

# The Freethinker

Vol. LXXIII—No. 12

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Price Fourpence

WHEN one of the Romanoff Tsars of Russia "shuffled off this mortal coil," the cry was immediately raised: "The Little Tsar is dead." To-day, and as we write these lines, another "Tsar" is, if not yet dead, at least reputed to be dying. Though, in this case, it is by no means a *little* Tsar who passes. Whatever views one may hold about communism in general, or about the Stalin regime in particular, no one with any sense of historical perspective can seriously deny that the Russian dictator is one of the great figures of our time. Like his immediate predecessor, Lenin, and his more remote predecessor, Tsar Peter, Stalin is one of those rare dynamic statesmen to whom it has been given "to cast the kingdoms old into another mould." As the organiser, par excellence, of the greatest revolution of our time, the place of Stalin in universal history is reasonably secure, as far as such things can be predicted in advance.

We are not here concerned with political phenomena as and when considered as such, nor do we open our columns to hero-worship, to the dubious and idealistic "great man" interpretation of history (as far as Stalin is concerned, he is assured of his due mead and, perhaps, more of posthumous adulation, even in professedly materialistic circles). "Great" men, like us lesser mortals, are conditioned by circumstances and owe much to the times in which they live.

For example, in the case under discussion, had Stalin not been rescued by the historical accident that the Russian Revolution broke out in March, 1917, he would have lived out the rest of his weary days in the Siberian Arctic, the one part of the Tsar's dominions from which political prisoners never escaped, where he was serving a life sentence for his political activities against the then Tsarist regime. (Incidentally, so far was the Russian Revolution from being regarded as inevitable in 1917, that, only a few months before it broke out, the exiled Lenin told a Swiss audience that he was afraid it would not transpire in his lifetime.) No doubt many a potential "Lenin" and "Stalin" rotted to death in the course of earlier centuries in the Siberian wilderness or in the terrible waterlogged dungeons of the Tsarist fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul in Petersburg. For, the Russian Revolution which finally erupted in 1917, had already behind it a century of epic heroism and of countless martyrs who perished, for the most part, "unwept, unhonoured, and unsung."

As, with the death or permanent incapacity of Stalin, an entire epoch in both Russian and Revolutionary history may now be said to have closed, it may be opportune to consider in broad historical perspective the effects of the Russian Revolution upon both Freethought and, more generally, upon secular philosophy. For there can be no doubt that, like earlier revolutions, its impact has been both profound and far-reaching.

In general, the influence of the social revolutions of the

past upon the evolution of religion has been profound, whether for good or evil. It is now indisputable that the effects of the unsuccessful servile revolutions in the Roman world upon the origins of Christianity were very great, though even freethinking critics of Christian origins have strangely neglected them. Similarly, Christianity itself has been strongly influenced by many more recent revolutions, culminating in the Protestant Reformation, which was a social upheaval equally with a theological one.

When we turn to the rise of modern secularism, it is impossible to divorce its origins and evolution from the dynamic effects in both the social and intellectual

spheres from the Dutch, English and French Revolutions of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Legal toleration for Freethought and for free publication were first secured in modern Europe by, and as a direct result of, the Dutch revolt against Spain and by the English revolt against the Stuarts. (For example, Spinoza, the first Freethought philosopher to die in his bed, only did so because the Dutch Protestants had forcibly overthrown the Inquisition. In England, the first form of modern Freethought was only made possible by the toleration established by Cromwell and "the glorious revolution" of 1688.)

In its modern forms in the Western world, both Freethought, atheism, and secularism, date, as mass movements, from the French Revolution (1789-94), and could not have existed without it. The famous Freethinkers of the 18th century were merely cliques of unorganised and persecuted individuals, like most pioneers everywhere. One could, indeed, almost describe the history of the 19th century as the struggle between the liberal ideas unleashed by the French Revolution, and the forces of the old regime in Church and State. Even to-day, those lands where religion is still officially established—the Spain of Franco is the outstanding example—this is due to the current defeat of "French" ideas by the forces of the old pre-revolutionary regime.

The Russian Revolution also takes its place in the historic succession of anti-clerical revolutions. Prior to 1917, the Russian Empire, "Holy Russia," was nothing but a vast semi-asiatic theocracy, in which the sacrosanct Tsar was both Emperor and Pope simultaneously. Over the vast population of illiterate serfs the superstitious "orthodox" Church exercised an absolute sway. For brutality, illiteracy, and political obscurantism, the "Holy Synod" was a worthy successor of the Inquisition, whilst the infamous charlatan, the Reverend Rasputin, was only the last of a long series of clerical impostors to dominate Russia's superstitious rulers.

Into this mediæval theocracy, the Russian Revolution burst like the proverbial thunderbolt. For the first time in all Russian history, the Government seriously set to work to teach the peasants the arts of literacy. For the past generation, despite some perhaps inevitable compromises

## —VIEWS and OPINIONS—

### Freethought and the Russian Revolution

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

with the old Churches, State education has been based on atheism, materialism, and, broadly, on secularist principles; whilst, even to-day, no member of the governing communist party can be a member of the Russian "orthodox" Church. The above are major achievements.

Since 1945, one can add that the communist regimes have broken the immemorial power of the Catholic Church in Hungary, Poland, and Croatia. As far as secularism is concerned, the Russian Revolution may, we think, be counted as one of its most powerful allies in modern history.

With regard to Freethought, however, the position is not quite so satisfactory. Like all modern revolutions in their early stages, the Russian Revolution has had its phase of

dictatorship—even England had its Cromwell. In the present regime which Stalin now hands on to his eventual successors, power in the still highly centralised regime is in the hands of a minority, whilst political opposition is still ruthlessly suppressed. The current mentality engendered by such a regime is one characterised by discipline rather than by Freethought, which is alien to an atmosphere of uniformity. In Marxist philosophy, the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is destined eventually to "wither away" into a stateless regime. Let us hope that the removal of the iron hand of Stalin will be followed by a more liberal political regime behind the (so-called) "Iron Curtain," the effects of which will, ultimately, extend to both sides of the Atlantic.

## Thomas Frederick Palmer

By THE EDITOR

*This speech was delivered at Golders Green Crematorium on Tuesday, March 10.*

*As announced in our last issue, Mr. T. F. Palmer died of cerebral haemorrhage on Thursday, March 5, after a short illness, at the age of 82. Mr. Palmer was born in Bath on November 13, 1870, and had been active in Freethought circles for more than half a century.*

WITH the death of T. F. Palmer yet another of the now few remaining links with what we may perhaps term the golden age of British Secularism is severed. T. F. Palmer became interested in Freethought in the closing years of the 19th century, when the influence of Herbert Spencer dominated contemporary Radical sociology and when G. W. Foote, along with a brilliant band of collaborators, was fighting an uphill battle against the then still firmly entrenched forces of privilege and superstition in the orthodox and aristocratic England of the day. T. F. Palmer threw himself wholeheartedly into this battle. In political outlook he became, and he remained down to the end of his days, a Radical of the Herbert Spencer school who vigorously opposed the forces of reaction and privilege whilst continuing to champion Spencer's doctrine of "The Man versus the State," and remaining consistently distrustful of the collectivist trends of the day and of the over-developed powers which socialist philosophy tends to vest in the State and its representatives. In a debate in which he participated, some 20 years ago, we remember Mr. Palmer's emphatic assertion that liberty, which he held to be the life-blood of progress, could not continue to exist under the Socialist State, which would never tolerate the free expression of minority opinion.

However, Mr. Palmer's main activities lay in the Secular Movement. A freelance journalist by profession, it was only natural that his primary activity should be in Freethought journalism. For upwards of half a century (1900-1953) he contributed regularly to *The Freethinker* and became one of its best-known and most respected collaborators. In this field he remained in harness until the very end, an article from his pen appearing in print on the day of his death. It is scarcely necessary to remind readers of *The Freethinker* of T. F. Palmer's wide range, lucid style and encyclopædic knowledge. He wrote articles and reviewed books on numerous subjects, and countless readers must have obtained from him their first initiation into the vast labyrinth of human culture.

Perhaps on account of his varied research into the numerous fields which he never failed to illuminate, as well as to the necessities of livelihood, Mr. Palmer did not produce the solid works of scholarship which might have been expected from his wide erudition. He contri-

buted pamphlets on "Immortality" and "Evolution" to Freethought literature, and collaborated with Mr. Chapman Cohen in revising *The Bible Handbook*. As an active member for many years of the North London Branch, N.S.S., he demonstrated himself to be a capable indoor lecturer and a keen and forceful debater, always *au fait* with the intricacies of the subject in hand. Whenever T. F. Palmer rose to speak in discussion his audience always were enlightened by his intervention.

Death, when it knocks, always seems a tragedy to the survivors. But in the case of Thomas Frederick Palmer he concluded a long life of keen study, and of honourable service to his fellow-men. Like most men whose primary interest is in ideas rather than in material gain, Mr. Palmer did not find the London streets paved with gold, and he lived and died a poor man. He enjoys, and will continue for long to enjoy, the deeper respect that is evoked by a fine intellect and by unwearied service to his fellow-men. Sometimes we are a little impatient at the seemingly slow progress of advanced ideas; but there is nothing much wrong with our movement whilst it commands the life-long devotion of such men as Thomas Frederick Palmer. His memory is an inspiration for us all.

### Black Cat

What in the fire do you watch so enraptured,  
Loftily free from subservience and awe?  
Disdain lies magnificent over your profile  
And runs to the tip of each cleanly-laid paw.  
Do you see visions of some further lifetime  
When we knelt before you and named you a god,  
Some nobler age of temples and sunshine  
When men were disposed by the autocrat's nod?  
Midnight's your hour with the fierce firelight fading—  
And your jewelled eyes wideawake and afar,  
With secretive visions beyond man's computing,  
Cruel and complete and remote as a star.  
What do you think of, self-centred and splendid,  
Satanic beholder of darkening gleams?  
What sudden prompting of swift-pouncing terror  
Uncovered your claws like a murderer's schemes?  
Yours is the night and the lonely recesses,  
Beneath the wild moon in the listening land.  
Yours is the night and the perilous reaches,  
Where life droops suspended from Sleep's slender hand.  
What call of the Sabbath turned you to the window,  
Satirical, stealthy as shadows in shade?  
For ever the question impinges on silence,  
For yours is the secret no mortal has made.

JOHN O'HARE.

# Our Seniles and Incurables

By (Mrs.) K. C. ALLPRESS

CARDINAL GRIFFIN recently rounded off his objections to the Abortion Law Amendment with the *cri du coeur*, "What is to stop them from killing off our aged and incurables on the same principle?" And I reply, "Nothing, save the tradition of sentiment and an unwillingness to depart from custom." We refuse to examine the realities of the problem, shrink with horror from deliberate extermination as if it were murder, and tuck it all away tidily at the back of our minds as an unalterable dispensation of God to prolong human life at any cost.

What we ignore in so doing is that the skill and devices of Medical Science have already interfered with God's Natural Law in many cases—with surgery, drugs and general therapy—and must, therefore, accept responsibility for the results of that interference. If at one end of the scale doctors exercise beneficent control over the human organism, it should not be allowed to squander itself and sprawl unchecked at a later stage. Death is as surely part of "God's scheme" as life, and the object of life being, we think, to develop and refine the individual, death may rightly intervene once that process is arrested or reversed. When our seniles then become greedy, suspicious, selfish and cunning and lose all touch with both this world and a hypothetical next, whither has fled the soul they have been maturing perhaps for the last sixty or seventy years or its entry into "eternal life and union with God?" If still there, how crushed, hidden and impaired! If not, at precisely what point did it depart? No one can answer, but the query may at least make us pause and reconsider wherein true humaneness lies.

Again, all agree that the catastrophe of our Age is largely due to the way in which scientific progress has outstripped and disintegrated moral and philosophical development. We have not yet learned how to use our knowledge wisely. I suggest one way is to control the age of our population and see to it that longevity is a blessing or a benefit—and not a curse. Of what avail the extra years to the incontinent nonagenarian, deaf and stupid, whose only interest literally is the next meal; or to an advanced case of cancer whose days and minutes are one long-draw-out pain? Many argue that as the cure for cancer may be discovered any moment now, these patients should not be denied their chance of recovery. But if they are at all elderly, this slender hope should hardly outweigh their present sufferings; let the patients be preserved only when the cure has been found!

To-day, the growing preponderance of seniles, like a cancer itself, is sapping the vitality of the community. This is not just a high-sounding phrase but literal truth, as all who have nursed the aged know. Twenty-four hours a day service to a senile, seven days a week, can not only prostrate the daughter-housewife, but can disrupt the entire family with permanent after-effects. No-one thus placed, however tender-hearted and honourable, has in my experience ever refused to admit utter thankfulness when at last her patient has died—and all invariably add that they hope to merciful heaven they themselves will never live to be such a burden to their relatives! The natural love of child for parent is gradually worn away, at best into pity, at worst into resentment and disgust at the unpleasant stranger who bears so little resemblance

to the patient she once knew. Can it be humane or right for the kindly impulses and affections of whole families to be so inevitably denigrated for the sake of a dubious belief in the sanctity of life "as God gave it?" I do not think so.

From the community's point of view, too, the elimination of seniles would be desirable. As it is there are not nearly enough beds and nurses for the thousands of *old* people who need them, to say nothing of younger invalids whose usefulness will return. And the answer to this is not solely, "Provide more beds and train more nurses," since this is a panacea which will further drain the country of *productive* workers, instead of increasing their number as is desirable. Think of all the time, energy, brains and money that go to the upkeep of senile homes, all the young nursing vigour and staff efficiency virtually wasted on care of the useless when it is so badly needed elsewhere both in existing hospitals and in other kinds of work! The saving to the social economy, were seniles and incurables eliminated, would be enormous, but two main objections always arise and stay the reforming hand.

One of these objections is that however useless a man or woman seems to us, his mere presence on earth or what he does is intended by God and necessary to His universal "tapestry" of events. (But is it not also part of that tapestry that I shall think and write as I do to urge this reform on a society which *might* carry it out? Question-begging, I admit, but that too has its place!). My chief criticism, however, is that though a man, by merely existing, may conceivably be the indirect cause of some good event, like saving a child from drowning, he is just as likely, if not more so, to be the indirect cause of evil!—and that is not counting the direct harm he does when, as I have pointed out, he is senile or incurable.

(To be concluded)

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## A Bradlaugh Ceremony

By invitation of the Mayor of Northampton, admirers of Charles Bradlaugh will take part in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Bradlaugh Monument in Abington Square, Northampton, at 3-30 p.m., on Sunday, May 3. Naturally the N.S.S. will put in an appearance at this tribute to the Society's founder, and London members can join a coach party leaving Charing Cross Underground Station at 12-45 p.m. Fare, 14s. return. Early application should be made to the Secretary, N.S.S., for tickets.

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## N.S.S. Annual Conference, 1953

The Executive Committee of the N.S.S. announce that this year the Annual Conference will again take place in Leicester, this City being the ideal centre in the special circumstances of 1953. Arrangements have been made with the Leicester Secular Society for the Reception on Saturday, May 23, the Conference on Sunday, May 24, and the Public Demonstration on the Sunday evening to be held in the Secular Hall. Hotel accommodation at a reasonable charge will again be available at The Bell Hotel, where the Sunday luncheon will be provided. Those attending the Conference should be cheered and fortified to endure the trials that must beset the thinking minority of the population a week later, when the country gives itself over to enthusiasm for the "Royal Circus" taking place at Westminster. N.S.S. members have every reason to rally to Leicester this Whitsun.

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**SOCIALISM AND RELIGION.** By F. A. Ridley. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

## This Believing World

**Irony could hardly go further** than in the case of the Roman Church asking its sheep to pray for the soul of Stalin. We are aware, of course, that Jesus is supposed to have said that you must love your enemies—but, as is well known, he spent a considerable portion of his time in cursing and damning his. Still, it looks well—the magnanimous Holy Church ready to forgive and forget. Time will show how the new regime in Russia—if any—is going to tackle the Roman Church. We do not look forward to a “give the other cheek” regime.

**Jersey appears to be** in a battle for religion in schools, and the letters written by pious people to the local press are typical examples of the fear that religious people have that they may soon be forced themselves to pay for religious teaching in their own religious schools, and not out of public funds which is what they want. People who want religion should be prepared to pay for it, and it is scandalous that public funds should be used to teach the outworn nonsense comprised in Christianity. One thing does stand out in Jersey and that is that its Christian population, Catholic, Protestant, etc., are quite convinced that all brands except their own are false, their own coming straight from the mouth of Jesus. Pardon us if we laugh!

**“Spiritual” Healing is having to put up** with competition. For example, Mr. Harry Edwards does it all through spooks; the Rev. A. C. Valdez, who comes from America, and is now at Newport, does it all through Jesus. He got a supernatural call some four years ago and since then—though he admits that either he or Jesus fails now and then—he is rivalling Mr. Edwards in the number of cures of incurable cases he manages to get. He insists that they are “miracles before your eyes!” The blind, the halt, and the lame, see and walk like young teen-agers directly he (or Jesus) touches them. But, as in the case of the formidable Edwards, there never appear the medical certificates certifying that the cases are incurable, and nobody appears to want them. Except our ignorant sceptics.

**Marshal Tito's approaching visit** seems to make good Roman Catholics everywhere squirm. Tito is only doing what the Church has done for centuries—insisting that he and not the Pope will be master in his own house. In this, the Church has had a long innings and we can well appreciate Roman Catholic anger against anybody who stands up to the Pope. We wonder, if the late Marshal Stalin had come to England on a mission of goodwill, English Catholics would have been angry? Even if he came to abolish war? Yet Stalin was a bigger enemy of the Church than Tito.

**The New Revised Standard Version** of the Bible just published in America has naturally confounded the Fundamentalists. A few of their most precious texts have been changed out of all recognition—or, to put it another way, God's Precious Word has been so hacked about that nobody now is sure what is the Precious Word. In the good old days of the Authorised Version, there never was any difficulty. There it was in the Bible, and infidels have withered away in their criminal attempts to tamper with God's Revelation.

**Unfortunately, a century** of intensive searching and criticism has shown that the Authorised Version got some things quite wrong dozens of times, and God insisted that they had to be put right. For example, the infidel Jews

have always protested that the translation of the famous passage in Isaiah regarding a Virgin was a fraud, and that the word merely meant a young woman, and that if a Virgin had been meant, Isaiah would have used a different word. It is dreadful to think about it, but the new translation has had to give in to the Jews, and there is quite a holy row in theological circles at this awful surrender to an unbelieving gang of the hated people.

**But a Methodist Bishop** called Martin has intervened. “The fundamentalist,” he says, “is always afraid that someone is going to overturn the Ark. The same type of mind at present condemning the new version of the Scriptures has condemned every other version we have had, including the King James Version.” Hear, hear! Bishop Martin may one day find that the *Age of Reason* is even more reliable than any version of the Scriptures.

## Theatre

**“The Father.”** The Arts Theatre.

August Strindberg's famous play (Max Faber's version) is about a Freethinker father and his losing fight against his wife as to which shall control the upbringing of their twelve year-old daughter. She plans and determines to have him certified mad to deprive him of his rights as father, and when he proposes sending the girl to town to stay with friends his wife exclaims with contempt, “Those Freethinkers!”

To a modern audience the play has slight weaknesses which were probably not apparent to the less psychologically-minded of the late 19th century, but it is grim and gripping.

Wilfrid Lawson expresses the strength of the Captain in a military voice at times incoherent, and he shows a striking contrast in the weaker moments. Beatrix Lehmann, as the wife, is hard and vehement—though at moments nearly tender—seeming to bear traces of her long-past Electra.

This is the third production by Peter Cotes now in the West End, and the many highly imaginative touches more than compensate for a tendency to slow down the action in places.

**“The Shrike.”** Palace Theatre.

This new American play by Joseph Kramm has a theme similar to “The Father,” but this is about a jealous woman who would rather have a mad husband than see him go to another woman. In each play the wife gains the power and ruins the man, but in this one the writing is relatively poor and the construction weak. It finishes where it should begin.

Sam Wanamaker is the man in a slouching monotonous performance. I would not like to see him as “The Father.” Constance Cummings, as the wife, puts the part over, but only just. Though a modern play, it contains more weaknesses than Strindberg's; the doctors show amazing stupidity and the whole thing is just a little too much larger than life.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS

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W. H. HUXLEY.—Apologies. We get so many cuttings that we cannot keep track of them all. We were under the mistaken impression that the Bournemouth paper rejected your letter *in toto*.

ALFRED REHTZ (Hamburg).—Thanks for your collected poems. We look forward to an English translation in the near future.

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Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

Lecture Notices should reach the Secretary of the N.S.S. at this 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.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Bomb Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hamstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: L. EBURY.

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

### INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: A Lecture.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 24, 7 p.m.: C. BRADLAUGH BONNER, "Radio Freedom."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: E. W. SHAW, M.R.San.I., "Roman Catholic Church and Sanitary Science."

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (The Trades Hall, Thurland Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m., F. A. RIDLEY, "Secularism—Critical and Constructive."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The Menace of Romanism."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, Ph.D., F.R.S.E., "Missing Links."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Street, Edgware Road, W.2).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: F. A. HORNIBROOK, "My Fifty Years of Freethought."

## NOTES AND NEWS

Our esteemed contributor, Mr. A. Yates, has defined Freethought as, in essence, the negation of religious belief—and nothing else, or more than that. In the course of his interesting article our contributor indicated that the present Editor of *The Freethinker* "habitually uses the term 'Freethought' in the sense which I disallow," and goes on to request "an authoritative lead" from the Editor upon this much-disputed point.

As far as "authoritative leads" are concerned we hasten to assure Mr. Yates that we have not the remotest

intention of issuing any ex-cathedra statement which professes to be such: we gave up the belief in papal and other infallibilities when we abandoned any belief in dogmatic theology! Freethinkers decide for themselves in such matters: they resemble the traditional Liberal M.P. who once made the historic boast that he "represented no one but himself and had the honour to possess the full confidence of his constituents"! and this goes for the Editor of *The Freethinker* as well as for his contributors.

However, if Mr. Yates wants the *personal*—and not "authoritative"—opinion of the present Editor, we think that he uses the term "Freethinker" in altogether too narrow a sense. In our opinion, Freethought may be defined as a critical mental attitude in *all* spheres of human experience: a critical attitude to authority and to received opinion in all walks and aspects of life. As another of our contributors, Mr. Du Cann, lucidly summarised it: "Freethought—which after all is only thinking with one's own mind instead of with other people's." We may, we think, add that such a mental attitude, Freethought in its essence, is the most valuable mental characteristic in the world, and has been, historically, the most valuable single factor in the known evolution of the human species.

Over and above this more general definition there is, of course, the more limited use of the term as the equivalent of anti-religion. In certain phases of the evolution of the Freethought Movement—though, even there, not in all—Mr. Yates's use of the phrase would be historically accurate and, of course, perfectly legitimate. Before Freethought could become general it had necessarily to assume the *negative* role of fighting religion and its current stranglehold on human culture. But, we must repeat, with all due deference to Mr. Yates, we cannot see how such a purely *negative* definition can be exclusive and exhaustive!

On Sunday, March 22, Mr. F. A. Ridley is speaking at the Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society on "The Menace of Rome," and later, for the Nottingham Branch N.S.S., at the Trades Hall, Thurland St., on "Secularism—Critical and Constructive." On the same night, Mr. F. A. Hornibrook is lecturing at "The Laurie Arms," Edgware Road, W., for the West London Branch, N.S.S., on "My Fifty Years of Freethought." These lectures should be of exceptional interest.

**MARSHAL TITO's** clash with the Vatican: the factual background

## TERROR OVER YUGOSLAVIA

BY AVRO MANHATTAN

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# Freethought and some Critics

By H. CUTNER

## II

FROM what I said in the previous article—and it is based on long experience—the reader can see that I am convinced our attack on Christianity has to be based on something very different from the usual discussion of dates, the value of certain manuscripts, and so on. As an example, whenever some ancient bit of manuscript or papyrus is discovered containing a few fragments of the Gospels or the Prophets, I find some Rationalists almost as excited as Christians. They appear to be just as anxious as Christians to prove that the late dates ascribed to the Gospels by Freethought critics are quite wrong. And if any of these manuscripts mention a “martyr”—that is, someone put to death for his opinions, even if he is not named anywhere, at the beginning of our era—why, that may be “Jesus of Nazareth,” and the mythicists are once more confounded.

Many years ago, I was ferociously attacked by Dr. Robert Eisler, a continental scholar of no mean attainments, for daring to differ from him on the historicity of Jesus. One or two of his articles appeared in these columns, but he became simply foully abusive, and I had to stop any further discussion. He himself completely differed from the orthodox presentation of the Christian case, but he was furious that anyone should differ from him. He claimed that Jesus was in reality the King of the Jews (I was never able to find out whether he was a crowned or an uncrowned king); he was also a Robber Chief with 900 brigand followers, and when he was not on duty as a King or as a Robber Chief, he was discussing the Pentateuch with Talmudic rabbis. This farrago of twaddle was seriously put forward by him and, as nobody appeared to take him seriously—except one or two Rationalists—he turned on me as a shocking example of sheer ignorance and stupidity.

The reader can rest assured that this kind of “discussion” is viewed by Christians with amused contempt. It had all happened many years previously before World War I, but the two disputants were then much better known. Dr. F. C. Conybeare was also a scholar widely admired and, in his *Historical Christ*, he made a furious onslaught on John M. Robertson—so furious was it, indeed, that he ought to have called his book the *Hysterical Conybeare*. A good deal more might have been heard of this but for the advent of the war, and I mention it because the *Historical Christ* has been a perfect Godsend ever since to Christians. Not willingly will they ever let it die. It is nearly always brought into any discussion when the existence of Christ is ever questioned: “Why, even the Rationalist Press has had to publish a book severely criticising the absurd nonsense that our Lord never existed.” And they add, “Why should we take the theory seriously when the Rationalist Press itself is against it?”

In truth, the Christian Church is ready to meet any criticism, but hates to meet one which puts Jesus Christ exactly on the same level as Jupiter or Apollo—nothing but a mythical Deity. That is more infamous than sinning against the Holy Ghost.

Thus it will be perhaps obvious why I dealt with the *Hibbert Journal* in three articles—though Mr. Yates is quite wrong when he says that my articles were entitled “The Hibbert Journal.” I hope he will have the grace to admit his mistake. The best of our theological journals,

I only very rarely referred to it, and I thought some readers at least may like to know what it thought of the Jesus Problem. The editor of the *Hibbert* flatly refused even to notice my *Jesus—God, Man, or Myth?* let alone review it; for, whatever else may happen, the chaste and orthodox readers of the *Hibbert*, even if a little more advanced than the followers of General Booth, must never be allowed to learn that there was very little more evidence for the existence of Jesus—if any at all—than there was for Adonis or Krishna.

As everybody knows who has engaged in the Shakespeare controversy, quite a number of people refuse to discuss it on the grounds that, after all, we have the plays, and it really doesn't matter much who was their author. In the same way, we have Freethinkers—at least 80 per cent. of them—who say it doesn't matter two hoots for Freethinkers whether there was a Jesus or not; all we are concerned with is to show that Jesus Christ was not God Almighty, that he was a man only, and it is a waste of time to discuss anything else. Good, and where has it led us?

The B.B.C. boasts that its religious broadcasts reach twelve million people every week, and all these broadcasts give a thoroughly Fundamentalist view of Jesus and Christianity. For all the B.B.C. cares, Freethought critics of the Bible might never have existed. And if unbelievers are permitted to cross words with believers, they must use the most discreet language, and under no circumstances would they be permitted to say that Jesus was a myth.

With the B.B.C. well behind them the Churches this year are going to have a perfect feast of true Christianity, not only before and during the Coronation, but long afterwards. Even the “Jesus-a-Man” Rationalists will be amusingly tolerated. At least, they are not mad enough to say that our Lord never existed. And all will be well in Heaven.

But Mr. Yates insists if we take Jesus away from Christianity and him there will be nothing for Freethinkers to attack. Freethought without Jesus—it does not bear thinking about! I find it hard to believe that he is serious.

There is Judaism which is not dead by a long way. There are religions like Buddhism and Islam—and there is the whole philosophy of Freethought as applied to our daily life, the fight for tolerance and justice, the right of freedom of speech for all men, and so on. When I read Mr. Yates's letter, I felt how much even in his case, Freethought had failed. How very little he had learnt of the philosophy of Freethought in all the years he had read this journal!

But let me make it clear that all Freethinkers are welcome into the movement whether they agree with very “advanced” views or not. Some will never get beyond the Renan stage. They find in Jesus Christ the Ideal they require—even if regarded only as a mere Man. Others may think of Him only as one of a large number of “Saviours,” ranking with Buddha and St. Francis of Assisi because, like them, He went about “doing good.” Still others will never lose the awe He has always inspired in them—something different, unique, if not an Almighty God, the nearest approach to one. I cannot share their views, but the Freethought Movement is big enough for us all. Even for Mr. Yates.

### The Seminarist

By VALENTINA MANOUSSO

IT was the year 1907; I do not remember the month: probably in the early spring, because Tiflis, the "City of Hot Springs," was not yet hot and dusty, but sunny, fresh and beautiful. Profiting by the fair weather I had taken my young children to play on the wide balcony overlooking the Golovinsky Prospect, the main street of the town.

The children were playing at trains, pushing cardboard boxes in guise of engines and carriages, puffing, whistling and having collisions, crashing with resounding noises. I was idly looking at the wide avenue, watching the passers-by, the few "phaetons" (the two-horse cabs) and the tram-cars. And then . . . a thundering crash shook the house . . . loud, short . . . somewhere near-by . . . The children were shocked, so frightened they could not even cry. Perhaps in their little souls they feared that they were responsible for the terrible happening, a real crash.

One thought only possessed my mind—to hide the babies, and I shepherded them double-quick into the nursery at the back of the house. What was it? It did not sound like an earthquake . . . or a thunder-clap . . . Curiosity proved stronger in me than caution, and with trembling hands I again opened the door leading to the balcony and peeped into the street. The street had been deserted, as if by magic. Only a few policemen and soldiers were running towards the Alexander Park, a few hundred yards away. They were shouting something, gesticulating.

"The telephone, madam . . ." A pale-faced maid announced this through the door, not daring to step on to the open balcony.

"Coming . . . 6-35 here . . . I am listening . . ."

"The doctor, please . . . it is urgent . . ."

"He is not at home. Try the Railway Hospital . . ."

Soon rumours started their rounds. A bomb had been thrown from the Alexander Park among the soldiers who were escorting a vehicle bringing money to the Treasury. An iron coffer containing several thousands of roubles had been placed on a four-wheeled platform, well in evidence. A horse was dragging the vehicle quite slowly, as it was escorted by six or eight soldiers on foot. A group of revolutionaries, hidden in the park, had thrown a bomb, and grabbed the money, when the shocked soldiers had been rendered *hors de combat* by the sudden attack. The gangsters had escaped, but somehow it became known that the leader's name was Josef Djughashvili.

My husband came home late in the evening with the sad news that our friend, Madame K., had been so badly injured by the explosion that he had to amputate her leg. No one was killed, but several were injured, some seriously. During the late meal my husband asked me:

"Do you know who this Djughashvili is?"

"Looks like . . . an anarchist . . ."

"Oh, no . . ." My pious sister-in-law ventured:

"An atheist?"

"All wrong, my dears . . . He is a seminarist . . ."

### King Jesus

THIS is the title of a historical novel by an eminent writer and scholar, one of the outstanding books of to-day, written by Robert Graves, an Oxford man who served in the First World War; later he became Professor of English at the Egyptian University in Cairo. He was an unconventional novelist who defied social convention and

who has had consequent trouble with his publishers. He soon discovered that the best way to make a living was by writing history disguised as novels. An essay written at the request of an American magazine for a description of the Roman world at the time of Jesus was returned with the hint that it was not in line with editorial policy. It later appeared in an English monthly instead. Other outstanding works of great interest to freethinkers are "I, Claudius," and "Claudius the God," obtainable at the public libraries.

The book "King Jesus" should be on every freethinker's bookshelf. It is a historical novel like the other two and gives an account of contemporary events between the reigns of Cæsar Augustus and Cæsar Tiberius, especially of events in Palestine under the Roman Procurator Pontius Pilate. Although the work is an imaginative novel with a basis of historical fact, the account given of the birth, life and death of Christ is as likely, or more likely, than another. It disposes of the immaculate birth story and makes Jesus out to be the grandson of Herod the Great, and his rightful legal successor to the Jewish throne. Hence the title. The narrative tells of a secret marriage between Herod's eldest son, Antipater, and the Princess Miriam (Mary), of the royal house of David, who became a temple virgin. The story tells how Antipater was falsely accused of high treason and beheaded by his father prior to the birth of the child Jesus. Miriam becoming later betrothed to an elderly wealthy timber merchant, Joseph, this being an arrangement of the lady Elizabeth, her cousin.

Mythology records that the great prehistoric goddess was the Great Triple Moon Goddess whose son Jaweh (Jehovah) was the tribal Hebrew deity, the great rival of Baal. Jaweh had two wives as equal co-partners whom he later divorced, as the Hebrews would not tolerate any female goddess. Later Jesus announced that his mission was to destroy the "works of the female."

The archaic Greeks recorded current events pictographically, and when by lapse of time the original meaning of a composition was lost a new meaning was invented that satisfied curiosity. A pictograph was called a "myth" by the Greeks, but it connoted no untruth as does the adjective in modern English. Thus ancient mythology may be a reliable yardstick by which to measure history. The book *King Jesus* contains much Greek and Hebrew mythology, and it is evident that a good deal of the material has been unearthed from hitherto untranslated Greek and Hebrew records.

The author has been accused of drawing upon his imagination far too liberally, but readers acquainted with the Apocryphal New Testament will soon appreciate that the narrative in *King Jesus* runs parallel with it. Both books can be read in conjunction with much interest.

F. S. HOUGHTON.

### English Christianity

"Which of the two forms of the Christian religion has had the more harmful results upon the minds of European populations, the Roman Catholic or the Protestant variety, is a question which is extremely difficult and perhaps impossible to determine. Whereas in Spain or Austria the power of the Catholic Church has been supreme, the effect has been, we know, the complete snuffing out of the thinking mind amongst the people, and the perpetuation of the Dark Ages. But, on the other hand, English bibliography has had even more pervading, and permanent, though quite different, cretinising effects. The complete intellectual surrender to priestly authority required by the Catholic Church, has resulted in obscurantism, and abolished intellectual activity and culture. But Catholic submission, involving as it does ritual prescribed observances, attendance on masses, confession, etc., and not only discouraging, but actually forbidding, theological thought, discussion, or inquiry, leaves the mind free from those preoccupations,

abolishes not only intellectual, but likewise moral problems. They are solved for the Catholic by submission to authority; he is delivered thereby from their obsession. The Catholic may, accordingly, be more human and more spontaneous in what mental and moral activities remain to him. He is not held to demonstrate and manifest at every moment, by the gravity of his demeanour, his concern for religion or righteousness. Among Continental Catholics that limited liberty goes as far as to allow the combination; startling to the Protestant of political anti-clericalism with quite orthodox and sincere practising religion.

"With the Protestant principle of 'private judgment,' the effect of religion on the mind becomes entirely different. Every man becomes his own theologian. The revolt against 'popery' resulted in England in a universal obsession with theology. Each weaver or tallow-chandler discovered his own solution of religious or theological doctrine, much as to-day every petty journalist or office clerk has his own plans for the solution of the world's social problems. The ignorance of the mass of English petty burghers and craftsmen at the time of the Reformation was abysmal. The majority were completely illiterate—many learned to read for the express purpose of being able to peruse the Word of God. They had no other literature, nor wished to have any. When, long after the Revolution, a tendency arose to rehabilitate the puritans, the hypocrisy and semi-illiteracy which had previously been charged against them by the aristocratic classes were excused by pointing out that even such men as Cromwell had scarcely ever read any other book than the Bible.

"Thus, the stranglehold of a tyranny was voluntarily fastened upon the general English mind by theological obsessions more complete and blighting in their way than was ever produced by the authoritarian absolutism and obscurantism of the Catholic Church. From that pervading blight the English mind has never indeed recovered. The puritan Commonwealth (1649-60) devoted more attention to the establishment of schools and to the spread of education than any English Government before or since. But those schools were exclusively theological; their objective was "Bible study." In the sequel, the Church of England—which had originally kept as close to Roman Catholicism as was consistent with throwing off the supremacy of Rome—and English Catholicism itself became, in self-defence, infected with the same disputatious theological obsessions as did the sectarian puritanism. The Universities, which had always been mainly theological institutions directed by the Church, now became more pronouncedly so. The public schools, also originally Church schools, came to be, when their importance developed, Christian institutions conducted by Church of England priests. England became the plague centre of a Bible Belt which spread round the world. A particularly virulent form of religious cretinism, quite unparalleled and unknown elsewhere in the world, became one of the most conspicuous and astonishing characters of the English mind. In throwing off priestly tyranny, England became the most priest-ridden country in the world."—Robert Briffault—*La Fable Anglaise*—(Translated by F.A.R.).

## Correspondence

### A NEW DEITY?

SIR,—Is it true that God has retired in favour of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, who will, in the future, be known as The Almighty?—Yours, etc.,  
E. J. WEBSTER.

### A SUGGESTION FROM AMERICA

SIR,—The fact that the Isenberg letter was printed apart in your March 6 issue seems to indicate that you contemplate the canonisation of Freethought Fathers. I am definitely against any rehash of old writings to take up valuable space, monthly or otherwise, and am glad to note that in the same issue H. Cutner has demolished the approach of our ancestors to combat religion with vain appeals to common-sense. If Mr. Isenberg is satisfied with this out-dated strategy, he is welcome to buy the whole or collected works of his heroes; for the rest it has taken enough time to adapt *The Freethinker* to a more up-to-date weapon to allow a relapse into the habits of discussion circles of old.

Hero-worship is a substitute for religion pure and simple. You may admire the professional skill of an old-time swordsman, but you must never pretend him to be a seasoned commando in modern warfare.—Yours, etc.,  
TOM HILL.

### AN INJUSTICE TO HELL.

SIR,—May I trespass on your valued space to register a protest against the latest injustice that has been inflicted upon me and the regions under my control?

I refer to the consigning to Hell of the late Joseph Stalin. It is well known that Stalin was an autoeratic despot who ruled by dogmatic laws and gave short shrift to those who questioned them.

He expected adulation and blind obedience from his followers and in every way conducted himself like a God.

It is obvious, therefore, that Stalin's proper place is now Heaven, the abode of the Gods. He will be at home there among all the other despotic rulers.

Hell, sir, is a democracy, and the placing of Stalin among us is nothing but a plot to disrupt our realm and lessen our chances of being elected to the United Nations. For we certainly plan to apply for admission to that body in the near future. And I think you will agree there is no one more fitted for membership than ourselves.

But first we must rid ourselves of Stalin.—Yours, etc.,  
"SATAN."

### CHRIST A MYTH?

SIR,—So much scholarly research has been put into the Jesus problem that the question of historicity is now, I suggest, removed from the realm of empirics to that of logic.

The J.C. of the Gospels is a re-hash of pagan Christs. It is a recurring myth. Now let us suppose you look for a man Jesus living c. 4 B.C.-c. A.D. 29. Let us suppose you find 40 of these Jesuses. Let us further suppose (what is impossible) that you pinpoint one of them to whom the Christ story is attached. *You still haven't got a legend*, for a legend is post-natal by definition. It grows out of a character; it does not pre-date it. And even supposing you find some legendary matter, it may still be in respect of some figure or mosaic, pre-dating 4 B.C.

Therefore, there is no definite background to the only J.C. of any use to religion.

Therefore, the most honest approximation to truth is to say J.C. did not exist.

Therefore, Cutner's position is not merely as empirically sound as knowledge permits, but logically irrefragible.—Yours, etc.,  
G. H. TAYLOR.

### PSYCHIC HEALING

SIR,—Your paragraph stating "that our healers are by no means eager to cure hospital patients" is rather unfair when Mr. Harry Edwards states (as you report) that he would be "very happy to visit the sanatoria and hospitals, but first we should have to receive permission from the medical authorities."

It is quite possible for Freethinkers to test the phenomenon of psychic healing for themselves by visiting Mr. Edwards at his headquarters in the village of Shere, near Dorking. I understand that he welcomes the opportunity of healing incurable ailments.

In his interesting book "A Pilgrim's Progress," Mr. Beverley Nichols writes that he attended one of Mr. Edwards's sessions, in which it is necessary to make an appointment to prevent crowds. The session lasted three hours and during that time Mr. Nichols saw many patients healed. Successes included a negro with abdominal trouble; a child with stiff foot since birth; a man with thrombosis; an old lady with rheumatoid arthritis, etc. There is no prayer or mystical patter. Mr. Edwards gives no promises in advance that a patient will be cured, and tries to heal cases given up as incurable. Mr. Nichols describes the healer as a man luminous with health.

Mr. Nichols also writes that absent healing has been successful in hundreds of cases, and mentions a dossier which he was allowed to take home for examination, in which there were details of over five hundred cases of "incurable" cancer which had been healed in the last four years. Mr. Edwards never asks for money, but "a healer must live, and if those he has healed like to give him something to help him carry on, Edwards is grateful. But he accepts indifferently the rich and the poor."

Are these healing cases fraudulent, or is there some unexplained phenomenon at work? Remember the N.S.S. motto: "We Seek For Truth."—Yours, etc.,  
ALFRED D. CORRICK.

### REPUBLICANISM AND THE N.S.S.

SIR,—It is not my intention to dispute with Mr. Marriott on the objects of the N.S.S.

The primary task of Freethinkers (and *The Freethinker*) is in my opinion, to combat superstition in all its forms, and Monarchism is fraught with superstition. A few articles on the British Monarchy (past and present) might do something to dispel the superstitious reverence of the public towards its titular head, and might help to awaken Republicanism. "Victorian museum-piece" it may be, but surrounded as I am by so many examples of Coronation-year idolatry, I feel the need for its revival.

I have no wish to weaken our movement; I merely hold that you do not strengthen it by forsaking its avowed principles.—Yours, etc.,  
C. MCCALL.

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