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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

## Peace and Goodwill

ON the evening of Christmas Day, that ancient pagan festival now transformed from the birth of the Sun God to the birth of the Son of God, the B.B.C. took up its self-appointed task of falsifying history in the interests of religion; a role which has become traditional since its inception by that grim old Puritan, Lord Reith.

Ever since that now far-off day on 25th December, A.D. 274, when the pagan Emperor of Rome, Aurelian, first proclaimed that day as the feast of the birth of Mithra, "the unconquered sun (*Sol Invictus*)," Christmas under successive religious dispensations has been ostensibly a religious holiday upon which vast numbers of fowls, turkeys and other birds worthy, no doubt, of a better fate, have been consumed with gusto in honour of the Incarnation of the Son of God.

However, to-day, now that both the Incarnation and the Son of God are being called into question as regards their historical existence, it becomes increasingly necessary for the clergy to bolster up fiction as authentic history, which explains, at first sight, the rather astonishing broadcast of the Rev. Donald Soper, D.D., from Broadcasting House on Christmas Day, 1949.

With regard to this particular effusion and its author, we once had the pleasure of debating with him many years ago on his own chosen ground on Tower Hill. It was his Tower Hill addresses on Wednesdays that first launched Dr. Soper on the road of fame\*—Broadcasting House.

At the time this now famous preacher of the Gospel struck me as a by no means unfavourable representative of his peculiar calling, and the fact that during the last war, he consistently took up a pacifist position, seems to indicate at least, the moral integrity which is required by supporters of what, whether right or wrong, was an unpopular view. However, even then, this minister and successor of John Wesley was an eloquent orator rather than an exact thinker, which is not an uncommon trait among popular preachers.

Such a supposition was certainly confirmed by the above-mentioned broadcast, the essence of which was contained in the speaker's concluding summary that Christianity was the only religion which had the courage to proclaim "peace on earth and goodwill to all men" as the essential of its message. All of which sounded quite impressive, particularly after a gastronomic saturnalia which, incidentally, makes the modern Christmas revert more and more to the status of a pagan, rather than of a Christian festival. When considered in cold blood, however, a more utterly mendacious statement can never have been made, even on the B.B.C., which is saying a good deal!

In the first place, Christianity itself has meant very different things to different people. It was, for example,

\* In his book *Question Time on Tower Hill*, he refers to the occasion of our debate and pronounced it a "draw."

the religion of the Roman Empire and also of the barbarians who over-ran the Empire. It was the religion of Charles Stuart and also of Cromwell who cut off Charles' head. It was the religion of the Protestant Reformers and equally of the Roman Catholic Church which burnt the Reformers at the stake. It was the religion of the Crusaders, both of those who conquered Jerusalem and burned alive the Jews in their Synagogues, and of those who added Prussia to Christendom by organising systematic man-hunts against the pagan "natives". It was the religion of the late Dr. Winnington Ingram, Bishop of London, who declared once in our hearing that to kill Germans during the First World War was a meritorious act pleasing to God. And it is to-day, the religion of the Rev. Dr. Donald Soper who holds that all war is un-Christian. Christianity is the religion alike of the Fascist Franco, and of the Socialist Cripps. Which of these versions and varieties of Christianity would it be true to say, this is the authentic Christianity which has promoted "peace and goodwill" amongst men?

Despite the many attempts that are being made to whitewash it, historically speaking, Christianity has been a religion based on violence, on conquest and upon naked force. To whatever period of its long history one looks one sees the same general features. In antiquity it owed its successful establishment as a State religion to violence, and the legend that it owed its initial triumph to "the sweet reasonableness of the Gospel," is a legend pure and simple.

From the end of the fourth century when it introduced what one of its own saints called "a new and inexplicable crime upon earth," the death penalty for unbelief, the old pagan cults of antiquity were systematically uprooted. That none of the numerous anti-Christian writers have survived except in Christian "refutations," is the best possible proof of the success of this legal terrorism, as, for example, A.D. 447, the works of all anti-Christian authors were banned "to avert the wrath of God".

Whilst in the Middle Ages, which, we would remind Dr. Soper, is the only epoch in European history when Europe has *really* been Christian in belief and practice, examples of religious intolerance and persecution are so numerous as to be positively embarrassing. Whether we take the compulsory baptism of the heathen Germans at, literally, the sword's point, by the great Christian Emperor, Charlemagne, or the long drawn-out horrors of the Crusades, the extermination of the Albigensis, or the savage "Acts" for the "combustion of heretics" (*de hæretico comburendo*) passed against the dissenting Lollards by English Parliaments, the moral to be drawn is an identical one.

Nor is the social record of Christianity in modern times much better. The hideous atrocities perpetrated by the Catholic conquerors of South America, and the wholesale extermination of the North American aborigines by the Protestant Pilgrim Fathers and their offspring, were both inseparably bound up with the expansion of



Christianity. Whilst in Europe, the terrible Thirty Years' War (1618-48), which turned Central Europe into a wilderness, represented the fitting termination of the "Wars of Religion". The Spanish Inquisition in its dealings with the Protestants and Oliver Cromwell in his dealings with the Irish Catholics, repeat the grim story of torture, murder, arson, and wholesale destruction in the interests of the religion "of peace and goodwill".

If in more recent times the element of naked violence has been less conspicuous this is solely due to the modern decline in the power of religion over public affairs. Even so, we do not recall any protest at the horrors of modern total war being made by any of the official churches. Whilst the recent example of Spain indicates that the age of Vatican-inspired crusades is not yet dead, and both the Church of Rome, which is openly advocating atomic war, and the Church of England which is publicly condoning it, do not indicate any conspicuous change of heart in this respect.

"Peace on earth and goodwill to men." Truly noble sentiments, but when the B.B.C. and Dr. Soper ascribe them to Christianity, we think that in the historic phrase of Mark Twain, the connection is "greatly exaggerated."

F. A. RIDLEY.

### A SCIENTIST AND RUSSIA

I AM troubled, for I have seen a *Manchester Guardian*, and there I have read that Professor Bernal has congratulated "Russia and all peace-loving people". No doubt every Tom, Dick and Harry has the right to congratulate whom he will, but there is something disturbing about the professor's expression of rejoicing. It was spectacular political propaganda, as blazing as that recent complaint of Mr. Shinwell concerning the quality of the paper in which the Lord Mayor wrapped his guests' chipped potatoes.

Felicitations of Russia and all peace-loving people at the harmless use of atomic energy is very good. We would all do that, for what better hope has the world than that the power dreadfully menacing its civilisation is capable also of ameliorating the lot of man, by levelling mountains, diverting rivers, and curing diseases? We know that it is capable of peaceful utilisation, and some, in their innocence, have thought that the U.S.A. and the U.K. had already been seeking to harness the atomic disintegrating force for industrial purposes, and had supplied radio-active material from atomic sources to hospitals for the cure of that dread enemy of man, cancer. These innocents have, however, been wrong. The professor's remarks imply that, for he congratulated us all on what he termed the first step taken for the peaceful exploitation of atomic energy, that is the levelling of some of the Ural hills by the recent atomic explosion in Russia, solely for non-military purposes. The professor unreservedly accepted the Russian report.

The professor's remarks fittingly appeared about the time of a cartoon in the *Daily Worker*, depicting the Soviet atomic explosion. The peaceful intention of the Soviet was there represented by the group of people at the control point of the explosion, one being a nurse, a symbol of self-sacrificing love. The Russian military forces were not shown. In the foreground, however, were two hairy yahoos representing western imperialism, and yelling "barbarians" at the lovable people detonating the bomb.

It would be absurd to suppose that the Russians do not intend to utilize the atom bomb for peaceful purposes. Her geographical situation has given her governments a

lively wish to break out of natural barriers, towards the south. The northern coast of Russia freezes in the winter, and too many of her great rivers flow northward. Her engineers must have long wished to divert these southward, and the success of such an undertaking would substantially better Russia's economic condition. Moreover, does anyone suppose the Soviet does not wish to vie with the West in the conquest of disease. There are great Russian names in medical science.

Professor Bernal's song, besides implying that the western world has used its atomic knowledge only for military purposes, implies also that Russia is less concerned with the military use of atomic energy than are U.S.A. and the U.K. An antidote to this is General Bedell Smith's observation in the *Daily Telegraph* of November 18, that the whole Russian industrial organisation is geared to the possibility of war. Her heavy industries are already in the difficult-to-bomb Urals. Then we have the various reports of the stations of the Russian army units on the borders of its territory, of its immense air-force, and its submarines. We have no need to claim that the western world is not keen to develop its own military power, but only a fanatic or a liar would contend that the Soviet is not very keen on keeping militarily on a level or in advance of the West, which, rightly or wrongly, it supposes as a danger to its might. That being so, the only commonsense inference is that also Russia is concerned firstly with the military uses of atomic power, and only secondarily with its peaceful use. It would be impossible to prove that Russia is concerned with the military use of the atomic force more or less than are the U.S.A. and the U.K. It is, therefore, strange that some whose reputation is high in science should talk as if there were no doubt about the matter.

It was, I think, Professor Bernal who very reasonably said that a scientist might, or even should, be interested as an ordinary member of the public in politics. In this connection it is probable that many Freethinkers have a preference for some part of Soviet life over our own. Our institution of royalty and its accompanying adulations are deplorable anachronisms, and our glorious parasitic growth, the Church of Christ, whose chief English representative wears a mitre which has in form come down to us from the time when Dagon, the Fish-god, was worshipped in ancient Assyria, is more than an incongruity. Then there is capitalism. Even if we believe in that we know it is a common object of reprobation.

On the other hand, waiving the question whether Stalin is in essence a king, and grossly adulated, we have the Russian Church. Its priests are paid by the Soviet Government, i.e., they are used for keeping the Russian people under spiritual domination. In recent reading I saw the pay of a village priest put at 4,000 roubles per month, as against that of a fairly favoured workman of 600 roubles. In Czechoslovakia there is a struggle, not to destroy religion, but to use it in the interests of the State. Priests accepting the government control are to be paid government salaries. There are also the Soviet forced-labour camps to be remembered.

Freethinkers have also to keep in mind that the Soviet Government does not favour free scientific discussion. Professor Eric Ashby, taking part in the radio discussion "Getting to know the Russians," told of a Soviet decree which forbade Russian scientists to write for foreign publications. Such writing was stigmatised as due to bourgeois vanity. He asserted also that free and easy discussion with Soviet scientists was impossible. However, free conversation in Russia of any Russian with a foreigner is, according to another speaker, Mrs. Ralph



Poston, a criminal offence. This lady, although knowing enough Russian to carry on a conversation, could do so only rarely. Major-General Hilton confirmed the difficulty. Free conversation, he said, could be indulged in only when the Russian was sure that there was no-one about who would probably denounce him.

Another speaker described the living conditions of the Russians as extremely low, and its economic announcements as open to doubt. The Russians are, of course, keen to have their people believe that their living conditions are better than those of their countertypes in the West. Absurd reports are, therefore, put out, e.g., that Britain was on May Day, 1949, an armed camp, with machine-guns at street corners to suppress the feared revolt of the workers.

In view of this we would be wise to require further evidence before believing the reports of the levelling of mountains which have appeared in the Press, apparently at Russian instigation. We would also be wise if we probe Professor Bernal's opinions as we would those of the communist-ecclesiastic saluter of royalty, the Dean of Canterbury.

J. G. LUPTON.

## WHITHER WEATHERHEAD?

I

THE Rev. Leslie Weatherhead is now the most popular London preacher; in this post-Parker epoch, no great distinction. Pulpit stars have been diminished in number and reduced in magnitude. Preaching is a decadent art, and never less in demand than in this era. There is one preacher who would be a more powerful magnet—if he chose to seek ordination. The Rev. Cyril Joad would, I am sure, surpass the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead. Without the "Rev.", a few months ago a queue of twelve hundred, it is reported, waited in Glasgow to hear this recent convert to Christianity.

Notwithstanding the Rev. Leslie's popularity, I was amused to hear that, if his organist kept a diary, he might sometimes write, as did Samuel Pepys of his minister Dr. Mills, "Mr. Weatherhead preached, I know not how, for I was asleep." No doubt the organist awakes in time for the closing hymn, like the parish clerk, who alas, having been an umpire the previous day, shouted "Over" instead of "Amen." I fancy, though, even the organist must have remained unsomnolent on a Sunday in August when his minister preached on "The Tyranny of Secret Fears," and touched on sexual perversions which Samuel Pepys would have thought best screened by the secrecy of his shorthand and not fit for a sermon. I was not surprised to read two anonymous letters in *City Temple Tidings*, bitterly complaining. I regret the anonymity, for it is certain that others felt that the writer's opinions were by no means shameful. I am not amongst the "nice-minded people" said to be shocked by the discourse, but I am one of the fair-minded ones who cannot but ask if the reverend gentleman was playing fair? I suffered, as he evidently did, from prudery in my youth, and if in my *Testament of a Victorian Youth*, regardless of the feelings of others, I had ruthlessly torn aside the veil, I might have brought the censure of the late James Douglas with the resultant rising royalties. Therefore, Mr. Weatherhead's candour in these matters attracts my admiration. There is, however, a time for all things, and to invite spinsters to hear a discourse that must have been most disturbing, if not disconcerting from the use of terms they did not understand, was not quite gentlemanly. I know of one lady of mature years who

was visibly perturbed. Sexual fears are not the only secret ones, and the subject in itself was no warning of what to expect. It was as unfair as it would be if I, an antiquarian of some repute, announced that I was to speak on the City churches and then launched out into freethinking diatribes against their creeds. Furthermore, there was no opportunity for discussion, and I fear the coward's castle of the pulpit was in this matter again in evidence. Mr. Weatherhead chides the cowardice of the anonymous letter writers. Is his own courage very manifest when—like so many of his cloth—he will tackle controversial questions when he cannot be answered back?

There was another equally amazing sermon in October. Here the organist may have slept, for musicians are usually infantile in their ignorance of theology, and I suspect would be as musical in a mosque as in a church—if the money was ample. The title this time was "God's Goodness and Human Suffering." It might have been called "The Problem of Pain." This much exercised my youthful mind, though I heard little of it from the evangelical pulpit under which first I sat. There was an obvious reason for silence there. What did it matter that we suffered so much "on this terrestrial ball," when only by the mercy of the Lord we were to be spared infinite and eternal pain in a posthumous existence? A rapid consumption or a cruel cancer paled before the too effectual fires of Hell. Naïvely I wrote in my diary that I proposed to write a paper for the Bible Class on "The Problem of Pain," but too much overtime made me refrain! My fellow adolescents lost nothing by this omission. I should have platitudinised about a "broken arc" and "a heavenly round," and perhaps quoted one of our hymns, "Some time, some time we'll understand." Later the problem became more personal, and thereby less platitudinous in solution. A Methodist mother—albeit a devoted disciple of one of Mr. Weatherhead's predecessors! the Rev. R. J. Campbell, as a martyr to rheumatoid arthritis, resolved, like a Roman matron might have done, that she would quit this world in which she felt she was useless to society and—mistakenly—a burden to her loved ones. A little more than a year later a friend of twenty-nine—a promising architect—after being under a doctor's sentence of death for a year, went to his doom like dumb driven cattle, silently, even sullenly, so that his end never pointed a moral or adorned a pious tale in a pulpit. Where I went from these staggering blows I have related in my "Testament."

WILLIAM KENT.

(To be concluded)

## COMPARISON ILLUSORY

The sun burns fiercely; o'er shadeless fells  
White clouds make blue slow-shifting shadows crawl,  
O'er moors, where no baby waters fall  
With splash and bubble, fresh from secret wells;  
Baked are their channels, hot their peaty swells;  
A sultry summer silence lies on all,  
Save bleat of lambs, and curlew's ringing call—  
Slow sleepy hours rich Memory's treasure tells!  
Whilst empires vanish, hills may look the same;  
Yet Time, unseen, is wearing these away;  
As hills to Time, so seems love's fickle flame  
To the great hills, which beautiful still stay,  
And constant, whilst successive passions die—  
To human thought eternal as the sky!

A. SLATER.



## ON DEFINING ATHEISM

THE present state of affairs regarding the definitions of atheism has clearly become highly unsatisfactory. Ought not a Freethought paper to be able to do something to clear up the muddle?

My complaint is this. While, originally and fundamentally, atheism as a denial of the existence of gods (cf., Cicero, *On the Nature of Gods*) means a statement of objective (negative) facts outside of man, a tendency has been manifest recently to limit the definition to indicating nothing more than the existence of a psychological fact inside the atheist's mind, viz., the lack of belief. By this new development I mean Bertrand Russell and another Rationalist authority, Joseph McCabe (*Atheism*, in his *Rationalist Encyclopedia*).

Bertrand Russell, who of all men should have known better, avows (*The Literary Guide*, July, 1949) that he never quite knows whether he should label himself "Agnostic" or "Atheist." Actually, he diluted the meaning of "Atheist" into that of "Agnostic" when he waveringly declared himself to be "Atheist" solely because he does not believe the existence of the Christian god Yahveh or of the Homeric gods to be sufficiently probable to him to be worth serious consideration.

McCabe expressly departs from the usual British and Continental usage of defining the atheist as "one who denies or disbelieves the existence of God"—and confines the meaning to "the absence of belief in God," that is to say, to exclusively stating a *psychological* fact of the atheist's mentality. This is plainly inadequate as any atheist means by his atheism much more than merely a state of his own mind, even if this state of "lack of belief" had resulted, as McCabe says (p. 250), from "having examined and rejected as invalid all evidence for God."

Now what are McCabe's reasons for such a self-stultifying subjectism?

He says there that (1) the definition of the atheist as one who denies the existence of God is usually a controversial device of the religious writer to maintain the odium which often attaches to the word—and so is unacceptable to atheists; and (2) that it would be difficult to quote more than one or two atheist writers in all literature who deny such existence (of God).

My comment to (1) and (2) is that the religious writer (odium or no odium) justly means by "God" one of his own Christian gods, Yahveh or Jeshua or The Ghost; these are, of course, his chief deities and we need not here enumerate all the minor "elohim" (gods) of the Mosaic books and their further celestial descendants, both benign and malign, swarming in the New Testament. What is relevant here is that, quite certainly, any *atheist* denies the existence of at least, Yahveh and other "elohim," if not also that of the dove-like Ghost or of Yahveh's son, Jesus. Actually, it would be difficult to quote an atheist who would not deny the existence of Yahveh. So McCabe's reasons for his rejection of denial appear to be singularly mistaken.

But what, precisely, could have misled him so? I surmise that he has, in this instance, mixed up the two possible senses of "God," those of a personal and of an impersonal God. While being mistakenly anxious to avoid his, atheist's, committal to the denial of an impersonal "God," he seems to have forgotten that it is generally the personal god Yahveh that is being denied on valid anthropological and zoological grounds, by atheists and even liberal theologians.

But is there really any ground for McCabe's avoidance of the denial even of this "impersonal God," which word he rightly suspects to be a mere name (p. 577)? There

is no justification any more for such a self-defeating limitation to merely disbelieving even the "impersonal God."

The means to make out an unimpeachable logical case for the atheists denial of the existence of any "Supreme Being" connoted by the expression "impersonable God" are now furnished by the modern development of mathematical logic. According to Professor Heinrich Scholz, the noted German mathematical logician, the principle of the excluded contradiction, in its new logistical form, states precisely that *there exists nothing to which a defined property both applies and does not apply* (*Archiv für Philosophie*, No. 1, p. 49). This logical axiom conclusively quashes the theological pattern of definition of (impersonal) God as "something that is both omnipresent (=everywhere) and (as "spirit") immaterial (=not anywhere=nowhere)." It is obvious that the theological implication thus involves a denial of the principle of excluded contradiction and so is to be, once for all, rejected as a self-contradiction. As the new form of the principle shows, a contradictory expression excludes logically, with the utmost certainty, *any* question of possible existence (of a referent) in the world (cf., Prof. R. Carnap, *Meaning and Necessity*, p. 21). This, I repeat, means the second valid denial of (impersonal) God, and both denials together make the whole argument *as conclusive* as ever an argument can be.

As an immediate upshot of my argument, I propose the following modification of the definition of the disbeliever. Atheist: one who denies both the existence of all personal gods on valid empirical grounds and that of any impersonal God (Supreme Being) on valid logical grounds.

This definition is, in my opinion, wholly adequate as it comprehensively and exactly states what the (negative) facts and strict logic require, viz., that no gods whatsoever exist. The definition has the further advantage of actually making atheism, in all of its senses, a truism; and, incidentally, of dispensing with Bertrand Russell's self-styled "philosophical (but really irrational) agnosticism" as both a psychological monstrosity as regards the mythical gods and a logical impossibility as regards the contradictory "Supreme Being."

Now the ultimate upshot of such an argument as mine is, I believe, that the problem of the relation between reason and revelation ceases to be subject of philosophy; it is solved by completely eliminating "God" and other primitive survivals. It is C. E. M. Joad who admits lately (cf., *Decadence*, 1949) that philosophers themselves are beginning to doubt, under the impact of the Logical Positivism (see on the latter Prof. Ph. Frank's *Modern Science and Its Philosophy*, Harvard University Press, 1949), whether their former main business, metaphysics, is possible at all! This, however, comes naturally after the metaphysics have been defeated in the exact sciences. Says Prof. Max Bense, another noted mathematical logician, in winding up his recent summary of the natural philosophy (*Moderne Naturphilosophie*, 1949): "Our concept of nature has, on the whole, gained in logical and mathematical perspicuity which means the advance of the logical and rational point of view; and it has lost in perceptual representation which means a retreat of the transcendental and phaenomenological point of view. The question whether the events of nature are to be interpreted idealistically or realistically, has become a secondary question. The question of the compatibility of modern natural sciences with Christian dogmas is of no interest to the science itself and, ultimately, is an obsolete question."

GREGORY S. SMELTERS.



## THE FAITH UNDILUTED

ONE of the constant complaints of liberal thinkers of all theological schools has been that it is difficult to get a clear, concise statement of what the more rigidly orthodox Christians are thinking. There are so many disputes between writers of various lines of thought that it is frequently a problem to decide just what is the orthodox doctrines on, say, the Atonement or the Virgin Birth. It is, of course, possible to go back to the Bible and to see what is said there about these matters; but, as Freethinkers and Unitarians have pointed out many times, there are passages which are of extremely doubtful authenticity; and these passages are often those which provide the clue (or which should provide the clue) towards the nature of Christian action.

One of the most eminent theologians of the day is Dr. Emil Brunner, Professor of Theology in the University of Zurich; and in 1936 he wrote a little book entitled "Our Faith", which was soon translated into half-a-dozen languages, including English. The English edition has long been unobtainable, but it has now been re-issued at 7s. 6d. by the S. C. M. Press.

I am not one of those writers who believes that it is possible to shut oneself up in a cast-iron box or an ivory tower, maturing one's ideas without any kind of reference to what others of different schools of thought are doing. Indeed, I think that one of the curses of theological controversy in this country has been the crystallisation of divisions between thinkers, so that those on either sides of the fence find it well-nigh impossible for any kind of mutual understanding to emerge. I hold, therefore, that a book of this sort is valuable reading for all, including Freethinkers, Rationalists, Unitarians, Free Churchmen, Anglo-Catholics, and followers of the Vatican. For Dr. Brunner, even though he states the "mysteries" of orthodox Christianity in a dogmatic way which will necessarily be unacceptable to those of us who believe in following our reason as far as it will carry us, does give a description of his beliefs which is moderately easy to follow, and which, at the same time, can be read in an hour or two.

He plunges right into the heart of the problem at the beginning of the book; his first chapter is entitled "Is There a God?" Those who hold that such a question is in effect unanswerable will gain some support from his views. "For the inquisitive," he says, "there is no God." In other words, Dr. Brunner would say that it is impossible to prove the existence of God by any kind of rational argument. Such a belief can be arrived at only by a kind of intuition. "God," he says, "is never in a class, never something among other things. He can never be named along with other things. Planets, mountains, elements are objects of knowledge. God is not an object of knowledge . . . Without God man would know nothing. Knowledge is possible only because God is."

Now, the reader who does not agree with Dr. Brunner will at once observe that these are sheer dogmatic statements. They are not supported by any kind of reasoned argument. They have to be accepted, and, if they are not accepted, the reader is driven either directly to Atheism or to some kind of Theism, not exactly associated with the Christian belief. Of course, we all know that in theory Roman Catholicism holds that the existence of God can be rationally proved. Many of us have harboured a suspicion that this is a quibble which is difficult if not impossible to support, and that it is only by accepting the premises of the argument that its con-

clusions can be finally established. This suspicion is confirmed by much that Dr. Brunner says.

Dogma is probably the part of Christianity of the most rigidly orthodox type which most repels the ordinary thinker who wishes to work things out for himself. The stricter dogmas of the Churches are, indeed, sometimes in conflict with the findings of science. For that reason, I think, Dr. Brunner's book should be required reading for all who would call themselves liberal thinkers. Needless to say, there is much in it which most of us would disagree with; but, perhaps because of that, it will appeal to those who do not share the learned doctor's dogmatic certainty. Here is the faith undiluted and pure; here is what the theological right-wing believe to be true. If we see flaws in the argument, if we understand Dr. Brunner as he can never understand us, that will only be an additional reason for believing that a philosophy of freedom of thought holds the best hope for the future.

JOHN ROWLAND.

## THE ELUSIVE YEAR 1 A.D.

READERS who are old enough will remember the heated discussions which took place about the beginning of this century as to whether January 1, 1900, began the twentieth century, or whether it ought to have been January 1, 1901. Almost the same kind of discussion is taking place now—does the mid-century begin this January, or next year? In the *Sunday Dispatch* for December 25, the argument has already begun with the Astronomer Royal taking part. But it is quite amusing to find Sir H. Spencer Jones actually quoting as an "authority" the "learned monk, Dionysius Exiguus, who had a profound knowledge of mathematics, astronomy, and theology."

There is not, as a matter of fact, the slightest proof that this "learned monk" ever existed at all, let alone any proof of his "profound knowledge." It is surprising that such an eminent man does not know (or perhaps he does know) that Dionysius—if he ever lived—was no more able to give us the year 1 A.D. than Sir H. Spencer Jones, if by this is meant the year of the birth of "our Lord." Somebody tried to fix some date for the "Incarnation" so took the lunar cycle of 19 years and multiplied it by the solar cycle of 28 years, and triumphantly produced the number 532, and this was given as the date when Dionysius gave an astonished and delighted world the year 753 A.U.D. as the year in which Jesus was born. It was called the year 1 A.D.

Unluckily for the learned monk, this date was at least four years out—as indeed the Astronomer Royal is obliged to admit; not that it will make any difference to his estimate of Dionysius' great "learning." People will go on repeating the fairy tale just as if the constant exposure of the myth never took place at all. Even the Benedictines, who are responsible for much of the Church's chronology, grudgingly are obliged to admit that there is no evidence for Dionysius—but it is all in a line with the repeated forgeries of the Church in other ways. And even an Astronomer Royal can swallow these myths without turning a hair.

H.C.

**PSYCHO-ANALYSIS — A MODERN DELUSION.** By Frank Kenyon. Price 5s.; postage 3d.

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### ACID DROPS

Needless to say, the Roman Church is getting these days a terrific amount of advertising, free, gratis, and for nothing. The B.B.C. reported, almost with rapture, the way in which the Pope opened his Holy Year, and how he sent his Divine Blessings to all the peoples of the earth, and its progress will be duly recorded every day by our very religious Broadcasting Corporation. Even though most people in this country are definitely Protestants and hate the primitive crudity of Catholicism, particularly its worship of statues and the eating of its God, the Holy Year will be given a conspicuous place in radio news. And yet there are people always complaining in Catholic journals that the Roman Church never advertises!

With the proverbial Irish humour a Dublin newsagent avoids giving offence to his Christian clients, and brings joy to the hearts of his Freethinking friends and customers. For instance, when a client requires a copy of *The Freethinker*, he is requested to ask for the "Little Flowers of St. Francis"! This happy idea; the perfect request *sub rosa*, gives us some slight idea of the difficulties under which our message is propagated in Eire, that true daughter of Rome.

Religious newspapers are suggesting that the most effective solution to our present economic difficulties is—prayer! And Parliament "should do something about it". After all, at Dunkirk, "when all the nation took to prayer with one voice, the whole world had a demonstration that God answers prayer", states *The Christian*. The public's memory is proverbially short, but we seem to remember that Dunkirk was a defeat, perhaps the German prayers were organised more methodically, that as well as God's customary incline to the side of the big battalions, no doubt decided God's answer.

Kenneth Horne, the new "Twenty Questions" master, need not feel that he is outside the pale in describing Santa Claus as fiction for the *Catholic Review*, official R.C. organ of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, goes even further and describes Santa as an "unholy fraud" and "Santa the Saint is giving way to Santa the sugar daddy". The editor maintains that to inculcate the idea that if we "are not good there will be no presents" is bad psychology, and certainly "un-Christian morality". True "Christian" morality, of course, is that if you don't behave you will be punished for eternity. The results seem to be the same.

We have been warned by an anonymous Christian correspondent from Port Elizabeth of the frightful punishment that awaits us in Hell for so "lightly taking the name of the Lord", just because we invited the editor of *The Recorder* to tell us what was the message of Habakkuk and Obadiah. What our correspondent would say if he was a regular reader of *The Freethinker* is best left to the imagination.

The motion at a recent debate of U.N.O. to place the "Holy City of Jerusalem" under International control was carried by a majority of Roman Catholics and Mohammedan votes drawn respectively from South American and Arab countries. This is yet another indication of the proposed *rapprochement* between Rome and Islam and bears out the contention of an article by F. A. Ridley in *The Freethinker* of 18th December, 1949.

A very close contest in Failsworth was decided by only twelve votes to allow cinemas to open on Sunday. The decision was too close to be comfortable, and Freethinkers in the areas where a cinema poll is being conducted should do all they can to make the decision overwhelming in favour of opening. The General Secretary of the N.S.S. will be pleased to give details and information.

A point of great interest to Freethinkers was raised in the Court of Criminal Appeal by the Lord Chief Justice in answer to Mr. John Maude, (K.C.), who appealed on behalf of Daniel Raven for a new trial on the ground that a "Mr. S. had taken the oath on the New Testament when, in fact, he was a Jew." Lord Goddard rejected the appeal and pointed out that a Court had neither the duty, nor indeed the right to cross-examine people as to their religious belief before they were sworn. This, of course, also applies to affirmation, and Freethinkers in such a position should always decline, respectfully, to answer any questions bearing thereon.

Not exactly in our line, but too good to be buried and forgotten in a newspaper file: The Soviet Postal authorities have refused to deliver copies of the Yugo-Slav Railways' timetables to Moscow as being detrimental to Soviet politics. Heresy rears its ugly head!

Bolton's Registrar will have no flowers in his register office, the local Parks Committee think it will be too expensive: this paltry victory pleases Councillor E. Robinson who thinks that Register Office marriages should be as drab as possible. "If people want a dignified and attractive wedding," he said, "they should go to church, and when a couple are married in church with the bride in white, that is a ceremony, but the Register Office is a business." Ignoring the implied insult, the last sentence should raise a laugh. Quite a few church weddings are far from unbusinesslike.

The National Council for the Abolition of Cruel Sports have just presented to the Government committee a document memorandum exposing the cruelty involved in those "noble sports" stag, fox and otter hunting. Ralph Champion, in an article in the *Sunday Pictorial*, comments on the sadism displayed even by clergymen who "find nothing inconsistent in preaching Love on Sundays, and then setting out the next day on a good gory chase." The descriptions of stags being torn to death, foxes caught up in barbed wire, and badgers being worried to death by terriers, are enough to make even a savage ashamed. Yet in this "Christian England" such things are lawful. How truly did *Punch* sum up the huntin' fraternity in the phrase, "It's a lovely morning, let's go out and kill something."

Mr. R. L. Roberts, in the *Church Times*, is writing a series of articles showing how Christians should bring up their children in "belief, prayer and worship." He tells us that "habits of morning and evening prayer must be formed very early" and we do like that word "must." No doubt, if a child managed never to acquire the pious habit, he "must" be made to—or pay for it. The Biblical injunction "to spare the rod and spoil the child" is a capital way of making children utter the drivel which Mr. Roberts and his like call "prayer." However, we were pleased to see that Mr. Roberts contends that if parents won't teach their children Christianity "they are in fact teaching Agnosticism." And what a splendid thing that would be if only it were true.



# "THE FREETHINKER"

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Telephone No.: Holborn 2801. London, W.C. 1.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

To READERS under 30, who would be interested in a vigorous International Youth Movement, write to H. Grabowsky, Van Leeuwenhoeksingel, 29, Delft, Holland.

C. E. RATCLIFFE.—Thanks for letters re B.B.C. Programmes. We can only hammer away with patience but it will be a long and slow job.

W. E. RICHARDSON.—Thanks for information. It is obvious that Christian Action is making tremendous efforts to permeate our public authorities.

Mr. R. MASON.—Thanks for your good wishes. No doubt the *Bible Handbook* is a most valuable weapon in a Free-thinker's armoury.

For *The Freethinker*. D. Finlayson, 4s.; W. Scarlett, 1s. 6d.; D. Behr, £1; V. H. Smith, £1 10s.

T. R. GRETTON.—Thanks. Copies of *The Freethinker* (December 25) will be sent to you for distribution. Your cuttings will also be returned.

BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges a donation of £1 from W. J. Bennett (Bristol).

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

The question, "Does Man Have Freewill?" will be debated in the Mechanics' Institute, Bradford, this evening (8th January) at 6-45 p.m., between Mr. R. T. Day, and Mr. Harold Day, Chairman of the Bradford Branch N.S.S. We understand there is no relationship between the debaters, so there will be no obstacle to hard hitting. Admission is free.

Newcastle-on-Tyne readers can hear Mr. F. A. Ridley in the Socialist Hall, Royal Arcade, Pilgrim Street, next Sunday evening, 15th January, on "Political Catholicism," at 7 o'clock. It will be the first of monthly lectures arranged by the local N.S.S. Branch. The February lecturer will be Mr. R. H. Rosetti, and Mr. L. Ebury will be the speaker for March. Admission for each is free, with some reserved seats at 1s. each.

We regret any inconvenience to members of the West London Branch by our announcement of the Annual General Meeting in the Lecture Notices of last week. The notice of postponement was received after we had gone to press. The meeting will be held on Sunday, 8th January, at 7-15, and members are asked to attend. Will Branch Secretaries please note that notices for insertion in *The Freethinker* should reach the office not later than Monday, for the following Sunday.

The *Church Times*, which certainly knows something about the way in which people can so easily be deified, quotes the Russian novelist, Ilya Ehrenburg, as "providing an interesting example of the process by which Stalin is becoming gradually deified." It appears that in his travels, Mr. Ehrenburg found one thing which always cheered his nostalgic heart—the picture of Stalin. It always "spiritually" revived him—as no doubt it does our own Communists. "Stalin," adds the *Church Times*, "in fact is due to become the object of a cultus such as Holy Russia formerly paid to the saints of Orthodoxy."

That the portrait will also soon be invested with miraculous properties is only a matter of time. After all, most Russians used to believe in their Ikons, in the Czar as their "Little Father," and, as far as adoring their Ruler be he Czar or Chief Commissar—what is the difference? In any case, Christian education is very hard to eradicate. Most Anglo-Catholics believe in the efficacy of Holy Relics and are ready to believe in the almost-divinity of a Bishop. People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.

Another "much wanted" book has found a publisher. It is on that quite new topic the Bible, and it is entitled *The Bible*. It is by Mr. M. Lawson, and will cost you 7s. 6d. In it there are answers to about 500 of the kind of questions people are always asking about God's Holy Word. Unfortunately, the *Church Times* does not think much of it for "the book is a chaotic jumble of information and speculation," which, anyway, strikes us as describing most books on the Bible by ardent believers. Still, it is for the Bible, and therefore easily found a publisher. But let a writer of a book *against* the Bible try to find one . . . !

The *Universe* is complaining that, under the Communist regime, churches in China are made into warehouses. Why not? They are thus infinitely more useful and, in any case, the churches were forced on to the Chinese people by gangs of missionaries with primitive versions of Christianity given up long ago by the "intellectuals" in the Church. Missionaries have no right to be in China at all, and should be expelled. What would the Pope say if Chinese missionaries invaded Rome this "Holy Year" and proceeded to convert Italians by telling the truth about Catholicism? And supposing they built temples in Vatican City—what would the Pope do?

We have to thank a correspondent for sending us Mr. Pirow's Newsletter, *The New Order* (South Africa), the front page of which is devoted to a *memento mori* of the "Eleven Martyrs of Nuremberg." The hysterical hotchpotch of Christianity, Fascism and anti-Semitism is journalism at its very worst. Whatever one's views on the Nuremberg trials, few outside South Africa would agree that the defendants were shining lights of toleration. One's feelings are outraged at the suggestion that the less-than-human, Julius Streicher (mis-spelled Steicher in the Newsletter), is worthy of commemoration.

Mr. Pirow would have us believe that "as the Victim of Calvary was innocent, so, in principle, were the victims of Nuremberg," but our credulity is strained to the limit when the "Protocols of Zion" are quoted in support of "the world-wide Jewish plot," and Dr. Malan's achievements for "National Status and Racial Peace in South Africa" are seriously put forward. Pity 'tis that there are people to whom such poison appeals, and religious credulity is fertile ground for such.



## ON JAMES JOYCE AGAIN

READERS will remember a little discussion I had in these columns with a great admirer of the work of James Joyce who was, in his opinion, perhaps the world's most astounding literary genius, and an out-and-out Freethinker to boot. Everybody has a right to his opinion, and I should not have questioned Mr. Kean but for the fact that my own reading of Joyce was just the opposite of his—and in particular, what I wanted was some evidence that he was a Freethinker. Needless to say none was forthcoming.

A rule of mine since I began contributing to this journal was not to write if possible about books I had never read, and as I had not read Joyce's early work I left them alone in the discussion. But I had read *Ulysses* and I found it to be utterly boring; I had not read *Finnegan's Wake* and could not conceive anybody trying to read such balderdash. The other day, however, I came across the *Essential James Joyce* which gives large extracts from his books, edited by Harry Levin, and it gives me a chance for saying a little more on a much-discussed writer.

First of all, it must not be forgotten that Joyce had a Jesuit education, and only in exceptional cases can one get over such a handicap. He was certainly "sceptical" afterwards, but nowhere can I find that he ever threw overboard his religion however much he might question such a conception as that of Hell. And Mr. Levin makes this quite clear when he writes, "That he felt the intellectual attraction of theology as well as an emotional appeal of ritual, is evident in everything he wrote." This passage was not quoted by Mr. Kean though he was quite ready to take other "secondhand" opinions while "respectfully" asking me not to do so.

In any case, Mr. Levin admits that theology and ritual were "submerged in the cold terror of Stephan's (one of Joyce's characters) central dilemma between carnal sin and priestly absolution." This dilemma was, of course, Joyce's own, and shows that I was absolutely right when I said that Joyce was not a Freethinker. We don't care two hoots for priestly absolution. And Joyce appears to have been worried about his Jesuitism all his life—for example, says Mr. Levin, "His literary technique is richly coloured by ecclesiastical symbolism; a series of notes on the liturgy of Holy Week accompanies the manuscript of Stephan Hero." The reader will find more evidence in Mr. Levin's *Introduction* that Joyce never threw off his early Christian training, and there is no need to press this any further.

But what about the two masterpieces? I can, fortunately, give a few extracts from them, premising, however, that I do so not from the books themselves, but from Mr. Levin's careful selection. What he has left out might well be much worse than anything he has left in. I can only suppose that some of his omissions were too much even for such a worshipper.

In *Ulysses* we get what the hero is supposed to be thinking, and some of his thoughts run like this:—

Blank face. Virgin should say: or fingered only. Write something on its page. If not, what becomes of them? Decline, despair. Keep them young. Even admire themselves. See. Play on her. Lip blow. Body of white woman, a flute alive. Blow gentle. Loud. Three holes all women, Goddess I didn't see. They want it: not too much polite. That's why he gets them. Gold in your pocket, brass in your face. With look to look: songs without words. Molly that hurdygurdy boy. She knew he meant the monkey was sick. Or because so like the Spanish . . .

And so on, *ad lib.*

I call this kind of thing drivel.

When I was studying shorthand, I used to practise speed by taking down the conversation in a sitting room—the people, of course, not knowing what I was doing. By turning my shorthand notes into longhand, I was able to read out again what had been said, and it is hard to imagine that so much undiluted rubbish could be uttered by intelligent people. To put down the everyday conversation we indulge in, or long rigmoroles without selection of what we are thinking about, say, on a walk, or when doing nothing, can be done by anybody; it does not require a literary genius. But why such writing should be considered of thrilling interest to other people is something I admit I cannot understand. I found reading it once again in *Ulysses* completely boring.

Finding it pay in this work, Joyce went much further in *Finnegan's Wake* and the same kind of people who find in Picasso and his followers great art, go into raptures over it. The more unintelligible it is, the greater the art, of course. To profess a love of *beauty* in music, in painting and sculpture, is like a red rag to a bull to these people. For them, music must have literally no melody, and the more hideous is its concatenation of dreary noise, the greater the genius of the composer. So in painting, a portrait without eight eyes plastered all over the neck, or a landscape which really gives us the loveliness of nature is rejected with disgust. It is no wonder that Joyce is hailed by such a gang as the greatest artist in words the Universe has ever known. Here are a few specimens:—

Drop me the sound of the findhorn's name. Mtu or Mti, sombogger was witness. And drip me why in the flenders was she frickled . . . And whitside did they droop their glows in their florry, aback to wist or affront to sea? . . . Through her catchment ring she freed them easy, with her hips' hurrabs for her knees' dontelleries . . . By that Vale Vowelose's lueydac, the reignbeau's heavenarches arronged orranged her. Afrothdizzying galbs, her enamelled eyes indergoadng him on to the vierge violetian . . . But the majic wavus has elfun anon meshes . . . Mavro! Letty Lerck's lafing light throw those laurels now on her daphdaph teasong petrock . . .

We are seriously asked to believe that this kind of thing represents the highest and greatest in English literature; and to help us to swallow this piece of sheer insolence, we are told that Joyce was an out-and-out Freethinker! Did not Carlyle once write that there were twelve million people in England, mostly fools? I am sure that that is exactly what the lovers of Joyce must think—and they are right if they can get people to believe the pernicious nonsense that *Finnegan's Wake* is literature.

I did not make a careful choice in copying the above—there are dozens and dozens of pages filled with this incredible rubbish. Here are more choice bits:—

My colonial, wardha bagful! A bakereen dusind with tithe tillies to boot . . . Merced mulde! . . . Is that the Poolbeg flasher beyant, pharphar . . . Hie sor a stone, singularly illud and on hoc stone Seter satt huc sate . . . A wearywide space it wast ere wohned a Mookse. The onesomeness wast alltolonely, archunsitslike, broadv oval and a Mookse . . .

We are quite religiously told that Joyce's writings have had a profound influence on all English literature since *Finnegan's Wake* burst on a breathless, expectant, and enthusiastic public. This is just as big a lie as the one usually, and very solemnly, told us by art critics



on the radio and in our intellectual weeklies, that Picasso has changed the current of European art. The only thing he has done is to make some art students feel that a long apprenticeship to art is no longer necessary, and that any kind of cubistic rubbish can pass henceforth for real art. The result is a ghastly increase of bunk in many of our art exhibitions.

James Joyce had a right to do what he liked with our language—debase or murder it in every possible way if he wanted to. I claim the right to criticise him. And anything I said previously about his work has been strengthened by reading the *Essential James Joyce*.

H. CUTNER.

## MISCONCEPTIONS OF MATERIALISM

CHAPMAN COHEN has often used the old tag, save us from our friends. He has also said the materialist need not defend a case stated by someone else, giving as an example, among others, J. B. S. Haldane. So also Prof. W. MacDougal, *The Freethinker*, September 4, "Modern Materialism is the assumption that mechanistic science can in principle achieve a complete and satisfactory account of the world and of man, his nature, origin and destiny." All this is sheer nonsense. Indeed, to accept such claptrap is to give up the case, for each of the different branches of science have different "principles" and they would not be needed if all could be accounted for by "mechanistic" science.

The notion of "assumption" is metaphysic and "destiny" is fatalistic belief in contrast to "science". And restricting scientific method to "mechanistic" science implies the theological argument that science cannot be applied in psychology and morality because these involve the question why. So, even to accept such balderdash is to support the theologians case. Now, how do such absurd misconceptions arise and why "modern" materialism? Has materialism changed, and if so, where are we getting to? F. A. Ridley has argued that things tend towards their opposites and that christians are now talking like freethinkers. Is it that, accepting the christian statement of our case, we are now talking like christians? Perhaps we might go back to the ancients and trace this process of inversion.

Going back to Democritus it is clear he had no "assumption" about "mechanistic" science, for there was no science of mechanics before Archimedes, nor any natural "forces" for there was no dynamics before Galileo. The philosophers had been in search of a "primary substance" with one arguing water, others fire, air, earth, others again number, mind, and another, that man is the measure of all things. But it is unscientific to try to explain all in terms of one. There cannot be a synthesis of one, and one multiplied by one equals one. Their mathematics was crude and they had no multiplication, for that did not come until Theon. This search was one of poetic imagery or metaphor for some co-ordinating or comprehensive analogy.

But the sophist could take any argument, or pit one against another, anyone could believe anything, or as they put it, everything was only opinion. So everything was uncertain, and the sceptics put the question, How, living in a world of illusion, can we be sure of anything? Let it be noted, the question is how, not why or what? Childhood's question, why, is theological and leads into a quagmire of "reasons". The question, what, is sophist; calls for definition in terms of terms that need further definition; with interpretation and re-interpretation until, with the identity of opposites, black is white.

But the question, how, calls for method, not explanation nor definition. In modern idiom science is the "know how".

As Chapman Cohen has said so emphatically "matter doesn't matter". The answer of Democritus was "calculable necessity". As against guessing, calculation calls for arbitrary criteria in measurement and an abstract concept of motion. The laughing philosopher never claimed his atom as anything but a theory, it was part of his method. But, confusing theory with fact, even mathematicians as with Leibnitz, tried to conceive an "insubstantial mathematical point". But it is even more absurd. This insubstantial atom was supposed to move in a void. This is as good a definition of nothing as the Christian God without body, parts, or passions. But how does this inconceivable insubstantial nonentity come to be identified with the hard, solid, concrete stuff called "matter"?

The sophist Plato turned everything upside down in a world of shadows. He was concerned with reality and ideas, Aristotle was concerned with actuality and motives, but the christian Aquinas was concerned with existence and evil. The christian associates materialism with the lusts of the Flesh. The distinction between spiritual and material existence comes from Aquinas not Democritus. With the christian distinction of body and soul Descartes "matter" is extended in space, that of Democritus was not. It was Descartes method that gave results in physics and his exception of the soul was a concession to theology. But we need not accept this Thomist argument of existence.

To the materialist matter is theoretical and scientific method can use any theory, as it does with the different subject matter of the different branches of science. It is the method that matters and it is the method of science that has increased our knowledge. The method prior to Democritus was that of analogy, which was revived by Aquinas. To think of man on a mechanistic analogy is to use the Thomist unscientific method of analogy to which anything is possible and everything is a matter of belief and not of knowledge. To the sophist as with Bertrand Russell, to whom, analogy is the basis of logic "knowledge is uncertain".

The early philosophers searched for one substance, the christian has one answer to every question, but the atoms were many. There is no one substance, no one criterion, no one panacea, but to our many problems we can apply one question, how? The materialist can ask the theologian and sophist their own questions, why and what? But they can not face the sceptics question, how, for to know how is to know. To the sophist, not knowing what, everything is a matter of unaccountable chance, and the christian, not knowing why, adds the adjective blind. But the materialist need not defend this "blind chance". To say things happen by chance is to say we do not know how, but to the sceptics questions, how do things happen, how do we know, and how can we be sure, science gives method in observation and test of experience.

The aim of the Ancient Sceptics was to dispel illusion, it still is with the modern. Materialism is not a creed, nor a doctrine, it is a commonsense necessity.

That Democritus was empirical may be seen in the following: "Of all my contemporaries it is I who have traversed the greater part of the earth, visited the most distant regions, studied climates the most diverse, countries the most varied, listened to the most men."

H. H. PREECE.



## NIGHTCAP AND HALO

"Germany is the kingdom of God."

—FRANZ SCHAUWECKER.

RICHARD WAGNER was the Mastersinger of the German middle class and their inferiority complex.

Although he set out as a radical materialist, he soon became a Germanic jingoist and religious mysticist. This change of mind—or rather retrograde development—can be explained from two angles: individually and historically.

Let us consider the personal point first.

In his early days, Wagner was far from being an anti-Semite; Meyerbeer, the Supreme Pontiff of the world of Parisian Opera then, was his model. When in Paris, he continuously pestered Meyerbeer with requests for recommendations and other forms of assistance. Five years after he had signed a letter to him as "Yours everlastingly indebted, Richard Wagner," he was blackguarding him anonymously in "*Das Judentum in der Musik*." Considering that this genius found his way to success blocked by a clique of mediocrities and unscrupulous bluffers, many of whom incidentally were Jews, his angered outburst could have been excused. However, when he had a free run, his anti-Semitism only accentuated.

There seems to be a piquant explanation to that. Wagner himself had a strong suspicion that he was the son of Ludwig Geyer, the actor and most intimate friend of his mother. With the strong probability that a strain of Jewish blood might have defiled his Aryan veins, he tried hard to wrap his parentage in a deep mystery. In school he went as Richard Geyer and it was only at the age of fifteen that he resumed—or assumed—the name of Wagner.

It is exactly his anti-Semitic raging that raises the possibility, insignificant though it be in itself, to the level of a strong probability. It is common knowledge that fanatics generally come from the ranks of converts, for going to extremes seems to be the safest way to hide a personal guilt complex.

Not only in this respect, however, was Wagner the embodiment of an inferiority complex.

The last vestiges of feudalism have never been eradicated in Germany, and every German dreams of being, in some way or other, an aristocrat—in spirit or blood, individually or collectively. The bourgeois revolution was too late and too little, with no time left to mature and take root. Halfway the liberal leaders noticed the danger signals from revolutionary Paris and stopped short on a stage of semi-democracy. German geniuses—Goethe not excepted—generally recall the mythical figure of a centaur with the upper half an olympic titan, whilst the lower half wags the philistine tail.

From his stuffy study bedecked with heavy rugs and carpets and cushions and dimmed from silk hangings, Wagner, in this stifling environment, sang of the strong and healthy, hero, freedom-loving under open skies.

Whilst he himself, fond of his collection of twenty-four silk dressing gowns, was all wrapped in luxurious silk and velvet, wore coloured satin trousers and jackets lined with fur and wadding—which resulted in several attacks of a skin disease, *erysipelas*—his characters were only concerned about purity in love or christian simple-heartedness, of "inner values" rather than of earthly riches. Yet their spendthrift creator continuously incurred debts to satisfy his craving for luxury and the voluptuous, and in his effeminacy liked to go about in female attire and to be addressed as "Madam"!

At last, the one-time Freethinker, Feuerbachian sensualist and apostle of Free Love, took to preaching a Germanic Christendom with its very denial of the senses. In "*Parsifal*" he wallows in humility and suffering like an ageing whore withdrawing into a pretentiously pious repentance, now that life has nothing left to offer.

In all this, it was not so much insincerity on his part but an attempt to compensate for his feeling of inferiority as a German—and possibly not too pure-bred Aryan—petty-bourgeois. Significantly, his work registers the trend from Talmi-Liberalism to the threshold of Fascism.

Freewill can act individually, yet its scope is limited through the existing raw material, i.e., the historical set-up of a given society an individual has to live in. Wagner's was that of a belated and all too sudden industrialisation. Compelled to unite politically for the sake of world competition, Germany was catching up with the West in enormous strides the impact of which impressed upon the German mentality. She was a late-comer in the struggle for world markets and colonies, so she had to be more dynamic than the rest of the capitalist states. In this era of industrial boom, of unparalleled speculating, gambling and profiteering, the unscrupulous adventurer becomes the human ideal; Superman is nothing but the glorification of that cold, brutal type who knows how to make money out of human bones and considers it his proper right to exploit the "under-dog." Add to this the surprise victory of little Prussia over Louis Napoleon's corrupt France and you have the explanation for the German self-conceit as "*Herrenvolk*" (Master race).

Musically, Wagner reflected the disintegration of the old order through Free Competition, under the Profit Motive: hence the negation of the old melodious pattern, rebuilt around a *leitmotiv*.

When he wrote his "*Ring*" poem (finished by 1852), industrial prosperity had reached its peak and left the impression that he had a clear road to success and power who was clever and crafty. The characters of the "*Ring*" represent this amoral type of blend between christian bourgeois and autocratic Junker: they are greedy, brutal, unscrupulous adventurers in romantic disguise—in short: "*Ring Leaders*," obsessed by fear from death, decay and corruption.

Still, the frenzy of speculation did not last long, the bubble of prosperity and unlimited aggrandisement burst when, in 1857, already the first crisis came; the slump left a morning-after feeling of frustration hidden behind an arrogance bordering on megalomania. Trade had badly failed the German supermen, so their unique vocation to rule the Universe had to be proved in moral fields in opposition to the low-minded herd of money-grabbers. Wagner, himself in gloomy spirits, set to writing his "*Tristan*" and afterwards retired into Tannhäuser's "*Venusberg*." Romantic escapism and intoxicating mysticism prevailed.

PERCY G. ROY.

(To be concluded)

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## CORRESPONDENCE

## TEACH US MORE

SIR,—I have been reading *The Freethinker* regularly now for about six weeks and find it very interesting, especially the historical articles. But if it is possible I would appreciate some scientific articles on atoms, organic evolution, astronomy, etc., occasionally.

I have been reading parts of Al Koran, and have come across references to the gospel of the "Infancy of Christ" and an apocryphal gospel of Barnabas. I expect these works have been written about in *The Freethinker* before, but would you give some of us younger readers the "gen" on the subject.—Yours, etc.,

PETER E. NEWELL.

## COMMENT

SIR,—Mr. Corrick may or may not be in need of support from his "good friend" Mr. Kent; but if the question the latter puts (*The Freethinker*, December 18) is a sample from bulk, the remedy seems to be worse than the disease.

In England the worker is permitted to pay up to 50-60 per cent. of his wages in order to get a roof over his head; the worker in Russia does not have this privilege. Perhaps Mr. Kent and his "good friend" will enjoy themselves explaining that particular aspect of "Russian tyranny."—Yours, etc.,

J. PLIMMER.

## MR. WOOD RETURNS

SIR,—Some months ago you asked me to conclude the R.101 controversy because your readers were tired of it. I complied with your request, yet you continue to allow Mr. Cutner, a member of your staff, to carry on with his own distorted version of the case with no opposition!

After being accused of dishonesty by Mr. Cutner I refused to write anything more for *The Freethinker* but now that he has been allowed to impute fraudulent motives to Mr. Harry Price, Mr. Austen (editor of *Psychic News*), Mr. Charlton, and myself—all trying to fool the public with what he declares is "an arrant fraud"—I must ask you to allow me the opportunity of refuting, in your columns, this serious and baseless charge by publishing this letter.

First of all I would like to know just when and where Mr. Cutner has ever made me admit (as he claims) that I never saw the verbatim report of the seance. What I said was that I did not have the report in my possession at the time he demanded to see it and so I sent him the only account I had available—Harry Price's *Sunday Dispatch* article.

Secondly, why does not Mr. Cutner name the two ladies whose secret information so much amused him? Or are they afraid to come out in the open? Stabbing in the dark is not a very honourable occupation anyway.

Thirdly, Mr. Paul Tabori, Harry Price's literary executor, sent me a letter apologising for any misunderstanding caused by his original letter to *The Freethinker* and stating that he had no intention whatever of conveying that the *Sunday Dispatch* article was a fake. No one but Mr. Cutner would have interpreted it as such, yet he accused me of using this fake account—"well-knowing it to have been a fake"—with which to bluff your readers! Mr. Tabori's letter to me was published in *Psychic News* (with his permission) so that both you and Mr. Cutner were able to read it, but you both very conveniently ignored it and still persist in denouncing the article as a fake.

Fourthly, I did not rush post-haste to *Psychic News*, as Mr. Cutner alleges. He knows this perfectly well because *Psychic News* had previously reprinted some of my *Freethinker* articles and it was only when you informed me of this that I knew anything about it. I saw no reason whatever why I should not continue to write for that paper if they were interested in what I had to say. And they certainly were!

Fifthly, Mr. Cutner writes that I "hurled the *Sunday Dispatch* article at him as infallible proof of the existence of spirits." Another deliberate falsehood because my quotations from the article were made some weeks before Mr. Cutner came into the discussion! In every article I wrote I stressed the point that I was not a confirmed believer in spiritualism and merely suggested that Freethinkers should preserve an open mind on the subject and encourage further enquiry. What a hope!

Lastly, if Mr. Cutner seriously desires (as he says) to investigate then why did he turn down the suggestion that a meeting should be arranged between the medium, Mr. Ian Costa (present at the original seance) and ourselves? His refusal speaks for itself. In his latest summing-up Mr. Cutner says: "For my part I am a little tired of this deliberate fraud." This is a serious and actionable accusation. For my part I am more than tired of Mr. Cutner's deliberate mis-statements.—Yours, etc.,

W. H. WOOD.

## MARXIAN IDEALISM

SIR,—I was pleased to see my friend, Mr. F. A. Ridley, in his article on "The Gods Form a United Front" make the important point that it is against atheism and materialism, rather than against Communism as such, that the gods propose to unite. This is a point hardly ever seen by the undialectical materialists of the many Marxian schools of thinking.

Intellectual power over men's minds can be and often is just as much a powerful incentive to control social life as economic powers: in fact it is often stronger because of its subtle workings and therefore difficulties of direct proof.

What an awful new unholy trinity Rome, Islam, and Communism would make. And when I include Communism in this I refer not only to the Communist parties as such but all the various brands of Marxian idealism with which I have been in contact.—Yours, etc.,

ROBERT REYNOLDS.

## CHRISTIAN FORENAMES?

SIR,—There has been some response up and down the Country (according to the Press) to the question put to the Home Secretary by Mr. Marshall, M.P. for Bodmin, concerning the alteration in the style of the new electoral registration forms, which call for one's forenames instead of christian names, as heretofore. Mr. Ede then assured the House that it was in order as, "not all forenames are christian names."

Nevertheless, yielding to pressure from church interests, it is probable that the forms will be reprinted with the style "Christian or other forenames." A profound mistake, I fear, as the real position—in my estimation—is rather as put in two letters I sent to Romford papers. The *News Chronicle* acknowledged, but did not print, my letter to them. I hope to get out a circular on these matters, and therewith petition the Home Secretary through the local M.P., Dr. Eric Fletcher.

You may also be interested to hear that I have been in correspondence with Canon T. B. Scrutton, Vicar of Kingston and Canon of Southwark, concerning his £5 challenge to anybody to prove that the Church is subsidised by the State. It is a public matter for full debate in *Parliament* when dis-establishment and dis-endowment of the Church come up for settlement. Meanwhile I have referred him to Lloyd George's speech on dis-endowment in connection with the Welsh Church Measure, House of Commons, May 16, 1912.—Yours, etc.,

H. E. EVANS.

[The letters referred to were excellent examples of Mr. Evans' forceful arguments.—EDITOR.]

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

## INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6.45 p.m.: Debate: "Does Man Have Free Will?" Aff.: Mr. R. J. DAY. Neg.: Mr. H. DAY.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, January 10, 7 p.m.: "Ethics and Modern Thought." Mr. GEO. E. O'DELL.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Christians and the Animal World." Mr. R. N. HAMILTON.

Lewisham and District Branch N.S.S. (Hope Hotel, 73, Loampit Vale, S.E.).—Sunday, 7.15 p.m.: "Political Catholicism." Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (The International Club, 64, George Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture. Mr. SALT.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2.30 p.m.: "Current Affairs." Sir ROBERT CARY.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Psychology and Ethics." Professor J. C. FLUGEL, D.Sc.

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. L. EBBY.

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



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