

# The Freethinker

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—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## The Strange Case of Fred Hoyle

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

ONE of the most disquieting facts about public life in Great Britain in recent years has been the obviously increasing influence of the Churches in matters which lie entirely outside the proper scope of bodies of an ostensibly religious character. One example of this, as was recently pointed out at a Rationalist Conference by an M.P., is the "pressure groups" in "marginal" constituencies, of which there are a good many nowadays, where any appreciable "swing" to Left or Right would unseat the sitting member and, perhaps, the Government which he represents: the more or less even political equilibrium which exists as

between Tory and Labour just at present, gives an excellent opening to such "pressure groups." Particularly, as few M.P.s are deeply attached to philosophic truth—the average politician being usually much less interested in where he will be after death than where he is likely to be after the next General Election!

Another and, perhaps, more familiar example of clerical censorship is, of course, to be found in our old friend, the B.B.C. It is no disparagement of the many excellent points of that organisation—the present writer, for one, has no desire for a commercialised radio as in the U.S.A.—to describe its attitude towards religion as both unfair and undemocratic. In a land ninety per cent. or so of the citizens of which take no active interest in religion, it is monstrous that the national air monopoly should regard it as its partisan duty exclusively to further the minority interests of the religious ten per cent. *The Freethinker* will continue to repeat this surely obvious truism for as long as the current policy continues, since in our robotised press, upon which the Churches are also active as "pressure groups," the current glaring anachronism of a virtual clerical censorship at work in an alleged Democracy, goes virtually unnoticed and uncondemned.

Nor, unfortunately, has, as far as has come to our notice, any public attention been drawn, or protest made, at what is probably the most glaring case of clerical dictation and suppression that has occurred in recent years: a case, indeed, which, in some respects, bears a sinister resemblance to the now world-famous suppression of Galileo by the Inquisition in the seventeenth century. We refer to the strange case of Mr. Fred Hoyle.

The essential facts in this case, probably the most glaring example to date of clerical censorship on the air, are, no doubt, familiar to our readers, but it may be desirable here to recall them. In, we seem to recall, 1950, Mr. Fred Hoyle, a Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, and a mathematician and astronomer of repute, was requested by the B.B.C. to deliver a series of talks upon present-day astronomy over the Radio on the "high-brow" Third Programme. The course was duly delivered and proved such an outstanding success that Mr. Hoyle was asked to repeat it on the more popular programme. This he did again

with conspicuous success. Subsequently, his lectures, which were widely regarded as the "hit" of the year's serious broadcasting, were published in book form, where they immediately became a "best-seller"; indeed, we believe that some of his reviewers actually expressed the opinion that Mr. Hoyle had been as effective in popularising modern astronomical theory as Mr. H. G. Wells had been in popularising the study of History in his world-famous *Outline of History*. Be that as it may, it is indisputable that Fred Hoyle's astronomical broadcasts were the most popular and widely-discussed scientific broadcasts of recent years, if not in the entire history of broadcasting.

What was the sequel? Mr. Hoyle has not, to our knowledge, ever been asked to speak on any wireless programme from that day to this. The most popular and stimulating broadcasts of their day have never been repeated. Like the fabled creature in Lewis Carroll's "Hunting of the Snark," he has "softly and silently vanished away, and never been met with again." At least, on the B.B.C.

What, the licence-holders of the B.B.C. may relevantly ask, is the reason for this extraordinary omission? The answer is, unfortunately, but unmistakably, clear: in his last lecture, Mr. Hoyle severely criticised Christianity and, in particular, the Christian Dogma of immortality, which he described, in our opinion, correctly, as ridiculous; asking the very pertinent question as to what the dwellers in eternity do with their eternal spare time. Evidently, our Cambridge author is of the same opinion as the great Anatole France, who once went on record with the historic observation that the self-same people who want a future life obviously do not know what to do with this one!

However, this is still a Christian land, and the shadow of its first director, the pious Lord Reith, still hovers over Broadcasting House. The Christian censorship of the B.B.C. swung into action at once. An orthodox astronomer was put "on the air" at once to correct Fred Hoyle's too realistic picture of a godless and purposeless Universe; a Universe to which, by no stretch of imagination, could either the Creation-story of Genesis or the "Design-Argument" of Paley be held to apply. More significantly and, also, more specifically, the B.B.C. put up that redoubtable champion of the Faith, Miss Dorothy Sayers, to reply to Mr. Hoyle's critical comments upon Christian orthodoxy. As far as we know, Miss Sayers's sole but, no doubt, sufficient qualification for defending theology, consists in her proficiency in detective fiction! At least, we have never heard that she has ever displayed any special proficiency in either Science, History, or Philosophy?

The "replies" to Fred Hoyle on the Radio were, to put it mildly, not precisely convincing. However, "apologetics" are rarely convincing to those not already convinced! We recall in this connection the historic reply of that pious "Defender of the Faith," George the Third, to Bishop Watson, the least unintelligent critic of Thomas Paine's

*Age of Reason*: "Dear me, Bishop Watson, I have read your 'Apology for the Bible,' but I really had no idea that the Bible needed apologising for." Miss Sayers was no more original in replying to Fred Hoyle than was Dr. Watson in replying to Tom Paine. But, also, in both cases, the Church had other, more potent weapons to use against the sceptics.

In some respects, perhaps, the Hoyle case bears more affinity to that of Galileo than to that of Paine: in both cases, it was the new astronomy that was at issue. Fortunately, the rise of liberal ideas and scientific freedom has now reached a point where the Church can no longer dispose of the rack and the *auto-da-fé*; or even the minor inquisitorial penalties of prison and exile. But one thing the clerical monopoly of the B.B.C. is still able to do: from that day to this, one of the ablest and most popular broadcasters of our time has been effectively kept off the air. It is, we repeat, a monstrous anachronism in a professedly democratic age and land.

## J. W. Hauer's Germanic Faith—4

By ARTHUR WILD

BEING a professor of comparative religion, Hauer certainly was better prepared to found a creed than anybody else in the past. He did not commit the "mistake" of Jesus who founded his religion without being acquainted with philosophy and scientific discoveries of the last centuries before his lifetime. Like Comte and Haeckel, Hauer founds his organisation after a career of research, publication and teaching. Like Comte, he does so in a revolutionary epoch. Like both of them, he lives long enough to see difficulties and disappointments. There is, however, a tremendous difference between the two rationalists and the mystic Hauer. Comte stresses the importance of his dogma—i.e., of the most general scientific truths—and the rest stands on it. Only later he lets his fetishist cult precede the dogma in his Catechism, but there is still a rigorous systematisation based on science. Haeckel's religion is science and the thinking to the end of its knowledge plus æsthetic and moral education based on it. Hauer's Faith contains almost nothing of what could be classified in the beginning of Comte's hierarchy of sciences though he certainly does not want to exclude it from school education and does not teach anything contradicting these sciences. The scientific truths which he himself discusses are those of the very end of Comte's hierarchy—those of biology, sociology, ethics. They are, of course, even if research is carried on carefully, exposed much more to the danger of pure subjectivism than those of such sciences as mathematics. Hauer himself admits that they are not so safe as  $2 \times 2 = 4$ , but he seems to be sure that even if there are errors in particulars, the general truths are correct. Comte's and Haeckel's religions are formed so mainly by giving science a religious accent. Hauer's religion is history, literature, arts, practical life given this accent or indeed almost identified with religion. Haeckel's teaching centres around the disciplines lectured in German Universities in the Faculties of (Natural) Science (Naturwissenschaften), the Germanic Faith is closely connected with those lectured in the Faculties of Philosophy (Geisteswissenschaften). Hauer concentrates on the search of the mysterious scientifically unexplained truths Comte entirely and Haeckel mainly on the scientifically explained truths. Hauer's Faith appears to the present author who is a European, was not educated in any orthodox tradition and is not an alcohol addict, to be an exquisite exotic brandy, whereas the systems of Comte and Haeckel are just pure crystal-clear water with a few drops of the "mental alcohol"; the quantity of alcohol increases

It is a truism in Freethought circles that it was the new astronomy of the Renaissance, the astronomy of Copernicus and Galileo, which dealt, more than anything else, the death-blow to the Christian orthodoxy of the Middle Ages. It is also, extremely probable that it will be the new astronomy of the age of radar and, perhaps, "space-travel," that will deal the death-blow to the "Design" argument and to Theism itself. It is precisely these implications that Fred Hoyle placed, no doubt for the first time in most cases, before his vast audience. That the Creation-story represents a pre-scientific myth emerges clearly from his description of the actual Universe. Therein lay his crime in the eyes of the Church. Hoyle is the "Galileo" of our time. If, in his person, the Church succeeds in keeping the new knowledge off the air, we may rest assured that future more enlightened ages will hold it as an equivalent crime to that which burned Bruno and forcibly silenced Galileo for speaking scientific truth in their day.

in Comte's works of his "second life." And the other neo-pagan movements in Germany? Most of them are the usual alcohol drinks you can buy in any German village inn.

The difference between the religiosity of the Positivists and Monists and Hauer's faith is seen most clearly in the methods they use. Both Comte and Haeckel observe the phenomena and on these observations construe laws, theories and hypotheses. Haeckel goes further, using the results of his scientific studies for what Comte would have called "idle and metaphysic speculations." Hauer, however, admits also in the studies, which give the *raison d'être* for his Faith, more or less unsafe or irrational methods. One asks, for instance, why Hauer is so sure about the crucial importance of race in religion. Here is an apt quotation concerning a railway travel to Aleppo during his stay in the Near East in 1928 after he had heard only Arabic for several months: "A youth in a distant corner of the carriage was singing for himself quietly a song, the melody of which touched me deeply. . . . He was an Armenian. . . . Here talked to me obviously something with which I am related by my earliest connexion. . . . From that time I had to subdue the whole history of religion under the leading idea of race, being sure that the race gives the clue to the knowledge not understood clearly enough until then." In the study of race Hauer, of course, requires finding out facts, but the results are based more on an intuitive integration than on mere rational conclusions. In his book on Indo-Germanic religions he also admits a kind of intuitive vision as a method. Moreover, this method can be used successfully only by somebody who is related (wesensverwandt) with the subject matter he studies. We would say that the truth would be more objective (and less poetic, no doubt) if the student were different in nature from the system studied and if the truth were obtained from using intuition. Certainly in these branches one cannot imitate the method of mathematics; if one admits the unsafe method of irrational intuition, one should be at least very careful how one uses the results arrived at.

Comte refuses introspection as a method of psychology. Haeckel admits it without any particular enthusiasm as one of its methods. Comte's "prayers" in his "second life" represent, of course, a kind of contemplation of intercourse with one's psychic images. Also the Monists have a kind of "prayer" the purpose of which is mental hygiene: we should meditate from time to time about something beautiful, noble, pleasant; if it were possible.

should eliminate undesirable phenomena entirely from our minds. Hauer's main method of religious experience is the metaphysical self-vision, something like the "irruption into one's Self" of the Indians, inspired by, but not imitating in detail the Yoga. What distinguishes Hauer from various theosophists, is that he not only does not prescribe any exact method of this self-vision, but he does not even analyse the resulting images. In an analysis by intellectual concepts he see irreligious and blasphemous proceedings. In accordance with Monism and with many German and other youth movements (Hauer was himself a youth leader) is Hauer's enthusiasm evoked by the phenomena of the outside world, of nature. Also in our Self there speaks the Self of the Universe.

Hauer's method is so primarily an irrational induction aiming from many different starting points, i.e., from one's own various religious experiences and from those of one's nation and race, at the "last reality." The usual method of the Christians is a deductive application of the last reality given once for ever by their exclusive revelation. This deductive application is not quite absent from Hauer's Faith either, but as he does not analyse the last reality nearer, there is little danger of rigid dogmatism and plenty of freedom for creative minds. Hauer's method is so comparable to that of those philosophers who in the Renaissance broke the hegemony of the deductive method, these philosophers being concerned with the sphere of reason, Hauer with the irrational sphere. In this emancipation from dogma Hauer has, of course, predecessors also in the sphere of imagination and artistic inspiration, as shown by his numerous quotations of poets.

Hauer's non-mystic critics maintain that his Faith is purely subjective. In the opinion of the present author it is not more subjective than any other religion (unless the "religion" is based on the truths of "exact" sciences). How subjective the truths of most common religions are, is best seen from their variations in space and time. Their adherents close as a rule their eyes before this fact, which Hauer does not do. By his broad approach Hauer certainly eliminates many of the absurdities of other religions—unfortunately only to become a victim of exaggerated racial doctrines of our own time, which he seems to defend with greater zeal than his elusive "last reality."

### Bless them All!

The River Avon was blessed at Pershore, Worces., last night by the Assistant Bishop of Worcester (Dr. C. E. Stuart) at a thanksgiving service for the success of the Lower Avon Navigation Trust.—(*Daily Express*.)

The Bishops are doing their stuff again—  
 Not blessing the crops nor praying for rain;  
 Not blessing the troops, nor guns for the slaughter,  
 Not blessing the land—this time it's the water!  
 Maybe they have shares in the L.A.N. Trust,  
 And hope that by praying it will not go bust—  
 Or perhaps they have nothing more urgent to do  
 (Which we think is the more likely reason, don't you?).  
 One never knows next where their blessings will fall—  
 On animal, vegetable, humans and all;  
 The soldier, the sailor, the tailor, the tinker—  
 Perhaps one fine day they will bless *The Freethinker!*  
 W. H. WOOD.

## A Freethought "Must"

THE value of a book cannot be judged by the number of copies it sells or the number of times it has been reprinted. Among current best-sellers may be found both the fine and the trashy works of our own and other times. And Freethinkers will too often have encountered the puerile Christian argument that the Bible must be good because it sells well, to use it unqualifiedly in connection with a book of their own. Yet, when a serious work of criticism, a systematic exposure of the most exalted volume in Christendom, reaches its tenth edition without the backing of powerful publishers or popular reviewers it is surely some indication of worth.

The *Bible Handbook*, recently reissued by the Pioneer Press (price 4s.), has played a consistently valuable role in the anti-religious struggle in this country since its first appearance in 1888. I have no hesitation in saying that it will continue to do so in the future. The old cry that Freethinkers are flogging a dead horse will, no doubt, be raised against me, but unfortunately it is not true. One has only to speak on a National Secular Society platform in London, Edinburgh or Oswaldtwistle to realise that Christianity still strongly influences people's thinking. One has only to go into the schools or turn to any copy of the *Radio Times* and one can see why. Christianity is firmly entrenched.

Christianity, however, is completely dependent for its teaching upon two revelations of God to man: the Old and New Testaments which together form the Bible. By the Bible, it either stands or falls. It is from there and there alone that it takes its fabulous story of a virgin-born saviour, which is illustrated in countless newspapers and periodicals, on greeting cards and in multiple-stores at Christmas: the story that is reiterated every year over the B.B.C. and invariably adorns the pages of that Corporation's paper. Each twenty-fifth of December we are given the same old rigmarole of prediction and fulfilment. Even among non-Christians the Bible is often treated as a book apart from all others, a book worthy of veneration. How often one hears it said that the Ten Commandments are the basis of morality or that the world would be all right if people followed the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount!

It behoves the Freethinker to expose Christianity for the fraud that it is, and to do so he must expose the Bible. No better weapon can be found for this purpose than the handbook which was edited by G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball with a preface by the former, and for which Mr. F. A. Ridley has now written a foreword. It is essentially a book that must speak for itself, a book which quotes chapter and verse throughout and invites the reader to check up for himself on Bible Contradictions, Absurdities, Atrocities, Unfulfilled Prophecies and Broken Promises, Immoralities, Indecencies and Obscenities. In his preface, Foote suggested that the "labour bestowed on this volume must give it some merit," and he sent it forth hoping that it would "assist Freethinkers, suggest fresh thoughts to inquiring Christians, and startle others out of their superstitious sleep."

I think it may safely be said that *The Bible Handbook* has fulfilled Foote's hopes. It is essentially a book to make people think. No N.S.S. speaker can afford to be without it and, of course, none of the older ones will be. Here it is again for the newcomer to our Society, ideally suited to slipping into the pocket, the handbook that enables him in five minutes—as Foote said—"to advance more arguments against the Bible than his opponent will be able to answer in a lifetime."  
 C. McCALL.

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by G. W. FOOTE and W. P. BALL

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## This Believing World

**That famous experimenter** in telepathy, Dr. J. B. Rhine, is asking whether it is a development "of the Evolutionary scheme." There is, of course, no "scheme." No one has planned or devised any "scheme." But Evolution is a fact, and there is no reason whatever to claim that it has ceased. And this being the case, it is quite possible that "mind" is still subject to Evolutionary processes in many directions. It might well be that man will gradually become subject to Telepathy. But believers in this "thought transference" or "extra-sensory perception" or E.S.P. or whatever fancy name is given to it are trying their utmost to show it as proof of—Spiritualism!

**We should make it quite clear** that E.S.P. proves nothing but E.S.P., and that "spooks" have no more to do with it than sponges. This does not mean that we recognise Telepathy as proved; so far, there is very little evidence upon which to form any positive conclusions. When a "sender" can dispatch the number of a banknote to a "receiver" in another room in the same house will be time to consider whether Telepathy has been proved. So far that simple test has always failed.

**Whatever "our Lord"** or our Protestant Churches think of Football Pools—and he is sometimes put forward as the greatest Anti-Pooler who ever lived—there are certainly some Roman Catholic churches ready to raise money, if possible, through Football Pools. And why not? Millions of people, in spite of their Christian education, love having a little flutter on a horse or on a boxing match or even on a playing card; and if it amuses them to go in for Football Pools, whether run by a "capitalist" concern or by a church, where is the harm?

**Naturally Roman Catholic "officials"** are ready to deny that the Roman Catholic Church "would centralise the Pools." That Church, as a Church, is unlikely to form the huge organisation necessary to deal with millions of forms; but if Roman Catholics "have to raise money," as they claim, and garden fêtes and such-like worthy attempts to rake in a few pounds are now more or less played out, the Pools might well do the trick. And even any objections put forward by "our Lord" or "our Lady" can easily be over-ruled by any Roman Catholic theologian—if he knows his job. Or to put it bluntly, if it is a question of raking in good money, the Church, perhaps all Churches, are ready to wink the other eye on gambling, betting, and even drinking.

**That great champion** for the abolition of capital punishment, Mrs. Van der Elst claims that she has spoken to "evil spirits" though, as an "occultist," she must never divulge their secrets. She also claimed that when a murderer is hanged, his soul left his body, flew through space, "and returned to another body to continue murdering other people." What a pity it is that this kind of drivel is so often used to help forward humanist movements. There may be a case against capital punishment, but surely it cannot be helped by such naive credulity.

**A gentleman called Palmer**, writing to *Psychic Realm*, has made some remarkable discoveries about "the Lord's Prayer." He confidently tells us that it "is NOT the Lord's Prayer," but was in use by Jews "hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus." "It was," he adds, "taken directly from the Talmud." The picture thus given us, that the Talmud was in existence hundreds of years before

the birth of Jesus surely should take a prize for supreme and hopeless ignorance. The date generally given for this compilation is about A.D. 500—though, of course, portions may have been written before. It was not begun until after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. But no doubt, Mr. Palmer will long continue to write similar "discoveries."

**We trust our American contemporary**, *Progressive World*, will not object to another little correction. It refers to Miss Barbara Ward as "an English liberal and journalist." Miss Ward is, of course, an out-and-out Roman Catholic—though naturally this is not always apparent in her articles. May we suggest that her opposition to Marxism may be due to her Roman Catholicism more than, perhaps, to a thorough understanding of that notable "philosophy"?

## Theatre

**IN Age of Consent** at the Princes Theatre, Charlotte Haldane exposes our archaic laws.

A young lodger, engaged to his landlady's daughter, is charged with having had "Carnal Knowledge" of a girl under sixteen. But although it is afterwards revealed that he is not the father of the unborn baby, it is by some law of 1885 that he is let off because he is under twenty-four. The girl is the fast daughter of a coarse, immoral woman, hardly types compatible with the same social strata in 1885. Mrs. Haldane also brings in aspects of the law in relation to ill-treated children whose future is often marred by their being placed in institutions.

Mrs. Haldane's main situation is highly dramatic, but unlike legal reformer John Galsworthy she has not drawn clear characters in every case. James Kenney (though too young for the lodger) at first gives a bad impression and finishes well. Brenda Hogan is hardly in type to be the younger daughter of a coarse mother. These are faults in the writing which are not hidden by good acting. Esmond Knight is perfect as the landlady's husband, but Mary Merrall was far too refined a type for the wife of a working-class man.

The play holds our interest and the message stands out: "Let us be freed of these obsolete laws."

**The School for Scandal**, which has started with a season of classical plays at the Kings Theatre, makes a visit to Hammersmith worth while. Baliol Holloway's production and Tom Lingwood's sets are well in atmosphere, there is an efficient and large cast, and the whole combine to give Sheridan's exposition of social evils a certain artistic magnificence.

Donald Wolfitt as Sir Peter Teazle very finely combines the lightness of comedy with the more serious moment of discovering his wife in a compromising position behind the screen. Rosalind Iden, as Lady Teazle, was never more happily cast. I liked also David Oxley's performance of Charles Surface.

**Henry IV** by Luigi Pirandello, is confidently played at the Arts Theatre by amateurs of the Cambridge Arts Theatre Trust. The drama is capably brought out as we witness the "mad" actor denouncing his family and friends whom—he considers—have treated him falsely. Finally he chooses to remain "insane" rather than return to live among them. This is great writing of a fine part by a great author.

By RAYMOND DOUGLAS

# THE FREETHINKER

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## To Correspondents

**FREETHINKER FUND.**—Previously acknowledged, £86 3s. 6d.; A. Hancock, 2s.; E. Swale, 11s.; J. Cannon, 5s.; F. B. Bolton, £4 1s. Total, £91 2s. 6d.

**Mr. CANNON.**—The statement to which you refer contained an obvious printer's error, as, one would have thought, was self-evident. Thanks for contribution and good wishes.

**THE FREETHINKER** will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: H. DAY and A. H. WHARRAD.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. BARKER and MILLS.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Bomb Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES. Every Sunday, 3 p.m., at Platt Fields, a Lecture.

North London Branch (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Every Sunday from 4 p.m. onwards: Messrs. O'NEILL, CLEAVER, WOOD, and other speakers.

### INDOOR

Bristol Rationalist Group (the Crown and Dove Hotel, Bridewell Street).—Wednesday, September 16, 7-30 p.m.: Open meeting. All are cordially invited.

Junior Discussion Group, South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Friday, September 11, 7-15 p.m.: Speaker, Swedenborg Society, "Swedenborg."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, September 13, 11 a.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "East and West Now."

## NOTES AND NEWS

We are glad to note that our French and Belgian comrades have held successful conferences at, respectively, Toulouse and Brussels. Both are, at present, fully occupied with their current struggle against the wave of clerical reaction which is just now sweeping over Europe. These conferences of national sections of the World Union of Freethinkers are to be followed up next week-end (September 12-13) by a meeting of the full executive committee of the World Union in Brussels, with representatives from most of its affiliated bodies. The president, Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, will preside, and Mr. F. A. Ridley, president of the National Secular Society, will represent the British movement. The main business before this 1953 session of the International Executive Committee will be the programme and general arrangements for the 1954 World Congress in Luxemburg next year. Amongst the subjects submitted to the Brussels meetings for discussion by the World Congress is a suggestion by Mr. F. A. Ridley for a paper on "The Catholic Counter-Reformation of the Twentieth Century." The present editor of *The Freethinker* has made a special study of this subject, and his work, *The Jesuits—a Study in Counter-Revolution*, is officially standard by *The Encyclopædia Britannica* amongst the Catholic Church. Another subject to be discussed is the relationship between the Freethought Movement and Monarchy—a subject upon which, it appears, the views of Freethinkers are by no means unanimous—at least, if

## G. H. Taylor

We very much regret to hear that the wife and daughter of our contributor, Mr. G. H. Taylor, have been involved in a serious accident on the roads over the week-end and are now in hospital. Our readers will, we are sure, join with us in hoping for a speedy recovery.

we are to judge from recent letters in our correspondence columns!

In view of the recent articles and letters on Buddhism which have appeared in our columns, we listened with much interest to a short address on Buddhism by a Buddhist professor from Ceylon which was broadcast on the Home Programme of the B.B.C. last Friday. The speaker, a high dignitary of the Buddhist Sangha ("Church"), belonged to the Southern, Hinayana or Theraveda School of Buddhism, to which our contributor, Mr. R. J. Jackson, also belongs. The Southern School repudiates—in theory, at least—the theism, mysticism and theosophy of their Northern brethren of the Mahayana School, and profess—again in theory—a rationalist philosophy. Our B.B.C. pundit spoke from this point of view, and the picture that he drew of the original teaching of Buddha and the early Buddhists was, in the main, rationalistic in character: the Buddha was represented as, indeed, the oldest Buddhist traditions represent him, as, in modern philosophical terminology, an agnostic, a positivist and, of course, a religious reformer, the ideas of whom were very similar to those of such modern agnostics as Herbert Spencer, Comte, and T. H. Huxley. Some of the earliest Buddhist sayings on the "unknowable nature of Reality" and on the futility of prayer, appear to bear our this conception. However, if Buddhism began as a Rationalist philosophy, it soon lost its original character in becoming a religion. Even our B.B.C. lecturer admitted that the Sacred Tree, under which Buddha is supposed to have found "Enlightenment," is now an object of worship; and when it comes to monks, praying-wheels, relics and reincarnation, there does not—except, perhaps, for a few philosophical "Modernists" like Mr. Jackson, who ignore its modern developments—appear to be much difference between popular Buddhism and any other popular religion. For that matter, even Catholicism claims to be rationalist—in theory! If prayer is futile, as, we are told, Buddha actually taught, why invoke Buddha?

We have received quite a number of requests for the publication of the scholarly articles on Robert Taylor which our contributor, Mr. H. Cutner, has recently published here. All our correspondents, headed by that well-known American Freethinker, Mr. Jack Benjamin, stress the desirability of finding a more permanent form for this study of the hitherto neglected career of one of the most brilliant English-speaking Freethinkers. We are hopeful that, in the near future, it may be possible to comply with our readers' requests and to re-issue these valuable articles, the fruit of much arduous and original research, in pamphlet form. It is always a bad day for any movement when it forgets its pioneers!

We very much regret that the article, "Unholy Matrimony," which appeared in our columns in the issue of August 28, 1953, was erroneously ascribed to Mr. Bisset Lovelock. Its actual author was Mr. Michael J. Barnes, to whom we extend our sincere apologies. The article in question was unsigned, and we should be much obliged if, in future, all contributors will, please, *sign* their articles (with address), since, otherwise, such mistakes in identification are bound to occur periodically.

# "The Reformation" of the Holy Orthodox Church in Russia

By ANNA KARENINA

EVERY educated person in Western and Southern Europe has heard of the Great Reformation in the Christian Catholic religion, the movement in the sixteenth century that gave birth to the various Protestant sects that subsist to this day. But how few are even aware that something analogous took place in Holy Russia during the following century, and of the great name of Nikon, Patriarch of Moscow. Yet to students of Russian History and the Holy Orthodox Church recent events in the "greatest country of the world," meaning, of course, God's own country, the U.S.A., combined, as they were, with destructive attacks on the "Republic of Letters," have brought to mind similar activities in ancient and barbarian Russia. Both very deplorable, not a doubt of it; but the "reason" for such drastic action in seventeenth century Russia was more logical and more far-reaching than the attempted ruin of modern thought (and authors) in Uncle Sam's ocean-washed domain.

The second tsar of the Romanoff dynasty was Alexei Michailovich (1645-1676) and, as is not unusual in Russia, the realm was far from quiet. Rioting against government officials was widespread, and of long duration. Chief among these was the rising of the Cossacks of the Volga, under the vigorous leadership of Stephen Rasin. Among the clergy, important, and disturbing, events also took place. A young and weak tsar (Alexei was sixteen when he succeeded to the throne) fell under the influence of the powerful Patriarch of Moscow, Nikon. He, Nikon, displayed extraordinary abilities, and was dowered with an imposing personality. As a youth he had run away from an unhappy life with a stepmother, and found refuge in a monastery by the Volga. Here he had the good fortune to find a well-equipped library. He lost no time in setting to work to educate himself, and step by step he climbed in the councils of the Church. This ruthless scholar overleaped all obstacles to his ambition. He had his wife interned in a convent; he himself became a monk; and, in due course, became abbot of a monastery in Moscow. It was here that the young tsar saw him, and was struck by his good looks and the fervour of his preaching. Since then the influence and power of the ambitious monk over the weak sovereign was unlimited. It was not long before the humble monk received the post of the Patriarch of Moscow and so became the most powerful man in the realm.

This happened in 1652. The ambitious Nikon only agreed to take this office after long hesitation and under certain conditions. His activities were not to be limited by Church councils and the like, and he was to become not only the head of the Church, but to receive the title of "Great Sovereign," a similar title to that of a tsar, and his activities were to extend in all directions. Being as courageous as active, and moreover a ruthless administrator, he was able to repress many riots in different parts of Russia's vast territory. His cruelty, as well as his capability, soon became a byword throughout the land. The ambitious patriarch soon lost all his friends, and ruled the country with an iron hand. Thus was witnessed yet one more of a continually recurring situation in Russian history.

Yet, as frequently happened in Russia's bloody and oppressive record, in some things the despot is able to "get a move on." This was the case with Nikon. One of his activities was important and beneficial—to his Church at

least. Doubtless the scholar in him caused him to decide on the correction of the religious books printed and written in the last hundred years, that is since printing was introduced into Russia. (Since 1563—see article in *The Freethinker*, June 26, 1953.) This was no easy task; a labour which may be compared with the preparation of the Authorised version of the English Bible earlier in the same century. For centuries the texts of the documents of the Holy Orthodox, or Eastern, Church had been translated from the Greek: mistakes made by the ill-educated translators were numerous. The energetic patriarch started this correction by inviting Greek scholars to Russia and by buying ancient religious books from Greece. For a number of years the work of revision was made at Kiev (the Canterbury of Moscow) and other towns and monasteries. In the end two thousand books altogether were printed, a great number for that time. These were duly despatched to parishes all over Russia.

The modern reader, looking back at what has happened since the Revolution to Russia and its Church, may not be much interested in the past history of the reformation of an ancient faith, and there is, of course, something to be said for that attitude. But nobody in these days is going to deny the great part, for good or ill, that the Soviet Union plays in present-day world politics. And, if it is true, as many believe, that one cannot know anything of wars about any institute unless one knows its history, one can neither neglect the past history of a state nor its system of religion. One will not find much in Western histories of Nikon and the great part he played in the Eastern Church. If the editor thinks well perhaps I may return to Nikon in the future, and tell of some of the almost unbelievably amusing ritual of the pre-Nikon Orthodox Church, and of what happened to the old gentleman, the Patriarch, in the end.

## N.S.S. Executive Committee, 3rd September

Present: Mr. Ridley (in the Chair), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Griffiths, Gibbins, Taylor, Hornibrook, Tiley, Johnson, Barber and the Secretary.

Thirteen members were admitted to the Parent, Bradford, Edinburgh, West London, Manchester and Glasgow Branches. The engagement of a secretarial assistant to work on the enrolment of new members was approved, subject to a review of the position after six months.

Reports of work were received from Mr. J. Clayton and Nottingham, Birmingham, Bradford, Halifax, Glasgow and Edinburgh Branches. Grants were made to Birmingham and Nottingham.

It was decided to co-operate with the Central Board for Conscientious Objectors, which offers advice and information to those who resist military conscription. Freethinkers have been amongst objectors to the "call-up," but hitherto Freethought has not been represented at meetings of the Board, as it will be in the future. It was also decided to support two campaigns being carried on by the Marriage Law Reform Society, (a) for more reasonable divorce facilities, and (b) for the extension of legitimation to children at present debarred from this when their parents marry.

Arrangements for a meeting, in which the N.S.S. will co-operate to be held in Manchester to protest against B.B.C. unfairness in religious broadcasting were noted. It was reported that the President and Secretary had been invited to visit the Mary Ward Settlement and lecture to those attending a Discussion Course there on the Foundations of Belief; and it was agreed that the invitations be accepted. The President's subject on October would be "A Freethinker Looks at Religion."

## Mind or Matter

By A. YATES

"All the choir of Heaven and furniture of Earth, in a word, all those bodies which comprise the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind."

SO said Bishop Berkeley, the propounder of metaphysical idealism; and so say, with certain modifications, many modern anti-materialists, philosophical and religious. Even the distinguished "rationalist" philosopher, Bertrand Russell, tells us that "The stuff of the cosmos is mental." What has the materialist to say in answer to such dicta? Let us glance at a few of the arguments with which he meets them.

In the first place, what "the mental stuff of the cosmos" may be I don't know, and as a convinced materialist, I have no hesitation in saying (maugre Bertrand Russell) I don't believe anyone else knows.

Can mind exist apart from a physical basis or organism? That is the crucial question. All we know of mind is our own minds; and if we are to accept the theory of Evolution, the human brain, the organ of mind, is one of Nature's latest specialisations. Absolute mind may be dismissed as a nonentity; for thought cannot exist without a subject of thought which must necessarily precede and condition it.

According to the theistic philosopher, the difficulty facing the materialist is how rationality can enter into physiological processes? He argues that there is no ground for supposing that rational thought can have an rational ancestry. But at what precise time during man's evolutionary development did the change occur from brute to *homo sapiens*? Was it the instantaneous result of a supernatural operation or of a gradual process of brain-growth from primitive instinct to human reason?

As a materialist I contend that there is no biological evidence that mind, thought, reason—whatever name we give to mental activity—can exist without a material organ of conception; and that rationality did not enter into physiological processes, but was produced by them.

How much mind is dependent on its physical basis is shown by the effects which certain diseases have on it. A disorder of the ductless glands will reduce genius to mental impotency, while an injury to the brain may put an end to its functions by death.

As Gley, a prominent French observer on the subject, remarks, "the genesis and the exercise of the highest faculties of man are conditioned by the simple chemical action of a product of secretion, a fact which should be borne in mind by psychologists," and I would add by anti-materialists in general.

But the chief argument of the anti-materialist by which he seeks to prove that "the stuff of the cosmos is mental" is the old argument from design or purpose in Nature. He points to the order displayed in the universe, and maintains that the adaptation of means to ends there shown must have existed as a mental concept before it could exist as a reality. But what he calls "order" is the very condition of its existence. Every natural phenomenon must be what it is or *nothing*. It is the inevitability of universal causation that invalidates the teleological argument; for, if things are what they must be, by what reasoning do we infer that they are the work of purposive intelligence? Follow the chain of causation as far as we like we find only processes and their inevitable results. To prove purpose in Nature we must show the necessity of purpose, or that the event would have been other than it is but for purpose.

## Faith for the Agnostic

THE entire universe, of which our solar system is but a tiny part, is made up of countless numbers of flaming spheres of nebulous gas dissipating energy. In time they burn themselves out, turn into solid matter and finally, burst asunder and revert again to nebulosity. This much is the verdict of science.

Let us postulate that these spheres are held to their respective orbits, not by the hand of God, but purely by the phenomena of their inherent nature, call it fate; just around and around of pure physics without plan or purpose or "preferred destiny."

Now, that which befalls as the result of unconsidered forces is called chance. All the different theories as to the origin of the solar system by the philosophers, entail the element of "accident" as the major premise of their explanation; and throughout the material universe no other factor (previous to man) is responsible for the variations and dispositions we see.

But this essay is not an argument for Atheism. It is, in fact, vice versa. More or less separated from this panorama of materialistic phenomena we behold also, an unseen universe—call it "life-principle"—which is a "horse of another colour." The "spiritual" universe of naturalism does evince a "preferred destiny." Wherever conditions permit it to express itself, we see it doing its best to advance to higher expression. From the slime of the sea up to the heart of man! Surely this is something.

The manifest verdict of rationalism when followed through, leads us to the abysmal depths of nihilism. Sensible men are denied the experience of "that peace which passeth understanding." But I want to submit that what is responsible for the heart of man is a worthy basis for a blind trust, and I vote to settle for a peace without understanding. A "weak" God, bound as he is, by both the decree of fate and the vicissitudes of chance is, nonetheless, something to be preferred to no God at all.

ALVIN McELVAIN.

## God Ethically Irrelevant

By GREGORY S. SMELTERS

THERE is an important logical aspect in the atheist's demonstration of God's non-existence that merits a wider recognition and appreciation. It is the logical relation between an ethical ideal and its realisation in human society. The traditional view made God a source of all ideals: (1) God; (2) the ideal; (3) the realisation of the ideal in the society. But as modern logicians have pointed out, this sequence is quite wrong. "It was taken for granted (in the Old Testament)," says Prof. S. L. Stebbing (*Ideals and Illusions*, p. 195), "that what God commanded was good because God was good and thus could not command what was wrong. Good is not 'good' because God commands it, but God commands it because it is good. In other words, 'good' is logically prior to God." That means that the logical sequence of the links is actually this: (1) "Good"; (2) the Christian God (Yahweh) who commands "good" because it is "Good"; (3) the realisation of "good" among men. Now it is obvious that, for us, the intermediate link is logically absolutely irrelevant, and as such to be dropped by all who want to be consistent with the scientific conception of ethics, respecting the scientific outlook of the world.

In general, the very (Christian) concept of peremptorily "commanding" morals has, as a vestige of Oriental religions, no more sense in modern democratic environment. It was the Oriental despotism which inspired the

idea of God as a commanding impersonation of sacred qualities. But as soon as we realise that the ideal qualities are logically prior to the person in value, the concept of worshipping God as such source loses all its traditional halo and remains only as an economic trick to be capitalised upon by the professional divines for justifying their, now irrelevant, church services.

This less known idea that "an object of spiritual love ('eros') can ultimately be only values, realised values, but not persons," was propounded, in Germany, e.g., by the militant atheist philosopher, Dr. D. H. Kerler, and this point of view was recently echoed by Prof. J. N. Findlay in his demonstration of God's non-existence, when he said: "We might respect this object as the crowning instance of most excellent qualities, but we should incline our head before the qualities and not before the person."

The result of this ethical aspect of atheistic reasoning was summed up by Prof. Findlay as follows: "From which it follows that our modern denial of necessity or rational evidence for such an existence (of God) amounts to a demonstration that there cannot be a God. We may accordingly deny that modern approaches allow us to remain agnostically poised in regard to God: they force us to come down on the atheistic side." ("Can God's Existence be Disproved?"—*Mind*, April, 1948, p. 176; 182.)

## Correspondence

### MR. VARNEY REPLIES TO HIS CRITICS

SIR,—Re Mr. Chas. E. Berry's statement that I seem to be terrified at Trades Unionists taking out of the national pudding more than they earn, I am not terrified at all. I am simply asking them and the industrialists to be logical.

I am amazed at the humbug and inconsistent attitude of the industrialists and the Trades Unionists.

The huge majority, in this thing that we call democracy, support with fanatical enthusiasm our present monetary system, and vote at every election for its continuation. They then proceed to demand enormous profits, large salaries, and big wages, which the system (which is only a limited system) is quite unable to produce for them, and consequently the Government has to resort to the printing of notes which have no intrinsic value, but which they have to guarantee to be as good as the real thing, irrespective of the economic fact that every time there is a new issue of these things, the value of them depreciates, and thus the monetary system which the democracy is so seemingly anxious to retain is being undermined at such a rate that collapse is inevitable.

If this thing the democracy is earnest and conscientious, and if they continue in their demand for bread and circuses, then they must be logical, and take less bread, or there will be no circuses.

Unfortunately, the masses are almost incapable of thinking objectively, and owing to the evil power of religion in the schools and churches, they become introspective, and can only think subjectively, placing their faith and trust in phantoms, and the power of the Press and the B.B.C. is such to-day that even Rationalists, and indeed some agnostics and atheists, are being inoculated with the virus.

The industrialists and the Trades Union leaders fail to see, or do not want to see, the fraud of the present monetary system, and soon maybe, we workers will be drawing £100 per week in wages, but it will cost us £110 per week to live. Herbert Spencer was right when he said: "The masses do not act as they think, they act as they feel." And it seems that a blind force is leading them to the abyss.

Re J. R. R.'s statement that Chesterton and Belloc had as much right to support Romanism as Bradlaugh and Foote had to advocate atheism.

I cannot logically agree with this, for Bradlaugh and Foote stood for objective truth, and suffered for it, whilst Chesterton and Belloc supported what every Freethinker believes to be a subjective and historical lie. If we believe in the Church's right to propagate a lie, and to lead children along the path of error, then we must also believe that Fagin had a right to teach little children how to steal. The only difference is that the Church is legal, whilst Faginism is not.

Bradlaugh and Foote were great Humanists, but the organisation to which Chesterton and Belloc belonged is more spiritual than human, and besides, it never has believed in the right of free speech, and when it was in power, it used fire and sword and crushing the right to freedom of thought, and brave men and women, for expressing their opinion, were burnt at the stake in such large numbers that the whole of Europe at one time was permeated with the smell of burning flesh. And J. R. R. would find that the tiger's claws are as sharp as ever.—Yours, etc., PAUL VARNEY.

### CHESTER-BELLOC?

SIR,—I was sorry to read the following statements made by Mr. Paul Varney under the heading "Hilaire Belloc" in your issue of August 14:—

"Chesterton and Belloc had a ready-made market of millions of Roman Catholics to buy their writings," and "Chesterton and Belloc had the merit of enslaving the minds of millions."

I would like to know where Mr. Varney gets his millions from. One million would not be so bad, but millions of Catholics reading Belloc and Chesterton is, I fancy, a state of affairs hardly likely to happen before the Second Coming.—Yours, etc., W. E. NICHOLSON.

### THEATRE?

SIR,—It had been some little time since I had the opportunity of seeing *The Freethinker*, and I was very well impressed with the new style.

I would, however, like to draw your attention to the paragraph on page 267, by Raymond Douglas, headed "Theatre." The play, "Escapade," has been running at the Strand Theatre since March 9, 1953, after its transfer from the St. James's.

The part of Stella Hampden is now played by Patricia Marmont, not Phyllis Calvert. Lance Secretan has been succeeded in the part of Paton by Christopher Cresswell.—Yours, etc., M. W. CARTER.

### FREETHOUGHT PLUS CLEAR THOUGHT

SIR,—The Rationalist movement not only in England but throughout the world is indebted to *The Freethinker* for the opportunity of discussing the present state of our cause. Pages have been thrown open to views of the present religious and political and, not less important, the social and economic conditions and trends of our time. Now one is entitled to ask, is this evidenced by some of the ideas expressed by some of our contributors as to the way we should take? One instance of what appears to me to show a lack of clear thinking. A correspondent justly stated that we should work for the relief, now enjoyed by those using buildings for religious purposes, to be discontinued, and churches, etc., to be rated in the same way as other buildings used for secular purposes.

A correspondent answers to this that all rating is wrong and should be discontinued. This is, of course, beside the point. Local rating may be wrong in principle, but while we live under this system it is clear that if some privileged bodies enjoy exemption, the rest of the community has to make up the deficit thus arising. We need not go outside the pages of *The Freethinker* to find evidence of the spirit of toleration(?) shown by some who, according to certain recent advisers, should be halfway by soft words and a less outspoken attitude. *The Freethinker*, July 17, 1953, contained a letter signed Basil Edgecombe, which should have brought a sharp reminder to what we are fighting against to any who are so bemused to think a militant attitude is not needed to-day. The writer is not content with a previous correspondent with whom he agreed, as "a certain Mr. Alexander," goes on to suggest that we who will not cringe to monarchy at the playing of the so-called National Anthem, should fear the invasion of our homes at night by the police whom we might have evaded in former days. In other words, we must be repressed by the modern Inquisition from daring to express our abhorrence of an reactionary system which shelters reaction in every sphere and in which every one of us has to pay dearly, both directly and indirectly. No further comment should be necessary: my opinion that anti-monarchists are armchair revolutionaries, in the glance at the list of the monarchs, and particularly of the importance of the countries they represented, who attended the recent coronation, compared with the number and importance of those present at similar shows of this kind in the past, is not enough to raise doubts in his mind of the armchair nature of the movement he derides. If not, then history is meaningless to him.—Yours, etc., JAMES H. MATSON.

MISTAKES OF MOSES. By Col. R. G. Ingersoll. Price 3d. postage 1½d.