

# The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## The Land of William Tell—and Calvin

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

LAST week we described a recent visit to Brussels and endeavoured to summarise both our personal impressions of that famous city and of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers which transpired there. At the invitation of a leading Swiss Freethinker I followed up this visit by a brief but extremely enjoyable and instructive visit to Switzerland, a land which the present writer had never previously visited, and his impressions of which may be not without interest to the readers of *The Freethinker*.

To cross the European continent between Brussels and Zürich is to be reminded of the archaic political and economic divisions which, to-day, form such a barrier to the peaceful social progress of the old continent. Between Ostend and Zürich one's sleep is continually disturbed, if one travels by night, by prying frontier guards and customs officials, demanding the passports of all travellers: these hoary relics of the Middle Ages are often appropriately dressed in uniforms reminiscent of Gilbert and Sullivan operas, of the year of grace, 1953, these quaint survivals of the now archaic age of the coach-and-four seem strangely anachronistic. It was, one reflects, precisely from this kind of division that Abraham Lincoln saved the United States: its present strength and Europe's concurrent weakness reflect the wisdom of political unity, and the folly of obsolete divisions in our present age, when jet planes and wireless telegraphy make increasingly meaningless the parochial boundaries of bygone ages.

The city of Zürich, at which our European pilgrimage concluded, is a beautiful and impressive city of some four hundred thousand inhabitants. It is by far the largest city in the Swiss Confederation and is the commercial and financial capital of the republic, and one of the recognised centres of international trade and banking, though not the political and diplomatic centre of Switzerland, which is situated at Berne, the totemistic city, as its name implies, of the "Bear." Zürich is a city which can trace an unbroken continuity since prehistoric times: a pre-historic settlement, recently excavated by Swiss archaeologists, existed on the edge of the beautiful Lake of Zürich and, under its Roman name of Tigurinus, Zürich was a fortified city in Roman times.

The city also played a leading role in the stormy medieval wars—now heavily shrouded in and by the mists of legend which surround the national hero, William Tell, the Swiss equivalent of our "King Arthur" or "Robin Hood"—wars which resulted in the creation of that astonishing political microcosm, the Swiss Republic, which has successfully defied all normal conditions, such as unity of race and language, which are usually indispensable to the formation and duration of any political community. Zürich also played a leading part in the Protestant Reformation, and was the native town of one of the most

famous of the Reformers, Ulrich Zwingli, who is commemorated by an impressive monument.

As might be expected from so radical a civic community, there is a vigorous Freethought movement in Zürich, as in the Swiss Republic in general. The writer had the pleasure of meeting a number of ardent and militant Freethinkers. Nor is our *Freethinker* unknown in Swiss Freethought circles: in Herr Albert Ernst, I encountered a splendid veteran of Freethought, who had formerly lived in London, where he regularly attended our Secular meetings, and who has read our paper, regularly and without interruption, forty-four years, ever since 1909. One supposed that,

for and on the European continent, this must be a record? Amongst his valued possessions, Herr Ernst cherishes a personal letter from the founder and first editor of *The Freethinker*, G. W. Foote, which he proudly showed to the present writer. As that amiable sceptic, who has somehow managed to get into the Holy Bible, the author of *Ecclesiastes*, shrewdly remarked: "Cast thy bread upon the waters, and it will return to thee after many days." Another very active Swiss Freethinker, Mr. F. Inhelder, is the son-in-law of Mr. Hecht, now resident in South Africa, but who was in bygone years a regular speaker on the North London platform of the N.S.S.

The Swiss Federation of Freethinkers is not, at present, affiliated to the World Union of Freethinkers, though it was at one time and will, we hope, be so again in the future. Notwithstanding this, we understand that our Swiss friends hope to be well represented at the World Congress at Luxemburg next September. The eminent economist, Dr. Gygers, Professor of Economics in the University of Zürich, and a Freethinker of many years' standing, informed the present writer personally that he hoped to be at Luxemburg next year, and we hope that his example will be widely followed.

Our Swiss comrades, like most continental Rationalists, have to face vigorous clerical opposition, in particular from the Roman Catholic Church, the counter-revolution of which, upon which the present writer is due to lecture at Luxemburg next year, is in full blast in most European lands. In Switzerland, which is divided, politically, between the Protestant and Catholic cantons who fought each other for supremacy at the time of the Reformation and, again, in 1848, the clerical counter-offensive centres chiefly on two points: cremation, which is illegal in Catholic cantons, but legal in Protestant ones—Sir Stafford Cripps, who died in Switzerland, was cremated in Zürich—and the restoration of the Jesuits. Ever since the civil-religious conflict of 1848, the Holy Fathers of the "Company of Jesus," the *corps d'élite* and militant champion of political Catholicism everywhere, have been forbidden to reside in Switzerland, on account of their former intrigues against the Swiss Republic.

Nowadays the "Black"—Catholic—cantons are moving heaven and earth to rescind this Federal Law, which does not apply to the other Catholic Orders. In general, religious differences reflect themselves obviously in the social sphere. A leading Swiss Freethinker, Herr W. Engler, who is a keen motorist, summarised the retrograde effect of Catholicism on social progress very neatly, remarking that one "could always tell if one was in a Catholic canton by the state of the local roads": an apt observation, and not only in Switzerland. However, Catholic Switzerland still retains one unique "spiritual" distinction: ever since the Renaissance, it has supplied the Vatican with the famous and exclusively "Swiss Guards" of the Papacy, an historic legacy of the days when the principal export of the Swiss Republic was "soldiers of fortune," a species briefly defined as one which has no fortune! The Swiss Guards of the French Kings were destroyed by the Revolution, but the Papal "Swiss Guard" is still at the Vatican.

The city of Zürich has famous associations in both the religious and political spheres. In the former, we have already alluded to Zwingli, who was killed in battle near the city in the religious wars of the Reformation, a spot also commemorated by an appropriate monument; also, more picturesquely for English readers, by one Louis Lavater, a Calvinist theologian from Tigurinus (Zürich), who wrote the first book on Spiritualism to be translated

into English: *Of Ghostes and Spirites Walking by Night* (English translation, 1572).

In modern times, two famous political personalities formerly resided in Zürich: Mussolini, then an Anarchist, who "agitated" in the city square, and Lenin, who resided there during the First World War. It was from Zürich, in the spring of 1917, that the German Secret Service sent Lenin back to Russia in the famous "sealed train," a journey which had such momentous consequences that it must rank, historically, as the most famous "Flight" since the famous "Flight" (Hegira) of the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina in 622, whence dates the chronology of the Muslim world. From this modern "Flight," as from that other, a whole historical era, a whole sequence of human activity, may be held to have originated.

The Swiss Republic is, indeed, an unique political creation; a little mountain democracy of four and a half million people, often engulfed in a surrounding sea of absolutism, with two religions and four languages spoken within effective boundaries about the size of Wales, its survival represents a constant miracle, due partly to its high Alpine passes which have deterred so many would-be invaders—Hitler was the most recent—from passing that way; and, partly, to the civic virtue of its patriotic people, prepared at all times to defend their ancient liberties to the death. *Floreat Helvetia!*

## The Roman Empire and Christianity

By P. C. KING

THE collapse of the Roman Empire and the submergence of the Græco-Roman culture in the fifth century was a catastrophe—a catastrophe from which we still suffer. Nay, more! just as some illness, from which one has been cured, may return in later life, the portents seem to foreshadow a like disaster these fifteen centuries later.

And in that calamity Christianity played the role of God's avenging angel, that is, of saboteur and traitor. It is true that its will for hatred and spite against the age-old institution was greater than its capacity to encompass its designs, but since intention is the measure of moral depravity and not achievement, judgment of the Christian must rest on his expressed sentiments.

"Rome perished in the Christian epoch" was a saying common in the Roman world at that time. It is, of course, a mere statement of fact, whatever justification there may or may not be for the implied connection between the two.

The early Christians awaited the divine show-down as an event of early consummation. Like other reformists they thought their *Advent*, the return of their Messiah, was just around the corner. Julius Africanus, a prominent Christian zealot, worked it out that the end of the world might be expected in 469 A.D. It was indeed a general belief that end of the Empire and the final triumph of the Messiah would be coincidental. The sack of Rome (410) must have seemed to fit in with this scheme of things.

The Christians were faced with the dilemma of all Messianists who predict an inevitable event and at the same time seek to arouse a missionary zeal to help determine that event. If the coming of God was scheduled for 469, what did it matter what man did, since the puny efforts of His creatures could neither hasten nor retard His divine decisions. But like other Messianists the Christian rose above such mundane rational arguments and went forth to give his god a helping hand in the glad work.

Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, posthumously awarded the order of sanctity, said the Roman Empire must be destroyed, since its rulers deemed it to be eternal. Other

prominent Christians uttered sentiments of like tenor. Vopiscus, a non-Christian writer, comments on the extraordinary licence and abuse, which Christians allowed themselves, when talking of Rome and her institutions—the Harlot, the Beast, New Babylon, were some of the terms of contempt and hatred with which they dubbed the Empire's premier city. Augustine and Orosius, famous names in Christian history, were foremost in this form of mud-slinging and, with Salvianus, another prominent Christian, were never tired of attributing the misfortunes of the Empire and the miseries of her people to their God's intervention and of stigmatising them as His just chastisement. In his famous work, *The City of God*, Augustine contrasted the Christian promise of heaven with "The City of Mammon, Rome the damned." "Loss of wealth, life, honour," he declaimed, "are of no importance to the Christian," and added that the Christian held an emperor "great" only if he had extended the power and worship of the Christian god—as cynical a confession of identifying self-interest with moral right as one could wish to meet!

Whatever the effect of Christian intrigue on the political disintegration of the Roman Empire, there is no doubt that Christianity received an access of strength with the destruction of the Roman unity. For, even under such Christian emperors as Theodosius and Honorius the Church was bound to the political body of the State; under the barbarian kings she gained a freer hand. Before the collapse, the Church was within the Empire; after, the barbarian principalities were within the pale of the Church. "Rome must be destroyed" certainly received its justification from the Christian's point of view!

Its most sinister aspect from the Rationalist's standpoint was not, however, the Church's efforts at sedition, but her implacable hatred of the cultural inheritance of the Græco-Roman world. The writings of the Epicureans, probably the most advanced thinkers of these days, have been almost entirely destroyed by Christian fanatics. Christians regarded all Græco-Roman culture askance, as "the tra-

dition of Paganism" or as "Hellenism," that is, an evil thing, a defiance of their god, something to be eradicated. Our inheritance of that culture, such as it is, is due to the fact that the whole of the Empire did not fall, only the western part of it, and that the Mussulman empire builders took it up and preserved it, to hand it back to Europe in the era known as the Renaissance.

Even internally the Christian Church showed its disregard for rational freedom and intellectual achievement. "Martyrs died for conscience, but not for liberty." Christians did no more, if as much, as others, to bring slavery to an end. The only objection the Christian had to persecution was not the principle but to being its victim; on the contrary, he practised it against his opponents, heathen or heretic, with enthusiasm!

The early history of Christianity is convulsed with

heretical quarrels, and it was usually the less rational interpretation that prevailed in the end. Arianism was, after all, an attempt to keep the religion within the realms of reality, to the rational concept that their founder was a man, not a supernatural being, a god. Pelagius was pronounced a heretic because he concerned himself more with living interests than mythical fancies like Original Sin. The Monophysites were merely trying to escape a physiological contradiction. But the more rational—or perhaps we should say, less irrational—interpretation always failed before the onslaught of the "Chalcedonite heretics," as the opponents called the party that eventually triumphed as the One, True, Catholic, Roman and Apostolic Church of Christ. And so it is the intellectual damage that it has done to humanity that is ultimately the greatest grief that Christianity has brought upon us.

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

By ANNA KARENINA

(Continued from page 294)

WE have shown how the Moscow Patriarch, Nikon, revised and edited the Scriptures and other religious writings in seventeenth century Russia. This, from the point of view of the Holy Orthodox Church, of which he was head, was a necessary reform. But Nikon did not stop at that; he set himself the task of tidying-up the Ritual of his Church, which to this day is probably the most ceremonial of the Christian churches. This step followed logical on the revision of the Scriptures on which the Ritual is supposedly based. Supposedly: for all rituals, in a natural growth, tend to expand and to take in elements of older religions and, in so doing, to overlay the original scripture that they are "putting over." Besides which any substantial revision of that scripture would necessarily affect ritual. Nikon, a man of thought as well as an energetic man, got busy.

It is well to keep in mind that there are many and, sometimes, considerable differences in the rituals of the several national Churches that make up the body of the Eastern, or Greek, or Holy Orthodox Church. The Western Christian, or Roman, Church more sternly repressed variation from a norm laid down by its centre, Rome, but conditions in Eastern Europe and Western Asia, the terrain of the Eastern Church, militated against such close control. So it came about that the older Eastern Church, in the dominion of Byzantium, had many differences in ritual from the later Russian (or Slavonic) traditions. For example, in Russia the sign of the cross was made by two fingers; in the Greek Church three fingers were employed. One is tempted to think that the preference for two fingers may have been due to the harsher climatic conditions of the northern land, but nothing is known on this point. All one can say is that religions are like that; the smaller the difference in ritual, the stronger the effort to secure conformity. Nikon, therefore, decided in his ruthless way to secure this greater conformity. But, first, let us give an example of the chaos in ritual in which he attempted to secure order.

The service in the Russian Church in his day was long and, for the average worshipper, tedious. But no priest dared to cut anything from the procedure; the rule was to read aloud everything that was supposed to be read. The priests found a wonderful solution to this rule: a number of persons were performing the different readings at the same time. The priest was reading from one book; the sexton from another; the sexton from a third, and so on;

troika, as it were, and not tandem. And not only reading was the subject of this strange procedure. Many prayers were being sung by the choir at the same time. In such manner the entire service was completed in a short time. The worshippers, of course, could make nothing of this chaos of noise. The more devout, who wished seriously to pray, who desired to praise, or beg favours from, the Almighty, brought their own ikons to the church, propped these holy pictures in front of themselves, and prayed to their God without paying attention to his official ministers.

Perhaps there may be other faiths, unknown to me, that indulge in such ludicrous goings-on, but the nearest illustration I can recall to this is the simultaneous employment even to date, of the prayer-wheels in Tibet. Perhaps Religion's old enemy, Science, has produced a nearer parallel in the modern submarine cable. When first used, one message at a time was sent over the line. Now upwards of a score of messages, or so I have heard, are "scrambled" and telegraphed, to be duly "unscrambled" at the hither end by some gadget of which I cannot conceive. However that may be, as we are continuously assured, all things are possible with God, so the prayers of the Russian faithful were doubtless "unscrambled" and dealt with by the appropriate section of the celestial chancelry.

But this ingenious securing of celerity had its dangers for the Church. Once let the faithful dispense with the priest—the go-between—then the flood-gates are open to Nonconformity. Nikon was not the man to stand for that, and he stopped this strange manner of prayer. But he also started something very big; the Church was divided into Old Believers and the orthodox, the Three-Fingered and the Two-Fingered; the Three-Times-*Aliluya*-ists and the Twicers. Actual civil war broke out in many places, the authorities fighting the *Raskolniks*, as the Old Believers were termed.

But this war resulted in the downfall of Nikon. He had bitten off more than he could chew, and even the Tsar lost his old admiration for the Patriarch. Nikon decided to go while the going was good. In the cathedral in Moscow he divested himself of his patriarchal robes, and left the church as a humble monk. He made one abortive attempt at a "come-back," and some years later he died an obscure and natural death in a monastery. As is the case with other dictators, his good and evil deeds troubled his country and Church until the Russian Revolution put paid to old ways in both.

## This Believing World

Another wonderful "miracle" of Healing without Faith has been reported in the Press. A small boy of eight, crippled from birth, with deformed hips, who had been operated on by doctors and told he might never walk as long as he lived, suddenly began to walk—and this without any help from a "Faith Healer," or any "spirit" doctor, or even an Indian Guide. We might add that not any "laying on hands" by a reverent parson either. But if Mr. H. Edwards had touched the boy, or any of the other marvellous "healers" who are about—what shrieks of triumph we would have had from the spirit-believing world! But how do they explain this cure?

Although the Shah of Persia is still front-page news, it was surely a little unkind to publish his photograph grovelling on a mat in prayer. Still, it is good to know that Roman Catholicism and Islam have one thing in common—pious grovelling. We have often wondered what the Queen would do if she met the Pope in person? Which of them would be expected to—well, if the word "grovel" is disliked—kneel? And why?

Our contemporary "Psychic News" reprints an old article showing how a "spirit voice" saved a lady's "sanity"—she and her husband "had almost ceased to believe in God," the implication being that they would have gone quite mad if they had become Atheists. "It looked as if my poor wife would end her days in an asylum," moaned the husband—but thank Heaven, "Spiritualism saved us." It "replaced God in His throne for us." Anyway, it is good to know that God can be in a throne as well as on it. We are curious to learn from any Spiritualist if God sits on his throne continuously—never goes for a Heavenly walk, for example, or listens in to Radio? But we doubt if even Mr. Shaw Desmond can answer that one.

Under a scheme of exchange, Canon Waddington officiated in American churches recently, and he gave his impressions of American religion the other day as a broadcast. It was as big a business in the States as any other, and organised as such—but it was difficult to see where the Lord or Jesus Christ or even Hell came into the scheme of things. The Canon discretely left them out, and concentrated on the enormous sums of money being spent to make people come to church. He also discretely refused to discuss the other side of the picture—the difficulties encountered, for instance, in bringing people to recognise the place held in the Churches by God.

Of course, if the Churches concentrate on "social" activities as distinct from religious ones putting the emphasis more on dances, amateur theatricals, concerts, than on Mass, Holy Communion, Fasting, Prayer, regular church attendance, and so on, it is not surprising that there are so many church members in America. The real question is—what exactly do they believe? Are they ready to defend Hell, Miracles, the Resurrection, the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Birth, and the adventures Jesus Christ had with a Devil? Apart from a few scattered communities and some very religious negroes, it would be true to say that religion in America depends almost entirely on *secular*, social activities, and not at all on the essentials of the Christian Faith.

Recollections of Cecil Rhodes were broadcast the other evening—some by Mrs. Lovemore, the daughter of the missionary who translated and obtained the famous concession from Lobengula for the Chartered Company for

mineral rights in his country. It was this missionary also who "remonstrated" with Lobengula for strangling his sister—the kind of murder which appears to have been the sport of many of these South African kings. How many people know that Chaka, the king of the Zulus, was responsible for the deaths of at least 1,000,000 human beings? Whatever else may be said about the whites in the blacks' country, at least they did their best to stop this kind of thing.

## Review

THE autumn number of *The Plain View*, edited by H. J. Blackham (subscription for one year 4s. 6d. post free, single copy 1s. from 4a, Inverness Place, Queensway, London, W. 2) is, as usual, full of excellent articles and reviews. Marxists will not fail, we imagine, to disagree with some of its criticisms, and even Tories may not be too pleased for what they may feel is "left-hand" compliment. But good provocative writing makes people think, and that is all to the good. There is a long article by M. L. Burnett on "a peace policy" for the Humanist movement, with many excellent suggestions for a peaceful solution of world problems; and for those who cannot get away from religion there is one entitled, "Religious Humanism," by M. T. Hindson, which insists that "no one can deny the reality of the world as a source of spiritual and material benefits"—the kind of truism which reads well, but appears to us as obvious as that apples grow on trees.

Mr. Hindson is quite sure, however, that man is "religious" by nature and, he thinks, will one day create a religion which "will offer a cure for the world's present spiritual malaise." No doubt many religions will appear as the cure—but whether any will finally be adopted as the only one necessary for the cure of the world's malaise, spiritual or otherwise, may well form a subject for discussion. Freethinkers, especially those who have studied religions, are not at all enthusiastic about having another added to the thousands in existence—even though labelled "humanistic." The best thing for mankind would be to abolish all religions.

In his article, "Personal Life," Mr. Blackham deals with many ethical questions such as "How shall I live?" and poses many other problems. For him, in the ultimate, the answer to them all is "Humanism." We hope readers will study what he has to say in his illuminating disquisition.

The reviews in *The Plain View* have always been first class, and in this autumn number they are exceptionally interesting. They give readers a fine guide for future reading, and we hope that everybody who can will support this vigorously written magazine.

H. C.

## Delight

I have been delighted so many times in life;  
But when I think on things that give me joy  
It is but to spill the pockets of a boy  
Of all their treasures: a broken-bladed knife,  
A piece of string, and conkers, coloured stones,  
Matches, and heroes' photos grimed and creased,  
With much adoring, and from a birthday feast,  
Hoarded in loving memory, chicken bones.

Such like are things that please me now: rain-drops  
Racing down panes, amber lights in beer, and prawns  
Eaten at midnight stalls, ships' voices in the night,  
Old Cockney songs and cricket, curio shops,  
Queer books, and sparrows on forbidden lawns  
Cheerily cursing peacocks. All bring me delight

JOHN O'HARE

# THE FREETHINKER

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## To Correspondents

A. N. RICHMOND.—We agree with your analysis of the article in question, but we try to include as many points of view as possible.

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## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

J. CLAYTON's Lectures.—Saturday, October 10, 6 p.m., Enfield (Barnes Sq.); Sunday, October 11, 3-15 p.m., Haslingdon; 7 p.m., Blackburn Market.  
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 week-day, 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: This week, F. A. RIDLEY.

### INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, October 11, 6-45 p.m.: W. BARTHOLOMEW, M.A., "Other People's Children."  
Bristol Rationalist Group (Crown and Dove Hotel, Bridewell St.).—Wednesday, October 14, 7-30 p.m., "Rationalism and Psychological Research."  
Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 13: R. CLEMENTS, "The Problem of Germany."  
Junior Discussion Group, South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Friday, October 9, 7-15 p.m.: Dr. F. BICKNELL, "The English Complaint."  
Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, October 11, 6-30 p.m.: A. HANCOCK, a Lecture.  
Manchester Humanist Fellowship (Cross Street Chapel Library).—Saturday, October 10, 3 p.m., WALLACE OWEN, "The Social Implication of Humanism."  
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare St.).—Sunday, October 11, 2-30 p.m.: NORMAN SMITH, M.P., "Reality Behind Politics."  
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, October 11, 11 a.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "What they Believe."  
West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, October 11, 7-15 p.m.: L. EBURY (Vice-President, N.S.S.), "The N.S.S., its Principles and Objects."

## Notes and News

The opening meeting of that enterprising body, the West London Branch of the National Secular Society, was held at "The Laurie Arms" last Sunday, October 4, when the indoor winter session was introduced by Mr. G. H. Taylor on the History and Prospects of the British Secular Movement. An excellent attendance was registered, and the learned lecturer answered numerous questions, and replied with his usual efficiency to an animated discussion. The Branch President, Mr. F. A. Hornibrook, took the chair. Next Sunday the speaker, as announced elsewhere in our columns, will be Mr. Len Ebury, Vice-President of the N.S.S., who needs no introduction to a London audience or any recommendation to a secular one.

# The World Union of Freethinkers

## The Belgian Scholastic Problem

[We propose, from time to time, to publish items relating to the international activities of the Freethought Movement.—EDITOR.]

THE Belgian Freethought Federation held its national congress at La Louviere on June 20 and 21st. Among several excellent discourses, that of Mr. Nicolas Smelten, president of la Ligue de l'Enseignement, and one of Belgium's most distinguished educationists, was outstanding. He reminded his audience that for 30 years, from 1884—1914, the clericals were in a parliamentary minority, but never for a moment ceased their attack on the State Educational System, although pretending to share in an educational truce. Once in power, though by a slight majority, the truce, once called a Duty to the Nation, was cynically thrown into the waste paper basket. Despite the increasing financial difficulties of the country, hundreds of millions of francs were appropriated for Church and convent schools. The policy of the Church has always been as expressed in the Jesuit paper "Civita Cattolica" in 1948 "where the majority in a State is Catholic, the Church requires that no legal existence be allowed to error. Hence, if there exist religious minorities, these must be unable to spread their doctrines. The Church would be false to its mission if it admitted, either in theory or practice, that error can have the same rights as truth." In the XVI century the schools were tools of the Inquisition. The Emperor Charles V required schoolmasters to take an oath that they would denounce parents whose children revealed that their parents listened to Lutheran doctrine. Under the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa a notable scholastic system was inaugurated, but met with determined opposition from the clergy. Before 1830, whatever sources of friction there were between Holland and Belgium, there can be only praise for the generous attention paid to intellectual education. Under clerical pressure among the first acts of the first Belgian Government of 1830 was one for the freedom of teaching. This did not mean that free schools, i.e., intellectually free, were to be established, but that the Church was to have a free hand in establishing its own schools. It permitted anyone to teach anything, anywhere, anyhow, unconditionally, provided that nothing occurred to arouse the attention of the police. State schools were regulated by law and paid for by the State. The Church was not satisfied and twelve years later a new Education law turned the State schools into Church schools. One Minister of Education even required teachers to submit to an episcopal regulation of their religious duties. This policy led eventually to the formation of the Ligue de l'Enseignement in 1864 and to the establishment in 1875 of the Model School, later the Training College of the City of Brussels. In 1879 a Liberal majority gave to Belgium a really liberal Educational system, to which the Church replied with a pullulation of convent schools and a threat to excommunicate the teachers in State schools. The first act of the Clerical Government of 1884 was to permit local authorities (communes) to appoint or establish Church schools as their own and to suppress the State schools. This was done in many rural districts and large numbers of teachers thrown out of employ, being replaced by nuns and priests. In 1895 all schools had to include religion taught by a priest or under his direction in their curriculum, no matter the preference of the local authority. Each clerical government thence-

forward endeavoured to go one better than its predecessor in privileges, particularly financial ones, awarded to the Church schools, not only in Belgium but in the Congo.

This policy goes on to-day, e.g., in 1949 the Catholic schools received 1,500 million francs from the public purse; in 1953 2,800 millions. There are to-day 101 Catholic training colleges and only 52 State ones. The Clericals even term some of their institutions "official."

We repeat to-day, declared M. Smelten, what we claimed fifty years ago: "The School must provide the child, within the limits of its understanding in ratio to its mental

growth, with a perception of its physical and social environment but without dogma or bias, in such a way as to protect the child from prejudice, error and misconception. Moral teaching must be based on knowledge, reason, character and conscience and avoid dogma. It is the duty of the school to open to the child the doors to well-being and happiness. No sectarian school can do these things by reason of its very essence."

And the orator finished with an appeal to save the National Schools.

C.B.B.

## The Delusions of Spiritualism—1

By H. CUTNER

IN his *On the Edge of the Etheric*, Mr. J. Arthur Findlay gives in great detail what "Etheria," the delightful home we are all going to when we die, looks like; and, as I said in my previous article, it appears to be a terrible fate. It is, he contends, inevitable for there is nothing we can do about it.

My real difficulty in dealing with the book is to pick out even a few of the "proofs" we are given that Etheria exists. As far as I understand it, we have first to know that the reason we can see or feel or know anything about our Universe is that we are tuned to its "vibrations." But there are a number of other Universes outside our ken because they have different "vibrations," and we can only sense these Universes when we die; for then, and then only, will we be attuned to them.

Whether our own world is a "vibratory" one, in the sense believed in by Mr. Findlay, is certainly open to discussion. We know our "world" because we are certain that we are alive, and because we can move about it, whether it has vibrations or not. And the question of the "ultimate reality" of our world, or our Universe, however interesting as an academic exercise, does not really arise. We are alive, we "experience" a world in which we live, and that is all there is to it for most people. We leave it to scientists to find out what is "Matter" or "Substance," and if ever we really get to know, we shall still have to live in the world and eat and play and study. Thus it really does not matter the proverbial brass farthing whether there are really any "vibrations" in this world of ours.

What matters to thinking man is that, as far as our study of the Universe has taken us, our Earth is the result of what we call Evolution. We are fairly sure that at one time it was a gaseous mass which has shrunk into the form we know it, and we are also fairly certain that "space" is peopled by millions of planets, suns, stars, etc., all in stages of evolution, some of them so far away that it takes thousands of "light years" for us to see them. No astronomer has ever seen any kind of a world of a different "vibration," not because it is impossible to see, but because the whole idea is both idiotic and fantastic. Either Evolution is a fact or it is not. But if Evolution is true this talk of "etheric" worlds is twaddle.

Mr. Findlay tells us that "science" leads us "to look on the Universe as something completely different from what it appears and to regard a world unseen as also real, and what is seen as only real to us inhabiting physical bodies." The difficulty here is that perhaps what Mr. Findlay means by "science" is something quite different from what I mean. I have never read a line in "science" which confirms a word of this sheer nonsense.

Science, let me inform Mr. Findlay, is one thing; what scientists say may be their own opinions, but is not necessarily science. When a Roman Catholic scientist (and there are many distinguished ones) tells me that he believes

the physical body of the Virgin Mary flew straight up to Heaven, a physical abode, wherein dwells a physical God and a physical Jesus both alive, who receive her; and when he adds that she appears in a physical body on certain occasions to Roman Catholic children, I see no "science" in his unblushing credulity. It is the same with Mr. Findlay who has a perfect right to believe in "a world unseen as also real" by which he means an "etheric" world not seen by us while alive, but seen by us when we are dead because we shall then be under a different "vibration." It may be that some scientists fully agree with him, and I should like to read what they have to say. But whatever they say is not science, but merely their opinions; and my opinion on this "etheric" world is as good as theirs, and I say it is just nonsense.

Mr. Findlay, following the Churches, tells us, "the human being is composed of body, soul and spirit." He adds, "The body is what we see, the soul is our mind and the spirit is our etheric body which is an exact duplicate of our physical body." Following—very humbly—one of our greatest philosophers, David Hume, I long since came to the conclusion that "mind" was *not* an entity though for convenience we use the word. When we die, the mind dies with us and is quite certainly not something apart from our physical bodies. In other words, there is no "soul." And science has never discovered any "spirit" in or out of the human body.

All Mr. Findlay seems to think necessary is to say a number of things and they must be so. They are "science." But, of course, he gives no reference whatever to "science" as such. Not a single "authority" is quoted.

Of course, we have mentioned by name Sir William Crookes, one of the most easily bamboozled scientists who ever "investigated" Spiritualism, and Alfred Russel Wallace. Well, we know that a number of scientists have embraced Spiritualism, but this was not because they were scientists. Had they been jockeys it is quite possible they would have done the same. A number of them were, more or less, Christians or Theists and they were quite sure of immortality long before they "investigated" Spiritualism.

In any case, even if Crookes and the others believed that "spirits" can communicate with us, did they believe in Mr. Findlay's "etheric" world? Why does Mr. Findlay then believe in it? He tells us that it is because he "has been told so by those who inhabit it"—not because "science" has proved it exists no matter what he has said previously about science telling us of "an unseen world." Spirits have come back from this "etheric" world and have told him enough about it to fill large volumes; and I am sure if Mr. Sloan the medium had lived on in this more or less—despised physical world of ours, he could have continued for years and years enlarging on what he had already "revealed."

Let me emphasise that I am not saying that Sloan

a "fraud." He certainly went off into trances and talked interminably about life in "Etheria." I am sure he never knew what he was talking about. Mr. Findlay wants us to believe that things are exactly as Sloan described them, not because there is a particle of evidence about "Etheria," but simply because he said so.

And please remember the contention is, that it was rarely Sloan who spoke but some living spirit using Sloan as a microphone. The spirit was once asked how he could thus speak to us, and the answer he gave was "By materialising my etheric mouth and tongue." And when asked how he did that, he carefully answered, "Remember you cannot get a proper grasp of the difficulties we are faced with until you yourself come across to our side."

This marvellous proof of "Etheria" reminds me of Jules Verne's *From Earth to the Moon*. He wanted his heroes to land on the moon but as he hadn't the slightest idea what the conditions were really like there, he cleverly caused a comet to deflect the rocket and wrote *A Trip Round It*. I am still wondering how an etheric mouth and tongue can be "materialised."

## The Anarchist Curé

By ARTHUR W. ULOTH

(Continued from page 319)

THERE were three, perhaps, four copies of this manuscript. In 1735 Voltaire obtained a copy and published a mutilated version in 1762. He cut out all the libertarian and revolutionary sentiments, being himself a bourgeois and a Statist, and restricted the edition to the freethought and anti-clerical sections. The complete text has only once been published, in 1864 at Amsterdam in three volumes.

It horrified those who discovered it, and it is amazing that the manuscript was not destroyed on the spot. Meslier's colleagues were so upset that they did not even allow his death to appear in the parish register. He was thus banished after a fashion from the Christian community.

The book is not the product of a calm and peaceable mind seeking to reveal the truth. There is evidence that Meslier had always been an unbeliever, even an atheist, but he had restricted his atheism to occasional witty sallies when in the society of educated men. He had always performed his priest's duties faithfully, without too much ritual or ceremony. But the situation was different now. The book is a cry of revolt, a furious onslaught on all established authority.

What is the theme of the work? It is that religion is the support of tyranny. Religion is not only a lie. It also stands for oppression. "Religion and politics . . . understand each other like two cut-purses. Political government upholds religion, however silly and useless it may be." Such is "the source of all the ills that overwhelm mankind, and of all the impostures which hold them unhappy prisoners of error, and of the falseness of superstition as well as of the tyrannical laws of the great ones of the earth." That is why Meslier made his own the wish that he had heard from "a man who, without education nevertheless had much sense: 'I wish,' said he 'that all tyrants could be hanged with the bowels of the priests.'"

No other writer of the eighteenth century wrote with such violence against royalty. No king pleased Meslier, not even Henry IV, whose praises Voltaire was to sing later on. "Where," he demands, "are those generous murderers of tyrants that existed in past centuries? Where are the Brutuses and the Cassiuses? Where are the noble murderers of Caligula and so many others? . . . Where are the Jacques Clements and the Ravailleurs of France? Why don't they come in our day to butcher or stab all

these detestable monsters and enemies of the human race, and to deliver by this means the peoples from their tyranny? But no, they no longer live, these great men! . . ."

"The first monarchies," he wrote elsewhere, "were gatherings of bandits, pirates, and thieves." The same with the nobles. "The first were bloodthirsty folk, cruel oppressors, and parricides." Without justification to start with their reign has shown no justification since. They are parasites, as are their servants the bureaucracy, "all these officers of princes and kings, all these haughty intendants and governors of towns or provinces, all these proud tax- and tithe-collectors, office clerks and bureaucrats, and finally, all these conceited prelates and ecclesiastics, as well as all these gentlemen, ladies, and misses, who do nothing but enjoy themselves and have a good time, while you other poor folk have to work day and night, and carry all the weight of the yoke, and are loaded with all the burden of the State."

It is not only against the ruling class that Meslier launches his attack, and against whom he calls upon the peoples of Europe to unite in revolt, but it is also against even the petty functionaries of the State. Not only the lawyers and judges, the men of justice, of "injustice" as he always put it, but also "the clerks, the comptrollers, the gendarmes, the guards, the sergeants, the ushers, the bailiff's men," and other "canaille." It is the bitterness of the poor that speaks through the pen of the anarchist curé.

He knew their misery. "All that," he says, referring to religious ceremonies, "will not produce a single grain of wheat, all that is not worth while one single stroke of the hoe that a manual worker gives to the soil to cultivate it." But he was also aware that this misery was the product of the institution of private property. "Men appropriate each one their particular share of the goods of the earth, instead of enjoying them in common." "All men are equal by nature." From what follows it seems that he means socially not biologically. "They all have equally the right to live and walk on the earth, equally the right to enjoy there their natural liberty, and to have their equal part of the goods of the earth, in working usefully everyone will have the things that are necessary to life."

He applied his communism to the relations of the sexes too. "If men did not render marriages indissoluble as they now do, and if on the contrary they left always both the liberty to join together, each partner following their own inclination, and the liberty to separate when they could not get on together, or when their feelings prompted them to form some new alliance, one certainly would not see so much disorder and discussion between the sexes. They would have their pleasures peacefully and contentedly, because it would always be good comradeship that would be the principle motive of their union, and it would be a great benefit for them as well as for the children, who would be provided for . . . from the public and communal goods. . . ."

Meslier's ideal was a society built up of peasant communes, the land of each being held in common, linked by agreements for mutual benefit. He did not go to the books of the philosophers, nor to the account of travels among savage peoples. He based his Utopia on the peasant communities that he saw around him, the outlines of whose organisation were still visible, crushed out of all shape though they might be by the existing social system. His ideal society was the dream of the people among whom he lived. The problem of the towns he dealt with very cursorily. He did not speak of industry and the urban artisan class, and commerce, of course, had no place in his commonwealth, being reduced simply to one community helping another in case of need.

(To be concluded)

# Correspondence

## MIND AND MATTER

SIR.—In his article "Mind and Matter" (issue September 11), Mr. A. Yates presumably asks: "... at what time during man's evolutionary development did the change from brute to *homo sapiens* occur? Was it the instantaneous result of supernatural operation or of a gradual process of braingrowths from primitive instinct to human consciousness?" That was a reasonably well stated question(s); but, unfortunately, Mr. Yates does not essay an answer but goes off on a certain tack, as a result of which his article is without point.

Surely it is the case that the development from instinctive living to (so-called) consciousness was evolutionary: that is to say, took place (and is still taking place) probably over millions of years. So far as I am concerned, the evidence of that lies around us. For the average person does not yet possess any great degree of consciousness (mental knowing) and yet is well away from instinctive living.

It is, I hope, obvious that consciousness (which is a word that labels consciousness "consciousness" all words label the real and unreal things they do label) is solely a matter of words and so speech. Therefore, Man's so-called consciousness slowly developed as he more and more "found out" things and duly labelled them with sounds (which are words) **WHAT THEY WERE** by which process things became **WHAT THEY ARE** ... their names!

The problem (quite easily answered, I think) is: How did Man (in fact, isolated individuals) name things (material and non-material—and later abstract somethings) **WHAT THEY WERE (ARE)** when he **DID NOT KNOW** what they were (are)?

It seems to me that Freethinkers (and most other people) give practically no thought to how the evolution of Man to speech occurred. They take words, whether spoken or written, for granted, presumably assuming that speech has "kind of" always been with us. Thus they write and talk and write and talk and, generally speaking, get nobody anywhere. Confusion, both mental and physical, abounds amongst conscious (sic) Man but not amongst instinctive non-man. Obviously, then, non-man (instinctive) life lives in a state of what I will label Unknowing Knowing. Equally obvious is the fact that the confusion above referred to is a direct consequence of the attainment of speech. Undoubtedly, by speech, Man is on the way to Knowingly Knowing (all the "best" gods are knowing knowers, of course), but while about every more or less adult and so-called civilised person considers himself as "good" (knowing) as his fellow, in fact I would suggest that average of Consciousness amongst people is, say, 10 per cent.

The confusion and corruption of people goes on apace. A person who may be an expert on some particular branch of knowledge (chemist, biologist, etc., etc.) is presumed by many to be an expert on *all* subjects. At least, the B.B.C.'s Director of the Spoken Word and various groups, for purposes of their own, thus try and get my suggested mass of 10 per cent. conscious people to believe anything these experts on one subject say on any other subject.

If it was not so frightening, it would be funny.—Yours, etc.,

FRANK A. WATSON,

Secretary, Leicester Secular Society.

## OH! MR. VARNEY

SIR.—Mr. Varney says "... the masses are almost incapable of thinking objectively." True enough, and they think like Mr. Varney, to wit, that the whole income distributed to the people is earned by the nation as a *whole*. But, parasites in the nation don't earn Mr. Varney—they sponge and even hard workers may be destructive of wealth.

It is physically impossible to take out of the national pudding more than is in it. It is possible to increase the pudding if parasites are set to work, and even to do so *with* parasites, where production is for *USE*.—Yours, etc.,

CHAS. E. BERRY,

P.S. (1).—What about a social effort to make a better pudding equitably distributed? Produce less and enjoy it more.

P.S. (2).—I never intended to waste effort to refute that one cannot take what doesn't exist and cannot exist.

## A ONE-SIDED TOLERATION

SIR.—I dreamed our glorious weekly published cartoons. One depicted a huge person seated upon the head of a tiny one labeled "Freethinker," who is repeating to himself: "I must be tolerant; I must not bite him in the Bo-Bo." Yes, and another guy has a gun at his head termed "Blasphemy Laws." There's a hero for you!—Yours, etc.,

HARRY FIDDIAN.

## ARRIVED AT LAST

SIR.—Since, as the presiding celestial Angel, I first escorted Lucifer, alias Satan, from the Elysian Fields, my life has been a torture to me. On earth, he never fails to win. Freethinkers, from G. B. Shaw downwards, only encourage Satan. Now he is supporting the Scottish Home Rule groups.

Josef Stalin has arrived here late. Zhdanov was very glad to see his old chief. The other Gods don't like it very much. St. Paul is extremely peeved. John Knox is considering reincarnating, in company with Annie Besant and Sir Oliver Lodge.

Heaven is *naturally* a despotic State. Rather crowded now though. Really, one does not know what Satan will be up to next. The trouble is—he knows all the *tactics*. What can a frustrated Archangel do?—Yours, etc.,

"GABRIEL."

## GENTLE JESUS?

Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive greater damnation. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. . . . Ye fools and blind. . . . Ye blind guides. . . . Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. . . . Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?—MATTHEW xxiii. 15-33.

## N.S.S. Executive Committee, 1st October

Present: Mr. Ridley (in the chair), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Ebury, Griffiths, Gibbins, Taylor, Hornbrook, Tiley, Shaw, Johnson, Cleaver, Corstorphine and the Secretary.

Sixteen members were admitted to the Parent, Blackpool, West London, Bradford, Kingston and Birmingham Branches. It was reported that Mr. C. McCall had accepted the invitation of the Committee to represent the Society on the platform of the meeting of protest against the B.B.C.'s policy on religious broadcasting to be held at the Chorlton Town Hall on Sunday evening, October 24.

The President gave a full report of the meeting at Brussels of the Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers, for which he was warmly thanked. This report will be elaborated in these columns in a series of articles. The Secretary reported on his visit to the Conference of the Ethical Union and expressed the opinion that useful contacts had been made from which worthwhile results would follow.

A design and estimate for a new badge were submitted, and the Secretary was instructed to order a supply.

A letter from Mr. John Jules of the Fyzabad Branch reported that contact had been made with the Nigeria Branch resulting in the pooling of information to the advantage of two branches operating under somewhat similar conditions.

Offers to accommodate the London Annual Dinner were considered, and the Treasurer and Secretary were authorised to proceed with initial arrangements for this function to take place in the latter half of February, 1954.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.

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