

# The Freethinker

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THAT STAUNCH BULWARK of the Christian religion, the BBC, recently reported a sermon delivered in, I think, St. Paul's Cathedral by the Dean, the Very Reverend W. R. Matthews. Dr. Matthews is reputed to be something of a modernist, and he advanced the contention that the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England were now out of date and ought to be revised. For, he said, they no longer adequately express the teaching of the Christian religion in the eyes of the men of the 20th century. He went on to indicate this current task of revision as one of the most difficult, but ultimately useful, tasks that the Church in its corporate capacity could, and should, undertake.

## What were the Thirty-Nine?

What, precisely, were the Thirty-Nine Articles of religion as drawn up in the year 1562 by an assembly of Anglican Divines convened for that purpose by Queen Elizabeth I — "that bright occidental star" as the editors of the authorised version of the Bible were to describe her a little later? Actually, they represent the end and summary of a whole series of consecutive formulation which began about 1538 under Henry VIII and Archbishop Cranmer. Ostensibly, these involved and ambiguous theological formulas were put out as a comprehensive series of theological definitions of the principal dogmas of the Christian faith. A rather deeper investigation will presently disclose that the Thirty-Nine Articles were intended to put forward an interpretation of the Christian religion, not only nor even primarily, viable for Christians in general at their initial date of promulgation in the mid-sixteenth century, but with a special eye to the particular needs of the English Church at that particular date. And not only of the English Church, but at least equally of the English State of that stormy era, when both Europe and the recently discovered "New World" were tearing themselves to pieces in the religious wars of the Reformation and counter-Reformation — Protestants versus Catholics. As Cardinal Newman was later to declare, the Church of England, along with its theological formularies summarised in the Thirty-Nine Articles, represented a middle way between the Church of Rome and the logical and thorough-going Protestant Churches which the German and Swiss Reformations had brought into existence during the course of the 16th century. Such was the historical genesis of the Thirty-Nine, which the later Jesuit controversialist Cardinal Bellarmine was to describe as "the cat with thirty-nine tails." And about which Karl Marx was to perpetrate his famous *bon mot* that "The Church of England would rather lose the whole of its thirty-nine articles than one thirty-ninth of its income."

## A Political Reformation

The one fact that stands out from the complicated skein of English history during the 16th century, is that the fundamental nature of the English Reformation differed sharply from that on the European Continent. For, while the Lutheran Reformation in Germany and the Calvinist Reformation in Switzerland, France, Scotland, *et al*, were

primarily religious reformations, that is, their reformed movements were founded by theologians (both Luther and Calvin were so) and fought over theological dogmas and questions of Church-government, in England the Reformation was primarily political. It was inaugurated and sustained by the royal power in the absolutist state of the Tudor monarchy, and its sequential fortunes fluctuated sharply with the personal religious views of the successive monarchs, e.g., under Henry VIII, its effective Founder, it was anti-Papal in Church-government, but remained Catholic in doctrine right up to that sanguinary monarch's demise. Henry's latest Catholic biographer explicitly declares that he was a schismatic but not a heretic.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## Exit the Thirty-Nine Articles ?

By F. A. RIDLEY

After Henry's death, the English Reformation first veered sharply to the Protestant Left under Edward VI (and his Regents, Somerset and Northumberland), then to the Catholic Right under Mary, who burned Protestants as heretics. Under Elizabeth, England, exhausted by a generation of rapid and violent change, tried to pursue a middle road, neither completely Catholic nor Protestant in doctrine, but under the firm control of the English State. The Thirty-Nine Articles reflect this point of view throughout; they can be and they have been interpreted impartially as Catholic and/or Protestant. That is, from a theological angle; politically, however, there is no ambiguity whatsoever about them. In the last three Articles, foreign (i.e. Papal) supremacy is flatly denied. "The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of England." So, equally, is Socialism, then advocated (in a revolutionary form) by the Anabaptists in Germany, and by the very similar "Fifth Monarchy" men in England itself — viz. "Property is not to be held in common as the Anabaptists do vainly boast." Contrarily, the majority of the Articles which relate to theology are purposely ambiguous; so much so in fact, that it is difficult to acquit them of deliberately facing both ways. But one fact stands out clearly: whether Catholic or Protestant, they are certainly English; they are, and are intended to be, the self-sufficient formulas of an English national Church, which recognises no foreign authority in either Rome or Geneva.

## The Thirty-Nine Articles Today

Obviously articles drawn up so exclusively for the needs both spiritual and political, of a bygone age, cannot, as Dr. Matthews urges, correspond with the needs of 20th century men and women. Undoubtedly from his own standpoint, the Dean has a sound case. Incidentally, the obvious fact that the Thirty-Nine are empirical, rather than logical, formulas, will not worry the vast majority of the members of Dr. Matthews's own Church, for the English are a notoriously illogical race. Look, for example, at that glorified hotch-potch of all ideas, the Labour Party! But we very much doubt if the cautious clique of episcopal bureaucrats headed by that arch-bureaucrat, Dr. Fisher, will venture to stir up the hornets' nest that would certainly start buzzing the moment that the Church of England attempted

to revise its traditional doctrinal formula. Anglo-Catholics, Evangelists and Modernists, would all start a theological tug-of-war which would probably tear the Church of England to pieces and end up in its disestablishment; an eventual consummation which might be welcomed by Secularists (and by the Vatican), but which is hardly likely to commend itself to Canterbury and his fellow-fishermen!

So while we must applaud both Dr. Matthews's logic, and his assessment of ecclesiastical evolution, we think that the authorities of the Church had better let sleeping dogs lie. Otherwise, it appears to be rather doubtful whether the Church founded by Elizabeth I will succeed in surviving the present reign of Elizabeth II.

## Germany and the Church of Rome

By P. G. ROY

WHEN RECENTLY TRAVELLING through the southern parts of the German Federal Republic, in a place of some 700 inhabitants, I passed the school just as the children after the recreation break returned to their classrooms. One boy stayed behind and went on playing. I stopped and started talking to him; it turned out that he, the son of an East German refugee, was a Protestant, and that the others had Roman Catholic religious teaching. There was in the school one more Protestant child, but his parents preferred him to conform and stay with the others.

The inhabitants of this southern part, descendants of the ancient tribes of the Alamanni and Marcomanni (the last ones developed into the Bavarians and Austrians), are staunch Catholics. Roman Catholicism is totalitarian and more readily given to hatred and persecution of the heretical than is the Protestant North. The Catholic inhabitants of Bavaria and Austria, no less than those of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, have revelled, centuries before Hitler, in persecuting others. Just because "Catholicism" is all-embracing, comprehensive, totalitarian, it is a political creed with its own political parties — not only in Germany. Be it the problem of euthanasia, of cremation, of birth control, artificial insemination or marriage laws, the *Ecclesia Militans* gives the faithful her "divine" rulings, and requests, even in Protestant countries, that Roman Catholics oppose the laws of the land where these differ from the orders of the Pope.

In A.D.719 the British cleric, Wynfrith — later known as St. Boniface, "Apostle of Germany" — received from Pope Gregory II full authority to preach the Gospel to the heathen in Germany to the right of the Rhine. When he felled a holy oak, sacred to the thunder-god Thor, at Geismar near Fritzlar, and proved that the Pagan gods were impotent, the fall of that oak tree also marked the fall of Paganism in Germany.

In 1530 the Papale Nuncio estimated that nine-tenths of the German population had embraced Protestantism. The counter-reformation recovered some of these losses, but since the Treaty of Westphalia, terminating the 30-Years War, in 1648, the ratio of Protestants and Roman Catholics remained fairly constant. In 1933 the whole of Germany had 62.7 per cent. Protestants against 32.5 per cent. Catholics. The census of 1950 for West Germany showed 24.36m. Protestants or 51.1 per cent., against 21.58m. Roman Catholics, or 45.2 per cent., and the latest estimates for both Germanies are: Evangelical Church 43m., of which 27m. are in West Germany; and Roman Catholics 26m., of which 24m. are in West Germany.

The bulk of the Church of Rome therefore is concentrated in the Federal Republic, with the ancient bishoprics of Cologne, Mainz and Trier and the unique Catholic University in Freiburg-im-Breisgau. Once a year all the Catholic bishops of Germany — they do not recognise the separating borderline — meet in conference at Fulda and publicise their edicts.

Although the *Daily Express* seems only now to have

discovered a plan to creat a Great Catholic Power in Central Europe, the Vatican was already advocating this in the 'twenties, soon after the first World War. This Danubian Federation was to fill up the "political vacuum" caused by the collapse of the Hapsburg monarchy. At that time it was planned to rope in not only Austria and Bavaria for Otto the Pretender, but also Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia. After the latter three broke away from the Washington-Rome axis, the plot had to be re-shaped and, in November 1947, while the Council of Foreign Ministers was in session in London, a secret conference took place at the Schönenberg Carmelite Monastery, near Ellwangen. Wurttemberg, attended by all the more or less prominent separatist leaders of German pan-Catholicism, to discuss the creation of a South German Federation made up of the USA and French zones in both Germany and Austria.

Already in 1940, Father Coughlin had preached a Holy Alliance of "the Christian Totalitarian States of Italy, Germany, Spain and Portugal" in order to crush the Soviet Union. Cardinal Frings of Cologne, and Faulhaber — a close friend of Pacelli — were the main champions of the South German or Danubian Federation and the main difficulty at that time arose from the rival claims of Otto Hapsburg and his uncle, ex-Crown Prince Ruprecht of Bavaria. Konrad Adenauer, who at one time represented the Deutsche Bank-Otto Wolff group (i.e., the Catholic faction of the Ruhr magnates) was Frings's protege and can be relied upon to keep the old plan alive.

## McCarthyism Downunder

AFTER HIS RETURN from Australia where he had been attending the Congress for International Co-operation and Festival of the Arts, Mr. J. B. Priestley reported (*New Statesman*, 23/1/60) that "downunder they are still fighting the Cold War, and the ghost of Joe McCarthy walks the streets and haunts the newspaper offices." "Opposed to the Communists who are not numerous (though a surprising number of writers are found among them) but no doubt are very active," said Mr. Priestley, "are members of another vast power organisation, also devoted and disciplined and ready to take orders from outside the country, namely, the Roman Catholics." And between the two, he continued, "the liberal-minded pinky-greys seem to be rather timid about asserting themselves." And Mr. Casey, who has since been made a British life-peer to the accompaniment of much ballyhoo, seemed to Mr. Priestley "to be rather out of touch with world affairs." Understandably so, too. Even late in August he was warning people against the Congress because "it would press for Summit meetings."

ON JANUARY 22nd we referred to "appalling" attendances at Corby (Lincolnshire) Universal Week of Prayer. It should, of course, have been Corby (Northants).

# Why I am an Atheist

By W. E. HUXLEY

WHEN I WAS NINE I heard a bearded priest of terrifying mien strenuously declare:—

"This is the Catholic Faith which except a man believe, he shall be damned everlastingly."

Now my pal Bert, two months my senior whom I loved more than a brother, was a Chapelgoer. Dreadful thought, he was doomed, for ever and ever.

I warned Bert of his fearful danger. He said that parsons did not always speak the truth in church. I gazed into the Heavens expecting to see lowering clouds presaging God's wrathful thunder and lightning. Instead, the sky was a clear azure. Was God not offended then? Perhaps he forgave Bert because he knew no better. I repeated the warning, adding that I was not kidding Bert. Bert referred the matter to his Pastor who assured him that if he were good he need fear nothing. God is love, and never sends the good to Hell. And to clinch the argument, Bert showed me the words "God is Love" in the Bible.

My faith in priests and adults generally was severely shaken, and in my small way I realised that everything I heard must be pondered before acceptance. On the other hand Bert was confirmed in his belief and faith in his pastors. No need for *him* to query what he was told. So today, Bert, a devout Baptist, thinks that I have sold myself to the Devil, and that contact with me would endanger his immortal soul. Surprised?

Being only nine I did not immediately reject Christianity. I knew that "Jesus came into the world to save sinners" because it plainly said so in a picture hanging on my bedroom wall. But I pondered well before accepting any statement, particularly on religion.

At 14 I was confirmed. I recall telling the curate who interviewed me in private that I was going to confirm the promise made for me by my god-parents at my baptism. Correcting me, he said that I would not confirm anything. The bishop would confirm me in that promise. Asking whether I could be bound by a promise I had not made, he told me that there was no need for me to make it since it had been done for me before I could speak. The curate seemed quite incapable of grasping my point. I spoke to a couple of other chaps about it, but they were engaged in more important affairs, *viz.* fireworks. So taking the line of least resistance, I went through with the ceremony.

A couple of years later I found myself at Mount Pleasant Post Office, London, for the Christmas rush. Two other fellows, slightly older, were fond of reading paper-covered books with strange illustrations. They would cover them up quickly if they saw me approaching ('cos I was too young!) but finally after I had sworn never to blame them, they lent me Haeckel's work on human embryology in the RPA sixpenny reprints. I was thrilled, and bought a new book each week. Evidently the authors were sincere men seeking and disseminating truth. But why had our teachers deliberately misled us? In what other subjects had they done likewise? How much else of what they taught us was false?

Still in my teens I journeyed overland to Téhéran. The Europeans there were not interested in religion, except of course the missionaries, whose company few of us sought.

After a year in the capital, I moved south to Kashan where there were no other Europeans. If I wanted to talk, it had to be in Persian. Here I made pals with a lad of about my own age, Agha Murteza, son of the Rais-us-Saadat (Prince of Sayids). With his younger brother Agha Muhamad, we used to practise shooting at full gallop, pick-

ing up articles from the ground, and similar equestrian feats. The horses came from the Sayid's stables, since I only had one. (It was the eldest brother of these Kashani boys who was such a thorn in the flesh of the British when the old industry was being nationalised.)

Murteza explained Islam to me, but he emphatically denied that he was trying to convert me. He only did so because, he said, my idea of it was so very erroneous. He called it "The Religion of Peace, Reformed Christianity." The idea pleased me. I afterwards learned that in his *Conflict between Religion and Science*, Draper had similarly described it. I readily agreed with Murteza that the doctrine of the Trinity denied the truth of the multiplication tables. Murteza was not dissembling. Muslims are not told to go into all the world and preach, and they have the definite command "La fitrat fi udDin" — "Let there be no compulsion in religion." There are still several hundred thousand Zoroastrians in Central Iran, the unmixed descendants of the pre-Islamic inhabitants. Nothing parallel can be found in Christendom.

A jihad is only lawful when non-Muslims attack with intent to deprive the Faithful of freedom of worship; for Islam (from the same root as "Salaam") means "Peace."

Islam is propagated more subtly, as is Roman Catholicism by marriage laws. A Muslim may take to wife a woman of any creed, which she need not renounce. But all the offspring become Muslims. Muslim women, on the other hand, may not be given in marriage to non-Muslims. Hence it often happens that a lad must embrace Islam even to marry his own cousin. Wherever these laws can be enforced Islam must spread. During the rule of the British Raj in India, the Government declared itself neutral in religious matters and would not allow Hindu Maharajahs to take counter measures. Consequently Islam spread (over Kashmir particularly) like a rash, isolating the reigning family.

Recurrent attacks of Malaria left me too weak to stay in Kashan, so I journeyed to Kerman, whose altitude was much greater. There I found a small European colony and an Anglo-Indian doctor. I am very sorry I lost touch with Syed Agha Murteza Kashani.

In less than two years I was in Persian Baluchistan watching for gun-runners. While there I read the famous debate between Gladstone and Huxley in the *Nineteenth Century* magazine for 1887 as well as other articles by T. H. Huxley. If Murteza's Islam had weakened my atheism, this was the antidote.

A trickle of beautiful clean cold water came down the mountain and filled a "hauz" in which I was wont to swim. The air being very dry, keen evaporation made one very cold on leaving the water, especially if it were blowing. One such afternoon, after leaving the water, I tried to dry myself while crouching behind a mound. The sky was azure, without a trace of cloud, yet suddenly I was in a deep shadow. Jumping up I saw hovering just above me a huge bird with a terrible beak and powerful talons. No man feels very brave when suddenly called on to defend himself under such conditions. And I am not of the stuff heroes are made.

Something had to be done, so I waved my towel. The bird never having seen a bath-towel before, I hoped would think it rock. I believe I did once touch a talon, but, fortunately there was no entanglement. The bird flew into

(Continued on next page)

## This Believing World

The discussion staged by ITV's "About Religion" the other Sunday between Fr. Huddleston and Mr. Francis Williams, took the line everyone expected. Mr. Williams proved to be a Humanist, full of admiration for Jesus as a "man." and Fr. Huddleston proved himself to be a rigid Fundamentalist — every word and every comma relating to "our Lord" literally true and unequalled anywhere else. Neither side modified his views. And the audience can now settle the question for themselves — Jesus is God Almighty and also the Son of God according to Fr. Huddleston, or a "Man," a very great and good Man, according to Mr. Williams. But at least Mr. Williams has reached the position of Renan in 1862.

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Most English villages are hotbeds of the crudest Christian superstitions and, especially those who follow Protestant Fundamentalism, have so little regard for "Christian unity," that they do their utmost to damn all dissenters of their particular brand of credulity. For example, the other Sunday, the Vicar of Shudy Camps, Cambridgeshire, with a pious population of 300 — according to the *Sunday Express* — held a morning service for three people. They were his wife, his warden, and the warden's wife. The reason for this is that a "cold war" has been going on for many months between the Vicar, the Rev. L. Gibson, and his parishioners. And why? "The village is backward. The church has never been any good," claimed Mr. Gibson. And where was or is "our Lord"? Alas, Mr. Gibson never mentioned him.

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But all the same, it appears that Mr. Gibson has been indulging in "High Church practice" which is so often anathema to "simple" village people who, in general, have no use for a Roman Catholic service minus the Pope, which is what "High Church" generally descends to. Hence the row, and hence the problem of "unity" which should be re-named the problem of "disunity." So it was in the early days of Christianity, and so it will be forever more.

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On the relevant question of "immortality," the Christian Church has actually no two minds. We all live again providing we have faith in Jesus. The Archbishop of Canterbury, himself the spokesman not only for the Church but for God Almighty and Jesus — this is, of course, hotly denied by the Roman Church — said in a recent article, "Who could doubt? I know we live in another world" — a declaration that must give heart to all Spiritualists, even those who are not quite as sure of Christianity as he is. Of course, when Dr. Fisher descends to particulars, he sadly and reverently admits that no one actually knows what the "next" world is, or where it is. Sufficient it is that Jesus called it "the Kingdom of God" — and after all, why should we expect a more precise description? It sufficed for "our Lord," and it should suffice for us. So a "future life" does exist, and all Christians will share it. But they prefer all the same to *postpone* it if possible!

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The "Daily Mail" gave us recently portraits of the victims of 13 unsolved murders during 1959 — and it is not unfair to ask, where are our infallible "spirit" mediums? As readers of the "spirit" experiences of the "most amazing woman in the world," Mrs. E. Roberts, detailed for us in *The People* know, she appears to have solved at least one murder mystery which baffled the police many years ago — no one knew it at the time of course, but the lapse of years makes it possible to claim anything. Well, here are a number of unsolved crimes — why are they still

unsolved? If there was any truth whatever in Spiritualism, there could never be an unsolved crime. The "spirits" of the victims would every time lead the police to the murderers. But the only spirits we get who tell us things are Uncle George with his lost watch, or Aunt Martha and her lost necklace — and even sillier things. But *never* an unsolved crime.

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A gentleman calling himself a "Bible detective," Mr. Rupert Furneaux, filled many pages of the *Sunday Pictorial* recently with an account of the "trial" of Jesus to find out whether "our Lord" was guilty or not. Exactly how much of what he actually wrote he believes himself is difficult to discern. Mr. Furneaux once wrote a book making it depend on the views of Dr. Robert Eisler who claimed that Jesus was the real King of the Jews, a robber captain of 900 bandits, and a controversialist on the Pentateuch with rabbis when he was not attending to his Court duties, and sharing the swag with his bandit companions.

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But for his "Pictorial" articles Mr. Furneaux left Dr. Eisler in the lurch, and concentrated on a re-writing of the Gospel trial accounts, and it is quite a heavenly miracle to find out how much he believes. Jerusalem, for example, was "swollen with a million pilgrims for Passover," the "atmosphere was explosive," and similar exhibitions of sheer imagination. He calls the trial of Jesus "the most dramatic and fateful in history" — but he seems unable to find a scrap of evidence that it ever took place. It is recorded only in the Gospels, four completely anonymous documents, packed with fairy tales, and quite unknown before about the year 180 A.D.

### WHY I AM AN ATHEIST (Concluded from page 43)

the mountains, to my great relief. Without further drying, I hurriedly dressed and returned home.

While walking, the truth flashed on me. The crucified were devoured by vultures! No one who has even seen these birds assemble in the sky when a pack animal is too weak to proceed with the caravan could doubt that they would do the same when a man is hoisted on a pole. This method of execution is probably of Zoroastrian origin, since they so dispose of their dead.

Re-reading the four accounts of the crucifixion I found that nails (then an expensive commodity) are not mentioned. According to St. John the imprints of them were shown to Thomas, but as the other evangelists know nothing of this important event, the story is suspect.

Dr. Brandt says that the condemned were normally provided with a small seat (sedile) to take the weight of the body, and limbs were lashed to the cross. When we consider that the three men joined in the conversation around them almost as if they were at a tea-party, can we doubt what happened? Nails would have caused agony far too great for this. It also makes plain why Jesus was able to walk so soon after his ordeal without arousing attention.

There was, therefore, no resurrection, but only the resuscitation of an *apparently* dead man. Christianity is the religion of slaves, taught by their masters to keep them in subservience. It is both false and vile. For that reason I denounce it, and proudly proclaim myself, especially to children, an Atheist who, like Abou ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!) knows not God, but loves his fellow men.

—NEXT WEEK—

THE POPE AND THE IRISH HORSES

By EVA EBURY

# THE FREETHINKER

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Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening; Messrs. CRONAN and MURRAY.

London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, CORSAIR, SMITH, etc. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH, etc.

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. TRIBE.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute) Lecture every Sunday, 7 p.m.

Central London Branch N.S.S. ("The City of Hereford" Blandford Place, W.1) Sunday, February 7th, 7.15 p.m.: G. H. TAYLOR, "Modern Trends in Philosophy and Science."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) Tuesday, February 9th, 7.15 p.m.: DR. D. STARK MURRAY, "Mental Health—1."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate,) Sunday, February 7th, 6.30 p.m.: Professor A. J. ALLAWAY, M.A., "Pre-War Political Ideals and Post-War Realities."

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, off Edgware Road, 3 mins. Marble Arch Station) Sunday, February 7th, 7.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The Social Origins of Christianity."

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Trades Hall, Thurland Street) Friday, February 5th, 7.30 p.m.: B. HAYLETT, "Modern Psychology."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, February 7th, 2.30 p.m.: K. COATES, "Is Marxism a Humanism?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Sunday, February 7th, 11 a.m.: Dr. J. KELNAR, "The New Approach to Mental Health."

## Notes and News

ON JANUARY 4TH, 1960, the N.C.C.L. issued the following Press Statement on the recent outbreak of anti-semitic and Nazi slogan painting: "The National Council for Civil Liberties is deeply disturbed at the evidence that there are people in this country who are prepared to support the Nazi programme and are painting swastikas and anti-semitic slogans. Less than a year ago (*Anti-Semitism and Colour Bar* — A Warning, available from the N.C.C.L., 293 New King's Road, London, S.W.3, price 3d.) we warned that the recrudescence of anti-Semitism in Germany could spread to this country, and we now call on the public to assist the authorities in their effort to stamp out this evil which brings shame on the British people."

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THE JANUARY ISSUE OF *Coventry Civic Affairs*, the news-sheet of the Corporation, informed us that: "Since November 9th, members of the Council House staff have assem-

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged £49 14s. 7d.: E. J. Rosic, 5s.; Mrs. F. Gubbins, 10s.; R. V. Ross, (U.S.A.) £3 9s. 4d. Total to date, January 29th, 1960, £53 18s. 11d.

bled at 8.35 a.m. each Monday in the Council Chamber (for a short time in the Staff Canteen) for a short service. A number of Anglican clergy and Free Church ministers read short passages from the Bible and give a 'potted' theme for the week. The short service ends with the Monday Morning Fellowship Prayer—

Teach us good Lord to serve Thee as Thou deservest; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labour and not to ask for any reward save that of knowing that we do Thy Will."

It would be interesting to know how many of the staff have been taught by the good Lord "to labour and not to ask for any reward," etc. Perhaps it is too early to expect startling results, but there might be a reduction in rates when the Lord really convinces those employees that salaries don't matter.

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THE SAME ISSUE devotes four columns to a description of Bishop Ullathorne (R.C.) School, prefaced by a brief account of why Roman Catholics "insist that their children should be educated in separate schools." Catholic parents are convinced — it quotes from a Memorandum of the Catholic Education Council for England and Wales — that "those things which they hold most dear are best transmitted to their children if the latter have teachers of the same Faith, using all that is good in modern educational methods but at the same time holding fast to the essential and tested teaching of the Church." It sounds so sweet, doesn't it? Our friend, Mr. Len Ebury has an exercise book used in a Gloucestershire Catholic school that rather alters the picture. The threat of Hell recurs throughout; the path of life is "unsafe"; souls plunge into the flames; the Devil waits at the foot of the bed when a person dies. "Tested teaching of the Church" no doubt; spread by modern "visual" educational methods, certainly; but held "most dear" only by a pathological priesthood.

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*Colchester Standard* (24/12/59) reported that a teacher of religious subjects at private schools had admitted trying to defraud the Law Society. The teacher's solicitor described him as "a man who for the last 30 years or so has lived to a large extent in a world of fantasy. He had theological training and has always had a lingering ambition for ordination in the Church of England."

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*The Age of Reason Magazine* (New York, December, 1959) prints a letter from Editor Joseph Lewis challenging ex-President Harry S. Truman to debate the latter's statement that "the Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of Independence were both based on the Bible." "I am ready to produce evidence of its gross falsity" wrote Mr. Lewis and he offered to give his share of the proceeds of the debate to four charitable organisations.

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THE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA (Box 11221, Johannesburg) has issued Bertrand Russell's famous lecture to a National Secular Society branch, *Why I am not a Christian*, in English and Afrikaans in one pamphlet for 2s. 6d. This is to beat the import ban imposed on the pamphlet which regrettably is now out of print in England, though still available in the book of the same title published by George Allen & Unwin.

# Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837)—Poet and Pioneer

By ADRIAN PIGOTT

(Continued from page 36)

The Chief of Police laid before Czar Alexander I a collection of Pushkin's "subversive" writings, and the Emperor decided to send the poet to Siberia. He would certainly have gone there, except for the fact that the headmaster of the Lyceum accidentally met the Czar when walking in the grounds of the Palace. He pleaded for clemency, saying that the young man was already an ornament to Russian literature, with a great future in store. Siberia would quench all his unusual promise.

The Czar relented and Pushkin was ordered to a primitive town called Ekaterinaslav in South Russia to work in the Government offices.

In May, 1820 (a few days after his 21st birthday), he left St. Petersburg for six years of exile, carrying a letter of introduction to his new superior, "the General in charge of the Southern colonies". The letter included details of Pushkin's background, stating that he had had a troubled childhood; that he was a graduate of the Lyceum, where he had shown extraordinary genius; that he had re-entered the world with a vivid imagination, but that he was lacking in principles.

There is no excess in which this young man has not indulged, just as there is no perfection which he cannot attain through the loftiness of his talents.

So far, this assessment was correct: but it is the ponderous continuance that provokes a sad smile to a reader in the twentieth century.

Several pieces of poetry—in particular his "Ode to Liberty"—were instrumental in calling the attention of the Government to him.

Although it has great beauty of style and conception, the ode is full of dangerous principles derived from the modern school of thought. He advocates the Rights of Man, Liberty and the Independence of Peoples.

The letter ended with a ponderous request that the troublesome unbeliever should receive every consideration, and that he should be advised "that men who are endowed with genius, but who do not believe in Ethics or Religion, will only bring misfortune on themselves and their fellow-men".

Pushkin's official duties were again only nominal, and his new chief was a genial, fatherly man, who admired and sympathised with the curious new member of his staff.

In his years of exile Pushkin lived an extraordinary life, engaged partly on his literary compositions (both verse and prose) and partly on enjoying life and society of all levels. He had a dual character: on one side he was a conscientious writer with high artistic ideals, and turning out a stream of plays, stories and divine poetry. On the other hand, he loved Life, and enjoyed social engagements to the full. He possessed a physique which was as exceptional as his memory, and he was able to survive the excesses which would have exhausted any normal man. In winter he would ride down to a frozen river, punch a hole in the ice with his fist and plunge in for a dip; then he would re-mount his horse and gallop off in the bitter wind.

He also possessed a most engaging personality and made friends readily in every grade of society. With men he sometimes showed sensitiveness and pugnacity. He featured in at least a dozen bloodless duels. With women, his conquests made those of Casanova look second rate.

He was not particularly handsome or imposing, but his eyes sparkled like diamonds and almost every woman was attracted by this eager lively little athlete with his infectious gaiety, his joy of life and his brilliant conversation. He was irresistible. Occasionally when he visited

a house to see the daughters, not only they—but their mother also—fell under his charms.

His years of exile were handicapped by poverty as his foolish father refused him any help, and Alexander's compositions were usually debarred by the Censorship, so his pen earned him very little. He did, however, have occasional days of appreciation, such as when visiting a small town in the remote Caucasus. The Mayor and leading townsmen gave a supper in honour of the Junior Secretary. The poet's eyes filled with tears as he listened to the tributes of appreciation paid by the humble people whose condition he hoped to improve. On the other hand he met many disappointments which every pioneer has to expect. The apathy of the people whom he was trying to help by his solitary labours sometimes exasperated him.

When he was twenty-four, at a time of dejection in exile, the social reformer wrote this indignant heart-cry:

Sower of Freedom in the waste,  
Before the morning star I rose.  
With fingers innocent and chaste  
I planted in a servile soil  
The seed from whence true living grows.  
In vain I trod laborious ways  
And squandered noble thought and toil.  
Grazed on, you heedless people, graze!  
You'll never answer Honour's urge.  
Do herds need Freedom?

They were made  
For pole-axe and the shearer's blade;  
From age to age, their kind obeys  
The yoke that jingles—and the scourge.

By letters he kept in touch with his fellow "subversives" in Moscow and St. Petersburg. One of his poems, *The Dagger*, applauded the removal of tyrants and was dedicated to Brutus and Charlotte Corday. It began:

Thou secret punisher of Freedom's rape,  
(Dagger that doth the final judgment yield  
For deathless Nemesis to wield);  
A god on Lemnos gave thee shape!

In 1825 he was injudicious enough to write in a letter:—  
I am taking lessons in Atheism from an English philosopher here. He has filled a hundred pages proving that no creative or guiding spirit exists. Not perhaps a comforting theory—but it is very credible.

This letter was intercepted by the Police and shown to the Czar who commanded the culprit's immediate expulsion from the Foreign Office. Pushkin was ordered to go to his father's estate near Pskov (80 miles south-west of St. Petersburg) and remain under police supervision. He was shattered at this; he had lost his job and had been publicly degraded; and now he had to leave Odessa which was warm and possessing some intellectual and social life, and theatres. He had to go and live in disgrace in a dreary northern countryside of mud and trees, and live with his uncongenial parents. The Governor of Odessa, however, was glad to see the last of his turbulent assistant because his wife had fallen in love with the poet.\* Pushkin was given one day in which to farewell his numerous friends

\*The Countess Vorontsova gave him a ring as a token of her love for him. Some years later when he was in the North, he wrote his tender poem "The Talisman" recalling the episode and nostalgically referring to Odessa, where—

An enchantress gave me a treasure  
As she clasped me — a Talisman.  
And she whispered, between her caresses,  
"From my Talisman never part.  
A marvellous power it possesses;  
'Tis the gift of a loving heart".

## Religion in the Market Place

By CHRISTOPHER SMITH

IN THE CITY OF MANCHESTER there is a piece of spare ground left from the blitz. Each week-day between one and two, and on Saturday and Sunday evenings, various speakers try to convert their listeners to a particular brand of Christianity. Occasionally a Muslim speaker extols the monotheistic virtues of his faith against the Trinitarian Christians. That all is not peace and goodwill in the Christian ranks is apparent to anyone who listens to the numerous prophets, though each justifies his case through the authority and inspiration of the faith in which he devoutly believes, and often uses accurate quotations from the Bible. From the National Secular Society platform I often refer to them as "Apostles of Discord." But, despite their dissension, they usually manage to unite against Secularism.

Most of us know how easily the ire of a really fervent Christian is aroused, and how far he will go in venting his indignation. We generally get one or more at our platform, warning the speaker to be careful what he says; that one day he will be sorry for what he is saying. And abusive remarks are not uncommon. But these expressions of Christian intolerance generally help to get us an audience. And it is interesting, after the meetings are over, to talk to some of the attenders and see how far they go with the Christians.

You discover a battle going on in the mind of the working man. He feels, more than anyone else, a sense of insecurity. He fears he will end his life worn out and perhaps poor, with a sense of futility and little to show for his labours. He cannot accept the Christian view that this life is a preparation for the after-life. He will tell you, he doesn't believe in this "Do as I tell you, not as I do" stuff. He will roll off a list of grievances against the Churches. The Church sided with the industrial masters against the struggle for a decent wage. (A coal miner said: "They always preached against us and the religious man was always first back in time of strike.") "For ye have the poor always with you." "The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate. God made them high and lowly, and ordered their estate." "A hymn like that speaks for itself, doesn't it?" I was asked. Besides, the ministers "are paid by someone, so they must do their bidding." "They must keep in with the boss!" And Church of England leaders are nominated by the government.

Emphasis on life after death is criticised, too, as dissuading men from improving conditions here. "I don't like the idea that this world doesn't matter," a seaman told me. "Religion is good for children, not for grown-ups." is a common remark. Hypocrisy is another complaint. "You ask whether religion attracts hypocrites," said a carpenter. "Of course it does, because hypocrites are imitations of good men: rogues want to pass for what they're not and since religious men are supposed to be good, they pretend to be religious." "Besides, it clears their consciences."

Then war. "What have the Churches done to stop war?" And persecution.

These people are not interested in theological problems. Many still believe in a "Supreme Being," but they leave it at that. "We can never know." Theological disputes are a waste of time; topics only for day-dreamers. "Getting too deep in religion drives people barmy."

They have something there! Manchester's Speakers' Corner proves that. Shouts of "I know that Christ saved me from sin and death," and "I am saved!" come from fanatics who are anything but a pleasant, and often a pitiful

and he went off with his manservant in a carriage containing his clothes, hurriedly bundled together with unpublished manuscripts including the famous play *Eugen Onegin*. His orders were to report to the Police at Pskov and remain under their surveillance — not a pleasant prospect for a local notability.

He stopped for a night at a small garrison town where an army officer happened to notice his name in the hotel register. The officer had been with him at the Lyceum; he found Pushkin in the bar, and there was a joyful reunion. Within an hour, a dozen regimental officers came to the hotel for a champagne celebration which lasted till 4 a.m. Pushkin was made to stand on a table and recite his poems, and was then hoisted on their shoulders and carried round the street in triumph. Next day he resumed his journey, sadly realising how much he was loved by the People, who were so different from his oppressors, the Court, the officials and the Police.

After ten days of uncomfortable journeying over rough roads, the prodigal son arrived at the family mansion near Pskov where his father severely rated him for being a failure, an atheist, a liberal and a revolutionary. The indignant father then went off with the entire family to their house at St. Petersburg to prevent the daughters becoming infected with Atheism.

Pushkin was thus left in a lonely manor house in cold unlovely surroundings, with a few serf attendants and with his faithful nurse Arina, who ran the household. However, "Sweet are the uses of Adversity", and his loneliness goaded him on to further compositions.

He discovered Shakespeare and avidly read "Hamlet", "Macbeth" and his historical plays. "What a man is this Shakespeare!" he wrote. "My mind staggers at his powers."

The local gentry were surprised at the behaviour of the new squire who wore uncouth clothes and who went to the travelling fairs and mixed with the peasants and even shook hands with them. He would play leapfrog with the boys, and sit down among the beggars and circus artists and listen to their stories. However, his personality was so compelling that he was always a welcome guest at the "big houses".

In December, 1825 Pushkin's friends in St. Petersburg staged an abortive revolution which resulted in five of them being executed and 120 being sent to Siberia.

In the same year, Czar Alexander I (who had ordered Pushkin's exile) died, and was succeeded by Nicholas I, so the poet took the opportunity to petition for his release from exile. The new Czar decided to interview this stormy petrel about whom the Police were continually complaining. The next development was the appearance at midnight of an army officer knocking at the door of Pushkin's manor house. This was in the autumn of 1826, and the poet was informed that the Czar wished to see him and that he must accompany the officer in his carriage to St. Petersburg. Arina broke into sobs, imagining the horrors of Siberia, but Alexander kissed his old nurse and told her that the Czar would be reasonable. He duly appeared before Nicholas I, who was of the same age as Pushkin, and who was a well-meaning ruler who attended to his work better than did most monarchs.

The interview started in a cold, informal manner—but gradually thawed and mellowed. Pushkin was at ease with a Czar as readily as he was with a peasant. He was pardoned and given his liberty and was eventually restored to the Foreign Office. That evening the Czar attended a reception at the French Embassy, and was overheard to remark: "This morning, I had a talk with the most intelligent man in Russia. His name is Pushkin."

(To be concluded)

sight. "If religion means that, I must be on my guard," is the typical comment.

The people are tired of a religion of gloom: they want an era of joy. The Churches have failed to make life joyful and the people have deserted them. As Secularists it is our task to attract them to the cause of reason, with emphasis on a good social life.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### GODS AND GREEN MEN

When Colin McCall says that the belief in gods "is irrational in the light of our experience," I hope he is not trying to speak for all mankind, past and present!

It may be irrational, I dare say it would be irrational, for Mr. McCall to affirm the existence of a god on the basis of *his own* experience at this present time. But I can conceive of persons who have been, and are, forced by the logic of events as they experienced them to affirm the existence of gods.

I have no experience of little green men from Mars. This does not prove that there are none; it simply means that none have come my way. If I were to proclaim that belief in life on Mars "is irrational in the light of our experience," I would be saying something unwarrantable by the known facts, for I do not know all the facts of all men's experience. I can only make such confident pronouncements about my own experience. S. W. BROOKS.

[Mr. McCall writes: Mr. Brooks has a singular capacity for misreading me. First, I said "the belief in most gods is irrational in the light of our experience." Then I instanced an omnipotent, beneficent god and said "its existence is incompatible with the world as we know it." Obviously the last phrase refers to modern, scientifically-minded man and not to Stone Age man or little green men from Mars. I have never pronounced on Martians and until I do Mr. Brooks might confine the discussion to gods and cabins.—Ed.]

### MR. BENNETT

In his "Reply to Critics" Mr. Bennett seems to be still unduly differentiating between Atheism and Secularism. He says "A secularist is an atheist plus. He is positively concerned with the affairs of this world." But so is the atheist. Mr. Bennett also says: "An atheist is not necessarily a secularist." I see no difference, and consider Freethinkers generally view the terms as synonymous.

With him, and Mr. Colin McCall, I prefer either term rather than "Humanist." Thanking Mr. Bennett for his kindly, and explanatory article. C. E. RATCLIFFE.

Mr. Bennett calls his creed "Atheism-plus." The sign should be minus — minus the remotest comprehension of its implications. He finds Christians good because his idea of morality is the same as theirs. Scratch him and find another of them. Unbelievers are not responsible for the black pages in political history, and the suggestion that they are indicates the purblindness of your contributor.

Most believers are either knaves or fools, but they are not totally devoid of virtue: they are still human. If the dictum of de Queiroz be not applicable to Mr. Bennett's friend, it is doubtful if the Roman Catholic Church would consider him unerring. It is because N.F. knows Catholicism so well that she opposes it so vehemently. Without such knowledge there would be no incentive to do so.

Will you point out to Mr. Bennett that the Churches are howling for recruits and that many vicarages are vacant? What he imagines is Atheism could easily be removed. Failing that he might be induced to retire to the Wilderness for meditation and cogitation where he should remain for many, many years. W. E. HUXLEY.

### POINTS FROM BOOKS

The following extract from Richard Bennett's book, *The Black and Tans*, serves to illustrate the amazing credulity of the Irish Catholic population:—

"A few days later a curious phenomena known as the Templemore Miracle suggested an outbreak of mass hysteria. A young Catholic seminarist saw the statues and holy pictures in the house of a newsagent begin to bleed. Templemore, one of the centres of terror and counter-terror, became a place of pilgrimage. The roads to the town were blocked with farm carts, cars and bicycles. Such traffic had never been seen, even for the races. Pilgrims slept in the streets and wretches past hope were dragged to the newsagent's shop in the hope of a miraculous cure. An old soldier who had been shot through the right knee at the battle of the Somme regained the use of his leg. A harness-maker was relieved

of his sciatica, and a girl, in the last stages of consumption, rose from her stretcher and walked. Or so it was said. The police also suspected that a consignment of arms, which had been landed on the West coast had gone through undetected in the general confusion." H. A. ROGERSON.

I recently read a book by an eminent surgeon, Sir Heneage Olgilvie, *No Miracles Between Friends*. Being intrigued by the title, I was pleasantly surprised to find out why the author chose it.

In the foreword he tells how a gentleman gave an audience (which comprised mainly top medical men) a description of a particularly difficult operation which, to say the least, would appear to be a little exaggerated.

A certain Frank Lakey therefore told a story about St. Paul and St. Peter, who had been sermonising in different market places on the same day, and then went together to a local inn to eat.

After the meal, the eternal argument arose as to who should pay the bill, and finally they decided to settle the issue by throwing dice.

St. Paul threw a 5 and 4, and St. Peter then proceeded to throw 7 and 7 upon which Paul said "Come come, Peter old man. No miracles among friends." Hence the title.

I thought I should let you know, as readers of THE FREETHINKER may be interested and possibly might derive pleasure from the book itself. A. GREGORY.

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