

A New Star

BY REV. FRANK BAKER, B.A., B.D.



SENTINEL OF THE NORTH SEA.—The "North Landing" aspect of Flamborough Head, Yorkshires.

The Week's Book Caserie

Shall Freedom Live?

WHETHER it be true or not, that as is commonly asserted, the outsider sees most of the game, it is certainly true that he gets a better view of the whole game than the team collectively or any one player individually. The best commentator on the game, and the most reliable critic, will nearly always be an onlooker, not a player. For some similar reason, perhaps, two of the most challenging books on present-day trends in British political life have been written by foreigners—both of them voluntary exiles on account of the suppression of liberty in their own lands. One of them, Professor Hayek, the author of *The Road to Serfdom* (Routledge, 5s.—now republished in paper covers, at 2s. 6d.), is a well-known economist on the staff of the London School of Economics; he is (or was) an Austrian. The other, Senor Salvador de Madariaga, the author of *Victory* (Bouvier (Jonathan Cape, 10s. 6d.), is a Spaniard, and at one time Spanish delegate on the League of Nations Council; he has on occasion also been a member of the B.B.C. "Brains Trust." Both are victims of the decline of liberalism in Europe: both look refuge in England because it was regarded to be liberal and free; both now write under a sense of duty, not just to the British people, but to mankind as a whole, to warn of the danger in which freedom stands in these islands from the tidal wave of socialism, communism, fascism and the rest which, starting in Central Europe a century ago, has by now submerged the free values of democratic liberalism over practically the entire Continent.

It is curious what a fascination the "isms of the political Right and Left" have for the ordinary mortal. They probably allure for much the same reason as the Roman Catholic Church allure—because they spare people the trouble of thinking for themselves. Articles of faith, or economic doctrines, are handed out ready-made, and one has only to subscribe to them without question, and accept official pronouncements as oracular, and one is free thereafter to do as one likes. "Führer befehl, wir folgen dir," was not just a slogan displayed on standards and placarded in public places as Nazi propaganda; it was an actual expression of the self-surrender of people to their millions who were only too glad to acknowledge Hitler's claim to do their thinking for them. Yet, as the bemused German masses soon discovered, when the right to think for oneself has been foregone—the right to form spontaneously an opinion, to hold to it, and to argue for it against all comers if need be—all that matters

of freedom has been forfeited, too. The liberties that remain are but the frills and furbelows of true liberty; for they are devoid of the moral quality which essentially distinguishes man from his animal friends. "If liberty were to die among men," says Senor de Madariaga, "no equality, no security, no prosperity would mean anything that a horse cannot get in well-kept stables."

YET it is the thesis of both of these books that liberty is already as dead over wide areas of Europe as it is in the Soviet Union. Professor Hayek, writing originally before the defeat of Germany, foresaw that victory would confront the Allies with almost as great problems as defeat, and that the greatest problem of all would be to free the liberated countries, and Britain herself, from the blighting effects of wartime regimentation and bureaucratic centralisation. Senor de Madariaga sees it, too, and deplors that, with hostilities at an end, people should be whisked off into elections, in the name of democracy, immediately after a war which has accustomed them to doing as they are told and to party "truces" which hold in suspense the free expression of public opinion. "Peoples straight from a strong experience," he writes, "are seldom fit to consider their own interests." They will, on the contrary, be the more easily led by the nose by plausible doctrinaires who volunteer to do their thinking for them. And so, the values that are real and of lasting significance are mortgaged to a political usurer, and catch-phrases become the vocabulary of the masses, who continue to flutter round the superfluous like moths round a lighted candle. Liberty gradually disappears, but nobody can be bothered to say its departure.

Millions of liberals could not be bothered; and that is why liberalism has suffered over all the Continent, so calamitous an eclipse. What is meant by liberalism? Let Professor Hayek, who holds that Britain has best exemplified it, answer:—

"The virtues possessed by the British people . . . were independence and self-reliance, individual initiative and local responsibility, the successful reliance on voluntary activity, non-interference with one's neighbour and tolerance of the different and the queer, respect for custom and tradition, and a healthy suspicion of power and authority. British strength, British character, and British achievement are to a great extent the result of the cultivation of the spontaneous."

Such is liberalism epitomised. Such are the moral qualities embodied in all kinds of British institutions, which "the progress of collectivism and its inherently centralistic tendencies are destroying. Liberalism will revive when Britain finds her soul again; and when she does, it may be that the collectivist tide, which has flowed for so long, elevating the economic above every value, will ebb again, and mankind will advance to the greater light and broader liberties once more. And Dr. Hayek advantageously takes advantage of his status as a foreigner to commend what nowadays few Englishmen would dare to cite—Milton's exhortation: "Let not England forget her precedences of teaching nations how to live."

IN sections of their books devoted to international affairs, both authors discuss at some length the prospects of a better world-order—and well they may, for nothing has suffered more obviously as a result of the decline of liberalism than international relations. Professor Hayek looks forward to a world community formed from a number of regional federations among States. Senor de Madariaga comes down more closely to the two great problems of the time—what to do with Germany, and how to effect a firmer understanding between Russia and the West. His tentative solutions have something of the appearance of impracticality; but they are interesting nonetheless, and are well worth consideration.

In one way and another both authors look with some wistfulness at the great liberal democracy across the Atlantic—where, where quarrelling European races have mingled to form a national unity as true and as well-knit as any. An outline of this process of intermingling and of its effects is given in Mr. E. A. Benham's lecture, published under the title *Race and Nation* in the *United States* (Cambridge University Press, 2s. 6d.). It is only an outline, and yet it furnishes a most apt affirmation in the face of the doubt and misgivings concerning the future which harass so many thoughtful people today. There, from the heterogeneous population of the United States, a nation has grown around a single idea—the liberal idea of freedom. It is, implicitly, the answer to the problems and the perilous tendencies to which Senor de Madariaga and Dr. Hayek, each in his own trenchant way, call timely attention.

R. O.

UNOBTRUSIVELY a new star rose over the literary horizon two hundred years ago. There was no herald of its coming, and few to witness its birth. Soon, however, its gathering splendour attracted everyone's attention. By May, 1746, one or two people wanted to know "who and where" was James Hervey, A.B., who a month or so previously had published a little book in two parts, the gloomy title of the first part—*Meditations among the Tombs*—being offset by the second, *Reflections on a Flower-Garden*. Strangely enough, the first part, one of the earliest efforts in the eighteenth century school of graveyard literature, was to many more popular than its companion. Lady Bradshaigh could write to Samuel Richardson, the novelist of sentimentality, through whose press the seven hundred and fifty copies of *Meditations* had been ushered into an unexpected world:—

"Yesterday after going once to church, I made Hervey's *Meditations* my study. I cannot, but say, I accompanied him with much greater pleasure among the Tombs, than in his *Flower Garden*, not however without some horror, felt a gloomy delight, and was greatly moved at some of his descriptions."

Although Laurence Sterne was not to publish his *Sentimental Journey* for another twenty years, and the word "sentimental" was only just making its debut in the select circle, the cult of delicate thrills and exquisite rapture was in the air, and Hervey managed to supply a mixture of languid meditation and exquisite delight, spiced with natural descriptions, that satisfied a growing taste. Very soon his book was the rage both among pious Christians who welcomed his genuine piety and among worldlings who had no marked objection to religion, provided it was elegantly garbed, and demanded no more than a second-hand emotion.

Both Hervey and his public chafed against the delay of the second edition, even though it did give the author a chance of adding to the inevitable second volume, which was to contain *Contemplations on the Night and Contemplations on the Starry Heavens*, a short *Winter-Piece*, matching the appendix to the first volume—*A Description of Creation*. At length, in December, 1747, Hervey could confide in sustained metaphor to a friend:—

"The *Contemplations* you are pleased to inquire after are, after long delays, or a very slow procedure of the press, launched into the world. What may be their fate, I dare not conjecture. Whether by the general disapprobation, they may be unfortunately belated, or, by the severity of critics, may split on the rocks of censure; or foundering through their own unworthiness, may sink in oblivion; or, blessed by a gracious providence, may gain the haven of public acceptance, and import those most valuable commodities, pleasure, improvement, and improvement, which delights."

They certainly reached the desired haven in safety. And to continue the metaphor, within the next hundred years they were to be re-equipped for a hundred fresh voyages, reaching the shores of all countries and all classes, and being followed by scores of literary vessels modelled on similar lines.

THE first volume of Hervey's *Meditations and Contemplations* had gathered up, within the next hundred years, his strain of morbidity, and his poet's eye for natural beauty. The second revealed another important characteristic: his love of nature—or natural philosophy, as it was then called. Methodism has always led the way in getting people to study and to think in nature. Hervey's case, as a neglected Oxford undergraduate, taken under the wing of the much-talked-of Fellow of Lincoln, John Wesley, it had expressed itself not only in a deep religious experience, but in a keen pursuit of scientific knowledge. When he later settled down as a country curate—keeping to the early-rising habits inculcated by Oxford Methodism—he continued a diligent student of nature. The microscope was seldom off his table, and such scientific apparatus as orrery, air-pump, globes and "telescopic tube" he regarded as indispensable articles of study furniture. He was continually borrowing or buying books on "natural philosophy," and in time some of his own writings were to furnish John Wesley with material for Methodism's scientific text-book, the *Survey of the Wisdom of God*.

Astronomy in particular fascinated him, as can be seen both in *Meditations and Contemplations*, and in its more restrained and more theological sequel, *Theron and Aspasia*. In typical over-loaded speech Aspasia is moved by the sight of Theron's telescope to muse:—

"If the microscope leads us downward to the curious secrets of the animalcule creation; the telescope bears us upward, to the grand regularities of the starry regions. The eye conducted by this wonderful guide, visits a variety of majestic orbs, which would otherwise be lost in unmeasurable tracts of ether. This, far more surprising than the discoveries of Columbus, has found out new colonies of worlds, in every quarter of the nocturnal skies."

There comes the inevitable moral: "As the telescope to the eye, so is revelation to the understanding."

EVEN tombs and flower-gardens cannot escape without some reference to the stars. In *Meditations* among the Tombs Hervey enforces the shortness

of human life in words which have been used as a mildly-popular synonym:—

"Make the extended skies your tomb; Let stars record your worth; Yet know, vain mortals, all must die, As nature's wicklereth birth. Reflections on a Flower Garden speaks similarly of short-lived human beauty: "With straining fire, an evening star Streaks the autumnal skies; It lights the blaze, then shoots away, And in an instant dies. Such are the charms that flash the cheek, And sparkle in the eye; So from the face descends fair, The transient graces fly."

Hervey confessed to wasting some of his youthful hours in versifying amid feminine applause. This he later discarded for the rapturous prose which sent a shiver of delight down polite and pious spines—though it caused many critics to shudder. It is well exemplified in his *Descent upon Creation*, where he apostrophises various powers in heaven and earth in a kind of elaborate sermon with Psalm 148 as text, thus:—

"Ye stars, that beam with inextinguishable brilliancy, through the midnight sky; oceans of flame and centres of worlds, though seemingly little points of light—Ye, who shine with essential effulgence, innumerable ages before your twinkling tapers were kindled, and who shall shine with essential majesty and beauty, when your places in the firmament shall be known no more; Ye who have endured for many years in the deepest obscurity; lay concealed in the contemptible city Nazareth; lay disguised under the mean habit of a carpenter's son—that he might plant the heavens, as it were, with new constellations; and reveal these clouds of earth, these houses of clay, with a radiance far far superior to yours; a radiance, which will adorn the very heaven of heavens, when you shall vanish away like smoke; or expire as momentary sparks from the smitten steel."

CONTEMPLATIONS on the Starry Heavens, of course, gathers together his scattered thoughts on the universe. With the night-fragrance of bean-flowers in his nostrils, he climbs a hill on moonless nights, and reveals in the spangled beauty of the skies. He gives a lavish exposition of the solar system, complete with the morals to be drawn therefrom, and begemmed with quotations from Young's *Night Thoughts*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Thomson's *Sensations* and the lesser lights as Moses Browne's *Universe*.

Though rejoicing in the heavens as revealers of God's wisdom, we are glad to find Hervey rejecting the foolish hope of reading man's destiny from the stars, speaking of astrologers as "sons of delusion, and dealers in deceit":—

"It is a question of indifference to me, whether the constellations shone out with smiles, or loomed in gloom, or the hour of my nativity. . . . Never, never will I search for any intimations of my fate, but often turn to my Creator's footstools, in yonder starry plains."

This essay was submitted by Hervey for the approval of his friend Dr. Philip Doddridge, who wrote to him:—

"I have just been writing to my good friend, Mr. Hervey, whose manuscript on the *Starry Heavens* I have reviewed with pleasure. I hope it will be the means of raising the hearts of many above the stars; and of fixing them on Him who is, so much more than anything material. 'The bright and morning stars' . . ."

This essay also it was which John Wesley was to quote at length in his *Survey of the Wisdom of God*, and undoubtedly it fulfilled the hope which Doddridge expressed for it.

Many congratulatory verses greeted Hervey's *Meditations and Contemplations*.—One writer addressed him thus:—

"Dine instructor! lead thro' midnight-gloom, To moralising stars and preaching tombs."

Moses Browne, the minor poet who had written the epic poem on the *Universe*, quoted in *Contemplations on the Starry Heavens*, joined the chorus of praise. Hervey was later to persuade him to enter Holy Orders, so that after being Hervey's curate for a time he was presented by Lord Dartmouth to the living of Olney, where his non-residence from 1763 brought together his curate John Newton and William Cowper. Browne, like Hervey, was a scientific evangelist, and the poet of the universe thus hails his prose-poet:—

"As some new star attracts th' admiring sight, His splendors pouring thro' the fields of light; So thy fam'd volumes sweet surprise impart; Mark'd by all eyes, and felt in ev'ry heart. Nature, inform'd by thee, new paths has found, And rises, here, a preacher for her God."

A new star? Well, perhaps not. Perhaps Browne, like so many of his over-enthusiastic contemporaries, was too hampered by the atmospheric conditions of the eighteenth century, and was not able to see Hervey in true perspective. Rather was he a comet, dazzling with his brilliance for a time, and trailing luxuriant splendor across the skies but destined, on due length of view, to the oblivion. Yet for all that, the metaphor is of the right type, for this "most heavenly-minded creature," as George Whitehead called him, is seen in his best when contemplating the stars, his feet planted on earth, but his eyes and his mind fixed on the heavenly places.

“A New Star [James Hervey].” *Methodist Recorder* (April 25, 1946): 7.

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