

Straws in the Wind

THE CRANK

BY G. K. CHESTERTON

IT is certainly an irony that, almost at the moment when Herr Hitler was being made Lord High Everything Else, the learned body specialising in his favourite topic of Race or Blood, the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, was listening to an authoritative pronouncement from the Chair, to the effect that the scientific world had long abandoned the Aryan theory, that it was very doubtful if there ever was any separate Aryan culture, that if there was it was probably borrowed from Babylonia, and that, in any case, it was practically certain that all civilisation and progress had come from the race living round the Mediterranean. That the Babylonian brick should fall on poor Mr. Hitler's head is a specially cruel blow; for even he could not well make anything of its cuneiform inscription, except that the spring of culture is nearer to the land of the Semites than the land of the Nordic Men. And indeed, as I have already pointed out, if there is one outstanding quality in Hitlerism it is its Hebraism. The New Nordic Man has all the worst faults of the worst Jews: jealousy, greed, the mania of conspiracy, and, above all, the belief in a Chosen Race.

For it will be useless for Hitler to answer, as Hindenburg or some old rough soldier might possibly answer, that he is a plain man and cares nothing what professors and pedants may say. That is where he has landed himself in the typically Nordic position of trying to have it both ways, and falling between two stools. The whole talk about Aryanism and the importance of pure Aryan blood was a thing invented by professors and pedants; only they are dead professors and discredited pedants. It was not a thing invented by soldiers or simple men; not even when their simplicity verged on savagery. I imagine that old Hindenburg must have passed about sixty or seventy years of his life under the delusion that he was a German; and I should not be surprised if, until a few years ago, he had never even heard that he was an Aryan. The Hitlerites have chosen to base their argument on science and not on tradition. They have taken elaborate notes from the lectures of anthropology and ethnology; they have shown the normal national industry and docility in taking those notes; but though they wrote it all by rote, they did not write it right. That is exactly where the important point about political and historical opinion appears. An ignorant man may be not only perfectly within his rights, he may be perfectly right, in going by instinct and tradition; because he is dealing with the facts nearest to him and giving them their ordinary names. There is such a thing as an Englishman; there is such a thing as American citizenship; such a thing as Irish nationality, and so on; and anyone who says there isn't is a fool. And so as long as a German says he is a German, he loses nothing through ignorance or indifference about whether he should or should not be described as an Aryan. For *him* it is perfectly legitimate to say that

he does not care a curse what the anthropologists at the International Congress say. But Hitler did definitely base his whole case on being an Aryan, much more than on being a German; and if it is not science, it can only be pseudo-science; and if he is not a doctor, he is a quack.

The portrait of Hitler was rather comically completed for me the other day, when somebody told me that he is a vegetarian and a teetotaller. These things would exactly clinch a guess of mine, about the sort of man he really is. To drink no beer may be Aryan; but most would hesitate to say it is German. The reader will be quite mistaken, however, if he imagines that I mean here a merely personal quarrel with the disciples of such a diet. Many men for whom I have a special spiritual veneration drink no wine. Charles Waterton was a water-drinker, as by a pun or verbal coincidence; and a famous Dominican (who is among these heroes of mine) told me that Cardinal Manning was so severe a teetotaller, that he sternly reminded an Irish priest that twenty-five per cent. of the criminals are drinkers; receiving the rather unexpected reply, "Indeed, Your Eminence, and I never knew the teetotallers had so high a percentage." Nor do I merely sneer at any other form of self-control; nor deny the greatness of vegetarians like Shelley and Shaw. But the point I mean, in the particular case of Hitler, is rather different. Taken along with his obscure fad about the Swastika, and his stale and dated science, and his dull, unsmiling and rather common face, it stamps him as a certain type in what may be called, rather intellectually than socially, the lower middle class. He is a Crank. A Crank is a type which does vary within limits; but very much within limits. Sometimes he may be defined as a man who has learning without culture; a Cambridge don always raving at the Catholic Faith exactly corresponds to this description. More often he is a man with a little learning, which is a very dangerous thing, and usually a very dull thing. Most frequently, what he has managed to learn he is never clever enough to unlearn; like Hitler with his Aryan origins. It is the tragedy of the Crank that he seems never in later life, for some reason, to cross the track of a culture superior to his own. The truth is, I suppose, in the case of the Nordic or Racial Crank, that he would never admit that any culture was superior to his own. The result is that he never knows anything of any really large ideas; his Imperialism or his Internationalism is always a small idea writ large. Cecil Rhodes was that sort of third-rate person, when he said solemnly that God wanted as much of the map as possible painted red. That is living next door to the lunatic asylum where people say that the English are the Lost Ten Tribes. I believe they have an idea that this remarkable ethnological thesis is somehow written, in invisible hieroglyphics, all over the Great Pyramid. Only the message is hardly so great as the Great Pyramid; and the messengers seem to realise

everything about the Great Pyramid except that it is great. I do not know Hitler. I have never seen him; I have not pressed for a social introduction, nor do I think it probable that he would exert himself excitedly to obtain an introduction to me. But you never know anything about a man until you see him; and I am willing to bet on the probability of what I should see. I think he is a person of arrested development; one of those stunted and stupid but very earnest little men, who go to vegetarian restaurants and write little pamphlets on prehistoric problems; about which they know both too little and too much.

Odds and Ends

By J. Desmond Gleeson

SWINDON MOVES WITH THE TIMES.

THE modern spirit is alive in Swindon. Science and progress advance there together, hand in hand. No barbaric gloom is to be found in that forward berg, no falling behind the times, or, for that matter, taking refuge behind "The Times." This little town, as most folk know, dedicated itself to the making of engines. Just as towns in the Middle Ages would devote themselves to Saints, so has Swindon devoted itself to service. It thinks in terms of a world running on rails and, in fact, feels that motors and such-like are a return to the anarchic conditions of pre-track days. Still, the beliefs of a Swindon rail worker is a separate subject and the whole point here is that Swindon has taken a great leap forward in the last few days, taking a header into the future, as it were as confidently as it headed the steam race in the past. New plant has been secured on the well-known "belt" system which ensures an all-round speeding up of work. Instead of a large number of well-meaning workers ambling round and lending a hand where they may be useful, the workers now anchor themselves in various positions and it is the work which ambles round to them on the tireless belt. On this new system it is calculated that whereas the building of a locomotive took 30 days, a mere 12 days may now be allotted for the same piece of work. Or, putting it the other way, while 12 engines a year might be turned out on the old plan, 30 may now be constructed in the same space on the new system.

There is a certain advantage in the application of this new idea. In the old days the railway companies were always short of engines. It was no uncommon thing for the passengers to get out and push their train while the engine had been taken away for use on a different line. But now each train can have its own engine. Nay more, soon each train can have two engines and when the speeding-up business has gone sufficiently ahead then there is no reason why each train should not have three engines, one at the front, one at the back and (just for a generous gesture) one in the middle. And there I think it will be well to restrict the free flow of engines, for should there ever be more engines to a train than carriages it is only too probable that ill-natured foreigners would begin to laugh at us.

WHO GAINS FROM THE LABOUR SAVING?

Now at first sight it seems very good-natured of the railway company to provide machinery which will enable engines to be made with so little trouble. If it will now only take 12 days to do the same work that originally took 30 days there will be a save of some 18 days a month. Thus, to put it roughly, the workers will only need to work two weeks each month and may devote the other two weeks to sampling the delights offered by the Leisure State. The machinery has been installed to save labour and here you find it definitely saving more than two weeks in every month. The labourers therefore will not have to work so hard, but since the work will still be well and truly done, why then there is no reason to do them out of the natural reward of their labour. In other words, they should receive the same wages for half the work since the railway company gets the same amount of work done for the smaller time spent on it. That, you will say, sounds perfectly reasonable and fair. Machinery is brought in to save labour and it is therefore only just that it should also save labourers. If the work is done nobody will suffer, the profits will be no less than usual and thus there is no case for defrauding the workers of their full wages. Will you believe it, then, when I say that after generously bringing in the new machinery, the railway company intends to sack some thousands of the men employed at Swindon? Will you believe it if I say the Company does not intend the workers to reap any benefit from the new process they are adopting? Will you credit me when I say that in accepting this invention to save labour the Company has in mind merely the idea of saving wages? Will you think I am drawing the long bow when I say that 30 engines a year is more important to the railway than the employment of two or three thousand people? The machinery is there and the workers who might profit by it are to go.

MACHINES MATTER; MEN DON'T.

Is it not funny that labour saving devices always mean in the end just the saving of wage-payments? When machinery was first introduced it was excused as a help to mankind. No one was cynical enough to admit that it was introduced merely to help boards of directors and share-holders. There was always that promise that when goods were able to be made more speedily and cheaper it was in order that there should be more to go round. Moreover machinery was introduced that the burden of the labourer should be lighter and that instead of slaving long hours he should find that the machine did the slaving and he reaped the reward. There was never any idea that he should be deprived just because wheels went round of their own accord without being pushed round. Is it not funny that reorganisation, rationalisation, technocracy and any newer name that it is hoped will somehow become fashionable all ultimately mean how shall management be saved the necessity of paying wages. It is, of course, funnier still that the economists who preach these things always try to link them with the increase of employment, as though the cutting down of wages could mean the extending of the number of wage earners—but that is the higher humour and hardly to be appreciated by those who are compulsorily in-