

THE

# FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXX.—No. 11

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL  
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The End of a Medieval Theocracy

It is a commonplace of anthropology that the more primitive surviving races upon our planet reflect archaic survivals of social conditions through which the entire human race once passed. Very primitive races, such as the Esquimaux, the Australian aborigines, and the Pygmy races of Central Africa and Malaya, have preserved the general conditions of Stone Age Man down to our own epoch. On a more advanced, but still archaic level, are the surviving medieval civilisations which still preserve an incongruous existence amid the so different conditions of the modern world.

Ethiopia (Abyssinia) represents the best extant example of such a surviving medieval culture within the Christian world. Whilst in Asia, we still have the Mohammedan states of Saudi Arabia, the Yemen, and Afghanistan, all still predominantly medieval in their culture and social life. In the Buddhist Far East, there still remain in this category of almost pure medievalism some Himalayan hill-states, Nepal and Bhutan, and the most isolated and bizarre of all such survivals, Tibet, "The Forbidden Land," of monks, mountains and mystery.

Tibet is very likely to be in the news in the near future, for the Communists who have virtually completed the conquest of China, are said to be about to invade adjacent Tibet for the purpose of "liberating" that ancient land from the yoke of its priestly ruler, the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan "Pope" who, as the alleged incarnation of Buddha, wields both spiritual and temporal supremacy. Even if the Chinese Communists do not make any such direct move yet, the close proximity of a modern Chinese regime based on the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, can hardly fail to undermine the medieval Buddhist culture of Tibet and thus bring about its eventual downfall. For a social philosophy based as is that of Russian and now Chinese Communism on the theory and practice of modern industry is scarcely compatible with a regime of monks and medieval monkish logic.

It is probable that we are now witnessing the end of, perhaps, the oldest and certainly the most archaic medieval theocracy on earth. For sheltered from foreign contacts by its soaring mountain ranges and inaccessible deserts, as well as by its arid poverty, Tibet retains unbroken its medieval religious culture. Only the vaguest rumours and the most spasmodic contacts link it with the great outside world beyond the impassable Himalayas and the endless wastes of the Gobi Desert. Upon the high Tibetan plateau the Dark Age of Europe still subsists, fundamentally unaltered, if in an oriental and Buddhist form.

The enormous Central Asiatic plateau of Tibet is almost equal in size to Western Europe: a vast area which, however, contains barely three millions of human beings. There is no industry and little agriculture. The

bulk of the lay Tibetans are shepherds, nomads, and cattle raisers, who pursue a migratory existence between their snow-clad hills and arid plains. In this land of perpetual wind and snow, the average height of which is from 10,000 to 16,000 feet, there are few towns, and as one would imagine from the extremely primitive conditions, the mass of the lay population live the lives of half-starved serfs very similar to their prototypes in the Europe of the Dark Ages.

The above historical comparison between medieval Europe and Modern Tibet holds also with regard to social and political conditions. For just as the Roman Catholic Church dominated the entire life and social order of the European Middle Ages, so also does the Buddhist Church control the entire scope of society in Tibet. The Dalai Lama reigns at Lhasa over Tibet, just as the medieval popes also built up a temporal power over Central Italy, the "Papal States." Whilst the Buddhist "Pope" is the centre of the Tibetan culture and social order just as the Christian Pope represented the centre of things in the European Dark Ages. The Buddhist Church of the Lamas (monks) wields in modern Tibet probably an even more exclusive sway than the Catholic Church ever did in Europe at the height of its power. One male Tibetan in every eight is reported to enter the monastic life, and such culture as Tibet possesses is under exclusive clerical control, as was, of course, those ages in European history when the word "clerk" meant impartially a person in ecclesiastical orders and anyone who could read or write.

The official religion of Tibet, contrary to the general opinion in western countries, appears to be a *bona-fide* branch of the Northern Mahayana Buddhism; that is, of a Buddhist creed seriously infiltrated by popular Hindu Polytheism. The sacred Scriptures of Tibetan Buddhism are literal and carefully preserved translations of the Indian Mahayana originals. There seems to be little doubt that the popular religion of the Tibetan laity consists largely of surviving pagan practices and a shamanistic cult of demonism. Tibetan Buddhism is mainly monastic. The largest monastery, Drepung, near Lhasa, is said to house 10,000 monks. The "Yellow Hats" are the most important of the monastic schools, but faction fights, at times reaching the proportions of a veritable civil war, have not been uncommon since the introduction of Buddhism from India in the seventh century.

The monastic culture appears to be scholastic, much like that of medieval Europe. Some European observers, as for example Mme. Alexandra David-Neel, have taken seriously the claim of the Lamas to magical powers, but most qualified observers describe the Tibetan Lameries as merely squalid dens of dirt, idle disputation and shameful ignorance, as and when judged by modern scientific standards.

Theosophists, of course, claim that Tibet is the home of wonderful spiritual guides known as Mahatmas, but one may surely suspect that their holiness increases in direct proportion to the height of the Himalayas and to



the consequent impossibility of testing their supernatural claims. It is on record that Madam Blavatsky, that doyen of the occult, once saw a real Tibetan Mahatma by, of all places in the world, the Serpentine in Hyde Park. To be sure, this was some time before the late George Lansbury introduced the mixed bathing in that delectable spot!

The effective link between Church and State in Tibet is the reincarnation of his predecessor by every successive Dalai Lama. Though in theory absolute in Church and State, the Supreme Lama is usually an infant selected by the great Abots of Lhassa, the Buddhist "College of Cardinals" who appear to be the real rulers of Tibet. To keep the power in their own hands, the Lamas are believed to do away with the Dalai Lama before he reaches years of discretion. A new baby is then proclaimed as his authentic reincarnation. Thus the Tibetan theocracy continues to run smoothly.

Tibet has been invaded before by both Chinese and British troops, but both invasions proved ephemeral. That the medieval Lamas can resist the Chinese Communists is unlikely, and this occupation is likely to be more permanent. That Marxism itself can be acclimatised in nomadic pre-industrial Tibet seems unlikely—incidentally, Karl Marx would, we think, have agreed with this judgment. But the end of the static medieval civilisation of Tibet is probably in sight. Perhaps the next Dalai Lama will be the reincarnation of some Communist worthy, perhaps Lenin. It is true that Lenin was an atheist, but according to many scholars, so also, was the historic Buddha!

F. A. RIDLEY.

### A LEADING LIGHT OF HUMANISM

IT was said of Erasmus that he laid the egg that Luther hatched. But, be that as it may, Desiderius Erasmus, in company with other intellectuals including Colet, welcomed the revelations of the revival of learning. The pioneer Humanists disdained the ignorance and obscurantism of the clergy and were anxious to effect far-reaching reforms within the Church herself. A brilliant protagonist of Biblical criticism, a prince among letter writers, Erasmus, when he detected and corrected the errors of the Vulgate in his rendering of the New Testament was careful, much in the spirit of the later Descartes, to scrupulously avoid any suspicion of heresy. For this was a deadly charge and, as a heretic, his contemporary Tyndale, was burnt alive, as were Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley, at Oxford, in the succeeding reign of Mary.

It has been urged against Erasmus that he was too timid to avow his real sympathies with the Protestant Reformers; but he was always the apostle of moderation and the truculence of the more aggressive Protestants, who were as determined to persecute as were their adversaries, was utterly repugnant to his pacific mind. Moreover, as T. H. Huxley once inquired: "Why should so moderate a man as Erasmus burn his spoon in their intolerant broth?"

Erasmus was born near Rotterdam in 1466 and his unconventional birth has been romantically portrayed in Charles Reade's masterpiece, *The Cloister and the Hearth*. In any case, his father was a priest, and both parents died in his childhood. As an orphan his guardians sent him to Deventer school and from thence he was consigned to an academy controlled by the Brethren of the Common Life. Then apparently under

pressure, he entered the novitiate of the Augustinians at Steyn, where he remained for seven years. But his time was not wasted, and his studies there perhaps laid the foundations of his future scholarship. When he became secretary to the Bishop of Cambrai, but soon wearied of his duties and proceeded to Paris, the great centre of culture. But life there proved too austere for his naturally delicate constitution, and he returned to Holland to recuperate. A victim of poverty, he became dependent on a wealthy widow, for which he was censured by the better circumstanced. But as Mr. W. E. Campbell notes in his *Erasmus, Tyndale and More* (Spottiswoode, 1949, 15s.): "In fairness to Erasmus, it should be remembered that time and again he refused ecclesiastical preferment, even when his friend and fellow Dutchman, Pope Adrian VI and later Leo X, wished to make him a Cardinal knowing that what he gave to office would be lost to sound learning—the cause he had most at heart."

Returning to Paris, he made invaluable friends, but he detested the lectures he was forced to attend to obtain his divinity degree. In a letter to an intimate he cautions him that his contempt for theologians in no way impairs his orthodoxy, yet the theologians' language is barbarous, "their apprehension dull, their learning thorny, their manners rude, their life mere hypocrisy and their hearts as black as hell."

At this time Erasmus was glad to receive an invitation to England, where, as an Augustinian Canon at Oxford, he became a guest at St. Mary's. There he met Colet, with whom a close friendship was established, while later in London, he grew intimate with Sir Thomas More, the author of *Utopia*. In 1503, Erasmus' *Manual of the Christian Knight* appeared, a pious tract for laymen, which occasioned a witty critic to remark that it contained more piety than its author possessed.

Subsequently, when touring in Italy as the tutor of Lord Mountjoy's sons, Erasmus was the scandalised spectator of the martial methods of Pope Julius II, when His Holiness made his triumphal entry into Bologna. In an epistle, Erasmus complains that: "In Italy at present, studies are singularly chilled, while wars are warm. Pope Julius fights, conquers, triumphs and in fact, plays the part of Julius to perfection."

After a stay in Rome, Erasmus left the Eternal City in 1509 and then paid his third visit to England. There he completed his celebrated satire the *Praise of Folly* which he dedicated to More and published in Paris. This remarkable work was written in Latin and intended for a limited circle of readers. But it was everywhere read and discussed by the educated classes while, if it increased the number of his admirers, also made him many unforgiving enemies. Pope Leo X read it without rancour, while perhaps to Erasmus' regret the *Praise of Folly* was soon translated into several European languages. Moreover, satirists multiplied, and their productions enjoyed widespread popularity.

If the *Praise of Folly* depicts Italy under the warring Pope Julius II, its implications are far greater. "Now as to the Popes," observes *Folly*, "if they claim to be the successors of the Apostles, they should consider that the same things are required of them as were practised by their predecessors. So, if they, being Vicars of Christ, endeavour to emulate his life, his labours, his teachings . . . if they thought only of their name as Pope, that is Father, and their title, Most Holy, what more afflicted beings would there be on earth? Who in that case would purchase the post with all his fortune and when purchased, keep it with the sword, with poison and with violence?"



Again, declares *Folly*: "The working of miracles is old and out of date; to teach the people is too laborious; to teach the Scripture is to invade the prerogative of the schoolmen . . . to be easy and familiar is beneath the grandeur of him, who unless he be sued and entreated, will scarce give princes the honour of kissing his toe."

Catholic apologists deplore the fact that the warnings of Erasmus were unheeded and admit that if the greatly overdue reform within the Church had been effected by ecclesiastical authority, this might well have prevented the Protestant Reformation with all the sanguinary religious conflicts that devastated the Netherlands, disgraced France, and culminated in the terrible Thirty Years' blood-bath in Germany.

Not only did Erasmus admonish the Papacy, the Catholic laity, but friars, monks and priests, were all lashed for their misdeeds. Nor were temporal rulers spared by *Folly's* indictments. For instead of securing themselves from temptations towards greed and immorality, princes, at evil's solicitations, "leave all this to the care of the gods, and only mind their own ease and pleasure. They think they have sufficiently acquitted themselves in the duty of governing if they do but ride constantly a-hunting, breed up good race-horses, sell places and offices to those of their courtiers who will give most for them, and find out new ways of invading other people's property, and hooking in a larger revenue for their own exchequer."

In correspondence with Tunstall, Bishop of London, Erasmus, while mildly approving his Lordship's zeal in the extirpation of heresy, at the same time trusts that the wheat will not be plucked up with the tares. On the whole, Erasmus went openly as far as the dangers of the time permitted a prudent philosopher. Indeed, the wonder is that he sometimes ventured to the lengths he did.

In 1500, Erasmus published his *Adagia*, a collection of Latin sayings and it first appeared in Italy where it was greatly appreciated. Later, he approached the eminent printer, Aldus Manutius, the founder of the celebrated Aldine Press at Venice, in 1494, who had only recently been released from prison when peace was concluded between the bellicose Pope Julius II and the Venetian Republic. The new edition published by Aldus was a magnificent production with additional aphorisms from the Greek. Erasmus also prepared for publication, manuscripts lent him by scholars of writings by Plato, Plutarch, Aristotle and other classical authors, never previously printed, but now made known for the first time to the general reading public.

T. F. PALMER.

### MASS HYPNOSIS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO GOVERNMENT

POLITICAL scientists of all ages have sought long and earnestly for an alternative to government as a remedy for the disease of anarchy. In our day, when the most dangerous form of anarchy is international, the anarchy which exists between the several dozen separate national sovereign states of the world, the theorists would have us believe that the only cure is international government.

This view has been courageously challenged by Mr. Trygve Lie, Secretary-General of the "United Nations": "The United Nations way," he says, "is the only way to peace." Nothing could be more dogmatic than this, except perhaps for the famous phrase: "I am the Lord thy God . . . I am a jealous God."

In the science of governing the world without government, much valuable pioneering work was done by the creators of the League of Nations, a laudable attempt to

scrape away the symptoms of war without harming the germ of national sovereignty which causes it. Some cruel critics tend to take the view that a "peace-keeping" organisation is a failure if it fails to keep the peace, but it is generally admitted that—with the exception of the war years—the League of Nations was a brilliant success.

The principle of co-operation between governments, enshrined in the Covenant of the League of Nations and in the Statute of Westminster, was accordingly embodied in the Charter of the "United" Nations.

Except for a few minor details in which it was more dainty, more delicate than the old Covenant, there was nothing new in the United Nations Charter. Meticulous care was taken in drafting it to deprive the new organisation of the power to carry out its decisions, and every difficulty was placed in the way of reaching decisions. This, of course, was a necessary safeguard, since the voting power was allocated in such a manner that the choice would inevitably lie between agreed decisions that will not be put into effect, and unilateral action before decisions can be reached. The Charter is a skilful blend of these two ingredients, plus a large admixture of deadlock, an unfailing antidote to government well known to political scientists since the earliest times of Polish history.

But this was not all. Members of the old League of Nations Association had pertinently pointed out that it was not enough for the nations to promise to be good. The people should also promise to be good. The League would not have failed if only all the people in all the lands had fallen on their knees and prayed for peace, if all the statesmen had gently tended their incipient haloes and governed (sorry, co-operatively organised) the world like demi-gods instead of like men. Government would have withered from the earth, and the era of perfect anarchy and perfect peace would have arrived. And so, the new "United" Nations Association has added one more ingredient to the UNO peace panacea. It is mass hypnosis.

Hypnosis has, of course, been long employed by medicine-men to induce tranquillity. Machiavelli recommended its use by a Prince who wishes to allay the suspicions of his enemies before subjugating them; serpents exert its soothing influence upon their prey before devouring it. It was doubtless with these antecedents in mind that Miss Dorothy Thompson, U.S. political scientist of the old school (believing that American peace and prosperity has something to do with Federal Government) described the U.N. Charter as "Something worse than nothing. It is nothing behind a facade of illusory security. Its sole purpose is to lull the people to sleep in the face of danger."

Even its critics cannot deny the somniferous effects of the Charter itself. The cathartic value of UNA's mass-mesmerism is, of course, considerably enhanced by the incessant chant, "The Only Way, the *Only* way," from pulpit, press, parliament and perambulator. When it is realised that UNO is the only thing that stands between us and an international law-making parliament and a government to enforce world law upon individuals by process of law not war, critics should admit that perseverance in the *Only* way to avoid government is well worth the risk of a third deluge of blood. In the meantime, if the people—except, of course, the die-hard advocates of international federal government, who are allergic to hypnotism—can be made to "hope for peace, pray for peace, think peace, believe peace and dream peace, one day, perhaps, they may sleep in peace."

HAROLD S. BIDMEAD.



## ACID DROPS

Ask anyone what book is the world's best seller, and we would wager that the answer would be "the Bible," so conditioned have people become to this pious yarn fostered by newspapers, magazines, and writers currying favour, that the response is automatic. A good example of how this "best seller" is sold is afforded by the report in the *Glasgow Evening News* under the headline of "Amazing demand for Gaelic Scriptures in Scotland." About 30,000 copies of the Bible were published in 1949; the financial loss was £3,300. At one time the Bible was useful for propping up the aspidistra, but we wonder what people do with it now? Obviously they do not read it, as witness the recent Gallup Poll.

Fr. A. Andrew, one of the R.C. broadcasters, has let us into a secret. He claims that the main target of religious broadcasting by the B.B.C. is the "fringer"—the person on the fringe of religion. It is a pity that Fr. Andrew did not continue. He should have told us what happened—was the fringer so impressed that he ran at full speed back into the arms of the Church; or was he so utterly unimpressed that he embraced Free-thought? Of course, the fringers themselves are never allowed to say what really happens. But perhaps they are like so much of Church history—a myth!

A letter in a recent number of the *Kensington News* carefully explained that Christianity and Communism were identical. It also pointed out that all trials behind the Iron Curtain were "purely political." Well, atheistic Communists appear to have a devil of a time explaining the whole hearted love for Communism displayed by the very religious Dean of Canterbury and other Christians—and certainly, the Red Dean himself would welcome pious adherents to the cause he so warmly advocates. But he could never welcome Freethinkers!

Excavations in the crypt of St. Peter's which have been going on for five years, have now, says the *Universe*, definitely proved that St. Peter's Tomb really exists where tradition placed it. Unfortunately, this R.C. journal goes on to show in detail how this wonderful result was achieved, and it quite fails to prove anything except that "results achieved have proved the inaccuracy of much that was taken for granted up to now," and many other complete failures. So far, the tomb of St. Peter has not been discovered. Perhaps God Almighty will have to be consulted in the end—for it looks as if a miracle must take place before it can be brought to light. And perhaps not even then.

Two interesting replies to the question of "incentives" were made by the Conservative and Labour candidates at Chelmsford the other week. For the Labour candidate, the ideal incentive was a "Kingdom-of-God Society" where "man equal before God should serve his fellow man to the glory of God." The Conservative candidate's reply included "happiness, a quiet mind and honest work." No mention whatever of God—which should suggest a moral, only we cannot place it.

Some short while back, the Rev. F. H. Mountney, who regularly preaches that in Christ all are equal, bitterly complained that "bishops (of the Church of Eng'land) treat Dissenters as being exactly on the same footing as members of the Church." Needless to add, Mr. Mountney has received the cordial support of all Anglo-

Catholics who, to put the matter bluntly, do not love Protestants. The *Church Times*, which also preaches in Christ all are equal, indignantly protests at the invitation extended to a Presbyterian minister to preach on Good Friday in St. Paul's Cathedral. And yet there is all this talk of "unity" among the two hundred sects of Christianity!

A fire destroyed ornaments, books, and hangings in a Preston Church. Aldenham Parish Church also blazed suddenly, and the Vicar led a party of volunteers to quell it. St. Luke's Church, Peckham, was the scene of a burglary, when not only valuables were stolen, but much damage was done to the furniture. In fact, God seems to be in recess, and there is nothing left for parsons but either to "watch and pray" or take out a heavy insurance.

Whoever counted the 10,000 spiders and weighed the 6 cwts. of dust that was swept from Evesham Parish Church must have cursed the men of God who had forgotten that "cleanliness is next to godliness."

Almost the last bulwark of freedom of the Press has been overcome in the Argentine. Peron's government has banned *La Prensa*, a liberal newspaper of over half a century, and one which did not hesitate to criticise the government, or to combat any encroachment of democratic liberty. Up to date, about 150 liberal journals have been banned by the Un-Argentine Activities Committee. Individual freedom of thought is in a precarious position in these days of mass organisations; extremes have met with, on the one hand, Fascist Argentine, and on the other Communist Russia, where no individual liberty is allowed; no one has the "right to be wrong." The torch of liberty is flickering—must it go out?

On March 12th the Soviet Union will hold an election. There will be one party: one official list of candidates and the electors will have the right either to vote for the official list—or not at all. Our election forecast is that the Communist Party will not lose its deposits.

Can you beat it? A correspondent in the *Evening News* asserts, with all pomposity, that Lent comes very appropriately now, rather than in the dull, dark days of winter. This profundity is on a level with the curate's joy that death comes at the end of life rather than in the middle.

Parents in Croydon Green who still think it necessary to have their children baptised will have to fill in a special form which asks whether the parents themselves were baptised, if they attended Sunday school, and if they still take an interest in church. Here, at least, one form for which the Government cannot be blamed. But just what value the vicar places on such forms is not at all clear, for undoubtedly people will still want to have their children "dipped" because it is the "thing to do" or because it is "lucky," or, as has been often stated, because it wards off the "evil eye."

In case pilgrims wanting to go to Rome for the Holy Year find the cost prohibitive, they are now told that they can go for five days there for £24, with "austerity" all the way; £5 a day, at least, seems rather a lot for the privilege of seeing Rome—or is it making peace with the Pope?—but no doubt it will be cheerfully paid by many. Nothing would persuade our pilgrims that the whole thing is a purely money-making concern and that the "Holy Year" is no more "holy" than is Lourdes.



# "THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,  
London, W.C. 1.  
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. ALMOND.—The author of the *Well of Loneliness* was the late Miss Radelyffe Hall. The book was privately printed and banned for public sale.

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.

The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), COMMON SENSE (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), 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.

Will correspondents please write on one side of the paper, and keep their letters brief. This will give everybody a chance.

## SUGAR PLUMS

On Thursday evening, 23rd March, Professor H. Levy, M.A., D.Sc., lectures for the National Secular Society in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1, on "The Meaning of Proof." There is more in the subject than meets the eye, and London readers are invited to join in giving Professor Levy a warm welcome. The lecture begins at 7-30, and admission is free.

The financial year of the National Secular Society ends on 31st March and outstanding subscriptions should be forwarded to the Head Office before that date, for inclusion in the Annual Balance Sheet to be submitted to the Conference at Sheffield. Every member of the Society can attend the Conference, speak, and vote on any of the resolutions.

Continuing their 69th Anniversary arrangements, the Leicester Secular Society have organised a Supper and Social for Thursday evening, 16th March. The inclusive charge is 5s., admission by ticket only. These can be obtained from Mrs. Dalby, not later than 10th March.

By ordinary standards there should be a deep depression over Heaven at the moment. God's guidance in the General Election, prayed for at a crowded election meeting in St. Paul's Cathedral, has landed the country in a political mess, and another election at an early date is predicted to put things right. Now the electors of Utttoxeter have voted in favour of Sunday opening of cinemas by 1,740 against 472. The majority might have been greater if the 472 had received copies of our Sunday Cinema leaflet.

We still have a few bound volumes of *The Freethinker* for 1949, and two only for 1948, for sale. They have sold remarkably well, and interested readers would be advised to snap them up. Back volumes are difficult to obtain and fortunate owners are always envied their luck.

## ON HERBERT SPENCER

NOWADAYS, the theological conception—that Man was "created" by God and, in essence, remains to-day what he was on the day of his creation—is seldom advanced openly. With certain "liberal" trappings it is nevertheless carried over into the conception of the non-dialectical Materialists (ranging from Rousseau and Herbert Spencer to Bertrand Russell). However much it may be camouflaged by the use of the term "Evolution," their subject-matter is in fact not History, not the objective development of the concrete material outcome of mankind's collective activity, but the relative and subjective development of Man and his "civilisation."

Lately, we have seen a good many agnostic Materialists desert our colours; the explanation for this fact is rather easy, if we see Religion mainly as a prop to prevent a derelict social edifice from crumbling. It is easy enough to "fight" an imaginary God or propose agnostic philosophies, so long as these ideals are unrelated to action. But when ideologically cornered through political tension, when confronted with the necessity of "taking sides," such men will retreat into the assertion that man's nature is rotten, that there is no real change anyhow and all we can do is to tinker with externals. And when it comes to the point where abstract tinkering won't do any longer, they remember that, first of all, they have their share in the old edifice: they readily sacrifice everything, including their "ideals," lest they endanger the ruling social order.

The rise of science has greatly narrowed the margin of mystery, so the modern makers of ideologies are facing a difficult task in producing such philosophies as to justify the *status quo*. It is far easier to manufacture the sought conclusions from pure fancies than from the actual nature of things. Hence, the apologists of the *status quo* have to instil their theological stuff whilst pretending to be "realists."

A brief two years after the tumults of 1848, when the rulers had regained their countenance, Herbert Spencer published his first book, purporting to be a scientific study of social phenomena. "What Spencer did was to start with two universal intuitions, which cannot be proved, and which must be accepted as necessities of thought—belief in personal identity, and belief in the permanent constitution of things which we call Nature." (cf. Duncan, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, p. 157.) Later, in his *Study of Sociology*, he "implies that in the slow course of things changes almost immeasurable in amount are possible" which "greatly moderates the hopes and fears of extreme parties." And he finds comfort in the idea that evidently "the Doctrine of Evolution, in its social applications, is calculated to produce a *steadying* effect alike on thought and action." (My italics. c. XVI.)

And what could be steadier than the apparent "fixity" of stellar motions? Thus Natural Law became a conception of Fixed and Necessary Limitations to Change on the one side, and permanence on the other. Changes were interpreted as interferences from outside with natural persistencies. Hobbes (*Leviathan*, c. II) asserts that not only inertness tends to persist: "When a body is once in motion, it moveth, unless something else hinder it, eternally".

Until, under the laborious studies of Darwin, Natural Science could start, a body of organised knowledge had to be collected with careful discrimination between species and individual varieties; so the Natural Order ranged from individual, through genera, species, family, order, etc., up to the Universal Order. In the name of Natural



Law the pre-Darwinian natural philosophers demanded implicit obedience from the facts within their scope, supposing that the species was a kind of blue-print held up by the Inscrutable Author of Natural Law, to which the wayward individual conformed as best he might. This is still the fundamental belief of the Fascist rascists.

Under this historical angle, the Royalist Hobbes can be excused; but what shall we say of Spencer, the "liberal" agnostic who extended this "Natural Law" into the field of human morale?

In England, the nineteenth-century industrial capitalist rejoiced to find throughout the animal kingdom a struggle for existence sharper than his own. Every organism lives under the disadvantage of being possible food for someone else, i.e., to be killed for the survival of others. That which, however, has escaped the notion of Spencer and his disciples is that Man, long ago, dropped out of this Food Chain, and, in fact, became its master.

For Spencer, the social propagandist, poverty was a sign of biological unfitness; if the impoverished masses demonstrated their fitness by concerted action in overthrowing the power of the rich, it was but "interference from outside" (or "Communist propaganda," as we call it nowadays). Yet, through the application of the theory of animal struggle to the economic battlefield, Spencer not only tried to palm off the shortcomings of our society with all its starvation and injustices, but to sanction the prerogatives of the rich at the expense of the toiling poor. "The poverty of the incapable, the distress that comes upon the imprudent, the starvation of the idle, and those shoulderings aside of the weak by the strong, which leaves so many 'in shallows and miseries,' are the decrees of a large, far-seeing benevolence." (*Social Statics*, p.354.) Consequently, sharing the Socialist antipathies of the Nazis, his doctrine is to show that we ought do away with doles and social insurances generally, because such measures help the unfit to survive at the expense of the fit. Herbert Spencer, descended from pronounced Non-conformist stock and lacking in appreciation of art, poetry, history and the value of travel, opposed even public education for those who cannot pay for it.

It is this social outlook which eventually accounted for Spencer's (and now Russell's) change of mind.

He started as an agnostic and relied on his own reasoning powers. Later in his life he came to regard creeds with a sympathy based on his desire to find an "engineering formula" for the "ultimate mystery." While he considered metaphysical questions as insoluble, they compelled him to recognise an "inscrutable Power" behind the phenomena which he called the "Unknowable." In this recognition of the Absolute—an inscrutable knowledge, which cannot be proved but has to be taken for granted—he finds the reconciliation of Science and Religion. That is the inescapable road of "Pure Rationalism".

At best, Spencer was doing substantially what Feuerbach, the German agnostic and materialist, attempted, whilst Dialectical Materialism demonstrates Man's "one-ness" with the cosmic process and material Nature—but also, and thereby, that Man alters Nature, and that more or less completely in accordance with his own will and pattern. It demonstrates Man's dialectical distinction from Nature, in the act and the fact of his productive opposition of himself to Nature. "By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time, changes his own nature." (*Marx, Capital*, vol. I, pp. 156-7.)

In this way, no other animal can react upon Nature and re-model or adapt it according to preconceived ideas. That is why it is sheer nonsense to apply mechanically to human society any conditions as may be found within the animal kingdom.

PERCY G. ROY.

### THE WATCH STORY AGAIN

HERE it is again, as fresh as if it had never been written up a thousand times before:—

"When I ran into Lewes (George Henry), I was one of G. W. Foote's youthful followers, an avowed Atheist, though even to myself I dared not say the word. I compromised with 'Agnostic.' I read *The Freethinker*, but never in public, usually at home in the lavatory. But Foote was not exactly metaphysical, he emulated Colonel Ingersoll and Bradlaugh, and I have myself heard him repeat Bradlaugh's notorious challenge to God to strike him dead on a public platform if he really existed: he (Mr. Foote) would give Him (God) five minutes. And there Mr. Foote stood, watch in hand, timing Him, while we sat and waited."—*Second Innings*, page 73. By Neville Cardus. Published by Collins.

The only thing that spoils the above pretty story is that it is not true. It was not true when applied to Ingersoll, it was not true when it was applied to Charles Bradlaugh, and it is not true now that it is applied to G. W. Foote. This hoary old lie has been going the rounds of the Christian world for years and it appears that it will never die. It originated as a "Christian truth" and will do duty for many more years yet. In fact, we confidently forecast that it will be applied to Chapman Cohen in the future, as indeed, it may be to all Freethought speakers. We challenge Mr. Neville Cardus to bring forward proof that G. W. Foote, Bradlaugh, or Ingersoll, ever used such stupid histrionics whilst lecturing. We do know of one man who used this "watch story," but the role of the jester was assumed to shock his hearers, and this man was not G. W. Foote. We believe it was George Bernard Shaw—and perhaps Mr. Shaw will confirm or deny it, in these columns.

We are willing to place the columns of *The Freethinker* at the disposal of Mr. Neville Cardus, although we suspect he will not take advantage of our offer either to substantiate his assertion, or withdraw it.

J.S.

**MATERIALISM RESTATED.** Fourth edition. By Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 3d.

**THE MOTHER OF GOD.** By G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

**ROME OR REASON? A Question for Today.** By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; postage 1d.

Under the auspices of the  
**NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY**  
Professor H. LEVY, M.A., D.Sc.,  
will lecture on

**THE MEANING OF PROOF**  
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1

on  
Thursday, March 23rd, at 7.30 p.m.  
ADMISSION IS FREE.



CORRESPONDENCE

SHAKESPEARE AND JOYCE

Sir.—Let no one be deceived by the fine articles, pro and con, of Kent, Cutner, Yates, *et al.* There is no Shakespeare problem. That conclusion I arrived at 60 years ago, and it has been reinforced by 60 years' reading of the plays, visits to London and Stratford, and a rudimentary knowledge of the laws of evidence.

May I also congratulate Mr. Cutner on his devastating articles about that uninspired lunatic, James Joyce.—Yours, etc.,

Pittsburgh, U.S.A.

GEORGE SEIBEL.

JAMES JOYCE

Sir.—Cruel circumstance has only to-day brought me to your issue of January 8, and so to read Mr. Cutner again at his favourite sport of showering contumely on James Joyce and his admirers. I am not inspired to grapple with Mr. Cutner—my views on Joyce have already appeared in your pages—but let me at least dispel his extraordinary belief that "to profess a love of beauty in music, in painting, and in sculpture, is like a red rag to a bull" to "the kind of people who like Joyce and Picasso." By implication, Mr. Cutner finds beauty in Mozart, in Michelangelo, and in Marlowe. Can it be that he is not aware that Hindemith and Epstein and Picasso and Joyce rank among the keenest and most sensitive appreciators of those artists in their particular fields? Or, if he is aware, what explanation can he put forward for what must seem to him a renunciation of that peculiar thing called beauty?—Yours, etc.,

N. T. GRIDGEMAN.

THE SHAKESPEARE PROBLEM

Sir.—A final word for Mr. Parsons. He is muddled. Edward de Vere was the Earl of Oxford, not Leicester.

His rustic neighbours gave him the finest grave-space in their church and cursed those who moved his bones. "Wherever does he get this from? Most of us expect our relatives to find us a grave. Why ask neighbours to do it? Shakespeare had bought the tithes, and socially was a man of position. At one time money would buy space in Westminster Abbey, as Humbert Wolfe recognised when he wrote:—

"For the rich and successful are apter  
To commend themselves to the Chapter."

The doggerel about his bones—which Mark Twain thought were the only lines Mr. Parsons' Shakespeare wrote—have always been attributed to him. I do not know Mr. Parsons' grounds for saying that anybody else was responsible.

If Mr. Parsons thinks there are likenesses between the handwriting of Shakespeare and that of Dickens, he knows nothing of calligraphy and little about Dickens. Mr. Parsons can see any day in the British Museum a letter written by Dickens to George Eliot, when he was only two years younger than was Shakespeare when he made his last extant scrawl. He can read every word of it. W. W. Greg published a fine volume giving specimens of the handwriting of about fifty Elizabethan writers. There was not one that appeared so labouring and illiterate as Shakespeare. Probably that was why the Editor discreetly omitted specimens of Shakespeare's handwriting!—Yours, etc.,

W.M. KENT.

THE WORD "ISRAEL"

Sir.—Much though I always appreciate and enjoy Mr. Cutner's contributions, I am sorry to say that his explanation of the name of "Israel" as a possible compound of "Isis" (ESTET) and Râ + El is without any foundation. In Hebrew, that name is spelled "Yisrâ'el" (with a preceding jot), meaning: the El who fights. In their awe not to name and cite powerful agencies, primitive people use roundabout ways of mentioning them. In the first instance, the "El who fights" was a Bull totem, the magic descendents of this steer ancestor called themselves "b'nej-Yisrâ'el"—literally (as the Bible has it): the children of Yisrâ'el.

Later, when Ezra, Nehemya and Co., having brought back from the exile some knowledge of astronomy, compiled the ancestral sagas into a Holy Book after the zodiacal pattern, they accorded the occult name of the people's totem to a tribal god, Ya'akob (Jacob), a god of Heaven whose name denotes "One who rotates." Perhaps it was no longer clear whether the El-who-fights was a Bull (taurus) or Ram (aries), but as both these zodiacal signs introduced the year at different historical periods, they were apt to circumscribe, as *pars pro toto*, the God of Heaven. So long as the spring equinox

(Passah) remained under *taurus*, the Israelites were the *taurisci*, the men of the Bull clan.

The Ram God, however, was Isaac (Yitz'khâq)—He laughs—another Faunus or Pan whose derisive and puckish laughter echoes the woods. Being a symbol of fertility, he must be sacrificed and a slight hint at his shape as ram is still contained in Gen. xxii, 13. Besides, in the esoteric language the facial contortions of the victim were called "the laughter." Originally, these tribal gods, brought into relationship in the biblical compilation, had nothing to do with each other.—Yours, etc.,

P. G. ROY.

[Mr. Cutner writes: "Mr. Roy does not give in the above how the word Is-ra-el was formed in the first instance. As the Encyclopedia Biblica points out, almost all the names in the Old Testament are artificial and were specially composed for some particular purpose."]

FATIMA CURES

Sir.—In the current issue of *The Voice of Fatima* (Portugal) testimonials to miracles are often given, and the paper's sub-heading, "We publish no miracles that are not confirmed by a Parish Priest or a qualified doctor," is carried on every issue.

As an instance of the depth to which the medical profession can descend, the following announcement, one of many in *The Voice of Fatima*, is a fair sample:—

I, Domingos Jardim, Licentiate of Medicine of the University of Oporto, testify on my word of honour that Delphina Sousa, 25 years of age, suffered during one year from *cortice pleurite*, and that the treatment I gave her proved efficacious only from the time that the patient had faith in Our Lady of Fatima and her miracles.

It is a fact that many priests do actually advise against doctors and operations, and the medical profession, rather than fight against this dead hand of medievalism, prefer to take the line of least resistance, and publish announcements of which the above is typical.

Portugal.

N. F.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: "Man and the Bible." Mr. ARTHUR W. SWAINE (Jehovah's Witness).

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 14, 7 p.m.: "The Conditions of European Revival." Mr. DAVID SHILLAN.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Education Act, 1944." Mr. JAMES P. MORRISON, M.A.

Irish Rationalist Society (The Four Courts Hotel, Dublin).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Psychology and Religion." Mr. EDMOND LAWASL.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Franco's Spain and the Church." Mr. CHARLES DUFF.

Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Hope Hotel, 73, Loampit Vale, S.E.).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: "The Church, State, and Politics." Mr. F. A. HORNIBROOK.

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

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "De Profundis—the Case of Oscar Wilde." Mr. A. J. STATHAM.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Problem of Disarmament." Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: A Lecture. Mr. DESMOND GREAVES (Editor, "The Irish Democrat.")

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 N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—12 noon. Mr. L. EBURY.

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



## CONTRACEPTIVES AND AUTOMATIC MACHINES

(Concluded from page 91)

The use by the Archbishop of the word "child," is obviously done to create prejudice by wrongly implying what a deplorable thing it is that any of these articles should get into the possession of a child of tender years, but such an event is extremely improbable and even if it did happen it is difficult to imagine how any harm would be caused. In the case, however, of a young person who has attained the age of puberty, as that young person would be capable of becoming a parent and of being infected by the disease, the desirability of being safeguarded by these articles is equally as great if not greater than in the case of a person of more mature an age.

It is extremely doubtful whether a substantial number of those young persons who would have used these things would be deterred from so-called immoral conduct because of the impossibility of getting them. This assertion is supported by a statement occurring on page 6 (14) of the report of the Trevethin Committee of Inquiry on Venereal Disease, issued in 1923. That statement was that certain people therein described, "attach too much weight to the deterrent effect of the fear of disease," and it is submitted that one might rightly add: "and the fear of conception." Some of these persons would no doubt take the wise course of abstaining from the forbidden pleasure, but many would proceed to indulge in some form of sexual experience and in consequence would be prepared to take risks, the risk of conception which might take place even if the practice of "coitus interruptus" were adopted, the risk of the social ruin of a young girl for life, the risk of the tragedy of bringing into the world a helpless innocent creature who would probably throughout the whole of his or her life bear the stigma of illegitimacy, the risk of being infected by what Voltaire called "that frightful ravage of nature which poisons the human race at its source and associates the most abominable of plagues with the most necessary of pleasures" ("Il Faut Prendre Un Parti," XVI, Tome XXXI, Paris 1821 ed., p. 176), the risk that an innocent babe will be infected by that most abominable of plagues with the result that it may become blind or deformed or mentally defective.

All these horrors will occur as the result of some of these young persons taking these risks. They might have been prevented by the use of these safeguards which are now going to be taken away.

In John VIII, 11, we read that Jesus said to the woman taken in adultery: "Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more." But the Archbishop, so unlike his Master in this respect, would wish to condemn innumerable young, ignorant, inexperienced persons and innocent babes, to lifelong misery because of some youthful indiscretion, in many cases committed at one passionate moment of overwhelming temptation.

In 1865, Mr. Solly, F.R.S., an eminent surgeon of those days, gave evidence before the committee appointed to inquire into the incidence of venereal disease. He was asked the following question: "Have you ever thought upon the best mode of arresting the progress of or putting a check upon the disease (i.e., syphilis) as regards the community at large . . .?" His answer was: "No, I have not, but I do not hesitate to say that I think if a good check could be found with regard to the Army and Navy, it would be most desirable. With regard

to the public, I see no reason for interfering at all." He was then asked the following question: "Then you are rather an advocate for the perpetuity of the disease?" He answered: "I think it is intended as a punishment for our sins, and that we should not interfere. I think that if every young man knew that he could have intercourse without the danger of syphilis there would be a great deal more fornication than there is." (See Parliamentary Papers, 19th November, 1867, to 31st July, 1868, No. 37, Questions 3,897, 3,898.)

Mr. Solly's answers were typical of the mentality of a vast number of prudish people of those times. Unfortunately those people still exist to-day. It was the Solly mentality that in the middle of the last war made most local authorities throughout the country reject a method of checking the spread of venereal disease which was advocated by the National Society for the Prevention of Venereal Disease. The method consisted of exhibiting in certain public places a simple description of a prophylactic precaution to be adopted directly after irregular intercourse. It was rejected presumably for the same reason as that now given by the Archbishop for taking away safeguards from young persons, namely, that it made irregular intercourse easy and safe.

Not only does the present official attitude towards the prevention of venereal disease apparently closely follow Mr. Solly's opinion in relation to ordinary members of the public, that any attempt to prevent the disease should not be allowed, because, if it was allowed, that would be an interference with a divinely ordained punishment for sin, but it strikingly follows a grossly inconsistent opinion that the prevention of the disease should be allowed in the case of members of the fighting Forces. It is common knowledge that there exist facilities in many service units for members of the Forces to acquire these articles free, and what is significant, without publicity. It is indeed not only a strange inconsistency, but it is a distorted form of justice to single out as special objects of divine punishment for sin, young inexperienced civilians, and at the same time to ensure that as far as possible members of the fighting Forces should escape that punishment.

Illegitimacy and venereal disease are such terrible calamities that every possible method of preventing them should be available to all persons of all ages. The Archbishop and his Parliamentary supporters, however, say in effect: "No, not to the young." That attitude is inhuman, it is callous and it is cruel.

The Archbishop said that the sale of these articles to young persons was horrible. It certainly is horrible to realise that this proposed legislation is an ominous sign that our inept legislators are still dominated by the pernicious influence of ecclesiastics in matters profoundly affecting the happiness and health of the people.

J. H. G. BULLER, D.S.O., LL.B.

### DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

Stamped upon English money is FID. DEF., the abbreviation of the above title in Latin, which was conferred by Pope Leo X on King Henry VIII, his heir and successors for ever, because Henry had written a book against Martin Luther's violent attack, defaming Roman Catholicism. Then King Henry established Protestantism, and ceased to be Catholic. So that the reigning Royalty of England, by their coronation oath, swear to be true Protestants; while the current coin of the realm declare English Kings and Queens to be the Defender of the Faith—meaning by Faith, Roman Catholicism.

W. A. V.