.

Here wreaths were laid by the World Union of Freethinkers, the Belgian Federation, German Federation, German Freethought Youth and by the Anarchists. Then the speeches were delivered. Finally *La Marseillaise*, played — as one Frenchman remarked — with more meaning, more significance than he had ever heard it.

Business sessions have taken place in the Free University building (the first building to house the 125-year-old University had belonged to a Cardinal!), where reports from the various delegations have been received, and where the state of free thinking in schools in different countries has been reviewed. At the University, too, three public meetings have been held in the magnificent modern auditorium.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Report from Brussels

— By COLIN McCALL —

In this admirably equipped, fan-shaped building, audiences of 300 or more (with a very high percentage of young people) have listened to distinguished speakers like Dr. Henri Janne, Rector of the University; Professors Lucie de Brouckère and G. A. Homes (Belgium); Professors E. Kahane and H. Laugier (France); Professor J. M. Romein (who was taken as a hostage by the Nazis) and Dr. P. J. Schmit (Holland); Dr. Ronald Fletcher (England); Dr. Jeanne Vandervelde (Belgium); and Dr. Olga Ferrer (U.S.A.). Papers by Dr. G. Brock Chisholm (Canada), Dr. J. V. Duhig (Australia), Dr. Suirob Ramirez (Mexico) and a Spanish Teacher (who has contributed to THE FREETHINKER, but must remain anonymous) have been read by others because of the unfortunate absence of the four. Many telegrams regretting absence and wishing success have been received. Messages from the Rationalist Press Association, Ghana Rationalist Group and the two Trinidad Branches of the National Secular Society, will particularly interest readers. And *The New Zealand Rationalist* printed a special "International Issue," which has been distributed among delegates. So did several of the foreign Freethought journals.

A Success

All here are agreed that the Congress has been an enormous success. The Belgian Freethinkers have gone to great lengths to make it so, and they have reaped their just reward. To gain the full co-operation of the University

authorities was, in itself, an achievement (can one imagine similar success in England?) and Dr. Janne's personal participation has been greatly appreciated. (His paper will be summarised in THE FREETHINKER.) But there has been a terrific amount of planning and organising. To M. André Koeckelenberg must go the credit of organising (with every help from the police, I'm glad to say) the long procession that cut through the centre of Brussels on Sunday morning, September 6th, on its commemorative way. Mr. Koeckelenberg, too, has tape-recorded dozens of speeches. Many others have translated them. To Secretary, Mlle. P. H. Pardon and to Treasurer M. Louis Courtois, must go our thanks for organising the business sessions, the banquet, and the tours; for arranging the printing and the duplicating — in itself a large task.

The President, Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner, as always, has spoken in several languages with facility, and he has chaired meetings and spoken at demonstrations for many hours in all. Members of the General Committee have also done a lot of work.

But, above all, this Congress owes its success (and, I repeat, it has been most successful) to the wholehearted co-operation of Freethinkers from different countries, who have combined in a manner befitting their belief in the supremacy of human reason and the unity of the human race. It was my honour to be one of the representatives of Great Britain.

Three Lies

By H. CUTNER

ONE OF THE GREATEST difficulties we Freethinkers have is combating Christian liars. Once a good Christian lie gets a start and it is—as I have often pointed out in these columns—almost, if not quite, impossible to catch up with. It will appear, not even disguised, as fresh as ever in the most remote parts of the world; and the Christian liar piously and rapturously repeats it as if it had never been dealt with. Year in and year out, for example, our Christian liars will repeat deathbed "conversions" of great "infidels" not only as if they were true but as if nobody had ever controverted them. And they have another reason. If an "infidel" was really converted, that *must* prove Christianity to be true. Far better for an infidel to be "converted" than to provide waverers or backsliders with some arguments which unconverted infidels cannot answer.

Moreover, supposing I or some other Freethinker takes the trouble to deal with the "converted infidel" stories—would any fully-believing Christian read what we wrote, let alone believe us?

A reader from Tasmania has sent me a page from an Australian publication of the Seventh-Day Adventists written by a bearded gentleman called Adlai E. Esteb in which he tells us "How Paine, Darwin, and Voltaire found God at last." Now, most readers of THE FREETHINKER know the Christian lies which bolster up these "conversions" quite well. In *Infidel Deathbeds*, G. W. Foote dealt with them in detail, and no doubt he hoped his book would scotch some of the lies. But that is nearly humanly impossible. No Seventh-Day Adventist would have the courage to read such a book. Far easier to believe a good, bare-faced Christian liar.

The story of Thomas Paine getting converted was dealt with by Ingersoll in a famous pamphlet in which he describes offering 1,000 dollars to a well known Christian and New York newspaper who told it, if the story could be in any way substantiated. 1,000 dollars was a hefty sum even for a newspaper and it did its best to find the evidence. It

completely failed, and admitted that Paine died a "shrieking" infidel. There was no need for Ingersoll to hand over the 1,000 dollars. But the utter failure to find any evidence whatever that Paine was "converted" on his deathbed was not lightly accepted by our Christian liars; and for 100 years at least they depicted him ill in bed with a Bible in one hand, a bottle of brandy in the other, and shrieking with the third for Jesus. Mr. Esteb, of course, hashes up the old story of a "young Quaker lady" who visited Paine when he was old and neglected, telling him that she had thrown *The Age of Reason* into the fire, "and the dying man looked half pained and half relieved. 'Oh, how I wish,' he moaned, 'that all had done as you did.'" This is incontestable proof not only that Christianity is true, but that Paine died completely converted. One wonders how much more credulous drivel the average Christian can swallow.

But ask any of them what does Mr. Esteb mean by saying that Paine "found God"? In actual fact, Paine never "lost" God—he was always a Deist. His *Age of Reason* makes his Deism as clear as sunshine. The truth is, of course, that people like the Estebes have never read anything of Paine—they would be too frightened.

The Age of Reason is unanswerable. The only way a Christian can meet it is by boycotting the book, and lying about Paine's "conversion". Never by reading it.

As for Darwin, it would be just as safe to say that the only thing about him and his work a Seventh-Day Adventist would know is his name. Nothing else. But of course the intelligent Christian knows quite well that the theory of Evolution, accepted by almost every living scientist and most laymen, completely disposes not only of the Genesis fairy tale, but of Christianity itself. If there was never a Garden of Eden, no Temptation by a Hebrew-speaking Serpent, and therefore no Fall of Man, there could be no necessity for a Saviour; and overboard goes the Christian

(Concluded on page 300)

Freethought and the Social Order

By F. A. RIDLEY

WORLD HISTORY can broadly be divided into periods of usually alternating authoritarian regimes and regimes which in varying degrees permit individual volition in speculative questions. The priestly despotisms of the ancient East and, after the rationalistic interlude of Graeco-Roman classical civilisation, the Catholic Theocracy of the Middle Ages, reflect the former type, while both ancient (classical) and modern civilisation represent the latter. Nowadays, the rather startling revival of authoritarian tendencies in Fascist and Communist contemporary regimes, has aroused speculation in various quarters whether we are actually on the eve of another such authoritarian epoch. The hall-mark of every totalitarian (to employ modern political jargon) regime, from ancient Nineveh to modern Spain, is that it is exclusively dominated by a single official ideology from which no—at any rate, significant—deviation is ever permitted. Such an ideology may be religious, as in ancient Egypt or in medieval Europe; or political as in the absolute monarchies of the 17th and 18th centuries, or in the Fascist dictatorships of our own day. But whatever its precise nature, it always insisted on uniformity in all significant branches of human activity. Such regimes are, of course, the very negation of Freethinking anywhere.

The life of the heretic, whether in medieval Rome or Nazi Germany, was apt to be brief, and his end obscure—that is if he was lucky enough to escape the kind of punishment reserved for heretics in the "good old times"! In such authoritarian societies, where "dangerous thoughts" represent the supreme crime, to think at all is dangerous outside the prescribed limits. For it is obvious that thought, as such, can never be entirely suppressed in any social order which rises above rooted savagery. For example, the Ages of Faith have left us colossal monuments in the shape of Egyptian pyramids and medieval cathedrals, which would have been impossible without a very high degree of mental power and concentration; a similar degree of mental activity devoted to criticism of the current religion would certainly never have been tolerated. In a modern democratic society where (within certain limits determined by economics rather than by theology or politics) freedom of thought and opinion is permitted, it is actually rather difficult to visualize what life must be like under a really authoritarian regime whether monarchical, Inquisitional or Fascist. And when society suddenly switches over from a democratic to an authoritarian regime it must be rather as if the roof had fallen in, or the end of the world (or at least a world) had suddenly arrived. I have myself heard Germans—men of culture and liberal views—express the horror which they experienced when the sudden arrival of the Third Reich swept away the whole political and intellectual heritage of recent centuries at one blow. It may also appear somewhat pessimistic, but it is undeniably correct to state, that, in the melancholy annals of world history which Gibbon succinctly summarised as "the register of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind" the authoritarian type of society has hitherto been the normal rule in the evolution of human society, while liberal societies which do not enforce a totalitarian discipline have been in a rather small minority. The fears expressed by some sociological pessimists today that mankind, after a relatively liberal period is now on the verge of another era of

authority, whether true or false, cannot be dismissed as merely defeatist in view of mankind's lugubrious past. The nature of the current social order can never be a matter of indifference to freethinkers, whether they wish to think freely in religion or with regard to some other human activity. For freedom can never be taken for granted; it has always been true, and it will probably always continue to be true, that "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance." "The glory that was Greece," perhaps the birthplace of free speculation, went down into darkness and religious bigotry because its advanced thinkers were not vigilant, or perhaps numerous enough, to stop the ultimate rot. And in what McCabe aptly termed "the century of stupendous progress" the 19th century—many Radical optimists could probably have been found to agree with Herbert Spencer's dictum, "It is certain that mankind must eventually become perfect." The melancholy era which has since elapsed, the era of war, Fascism and nuclear insecurity, does not lend any degree of support to so satisfactory a conclusion. The sobering, but eminently probable, conclusion appears to be that progress is spiral and intermittent rather than direct and continuous. That, as Ibsen—a freethinker, if ever there was one—made one of his clerical characters remark with obvious satisfaction, "Now heaven be thanked, each new attraction is still attended by reaction"! (c.f. *Brand*).

Counter revolutions appear to be the virtually inevitable sequels to revolutions, and counter-reformations usually follow reformations. Progress—like its concomitant, liberty—is something which each generation has to fight for. There are always potent forces in every society which, if they can once get into the saddle, will quickly put an end to any supposed "natural" or social right to think freely. History gives us many lurid examples of such suppression, of which the millennial victory of Christianity in the 4th century is perhaps the most ominous and significant. The victory of Christian intolerance under Theodosius and Augustine put mankind back for a thousand years and more. And modern examples indicate that the danger is not merely historical. The magnificent German culture was virtually obliterated by Hitler & Co. for twelve frightful years. Such memories do not make for any complacency.

What general practical conclusions can be drawn from the above? Surely this: Freethought must always be militant; activist and continuously sensitive to current trends of public opinion. An ivory tower is no place to think freely in! Free speculation is only possible in a free society: the two stand or fall together. The fight for a free social order is a necessary condition and an integral part of the activity, and even of the very existence of any thought unconditioned by authority, in this as in probably every other age.

OBITUARY

We regret to record the sudden death of S. H. Moore of Sidcup, Kent, at the age of 60. A surveyor by profession, he was keenly interested in music, both classical and light, and was an accomplished violinist. He was also interested in photography and outdoor activities. He was a regular reader of THE FREETHINKER and to his Freethought he added his activities in other radical movements. A secular service was conducted by Mr. F. A. Ridley at Eltham Crematorium on September 4th. We extend our sincere sympathy to his widow and family.

This Believing World

Poor old Leicester! It will have to mend its ways if it wants to hold the grace and pride of God Almighty. According to Pastor Simpson who was obviously heart-broken when penning his dismal letter to the *Leicester Mercury*, a gentleman was recently preaching the Gospel in the Market Place a little late, but owing to the poor lighting, was unable to read out loud God's Precious Word which the Pastor is convinced is the "secret of England's greatness." How can any gent bring the Gospel to the people if Leicester's lighting is so poor? What are the city's Fathers doing about it?

★

In that famous Mecca for artists in Cornwall, St. Ives, there is a holy row between an "invader" and the town councillors as to what may or may not be sold on Sundays. In defiance of the Sabbath Day and the very pious restrictions imposed upon it to keep it "holy" this "invader" opened a gallery on a Sunday selling pictures and post-cards, and was promptly and heavily fined. The saintly mayor was not having God's Holy Day desecrated in St. Ives, and so advised people who want to see pictures to go to the Art Gallery *free*.

★

All this is a lesson to Freethinkers. If the citizens of a town want religion rammed down their throats in this way, it is of course their affair. If they do not, then they should kick out at election time all religious fanatics. But that this kind of religious fanaticism could take place in this year of grace 1959 shows how little of the Freethought message has reached the ordinary public — even in a place like St. Ives. Cornwall is, of course, completely backward in religion — its point of view is that of, say, 1800 A.D. But surely *some* Freethought has reached its heavenly-minded citizens?

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But while so many people in out-of-way towns keep Sunday holy by the grace of God, they do not always fall for "ghosts." It appears that a 16-year-old shopgirl and her 17-year-old boy friend have gone into hiding at Weymouth because they claimed that they both saw one at her home. It was "white, legless, and had black hair, and floated a foot above the ground." This seems quite a reasonable description of a ghost and should forthwith be investigated by *Psychic News* and *Two Worlds* and so confound blatant materialists.

★

The two veracious young people went into hiding because people were laughing at them, and thought they were "mad"; and the young lady's mother complained that it wasn't fair "to ridicule them like this." They "truthfully" thought they saw one. Which is quite fair comment. After all, the young lady who has made Lourdes famous throughout the world quite "truthfully" saw the Virgin Mary and heard her speak in perfect French. All Catholics believe her; so why shouldn't all ghost believers believe in the young couple in Weymouth?

★

Even sinning against the Holy Ghost — whatever that is — is perhaps not considered as vile by the Roman Church as a fully ordained priest wanting to get married. However, Fr. Furlong, the Roman Catholic priest in charge at Wallasey, Cheshire, risked eternal damnation and excommunication and all the other dire penalties Christianity imposes for backsliders, to marry the 19-year-old daughter of a wealthy jeweller in a register office. For people who are not bull-dozed by credulity and superstition, this seems a perfectly natural thing to do — but what is the Holy

Church going to do? Or perhaps we ought to say what *can* it do?

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Some readers will remember that faithful evangelist, Renee Martz, who at the age of six was successfully bringing erring and sinful men back to Christ, and who has since continued the good work. A little older now and married, she came back to this country determined to bring our *entire* population back to the Lord, perhaps remembering the great success the Rev. B. Graham had in converts — and cash. Unfortunately, the inimitable Billy appears to have annexed all the available converts — and cash — and poor Renee is bewailing the fact that "Britain is almost pagan." So, alas, she has deserted us to try her luck at Miami which, thank God, could never be as pagan as poor, old, impossible Britain. We hope she rakes in the shekels as well as her great forerunner.

THREE LIES.

(Concluded from page 298)

Faith. Whether Darwin who proclaimed his Agnosticism for many years before his death was or was not "converted" would not, could not, alter the shattering blow to Christianity, given it by the theory of Evolution; only Darwin was *not* converted. The story given with such gusto about it, written by a Christian lady liar called Lady Hope has been often exposed in these columns and is just one long Christian lie. Lady Hope never produced any evidence whatever for it. As she herself was obviously dying for some publicity, she trumped up her story of the "conversion" of Darwin, knowing perfectly well that it would go on its rounds and never get caught up. But her name would be "insolubly" linked up with Darwin's and that was indeed *some* publicity. In both Paine's and Darwin's stories we have to thank women, good Christian women who can almost always beat men in getting a sound Christian lie on its extensive travels.

In Voltaire's case, it appears that in 1954 "several important documents were found in Parisian archives," though no evidence whatever is given for this statement. What does the phrase "Parisian archives" mean? In any case, the reputed "conversion" of poor old Voltaire — he was 84 when he died and very ill — began as soon as the lie could be sent on its rounds. But note — there was no need for Voltaire to "find God at last." He was, at least he always proclaimed himself, a Deist, and coined the well-known phrase, "If there were no God it would be necessary to invent him." That he "recanted" in some measure when he *first* became ill was because he hated the idea that his body would be thrown on a dunghill to be eaten by dogs if he did not "recant." He was ready to sign any "recantation." All the same, he died an unrepentant Deist later. He never "recanted" into the Catholic Church which was then in power — though it would make no difference to unbelief in Christianity if he had done.

The idea that a "converted infidel" could prove the truth of Christianity comes only from the most ignorant and stupid of Christians. But there it is, for the ignorant and stupid Christian is always with us. And never, never would he read such an article as this. It might shatter his faith.

INGRATITUDE

A 68-YEAR-OLD WIDOW living in a one-up-one-down alms house, complained that there was a hole in her bedroom ceiling. Then the vicar of Wragby, Lincolnshire, the Rev. Reginald Nunn, stood up in his pulpit and said: "What does an elderly pensioner want, a mansion in Berkeley Square — complete with nightingale?"

Sunday Express (23/8/59).

THE FREETHINKER

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All articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals. THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 15s.; half-year, 17s. 6d.; three months, 8s. 9d. (In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.00; half-year, \$2.50; three months, \$1.25.)

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (rear of Morley Street Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. CORINA and DAY.
- Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN and MURRAY.
- London (Finsbury Square, E.C.2).—Every Wednesday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and C. MCCALL.
- London (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Saturday from 6 p.m. and every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. TRIBE.
- London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and WOOD.
- Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.: Various speakers.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.
- Worthing Branch N.S.S. (The Front, Worthing) Sunday, September 20th, Afternoon and Evening; Messrs. BARKER, GORDON, MCCALL and MOSLEY.

INDOOR

- West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. (230 Hainault Road, E.11) —Thursday, September 17th, 8 p.m.: Discussion opened by COLIN MCCALL on "The Problem of Evil."

Notes and News

WE MUST THANK the numerous subscribers to THE FREETHINKER who immediately sent us the extra charges on learning that we were compelled to increase the price of the paper from fivepence to sixpence. Few things have pleased us more than this spontaneous tribute to our journal which probably has more real friends than any other publication in the country. Our readers can rest assured that we and our contributors will do our utmost to "carry on" heartened with such personal proofs of affection.

★

WE HOPE to publish another article by Mr. Geoffrey Ashe in reply to the further criticisms made by Mr. Cutner on his *Sunday Express* articles, in the near future. Mr. Ashe is a worthy opponent and the discussion should prove of the greatest interest to our readers.

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THIS YEAR THE RATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION is celebrating its Diamond Jubilee and to mark the occasion a Dinner will be held at the House of Commons, London, S.W.1, on Saturday, October 24th, at 7 for 7.30 p.m. Mr. Joseph Reeves, M.P., will be in the Chair and the toast of "Prosperity to the R.P.A." will be proposed by Dr. J. Bronowski. Other distinguished guests who hope to be

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUS acknowledged, £270. 3s. 11d.; Mr. & Mrs. J. Parnell, 10s.; W.H.D. 5s.; E. Swale, 10s.; R. Underwood, 15s.; D. Humphries, 5s.; S. C. Merrifield, 2s. 6d.; C. Cullen, 2s. 6d.; G. Swan, 2s. 6d.;—Total to date September 11th. 1959. £272. 16s. 5d.

present include Lady Wootton, Mr. Ritchie Calder, Professor A. J. Ayer, Professor Antony Flew, and Mr. Kingsley Martin. Members of the National Secular Society are cordially invited to attend. Tickets (25/- each) may be obtained from the Secretary of the R.P.A. at 40 Drury Lane, London, W.C.2.

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THE LONDON *Evening News* (21/7/59) printed an A.P. report from Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, where a local production of Tennessee Williams's play, *The Rose Tattoo*, has been cancelled "because of opposition by a Roman Catholic bishop."

★

MR. W. CRONAN, Secretary of the Edinburgh Branch of the National Secular Society, reports five "splendid meetings at the Mound" during the Edinburgh Festival. Thanks are due, adds Mr. Cronan, to the N.S.S. Vice-President, Mr. Len Ebury, for "impressive addresses," and "it was most satisfying to have large crowds at every one of the meetings." "Plenty of hecklers kept the meetings lively but as usual, Mr. Ebury was in fine form and able to meet all opposition."

★

"TWO DISGUSTED SOLDIERS" wrote to the *Daily Mirror* (20/8/59) giving an excerpt from their Company Orders pointing out "that the practice of wearing Religious medallions is forbidden when in uniform." "Men may wear this rubbish" — the Order goes on — "when they are in civilian dress only . . . Queen's Regulations state that all trinkets of any kind are forbidden." "Don't the Army high-ups believe in God any more?" asked the T.D.S. The *Mirror* didn't answer the last question, but it put the soldiers right on Q.R.'s, viz: "Soldiers wearing 'shirt-sleeve order' with open necked shirts are definitely forbidden to wear necklace charms — if they are visible." But the Regulations say nothing at all about religious medallions being rubbish. That statement is rubbish!" exclaimed the *Mirror*.

★

THE Rev. Ivan S. Milstead, pastor of Carley Evangelical Baptist Church, Leicester, and co-chairman of the Youth Commission of the International Council of Christian Churches, is the latest to relate juvenile delinquency to lack of Christian teaching. At the European Evangelical Conference in Oslo recently, he said that "The teenagers now being classed as 'juvenile delinquents' are in fact the first generation to manifest the fruit of non-attendance at Sunday schools" in Britain. It is no doubt true that Sunday school attendance has dropped considerably since the war, but Mr. Milstead conveniently overlooks the religious teaching in schools. It is rubbish to say, as he did, that "in Britain vast numbers of boys and girls were growing into adolescence without any Christian association or instruction whatever." Hasn't he heard of the 1944 Education Act? If not, we refer him to next week's item advertised below.

NEXT WEEK

PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES
and RELIGION in SCHOOLS

The Stars Shall Fall From Heaven

By B. ANDREWS

DESCRIBING THE "LAST" DAYS, the writer of the book of Matthew states that the stars shall fall from heaven. Now this was a very reasonable statement to have made in ancient times, when among many other misconceptions the earth was the centre of the universe, the moon small enough to place under a woman's feet and the stars of such size that twelve of them could be used to make a crown. (Revelation XII.)

Today religionists would describe confusing parts of the divine revelation as allegorical. One can't help noticing as time goes on that this word "allegorical" comes up with embarrassing frequency. I am positive that should I be able to ask the writer of the book of Genesis or Matthew the size of the sun, moon or stars he would use his hands to describe them.

In more modern times we have the great genius Isaac Newton. His *Philosophia Naturalis Principia Mathematica* was "perhaps the greatest work in the history of science." Pierre Laplace called Newton "Not only the greatest genius that ever lived, but also the most fortunate, for there is but one universe, and it can happen to but one man in the world's history to be the interpreter of its laws."

Great genius though he was, Newton accepted without question the statement of his contemporary, Bishop Ussher of Ireland, that the world was created on the 26th of October, 4004 B.C., at 9 o'clock in the morning. If this genius and philosopher could be, as we now know, so very wrong, what credence can we possibly place in the unknown writer of Matthew about whom we know nothing, and yet whose so-called revelations in the Bible are aspired to by millions of people.

"The stars shall fall from heaven," states the Bible writer. He does not say ten stars or a few stars or a hundred stars, he says "the stars." If language means anything it would be quite in order to take his statement naturally to mean all the stars, or the 3,000 or so which are visible to the naked eye. This writer had no idea that he possessed a lens in his eye, the weakness of which prevented him from seeing the millions of other stars in the sky. He had no idea that the earth was part of a spiral system which contains over 300 billion stars.

The giant telescope at Palomar can reach out to a distance of 2,000,000,000 light years. Observations made there together with Einstein's computations on the relationship of mass and space lead to the assumption, very conservatively, that the entire observable universe has a diameter of 7,000,000,000 to 8,000,000,000 light years. (One light year equals 6,000,000,000,000 miles.)

Assuming that island universes are distributed evenly, we arrive at a figure of 1,000,000,000 galaxies each composed of 200 to 500 billion stars, each star a sun 1,000,000 times as large as the earth.

Let us look more closely at these fantastic numbers. 1,000,000,000 galaxies each containing between 200 and 500 billion stars. Being very conservative we can assume the entire observable universe we know of to contain 1,000,000,000 multiplied by 300 billion, which gives us 3×10^{23} stars.

What does 10^{23} mean? It means 1 with 23 zeros after it.

What can this number mean? Suppose we take a small electric motor which rotates 33 times a second. This would mean roughly 2,000 times a minute, which is almost 3,000,000 times a day. Let us combine the motor with a comptometer which can automatically count these rotations. The comptometer will stop the motor when the

number 10^{23} is reached.

We put the switch on and watch the numbers mount. 100, 200, 300, 5,000, 8,000, 25,000. We are confident. We are also curious whether the number 10^{23} will be reached in 12 weeks or four months. We take a sheet of paper and calculate. We are appalled.

The motor has to rotate for about 10 years to reach 10^{10} . To reach 10^{12} it will have to run for a thousand years. 1,000,000 years will pass before we arrive at 10^{15} . Our whole universe may not exist long enough to give our motor a chance to reach the number 10^{23} . The fantastic numbers involved are incomprehensible to any intelligent mind. For those who have any idea of figures the mind reels.

The Milky Way, or the Galaxy as it is known, is a gigantic spiral system. Its dimensions are roughly 120,000 light years in diameter and about 20,000 light years thick at its centre. It contains about 300 billion stars. The earth, with the rest of the solar system, is situated about 35,000 light years from the centre of the system. Not only do the planets revolve around our sun but the sun itself and all the stars revolve around the centre of the system. To make one complete revolution the sun takes 250 million years.

The sun, with a diameter of over 800,000 miles, is only a very medium star. Others are considerably larger. The diameters of some of these are Betelgeuse, 260,000,000 miles, Antares, 400,000,000, and the super giant Epsilon Aurigae, over 1,000,000,000 miles. The sun with most of its planets in their natural orbits could be very comfortably placed inside Epsilon Aurigae. Considering there are many millions of galaxies like ours, who can say what fantastic sizes some of their stars are?

The writer of the book of Genesis goes into some detail as to how God created the grass and the herbs and the fruit trees yielding fruit after its kind. Mention is also made of cattle and creeping things and about their being fruitful and multiplying. All this was said to be very good. It is almost impossible to find words or terms of expression to describe even limited parts of the universe but the writer of Genesis dismisses the entire "creation" with a single sentence, "He made the stars also."

For the stars to fall from heaven, it is naturally necessary for them to move from their original positions. It is also necessary for them to travel at some speed before singling out Mother Earth for the final theological impact. In order to explain this cosmic delinquency more fully it is necessary to consider the Bible at Matthew XXV: 36, "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man."

There are thousands of astronomers watching the heavens constantly. Most amateur telescopists study the heavens for the express purpose of detecting movement. That is how comets have been discovered and are being discovered every so often. So should any star decide to defy all natural laws its track and speed would be plotted with mathematical precision and should its target be the earth the time of collision would be worked out to the nearest second.

If Alfa Centauri, which is our nearest star, decides to "fall" to earth we would have $4\frac{1}{2}$ years' notice, that is if it travels at the speed of light, which it cannot do in any case, because nothing can travel at that speed. The word "nothing" is used here to refer to matter and mass.

Energy is equivalent to mass. If we add energy to a body we add mass to it. A heated iron, richer in energy,

weighs more than a cold one. A car in motion weighs more than when it is standing in a garage. The increase in mass is proportionate to the speed.

When a body travels at half the speed of light, its mass increases by 15 per cent. At 85 per cent. of the speed of light its mass is doubled. At 99 per cent. of the speed of light its mass is seven times what it was at rest. From then on its mass mounts in a steep curve. At the speed of light its mass reaches mathematical infinity.

A body of infinite mass would offer infinite resistance and would no longer move at all. That is the reason why no body can ever attain the speed of light. The fastest speed detected in the universe is 25,000 miles per second. At that velocity Alfa Centauri will take over 30 years to reach the earth.

The Bible writer, however, does not state that Alfa Centauri will fall from heaven in a manner to be worked out by Einstein; he says, "The stars shall fall." So Fundamentalists of some future date, if there are any left, can rest assured that they will receive ample notice of all cosmic catastrophies because the text has been changed from "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man" to "But of that minute and second every human being will know."

[Reprinted from *The New Zealand Rationalist*.]

Demons

By PETER F. MOORE

SOME LITTLE time ago (*The People*, June 7th, 1959) Christian religious leaders reasserted their claim to be able to exorcise those demons which (according to the best authorities!) infest the world around us, and seek to possess us. There is nothing new in this declaration of the Church: it has been one of the functions of priesthood since ancient times. However, this idea was propounded in no mystical manner, but by the Church of England Committee on Psychic Research, an august and learned body, which stated that a large percentage of mental illness was the result of possession by evil spirits and could be cured by exorcism.

I do not think it impossible for some forms of mental illness to be alleviated by this means. The rites of exorcism are the most fearsome and primitive in the corpus of the Church; given a patient who believes and thinks in an anthropomorphic manner, the rite might well give some relief as the subconscious strain is forced to the surface. Whether or not this would be permanent is another matter. A very satisfactory conjunction of "ancient and modern" perhaps, it yet leaves one question unanswered: Are there any devils to exorcise?

This question is the very basis of religion, for the devil is older than god, and men worshipped him long before the Israelites hit upon the concept of one transcendental deity. God was, in fact, built up in men's minds by intellectual examination, while the devils were there, ready made, in life around them.

In the Greek-speaking world, at what is considered the first golden age of the West, the old pre-Hellenic earth deities held more power than the official sky gods. As the Christians spread over Europe they met devil after devil: some were turned into saints, with or without the official blessing of the Church, some remained intransigent and were relegated to an already over-populated hell. The Schoolmen held various theories as to their powers and numbers. One otherwise undistinguished scholar put their number, I believe, at 6,572,839! When, in the Renaissance, a more scientific approach began to develop, control of

demons was an important part of a gentleman's education, and more than one pope had a textbook on the subject ascribed to him.

Devils fell into two main species. First, those who lived in the countryside and were there before the Church. These lived in trees, streams and rocks. Being rustic, they could be contacted by very simple means, especially on St. John's Eve and other old Pagan festivals. The other species had no such ancient lineage, being discovered—one is tempted to say, invented!—after years of careful research. Now the type which is trying, dear reader, to enter you at this very moment is a sub-species of the latter. They have had what is perhaps the most spectacular career of the whole genus, though the last really important case was the Witches of Salem in 1692, a triumph of ignorance, hate and persecution over justice and common sense, which led to the horrible deaths of about eight people. Aldous Huxley, in his book *The Devils of Loudon*, gives a terrifying picture of the effects of hysteria in a small French town in the 1640s. It is worthy of note that there have been no famous cases after the 17th century.

Assuming that the Church Committee is right, then it is faced with the logical consequences of its position. These devils must be absolute evil; they are not merely an absence of good or the result of man's weakness, but an evil entity existing in the Universe. If one states that the Universe was created by an active intelligence, then these devils must have been created as part of it. Christians may argue that free will caused the Fall, but they also state that man alone possesses free will. Minor devils are less than men (the ranks of hell are organised in a civil service style hierarchy!) and it is only the very low echelons with which we are concerned here. As these beings are created, and are not the result of natural selection, the Creator is responsible for them. What is more, they would appear to be designed for the sole purpose of doing evil. But we are informed that the Creator is absolute goodness. If so, evil must come from someone else. But if it does, it is hardly likely to be influenced by the good, and is under no compunction to obey the exorcist. It is all rather confusing.

The common kind of exorcism practised today concerns the haunting of places rather than individuals, but in all hauntings there is a human element and phenomena are generally traceable to a member of the household who is unstable. One of the first full accounts of a poltergeist occurs in the journal of John Wesley, at the height of the Revival of the 1760s. It is to be observed that Wesley could not exorcise the demon. Proper medical treatment appears much more effective. In fact, the revival of the idea of demonic possession would be a reversion to barbarism.

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CORRESPONDENCE

SPACE SHIPS

If all that mankind desires is work, they will get it. Considering the dreams of space travel to be plausible, and assuming the ships are not used for obliteration of the world, of what real use would they be? They could hardly produce one more grain of wheat or one article of attire. They would, however, lengthen hours of work. There would be no end to the demand for materials and "increased production" to the limits of human endurance. I foresee a slavery worse than that used to build the pyramids.

G. RICHARDSON.

REMEMBERING ZION

I have carefully read through Mr. F. A. Ridley's article in THE FREETHINKER of 28th August, entitled "Remembering Zion," and, while I may not remember Zion, I do not think I will forget my astonishment at the general tenor of his argument, and especially its last sentence: "For without Jahveh, its celestial god-father, what earthly right has Israel even to its name, let alone its existence?"

Since Mr. Ridley asks his readers he presumably wants an answer, and this letter, as brief as I can make it, is to tell him "what earthly right" (note these words) the State of Israel is entitled to in both name and existence. But before doing so let me observe that Mr. Ridley has been dealing with the religious, or *celestial*, aspect of Temple-building and may intend in another article to deal with *earthly* rights. I surely do not need to remind him that Secularists are primarily concerned with the affairs of this earth, not ecclesiastical, not celestial, not godly. One must deal first with earthly *facts* in order to understand earthly rights. I would also observe that I am not a Jew but an Englishman, and it is my right to consider the calling into question England's right to dispose of what she possessed at the time when she gave away her possessions. Does Mr. Ridley consider that England had no right to give Mr. Nehru the peninsular of India? If he thinks that she had that right, then why has England no earthly right to pass Palestine to Mr. Ben-Gurion? Both were British possessions acquired by the history-sanctioned "right of conquest," not yet disappeared from this wicked world. British governments came to rule both governments, of the Moguls and other monarchs, and the Sultan of Turkey, England's enemy in the First World War. That is clearly England's earthly right to endow the Republic of India and the State of Israel. Both are recognised by the United Nations. What more do they need on this earthly plane?

The transfer of powers in Palestine was not so simple as in the case of India. Mr. Ridley has surely heard of Mr. A. J. Balfour, sometime prime minister of England, who under the premiership of Mr. Lloyd George was foreign secretary. Palestine was under British mandatory rule in the nineteen-tens, when Mr. Balfour threw open the settlement of Jews in Palestine, in what he called their HOME. Thus many years passed before the State of Israel was revived, during which Palestine had a quickly growing Jewish population, who had an advisory council to assist the mandatory power (England) in the government of the country. When premier Attlee pulled out of the country the Jewish council was left to take its part in the "free for all." The Arab population, who had no liking for war, fled to neighbouring states in their hundreds of thousands. These states—about half a dozen—invaded, or tried to invade Palestine, but Ben-Gurion defeated the lot of them, and holds Israel by "right of conquest." That is the earthly right that Israel has to name and existence. Secularists, as realists, should acknowledge that, and not look to Jahveh as an excuse. If celestial reasons are demanded, Ben-Gurion's people can point to reclaiming the deserts, which both Turks and Arabs left untouched.

A final word: I do not wish this "free-for-all" world to continue. I wish all communities to be ruled by their own elected people. That surely is good freethinking and good secularism. But I close with a vision of President Nasser reading the front page of THE FREETHINKER of 28th August and rubbing his hands with pleasure.

STEPHEN HULL.

EIRE

Having just returned from holidaying once again in beautiful Ireland, I notice the comments about Eire under "This Believing World" in your August 28th issue.

It is quite true, of course, that many Irish leave their own land in search of employment elsewhere. But do they give up their religion, any more than their love for their native soil, when they come to a Protestant country like England? Not a bit of it! How, then, is Rome "ousted"?

"Traditional enemy" of Eire, England may well be; but any who move about that country today feel this enmity to be a thing

of the past. The Irish, southern as well as northern, are a friendly, hospitable people. I can appreciate the point of view of both North and South on religion and politics while actually sharing neither. Nevertheless, I have the feeling that some day, somehow despite all the difficulties, partition in Ireland must end.

Lastly, just a word about your columnist's reference to England's "heathen wilds". Generally speaking, the English are an apathetic people, and they neither believe nor disbelieve very strongly. This is not something to chirp about; it is lamentable.

G. I. BENNETT.

[Surely Mr. Bennett is treating the T.B.W. paragraph a little too seriously?—Ed.]

MITHRAISM

I have just seen your most unsympathetic and inaccurate report of the Mithraic rites performed on Hampstead Heath on Midsummer's Day. You find it amusing that the rites should have been held on Hampstead Heath—but to my mind, what better place could be found, close to earth and sky, overlooking a great city of men?

J. P. BURT.

[We intend to publish an article from the Convenor of the Society of Mithra, to which Mr. Ridley will reply.—Ed.]

THE QUEEN

Allow me to suggest that Mr. Robert Clarke be told to launch his attack on the Queen in a Republican journal because since the Protectorate, British Monarchs reign by the Will of the People.

Thanks to politicians of one colour or another the Atheistic Secular Movement is already drenched in unpopularity. It is not inconceivable that the Monarchy will outlive the Churches. Our movement would be well advised to stand aloof.

W. E. HUXLEY.

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