

## REVIEWS

**RELIGION AND COMMUNISM.** By Julius F. Hecker, Ph.D. (Chapman and Hall; 8/6.)

**THE TRUTH AND ERROR OF COMMUNISM.** By H. G. Wood, M.A. S.C.M.; 4/-.)

**COMMUNISM AND THE ALTERNATIVE.** By A. J. Penty. (S.C.M.; 3/6.)

Thomas Mann has pointed out the danger in the teaching of Spengler, one of the prophets of the new Germany, 'compared with whose historical materialism that of Karl Marx was an idealism of ethereal hue'; and readers may wonder whether the Nazi régime, in the logic of its utterly pagan principles, is not the worst menace to Christianity and to civilization that Europe has yet seen; and they may feel that in face of this hideous thing a discussion of the relation between religion and communism is a little lacking in actuality. But it is precisely because the question of Communism can now be considered in tranquillity, because Russia has taken her place in friendly relations with France and the other civilized nations of the world, because there are signs of an arrangement in the matter of religion, that the subject has acquired great interest. Mr. Hecker does not hold out much hope for the future of organized religion in Russia, but on this point *he* is not qualified to judge, since his notion of the real nature of religion is fantastic and naive: he does admit, however, that the problem is 'in the last analysis a theistic problem: if there is a God in the universe, men will continue to seek and worship him.' That is fundamental: Communism is an economic cause, and not, as M. Berdyaev would have us believe, a new religion—an absorbing enthusiasm for a cause does not make that cause a religion: it is altogether on the economic plane, and hence it cannot supply all the needs of man. Sooner or later religion must return. Where Mr. Hecker's book is of extreme value is in its account of the reasons why the Orthodox Church has been reduced to its present plight: its persistent anti-intellectualism—driving thinker after thinker from its fold: its failure to instruct the people—leading to abundant superstition and the foundation of numerous sects; its complete subservience to the State—even to the extent of becoming an instrument of espionage for the Imperial Government in its suppression of popular movements: its ferocious opposition to any kind of social reform. No wonder that when the Revolution came, the Church was regarded as the indissoluble partner of the ghastly tyranny of Czars, and

## BLACKFRIARS

was persecuted accordingly : for in this case religion had indeed been administered as the opiate of the people.

Mr. Wood is a liberal Protestant; he is aware of the injustice that has provoked Communism, but he would prefer justice to be achieved by gentler methods. He deals at length with the falsity of Marx's theory of surplus value—but his system can lose that little appendix and be even healthier than before. Mr. Wood evidently believes that egoistic man can be made co-operative by moral persuasion : a strange view in the face of history. The truth seems to be that the egoistic instinct is so radically rapacious in man that nothing short of an entire transformation can bring his will to act for a common rather than, a selfish end. This is what Catholic Christianity claims to do; precisely to create New Men in Christ Jesus. But new men take a long time to make, and multitudes remain as they were. What is the State to do meanwhile? Allow free reign to anarchic capitalists until a sufficient supply of new men **is** forthcoming? The function of the Church and the function of **the** State must be kept clearly distinct, and this Mr. Wood fails to do. He leaves the impression that the world can be changed by the exhortations of clergymen to captains of industry. He should have insisted that the primary business of Christianity is to transform mankind : when that is done there will be no social problem for the State to solve—and the way the Church contributes to the new order is to proceed as rapidly as possible with this work. Moral advice is not creative : that is the work of grace. The Church then has this vital part to play ; but we cannot dispense with the State and its immediate solution of the problem of justice in an unreformed humanity—a solution necessarily achieved by law, by force, by organization. The State has a choice of various solutions : that of Communism is based on the view that the growth of social injustice cannot be prevented unless the means of production are owned by the **com**munity. If Mr. Wood had given his reasons for the soundness or unsoundness of that view his book would have been more valuable.

Mr. Penty accepts whole-heartedly the thesis of the romantic writers Berdyaev and Fullop-Muller that Communism is strictly **a** religion. As already suggested, this view is not well grounded and, moreover, confuses the issue. If every intense enthusiasm was considered a religion, it would make polytheists of us all ! Then Mr. Penty's alternative — with which he is more concerned than with Communism— is strikingly *simpliste*. He evidently thinks that the revival of agriculture and a new peasantry would be a mainstay against Communism. That is surely true. But it is most questionable whether the peasant is an ideal type, in

## REVIEWS

any sense, for the new social order. Avarice and selfishness and a dense resistance to progress are his historical attributes, and these unfit him for collective action and life. There is also in this book an attempt to revive the doctrine of national self-sufficiency—which, with its political reflex of nationalism, is peculiarly inopportune at the moment. Finally, we suspect from Mr. Penty's discussion of Guilds and Corporations and from his approval of a quotation from Major Barnes, that he still nurses two illusions—the romantic illusion that the Middle Ages were a golden period whence social reformers may learn useful lessons, and the less romantic illusion that Mussolini's corporate State is something more real than a word.

A.M.

THE CHURCH AND THE JEWS IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY. By Solomon Grayzel. (Philadelphia, 1933.)

The basis of Mr. Grayzel's book is formed by the appendix, which consists of original documents illustrating the mediaeval attempt to regulate intercourse between Christians and Jews. Although no hitherto unprinted material is published, the pieces are comprehensively selected from existing collections; and these authorities are carefully explained in the opening chapter. All the conclusions reached by the author are drawn from these primary sources; and such subservience to his authorities does great credit to Mr. Grayzel as a historian. His book, therefore, preserves an admirable unity throughout; and however artificial historical unity may be, it is invaluable for a thesis like the present study.

The thesis of Mr. Grayzel is that not by coincidence did the thirteenth century witness the development of Christian institutions and the degradation of the Jews. To ensure the superiority of Christendom the Church wilfully depressed their condition. That Christians depressed the status of the Jews is undeniable; but they were mostly the secular rulers of the new national States like our own King Edward I. In dealing with the Jews the ecclesiastical and secular administrations came in contact with each other. The author ably illustrates the problems which thus arose and which have considerable interest from the point of view of legal history and political science. He contrasts the lenient treatment of the Jews by the Holy See with the harshness of local councils, that were more influenced by popular opinion, and notes the bitterness of the newly enfranchised burghers for the Jews. But this was probably a more important factor in the oppression of the Jews than he supposes. The decline of Jewish prosperity was more directly caused by the rise of popular privileges than by the expansion