

THE FREETHINKER

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Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Freethought Faces the Future

AS we enter the year 1950 so oddly called "the year of grace," and stand on the threshold of the future, it will be appropriate to take stock of the overall situation that confronts us. How, and where stands Freethought to-day? What are the contemporary drifts of civilisation to-day, and how do they affect the contemporary movement for intellectual and social emancipation which is comprised under the heading of Secularism?

It must, we fear, be conceded that the outlook is far from ideal. The drift towards an atomic holocaust, a third blood-bath in a single life-time proceeds inexorably despite the platitudes of the politicians and ecclesiastics, whose voluble protests at its horrors yet manage to keep pace with an effective support for militaristic preparations for a war—or should it be a crusade?—for "Christian civilisation."

Nor, unfortunately, is such support confined only to Christians. Both science and philosophy, or at least, scientists and philosophers, which is not quite the same thing, lend themselves to the current drift towards a cataclysm which, as they themselves are the first to confess, must end by destroying both science and philosophy.

We begin this survey with the current crisis of civilisation since Freethought is essentially a phenomenon of civilisation and stands or falls with it. In a Dark Age such as that which engulfed the ancient secular civilisation of Europe and which put an effective end to "the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome," the Freethought of antiquity died with its civilisation in a "Dark Age" which was also an "Age of Faith." Such a renewed "Dark Age"; a renewal incredible in the self-confident nineteenth century, visibly threatens to engulf our civilisation to-day, as a result of the now deplorable failure of Humanity to control its amazing intellectual and moral technical expansion since the Industrial Revolution began two centuries back.

Continued failure in this direction can only spell the impoverishment and if continued long enough, the ultimate collapse of modern, as of ancient secular culture; similarly, of modern, as formerly, of ancient Freethought. To fight against this current drift to destruction remains the first duty of any secularist philosophy which, in 1950, is serious about its own survival and that of the values and aspirations for which it stands.

The most powerful and ubiquitous of the contemporary enemies of secularism and of any philosophy which discards belief in the supernatural, has no illusions about the present suicidal drift to destruction of modern civilisation. The Church of Rome, which saw both ancient Freethought and medieval Freethinkers die violently in its dungeons or at its *auto da fes*, waits brooding like a vulture for the collapse of the modern secular culture which, ever since its inception in the age of Spinoza and Galileo, has represented its most dangerous antagonist.

At the Vatican, they take long views. One must not confound temporary tactics of accommodation with their long term fundamental strategy. Beyond all its temporary

manœuvres dictated by circumstances of an age of rapid change, the papacy pursues a single and constant aim with a single-minded and ruthless zeal: the destruction of modern secular civilisation and the re-introduction of medieval ways of life. In a new Dark Age, in which science would have committed suicide, Rome would once again reign as of old over a medieval theocracy, and heretics and Atheists would have but the choice, which was theirs for a thousand years, to obey or die.

Such is the ultimate ambition of the Vatican; this is the final goal, to which all the present demands for an atomic crusade against Atheism, Materialism, and Communism, are intended to lead.

Such is, we believe, an accurate presentation of the overall scene in long-range perspective, which confronts the world as 1949 gives way to 1950. Let us survey the same spectacle, but, from a short-term standpoint.

What must strike everyone to-day who attentively surveys the religious field is the close connection now visible everywhere between ecclesiastical policy and social, political, and intellectual interests which have no obvious connection with religion at all. This is most obvious, but, by no means exclusively so, in Catholic lands and circles: the present political tie up between the formerly atheistic French Bourgeoisie, the heirs of the anti-clerical French Revolution, and political Catholicism is an obvious case in point. One may, under present day circumstances, reasonably suspect that this is a marriage of convenience between the contracting parties, to-day, threatened by the loss of a good deal more than "spiritual values," rather than that the class to which Voltaire once belonged, has seen the light from Our Lady Immaculate at Lourdes!

The regime of Franco in Spain and the recent pro-Catholic correspondence in the once staunchly Protestant *Times*, which would have caused a riot, if not a revolution in the England of the last century, are examples of the same process at work, of the growing alliance between "spiritual" and secular reaction.

And this phenomenon is not confined to Catholicism. In the Islamic theocracy of Pakistan, in Calvinistic South Africa, in the newly-founded State of Israel, the identical phenomenon is visible: the union of reaction in Church and State. In this connection, the latest example of Israel is not the least significant. A handful of clerical M.P.s in the Israeli Parliament at Tel Aviv, simply by holding the political balance between the evenly balanced forces of Left or Right, have been able, as a price of their political support, to set up what is, in effect, a Mosaic theocracy in the world's youngest state; in which public transport is forbidden on the Sabbath and in which "mixed marriages" between Jew and Gentile are forbidden to the members of the "Chosen Race."

Nor, since Truth, like Charity, begins at home, can we omit the melancholy spectacle of the British Labour Movement founded by the militant Atheist, Robert Owen, ending in the daily genuflections and pontifical humbug of the ineffable Sir Stafford Cripps and his psalm-singing band of priest-ridden, dollar-starved saviours of society—1950 brand.

It is evident from the above that the work of the Free-thought movement and of Atheists who take the Atheism seriously, did not conclude in 1949. There is still plenty of work for them to do, nor, as must now be obvious, can present day secularism be content merely to confine itself to the technical spheres of the scientific and historical criticism of religion. If religion seeks to permeate society with its influence, so, also, must Atheism. A sociological approach to our problem is one necessitated by the very nature of the times in which we live. Secularism, surely cannot be indifferent to anything that belongs to the secular sphere!

As the year 1950 opens, militant Freethought faces the future soberly but confidently. It sees in the frenzied manœuvres of its old enemies the tangible proof of their despair; and the presage of its own final victory. We close our ranks and go forward.

F. A. RILEY.

JEREMY BENTHAM AND HIS DISCIPLES

MONSIEUR ELIE HALEVY, the distinguished French historian's volume, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism* (Faber, 554 pp., 25s.) is a very important work. It is sympathetically critical in character. As Lord Lindsay, O.M., observes in his preface: "It is a book that I have long known and admired as the most illuminating work on the English Utilitarians that remarkable school of thinkers and writers who left their mark so deeply on nineteenth century England, whose influence still works powerfully in us, even when we least recognise it."

The decade preceding 1815—the year of Waterloo—saw a revival of liberalism. Cobbett deserted the anti-Jacobite camp, became democratic, and helped to secure Francis Burdett's election for Westminster. Romilly became the untiring advocate of penal reform. But it is true, that Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth had all recanted Radicalism and turned Tory, if Byron, Keats and Shelley still upheld the flag of freedom.

Jeremy Bentham and James Mill—John Stuart Mill's father—became acquainted in 1808. Born in Scotland in 1773, the elder Mill migrated to London and soon became a contributor to the *Edinburgh* and other Reviews. Much as Engels assisted Marx, Bentham assisted Mill, until, with the appearance and wide sale of the latter's *History of British India*, he was appointed to a lucrative position in the East India Company. Stern and forbidding as he outwardly appeared, Mill was devoted to Bentham who gave him a doctrine while the former in return partly converted his comrade into a democrat and gathered round him a band of disciples who made known Bentham's teachings, not only in England, but throughout the civilised world.

Bentham strove to interest Pitt and Dundas with his plans for penal reform, but his proposals met with the customary official indifference and neglect. Despite Bentham's monetary sacrifices, his experiences with Pitt's successor were equally discouraging. Much as he deplored Bentham's religious scepticism, Wilberforce was highly indignant at the cavalier treatment Bentham had endured. "Never," he averred, "was any man worse treated than Bentham. I have seen the tears run down the cheeks of that strong-minded man, through vexation at the pressing impertinuity of creditors and the insolence of official underlings when, day after day, he was begging at the Treasury for what was indeed

a mere matter of right. How indignant did I often feel when I saw him thus treated by men infinitely inferior. I could have extinguished them."

Many men would have been driven to chronic melancholia by such shameful conduct, but Jeremy was made of sterner stuff. But from a Tory, he developed into a Radical who attributed human misery to the misgovernment of aristocratic and plutocratic cliques. As Halévy avers: "The disappointment and distress he suffered made him a democrat."

In 1832, the year of the Reform Bill, Bentham died. His corpse he bequeathed to science and, in presence of his body on the dissecting table, surrounded by his disciples, Southwood Smith delivered the dead philosopher's funeral oration and Bentham was hailed as the harbinger of a more enlightened age. For not only in France was Bentham famous, where in Paris in 1825 his eminence had been signalled by a splendid reception, but in Britain, Continental Europe, and the two Americas, there existed innumerable adherents of his Utilitarian philosophy. Indeed, the dead man towered as a sage, far exceeding in wisdom his most eminent disciples.

Dunton and Mill had long been Bentham's leading representatives, but their place was later taken by Sir John Bowring who had more time to devote to the sage than James Mill, who became more and more deeply immersed in the business transactions of the East India Company. Still, Bentham's doctrines were disseminated independently by James Mill. Ricardo, the intimate of both Mill and Bentham died in 1823 and, as our author testifies, "the despair into which James Mill was thrown by his death astonished all those who had taken him for a man of stone. But Joseph Hume and Francis Place were even to survive James Mill. . . The other disciples of Bentham belonged to another generation, the friends of John Stuart Mill, they were not yet thirty: these were the true founders of the sect."

The small Utilitarian Society was formed in 1823, and John G. Graham and John A. Roebuck, with John Stuart Mill—the three Johns—were noteworthy members. Their meetings were twice weekly and the writings of Ricardo and the Benthamites were discussed. Although his Freethought convictions debarred him from sending his son to Oxford or Cambridge, James Mill's philosophy became well known in Cambridge owing to the activities of Charles Austin who had introduced a group of students to his essays on political science. Then, as now, Cambridge far exceeded Oxford in scientific research. As Halévy observes, while Oxford was nursing the Methodist revival, Cambridge had accepted the teachings of John Locke. "In 1793, the undergraduates were enthusiastic over Godwin; now they were advancing from Paley to Bentham. During this time the poet and metaphysician Coleridge was inspiring the Oxford theologians, until the time was ripe for the religious explosion of a new movement of religious enthusiasm, the agitation of the Tractarians and the philosophy of the Neo-Catholics."

The Utilitarians, however, were determined to spread their teachings wider, and when a group of artisans founded a Mechanics' Institute, they appealed to the Benthamites for financial assistance. The Institute was thus converted into a Radical organisation, with marked success. As a library was needed, the Utilitarians formed a Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. Then a new University College, without the tests and expenses imposed by Oxford and Cambridge, was projected and established in London, provided with a strictly secular constitution. The poet, Campbell, initiated the

new centre of culture and his proposal soon won the support of Francis Place, the Radical merchant tailor of Charing Cross, James Mill, Brougham, and the great Greek historian, George Grote, among other progressive public men.

Greatly alarmed, the Anglicans founded King's College as a rival institution, and the Evangelical leader, Wilberforce, accused the Utilitarians of making their College secular in order to attract money from the Jews. As Halévy points out: "The enemies within: the Protestant Dissenters who dreamt of using the new institution for the instructions of the ministers, were equally dangerous. They succeeded in turning aside the candidature for the Chair of Philosophy of Charles Hay Cameron, who was supported by James Mill." Still, the Benthamites secured the Chair of Jurisprudence, and John Austin's lectures on law, even if they repeated the teachings of earlier legal reformers, were revolutionary in comparison with traditional expositions on law.

In 1824 the *Westminster Review* was founded by Bentham and his adherents and, for some years, remained the leading exponent of radical opinion, in opposition to the views advanced in the Whig *Edinburgh* and the Tory *Quarterly Review*. Owing, however, to differences with Sir John Bowring, the *Westminster's* editor in 1828, James Mill and his celebrated son, John Stuart Mill, with their friends forsook the Review, and its earlier extensive influence seriously declined. Yet, differences with Sir John Bowring, the *Westminster's* lasted, he adorned its pages with a striking study of the French Revolution, and combated David Hume's attempt in his *History of England* to whitewash the sins of the Stuart kings and their myrmidons.

T. F. PALMER.

(To be concluded)

THE R. 101 SEANCE

RATHER late in the controversy over the R. 101 seance, I am offered space by the editor of *The Freethinker* to reply to Mr. H. Cutner's recent "Summing Up."

This so-called "summing-up" is really a reply to my comments on his previous article, reprinted in *The Freethinker* from *Psychic News*. But as the readers of *The Freethinker* have not had the opportunity of reading my comments—"reasons of space" was the excuse given me when I protested about this—how can they appreciate the points now raised by Mr. Cutner?

I am offered space for 1,200 words to reply to Mr. Cutner—almost exactly the amount that would have been needed to print my previous comments. Strange how "reasons of space" vary from week to week! But I will be merciful and not use all the room offered me—Mr. Cutner can use it to distort what I am now writing, as he has previously distorted almost everything else.

I see no point in arguing about whether Miss Beenham was "very distressed" as she left the seance room 19 years ago—nor can I see how it affects anything, anyway. The evidence that satisfies me concerning Miss Beenham's ability to record a conversation in shorthand is the fact that at the same seance she took verbatim notes of a speech delivered (according to Harry Price) at 250 words a minute. And what Mr. Cutner's anonymous S.P.R. friend has to say about that is a matter of no interest to me at all. In any case, she was not present at the seance, so she knows no more about the speech recorded than she can know about Miss Beenham's alleged distress.

Mr. Cutner's main complaint seems to be that Mr. Price, Mr. Tabori and Mr. Charlton have all changed their minds since writing the material on which Mr. Cutner based his attack on the seance story. What really happened, in my submission, is that Mr. Cutner deliberately misunderstood what they meant and he now resents being corrected.

I am sure Mr. Cutner has too much intelligence to believe his own allegation that the seance story was written by Mr. Charlton and Mrs. Goldney, neither of whom was present at the seance, and I will not insult the readers of *The Freethinker* by attempting to answer him seriously.

If Freethinkers are really interested in the facts regarding this seance, they can read them for themselves in Harry Price's book *Leaves from a Psychist's Case-book* (pages 118-132). If they are not, then so far as I am concerned they are at liberty to rejoice with Mr. Cutner in his cleverness at exposing another Spiritualist fraud!

A. W. AUSTEN,
(Editor, *Psychic News*).

THE LATE HARRY PRICE

IN an article in the December issue of *Enquiry*, his literary executor, Mr. Paul Tabori, writes eulogistically of Harry Price and his deep interest in Psychical Research, and concludes with:—

What was his faith? Did he believe in ghosts? He was charged both with hypocrisy and with a deeper faith in psychic phenomena than he ever professed in print.

He wanted to cleanse psychical research of imposters and swindlers who abused people's credulity and profited by the loss of some beloved person by pretending to summon him from the Other World.

The reports that near the end of his life he went through a "change of heart," I find ridiculous. It has been said that in the last years he had "come to see the light," that he believed in the after-life, that he accepted ghosts and spirits and their messages.

Although Price accepted the doctrine of the soul's immortality, he questioned whether the immortal soul could return to earth to demonstrate its presence in the phenomena of the seance room, or whether these phenomena may not have another explanation: *that was why he rejected spiritualism.* (Our italics.)

Perhaps the Editor of *Psychic News* and his spiritualist followers will once again claim that this means the very opposite! It seems a great pity that most of them, anyway, will never see this unequivocal testimony to Price's unbelief.

H. C.

"Church-filling" stunts were condemned by Unitarian Rev. Hill Wareing, at Manchester, who thinks that the practice has done more harm than good. The majority of his colleagues were, however, against him, and we are not surprised. How else is it possible to fill a church if not by kidding the congregation with whist drives, socials and the like? The old order changeth, and divine service which once included sermons of many hours duration sprinkled with lurid pictures of hell, no longer attract, and the fear of hell is no longer a hangman's whip to force people to church. The fires are cooling.

ACID DROPS

The depths of inanity have not yet been plumbed, but we are getting low as witness the latest antics of the Rev. Alan Johnson, who invited 199 children to bring their dolls to a special blessing service at his church in Northfleet. As the children filed past him, he blessed the dolls, golliwogs and teddy-bears, with a bunch of leaves and holy water. Among the dolls was a black one, which ought to make Dr. Malan fume, but it does show that there is no racial hatred in the Rev. A. Johnson's make-up. What a pass has the Church come to, when these sort of antics are arranged in order to get a congregation—at all costs. To quote the "Good Old Book," "unless ye become as little children . . ."

Christ Church, Norwich, is still a little behind the times when it comes to collecting boxes on long poles with a little bell on the end to coax hesitant donors. Why not be up to date and have an electric charge on the end of the pole and shock the elusive tanners out of worshippers' pockets?

One way of getting a congregation these cold mornings is to issue them with hot water bottles, as did the Rev. J. Nickels at Kensington Church. A more certain way would be to offer glasses of grog, which, we are certain would bring a record crowd. There is, however, a lot to be said for a sermon in the old manner, with plenty of the old-fashioned Hell, which should keep everybody warm. Incidentally, it would be much cheaper than hot water bottles and is not conditioned by electricity cuts.

A group of a million American Roman Catholics started in 1946, to pray in unison for the conversion of Russia to the "true faith," and according to *Novena Notes* (U.S.A.) they are still at it. Something must have gone wrong, or perhaps God has not heard them yet, or perhaps the pipe line is blocked by the body of the Blessed Virgin, which is still hovering in inter-stellar space waiting for the Pope to make up his mind whether to allow the B.V.M. permission to be "assumed" into heaven.

The King's Speech at the prorogation of Parliament was cast in the same vein of pious twaddle of all the previous speeches. He prayed "that under the guidance of Almighty God, we shall overcome our difficulties and reach the goal of a stable and prosperous economy." What with the King's effort as well as the daily exhortation to God at the commencement of every Parliamentary session, one could logically surmise that He would know what was wanted, but to make "assurance doubly sure" why not tell Him exactly what sort of an economy we want; Conservative, Liberal, Socialist or Communist? Better still, why trouble Him at all, He is going to be pretty busy during "Holy Year."

What a wonderful chance the Pope will have when he is televised in the "Holy Year" (1950) to show the world some of the "marvels" of Catholicism. For instance, a bottle of the darkness that overspread Egypt, or in view of the discussions re the Virgin Mary, the phial of her milk that is in his possession, or even the bottle of the blood of St. Janisarius which is said to liquefy on his feast day.

Devaluation appears to have hit many missions to "natives" pretty badly, and we are very pleased to hear it. It is nothing but divine impudence to carry the outworn message of Christianity to people who have had for

thousands of years an entirely different culture, and who are given a view of the Christian religion which is repudiated by most of the intelligent men in the Church. It is really amusing to find missionary societies appealing for funds to convert the "heathen," while their bishops are complaining, not only of the apathy and indifferentism of the majority of Christians here, but of downright unbelief in God's Glorious Message. Still, it is much easier to bamboozle the "savage" these days than a well read university trained man or woman in England. And the bishops know this only too well.

The recent discussion in *The Times* on "unity" which, by the way, has never meant anything for the Roman Italian Church but the wholesale swallowing of all the other sects, has brought forth also a discourse from the "Apostolic Delegate," Archbishop Godfrey, and he has taken more than a column to express what we said in a line or so when we referred to the matter some weeks ago. "It is for those who left the Church," he says in effect, "to return to it." And of course "they have to pray and pray without ceasing."

The Roman Church will never "give ground in certain beliefs and practices" for there is only One Church "one and indivisible," and the seceders must go humbly and contritely back and give in to everything the Italian Cardinals insist upon. That is the Roman Church's position and a very strong one, and it would be very foolish to take up another. In the ultimate, the Church of England can never give in, of course, but quite a number of converts will no doubt be made from Anglo-Catholicism. The only thing that remains from the correspondence in *The Times*, is more "disunity" than ever.

However much Communism in Europe may take an anti-Christian attitude, there are always Christian Communists like the Dean of Canterbury who see in Communism the complete fulfilment of Christian hopes. One of the Dean's comrades is Dr. Leung, who is the General Secretary of the East Asian Christian Conference at Bangkok, and who has discovered in Chinese Communism a valuable ally to Christianity and Christian missions. Formerly Christian Missions in China had identified themselves with "non-progressive Chinese governments," but—so long as Christians accept Communism—all will be well with Christ in China. Which, considering that all the early Christians were Communists, is quite logical.

Those misguided Christians who believe that there is no Hell and no Devil, get sharp reminders of their error every now and then in the *Church Times*. We like to see this, for a Christianity without Hell is much too emasculated. Fortunately, there is the Church Missionary Society which has to preach Hell, and just now it is running a play at the Fortune Theatre entitled the *Gates of Hell*, with Satan as "a fascinating character"—as he ought to be—in comparison with an average bishop. Plenty of plays, with the radio and the cinema thrown in, might well bring back Christian unbelievers in Hell to a more primitive and more religious state of mind. Thank Heaven for the Devil!

THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW

Why is Bishop Barnes against gambling? Isn't Christianity a gamble in "futures" and the prize all odds-against chance? Even the original prospectus was not over-optimistic, for many are called but few are chosen.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

H. DAY, R. MASON, L. SPARKS, A. H. STONE, E.J.W.—Thanks for cuttings.

A. HEWITT.—Sorry, but we cannot admit letters of personal abuse.

The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), THE FREETHINKER (U.S.A.), THE LIBERAL (U.S.A.), THE VOICE OF FREEDOM (U.S.A., German and English), PROGRESSIVE WORLD (U.S.A.), THE NEW ZEALAND RATIONALIST, THE RATIONALIST (Australia), DER FREIDENKER (Switzerland), LA RAISON (France), DON BASILIO (Italy).

Lecture Notices should reach the 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.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three-months, 4s. 4d.

SUGAR PLUMS

This is the last opportunity for reminding those wishing to attend the Annual Dinner on Saturday evening, January 7, in the Holborn Restaurant, but who have not applied for tickets to do so at once, enclosing 15s. per ticket, and if vegetarian, with instructions for any hotel accommodation required, to The General Secretary, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1. A number of diners are coming from the provinces and London is sure to be well represented.

The *Universe* comes out with a flaming headline—"Conversion Teams to Visit Every House in Country"—which looks like a rather formidable task to a mere unbeliever. Of course, Roman Catholics have always boasted about doing something like this, and as the visitors would always be priest-trained, they actually imagine conversions will come in by the million. Well, we hope that some of the non-Catholic houses they are going to bombard will be those of Freethinkers. We have an idea that "our Lord," even if aided by A. 1 conversion teams, will suffer a terrific defeat.

Fr. J. Heenan appears to be one of the leading lights in this movement for converting England, but with his record of almost complete failure in impressing anybody as to his qualifications, we wonder why he was chosen. He insists now that "the new approach should be through plain, simple, forthright instruction on what the Catholic Church teaches"—as if most people didn't know. And any Freethinker should be able metaphorically to wipe the floor with the kind of drivel we get from our Heenans and Martindales. If the converters have any doubt, let them try us.

The *Diary of a Dean* by Dean Inge, ought to prove that his nickname, "the Gloomy Dean," is a misnomer; it should also prove how far removed the princes of the Church are from their "flock." Judging from the extracts of the *Diary* that we have seen, a Dean's life seems to be lunches, dinners, banquets, and Mediterranean cruises. Blessed are ye poor, for ye shall have your banquets in heaven.

NEW YEAR'S WISHES TO THE CHIEF

Dear Chapman Cohen, may you rest you well,
In fireside armchair, or garden-seat;
May you rest you well, we all repeat,
Who learned from you to fear not God, nor Hell:
You taught us truth; your fee you now collect
In your retirement: affection and respect.

B.S.

MOUNTEBANKING

THE word "mountebank" is from the most charming of languages, Italian, for they say "montare in banco," to mount on a bench. It indicates quack doctor, one who proclaims his nostrums from a platform; but, more widely, any boastful pretender or charlatan, and the verb has come to signify any cheating by false pretences or boasts.

In recent years it has been applied to that ebullient Italian, Mussolini, and whosoever recalls a certain appalling picture of that dictator, in be-medalled splendour, rousing the baser emotions of his fellow-countrymen in the Ethiopian affair, dramatically juxtaposed in the cinema with one of the Ethiopian monarch, pleading with dignity his country's cause before the Assembly of the League of Nations, will probably think the abusive epithet then justifiably used. In the course of that man's life there came a time when his end was to be expected not from his origin, his early battle with the infamous church, his socialism, which indicated some degree of idealism: no, not from these. Nor is the end of which we speak the wretchedness of his death, for the pains of that were soon over; nor do we mean the haunted months immediately before his death. Such misadventure may come to the most immaculate. We may think of it as destiny, the fate wrought, against the will and hope of men, and according to ancient mythology, by the jealous gods, but, according to godless moderns, brought about by the inevitable concatenation of circumstances.

What became foreseeable was that one who withdrew from the task of seeking the solution of the various problems of his country's politics through the medium of free discussion, and silenced his inconvenient opponents by bullet or bludgeon, should deteriorate into a braggart: for after the Fascist revolution the essential problems remained much as before. So the great leader was impelled to whip up the emotions of his people by pointing the way to military glory, and instilling such maxims as "obey, believe, fight," maxims which in fact flourish everywhere, but not everywhere with the same luxuriance. Then can be foreseen that great disaster of peoples, war, a destruction even to victors. But these things too are under destiny, for whatever happens inevitably happens.

To assert the inevitability of specific moral actions is, however, deprecated by most Christians. There is Calvinism indeed, but that twist in Christianity is not now popular, at least in the civilised parts of the U.K. and U.S.A. The Christian leader usually emphasises the moral responsibility of man, despite that terrible picture in the New Testament, of Christ's Chancellor of the Exchequer, Judas Iscariot. Jesus was, via Miss Dorothy Sayers, the man born to be king, but Judas was, per the holy story book, the man born to be a traitor.

Poor chap; when he was a little fellow, playing marbles in Galilee, or wherever he then lived, he knew nothing of his awful fate. His mother kissed him, just as other mothers kissed their sons. Perhaps she smacked him occasionally and no doubt his father sometimes got angry with him; but neither of these, nor any of his friends or relatives, had an inkling that he would be the keeper of the moneybags of the first Christian community. Think of a god selecting Judas, even before he was born, to betray the Son-redeemer! If the poor fellow's parents had known what their god intended to do with the lad, would they not have cried out in agony against their fate, and have tried to strangle little Judas in his cradle?

It might be thought that in these days no sensible man would assert the doctrine of God's deliberate devotion of Judas to a traitor's career; but to refrain from such assertion is to give up part, and a great part, of the Christian story. Did not Christ say to his disciples "one of you shall betray me?" Many have wished to save God's reputation, thinking that possible, and to do it have even given up the Bible. Atheists are able to take a calm view, and exhibit Judas as the most maligned character in fiction. Let us leave Judas in that category, and turn to Jesus, who brings us back to mountebanks.

Judas forbade that we should describe Jesus as a quack, but he does remind us of pretenders, and of a gentleman who writes that the Incarnation was beyond all comparison the most important event in history. This assertion was made by one of the officially most influential men of his day, William Temple, once Archbishop of Canterbury.

One element in the definition of a mountebank was declamation from a platform, and Archbishops do that; although their habitual platform is called a pulpit. That is a holier kind of platform than those used in mere secular affairs, which are themselves more respectable than those lowly things known as soap boxes, from which Atheists have at times declaimed. There is, however, nothing intellectually despicable in proclaiming from a soap box; it is what you proclaim, not how you proclaim, that makes the difference. However much we might be tempted, near Christmastime, to say only nice things about Christians, it remains difficult to do otherwise than think their teaching a nostrum, a quack medicine, that men take at deadly peril to their intellectual health.

The mentality of archbishops, bishops, and minor clergy needs some explanation. The Freudians might indicate to us an explanation along the lines of the father-son relationship. Father knows everything; and the clergyman's father is the complex of his teachers, school chapel, disciplined praying, and pious books. We might call it the Christian tradition; and just as children fear to question their physical father's authority, thinking him omnipotent and all-wise, so does the clergyman fear the authority of the Christian tradition, and thinks it sacrilege to question it.

Then there are the common people. If the mass of people, the herd, breaks away from the Christian belief, then the parson will be a mere nonentity. With that impinging on his consciousness, the young clergyman clings to his Faith, becomes, in time, a canon, a dean, a bishop, or even an archbishop; and then, at any time, he may say, "The Incarnation is the greatest event that has ever occurred, and is that beyond all comparison."

Then we have an educational system that encourages the priestly superstition. Our public schools have chapels, and their masters are selected from those who are themselves believers, or those who so reverence "good form" that they would never dream of upsetting the established customary shibboleths. Even the Board of Education,

guardian of the mind of the less privileged child, takes part in the bad work. It has published a pamphlet, "Citizens Growing Up," emphasising the need to return to the Christian Faith.

Yet how difficult it is for anyone who reads to believe the New Testament story. John, for example, which the Archbishop called the profoundest of all writings, has, in every chapter, the ring of a deliberate faking, to prove that Jesus was a god. In the face of this its evident character the distinguished cleric goes on to tell his readers the old fairy story. History, he said, in its full meaning, dates from the Incarnation. He tells us of the Crucifixion, the Ascension, of "when the physical presence of the Lord was withdrawn." "The modern world," he said, "has lost its way. Every department of life is effected with futility."

Shall we call him a mountebank? He certainly proclaimed a nostrum.

J. G. LUPTON.

FREETHINKING TO SOME PURPOSE

IN his economic history of the Roman Empire, Rostovtzeff puts forward the thesis that the civil wars of the second century A.D. destroyed the old system of government by its citizens and there grew up in its stead a bureaucratic order. The famous reforms of Diocletian and Constantine were not the inspiration of original genius, but the feeble consecration of a pernicious system already in existence. This system wherein nearly every trade, profession and occupation was turned into the obligation of an hereditary caste, produced a state not far removed from slavery for all, under the "oriental despotism" of the emperors. Though the abolition of the old classes and the transference of the business of governing into the hands of bureaucrats might seem at first sight a levelling-up process, "slavery and equality are incompatible," says the author. "A wave of resignation spread over the Empire. It was useless to fight, better to submit and bear silently the burden of life, in the hope of a better one—after death."

It was these conditions of a hopeless political servitude and of a culture become formal and sterile in its rigid framework that provided so fruitful a ground for the expansion of Christianity and the development of its Catholic Church. Christianity became the grand escapism for a despairing generation. The impoverished and credulous masses grasped eagerly at the mystic promise of another life where their frustrations would be ended and their aspirations realised. For the intelligentsia, too, it had its allurements; it offered a new field where originality and expression, that could no longer be satisfied in the conventionalised schools of the *grammaticus* and the *rhetor*, might find outlet, as such men as Jerome, Salvianus and Augustine did. True, it was escape from one servitude to another, but the new creed had a novelty and vigour which the decadent paganism was incapable of giving.

Yet it *was* another slavery as we, looking back over the centuries, realise only too well. Had conditions arisen to give a renewed vigour to the great Graeco-Roman culture, thirty generations of mankind might have been spared the darkness and obscurantism of the succeeding ages. And we, too, perhaps, might be standing on a threshold that offered a more encouraging prospect than at present seems likely to be our lot. For there is an ominous parallel between the fifth and the twentieth century of these *anna domini*, and the shadow

of a like cataclysm in our time is not so excluded as we could wish.

In the critical position in which we find ourselves to-day the rationalist has a duty to society—the duty to see that freedom to think to some purpose is preserved and that our best intellects are not drawn, in despair, into a new “church.” Atheism is not a negative attitude to life like the apathetic agnosticism, recently exposed in this journal by F. A. Ridley. The rationalist is one who argues from facts and strives to arrive at a constructive conclusion. He cannot be bound by any *a priori* concept of the way of life, nor submit to a “discipline,” which is but another word for servitude to another’s ideas. He must be free, free to think, and not compelled to abrogate his judgment to creeds or prophets, whether old or new. It may well depend on the efforts of rationalists to preserve free thinking, whether or not we shall avoid the abyss of a new Dark Age and slavery to a new Church.

P. C. KING.

CORRESPONDENCE

ANARCHISM

Sir,—May I point out to John Rowland that Anarchism does not necessarily imply, as he seems to think, “complete individualism.” Of the four main tendencies of thought that have manifested themselves in the Anarchist movement since its inauguration in the late sixties of the nineteenth century—Anarchist Communism (Kropotkin, Malatesta), Mutualism (Proudhon, Warren), “Christian” Anarchism (Tolstoy), and Individualist Anarchism (Sterner, Tucker)—only the body of ideas associated with such men as Max Sterner, John Henry Mackay and, to a lesser extent, Benjamin Tucker, can be said to have any similarity with “complete” Individualism. Even Emma Goldman, whose Anarchism appears to have been very much influenced by Nietzsche, vigorously denounces Individualism in her essay, “The Place of the Individual in Society.” Anarchists certainly emphasise the importance of *individuality*, but the Individualism whose leading idea seems to be that of

“Damn you, Jack, I’m all right,” finds no favour with the modern Anarchist, though he certainly rejects its extreme opposite—the idea that society has an existence apart from the individuals who comprise it. I have read fairly widely the works of both Alex Comfort and Herbert Read and I cannot remember having come across them advising Individualism in the sense that I have defined it, which seems to be the sense in which most people (including the readers of this journal) would understand it.

Also, with regard to the letter of Alfred Corrick, I should like to point out that the present régime in Russia bears as little resemblance to the original ideas of the pioneers of Communism as does Fascism. Communism is an economic theory which holds that for social justice to prevail it is necessary to abolish the present class structure of society and replace it with a system in which the means of production and distribution are owned and controlled by the people as a whole and not, as they are to-day, by a privileged class (whether it be that of the private capitalists or of State officials). It also implies the replacement of the government of men by the management of things, the abolition of the monetary system and the establishment of economic equality as the prerequisite to equality of opportunity. Not one of these conditions exists in Russia to-day. Private capitalism has been replaced by State capitalism and there exists a hierarchy of privilege equal to that of the Western nations. Thus, to write of the tyranny of “communistic government” is nonsense to anyone who has any acquaintance with the ideas of such men as Marx, Morris or Kropotkin, or even the pre-1917 Lenin, since all of them envisaged Communism as a non-governmental society, whatever differences of opinion they had concerning the means of attaining it. Communism to them was in fact, though Marx and Morris would probably have refused to admit it, an Anarchist system of society.—

Yours, etc.,
S. E. PARKER.

WORLD GOVERNMENT

Sir,—That was a fine and timely letter from J. G. Davies in *The Freethinker* of October 16 under the heading “Drifting to War.”

Lovers of peace will have to unite and work as they have never done before if the present drift is to be arrested. They must fight not only indifference but the quickly spreading conviction that another war is inevitable. It has to come sooner or later—that is the talk. With modern weapons, and the hatred engendered by despair at ever abolishing war, another world conflict will endanger the survival of the race.

Somerset Maugham says in his recently published “Note-book”: “I think it possible that, having arrived at a certain high stage of civilisation, men will wilfully revert to barbarism; or fall back from inability to maintain the high level they have reached.” H. G. Wells, as is well known, died completely pessimistic about the future. Now we have Bertrand Russell, obviously overborne by the contemporary scene, regarding an atomic war as a desirable possibility. Thus we have the finest intelligences joining the prophets of death. As for the Christian Churches. . . . ?

World Government is the only alternative to these recurrent slaughterings. It is probably too late to stop another war and, threatened with this prospect, our social activities are like the building of castles of sand before the advancing tide.—

Yours, etc.,

E. A. McDONALD.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 3, 7 p.m.: “Ethics and Modern Thought,” Mr. H. J. BLACKHAM, B.A.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Coopers Hall, 12, Shaw Street, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: “Why I am an Agnostic.”

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: “The Palestine Problem,” JAMIL ALI AL-SELEH.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: “The Mid-Century,” Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

OUTDOOR

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Bombed site, St. Mary’s Gate).—Lectures every lunch hour, 1 p.m.: Messrs. E. BILLING and G. WOODCOCK.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

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

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A TWENTIETH CENTURY MARTYR

ON 13th October, 1909, over 40 years ago, the walls of the fortress of Montujich, in Catholic Spain, echoed the rifle-volley that put an end to the life of Francisco Ferrer y Guardia, Freethinker, philosophic Anarchist and educational pioneer. Yet far from eradicating the pernicious doctrine of secular education which he advocated, as the government fondly imagined it would, the death of Ferrer brought his doctrine to the eyes and ears of thousands of people who would have otherwise remained in ignorance of it. Not only this, but the wave of protest that swept through the liberal and radical worlds at his legal murder—in some cases it even resulted in violence, as in Paris—was instrumental in bringing down the Cabinet under whose orders his frame-up had been carried out. (It is a sad comment upon the decline of the "eternal vigilance" for liberty in the world, that in Spain to-day similar murders take place without any protest whatever being voiced, except in some isolated revolutionary circles.) Francisco Ferrer was born on 10th January, 1859, in the village of Alella, some twelve miles outside Barcelona. His parents were well-to-do farmers and devout Catholics. Until he was twelve years of age Ferrer went to school in both his native village and the neighbouring village of Teya. At the age of 13 he started work as a shop assistant in Barcelona and he remained in that occupation until he was 20, when he became a ticket inspector on a railway running between Barcelona and the French frontier. Such a position enabled him to act as a valuable means of communication between the exiled Republican Leader, Ruiz Zorilla, and his followers. In May, 1885, however, he resigned and went to live in Paris.

It was in Paris that the series of events that eventually led to Ferrer's death commenced. After many vicissitudes he finally succeeded in obtaining a position as professor of Spanish at the Paris Philotechnic and Grand Orient of France. It was here that he met Mlle. Meunier, who was, in his own words, "a wealthy old lady with no dependants, who was fond of travel and studied Spanish with the object of visiting my country. She was a convinced Catholic and a very scrupulous observer of the rules of her Church. To her, religion and morality were the same thing, and unbelief—or 'impiety,' as the faithful say—was an evident sign of vice and crime." Ferrer became friendly with her and she invited him to travel with her in various countries, which he did. However, since he could not "conceive life without propaganda," he attempted to convert her to his point of view. He succeeded to the extent of ridding her of reverence for the Church, but she still clung to her belief in the existence of a supreme being. Nevertheless, she was determined to endow the educational work that was now the purpose of Ferrer's life (unfortunately, it is not possible within an article of this size to do justice to what exactly were the aims of Ferrer—perhaps this can be done in a further article) and when she died she left him sufficient property to allow him to go ahead with his scheme for a secular school, a school of a character very advanced for those days, to combat the poisoning of the child's mind by the Catholic-dominated educational system of Spain.

Now in possession of the means to realise what had previously been a dream, Ferrer returned to Spain and in the following November (Mlle. Meunier having died in April, 1901) the Escuela Moderna was opened in Barcelona. From then onwards the Modern School made

slow, but steady progress. But in 1906, the government decided it was about time it clamped down upon what it considered to be a threat to its existence. Ferrer was arrested and charged with alleged complicity in the assassination attempt of Mateo Morral, a former librarian of the School. Ferrer was imprisoned for a year before being brought to trial, but in spite of strenuous efforts by the authorities, the civil court, before which he was finally brought, acquitted him. Upon his release Ferrer immediately attempted to restart his school, but the government, robbed of its prey, refused to authorise his attempt. Unable to put his ideas into actual practice, Ferrer turned to a wider sphere of activity and in 1908 the "International League for the Rational Education of Children" came into existence, with Anatole France as honorary president and Ferrer as president. An International Committee was formed with representatives from England, Germany, Italy, Belgium, France and Switzerland, among them being Ernst Haeckel. The League also published a revue called "L'Ecole Rénovée," in Paris.

Once again, however, the Spanish Government attempted to rid itself of someone who was undermining the social and religious dogmas upon which it depended in order to justify its existence. And this time it succeeded. On 31st August, 1909, Ferrer was arrested and charged with being the leader and fomentor of the Barcelona "Red Week," which had taken place a month previous. He was brought before a Military Court and found guilty after a trial that was blatantly "fixed" from beginning to end. For not only were those witnesses favourable to him kept in custody miles away from Barcelona, not only was the defending officer given only 24 hours in which to study an indictment which had taken five weeks to manufacture, but three years after Ferrer's death the Supreme Military Council of Spain had to declare him innocent and restore his property to his relatives! Again demonstrating the criminal means by which the Papacy seeks to maintain its tyranny.

At a quarter to nine on the morning of 13th October, Francisco Ferrer faced the firing squad in the grim castle of Montujich. As the squad prepared to carry out his execution he cried, "Aim well, my sons! It is not your fault. I am innocent. Long live the Escuela . . ." but he was not allowed to finish his sentence, for three bullets crashed into his brain. . . . Thus he died and his name was inscribed on the list of martyrs who have given, and are still giving, their lives for human justice and freedom.

S. E. PARKER.

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