

THE

Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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The Prospects of Freethought.

THAT Freethought is steadily gaining ground is a commonplace, the truth of which is apparent to all who study the present conditions of intellectual life. Everywhere the weakening of orthodox beliefs is evident; even those who retain the traditional terms are not exempt from the influence of Rationalism. There is with even these a growing dislike to discuss questions of doctrine, and what must strike all readers of modern sermon is the extreme indefiniteness of the theology taught. Much of it reminds one of the soldier's prayer: "Oh God—if there be a God, save my soul—if I have a soul, from hell—if there be a hell. Amen—if necessary." Books, dealing with religious subjects in a manner that would have raised a storm of angry denunciation a few years ago, drop almost daily from the press, and are received as a matter of course. All classes of believers grow more tolerant of differences in matters of religion, and it cannot be too often insisted upon that toleration of heresy is only one aspect of indifference to religious belief. Historically, religionists have never been tolerant while they were firmly convinced of the truth of their doctrines; and, as I see no reason for believing that human nature has undergone any radical alteration of late, I am bound to conclude that this changed attitude towards heresy is largely due to the presence of a suspicion that there may, after all, be errors in the religious position.

Now all this is, with a proviso, gratifying enough to a Freethinker. It is something to find two people disagreeing on religion without one of them wishing to murder the other, and the unbeliever has every right to congratulate himself upon the change. But it is a change that is not without its dangers. It has happened more than once in the course of European history that a little more plausible speech and a slightly less truculent behavior have lulled the suspicions of reformers—with disastrous consequences. At the period of the Reformation, for example, it was the glossing over of Catholic superstitions with a slight coating of Rationalism that enabled Protestantism to give superstition a fresh lease of life and check progress in religion for a good hundred and fifty years. On a smaller scale the same thing has occurred many times since. The Churches are playing the same game to-day; and there is a distinct danger that, by gilding the pill of superstition with a thin layer of reason, they may induce people to accept all the old evils under a slightly different terminology. The rationalistic theologian is, as a matter of fact, a far greater danger to the progress of real freedom than the man who is hide-bound by dogma and doctrine.

It is sometimes said that a rationalised theology is better than a theology that sets at defiance all reason. As far as the Churches are concerned, probably; but so far as the future of Freethought is concerned, emphatically no. Theology is never so dangerous as when it puts on an air of plausibility. If theology, pure and simple, were taught in the churches, Freethinkers might

well rest awhile and wait for people to reject it out of sheer disgust. But this does not occur. What does happen is that many of the old evils are perpetuated under new forms. Sabbatarianism is no longer preached openly—to any considerable extent—but it exists under the flimsy pretext of protecting the workman's day of rest—a pretext that has gulled more than one champion of labor and more than a few non-Christians. It is, to select another example, a matter of small consequence to the far-seeing Rationalist whether Church or Chapel rule in our educational councils. The significant thing is that a *theological* party rules, and the important thing is for both of them to be cleared out. Yet one finds many Freethinkers supporting Dissenters in preference to Churchmen, because the former profess more liberal sentiments than the latter. As though at bottom there were a pin to choose between them.

I have said Freethought is gaining ground, but it is well to look at a couple of examples to see how far we have really travelled, and how much ground we can securely call our own. We say we have secured freedom of speech. In a sense, that is correct; but I am afraid Freethinkers are far from realising how limited our freedom in this direction really is. There are still scores of places in which this freedom is denied. In very many of the large towns in Great Britain public halls, that are available for almost every other purpose, are closed to Freethinkers. In some towns it is impossible to secure any hall whatever for the purpose of delivering a Freethought address. Even in London, with all the apparent freedom of a metropolis, a movement initiated at the commencement of the winter season had to be partly suspended owing to the impossibility of securing places in which to hold meetings. What is the value of the professions of liberality that one hears from the Churches in face of these facts? Is there any real freedom where every possible obstacle is thrown in the way of our propaganda, and where, in almost every case in which public halls are under the control or the influence of religious organisations, the freedom to speak therein is peremptorily refused? The truth is that Freethought can only be voiced where it is strong enough to compel the religious world to give way. In every other case the old instruments of suppression and boycott are in full use.

Or take, again, the freedom of the Press. Here, also, it is true that the only Press that is free is the one that is devoted to the advocacy of Freethought. Our meetings are still boycotted by the Press at large, and, while lengthy reports may be issued concerning the efforts of the Churches, the propaganda of Freethought is studiously ignored. Even in the case of advanced books—books that criticise religious opinions freely in the light of recent knowledge—these are refused notice or adequate review. I could instance more than one case in which Freethought books have been reviewed by men of acknowledged eminence, and at the last moment editors have refused to insert the review—for which the author has been paid—for fear of offending his readers. I do not think that the whole of the blame for this should rest upon the editor. The ordinary newspaper is, before all things, a business concern, and its task is to provide the class of article for which the public will pay. The real responsibility lies with that portion of the public that will not read a paper which ventures to indicate that the fundamentals of Christianity are open to question.

Take, again, the case of this journal, which is only an example of the manner in which all avowedly Free-thought literature is treated. I have been told by scores of newsagents, over and over again, that, upon showing it in their windows, their customers, very often parsons, have cautioned them that, if this paper was displayed, their custom would cease; and one can blame a man but lightly who, with nothing but his trade between his family and starvation, bows to the storm. Still, all these things should act as sharp reminders to those who imagine that the forces of theology are spent, or that Freethought can command any more toleration than it has the power to enforce. Freethought has only continued to exist because it has been a fighting cause, and when it ceases to be that it signs its own death-warrant.

I have said that, with a proviso, the weakening of theology is a gratifying sight. The nature of that proviso should be apparent to all. While religion is aggressive and unaccommodating, organisation unconsciously shapes itself. The mere pressure from the outside secures it. It is at a later stage, when religious organisations become more susceptible to popular pressure, and are content to subdue their harsher features in order to retain their privileges, that what one may call the critical period of Freethought commences. But, unfortunately, it is just at this period that the energies of many are apt to slacken. We lose sight of the important fact that it is just here that *conscious* organisation becomes of vital importance to the whole of the movement. If the Churches are shrewd enough to veil their real aims and teachings from the people, it should be our object to keep them well before the public. If the clergy continue to voice liberal sentiments in the pulpits while at the same time encouraging intolerance in the ordinary walks of life, Freethinkers should at least be sufficiently alive to their own interests to show how much their professed liberality is really worth. It is not by each man hiding his convictions that the cause of Freethought is to be best served, but by each doing what lies in his or her power to convince others of their truth, or by giving every possible support to those whose chief business it is to conduct the warfare.

Frankly, I do not believe that Freethinkers do this. There is an immense amount of latent unbelief in the country; what is needed is that it should be quickened into activity, and effectively drilled. We blame Christians for their intolerance towards Freethought; but can we honestly say that Freethinkers are themselves free from blame? Can we really expect other people to respect our opinions if we do not set the example of paying them some respect ourselves? If every Freethinker were as alive to the interests of his cause as Christians are to the interests of their creeds, how great an alteration might be effected in the prospects of Freethought! I sincerely believe that, if each Freethinker in Great Britain were to seriously resolve to do something—no matter how little—for the cause he professes to believe in, our propaganda might be placed upon a really satisfactory basis for many years to come. As matters stand, the brunt of the fighting is borne by a few, while the mass stand waiting for results which can never arrive without their help.

After all, the future of Freethought is dependent upon Freethinkers themselves. The extent and efficacy of our propaganda must depend upon the support given by individuals to the general movement. We possess at present the nucleus of an organisation, both as regards the propaganda of speech and the propaganda of print, such as we have not possessed before. Let Freethinkers look to it that these receive the support they deserve. Those who are giving to the movement what is, after all, greater than any gift of money—their whole lives—have a legitimate right to ask this much, and to expect an answer. "Friend," said a shrewd old Quaker to a man who was expressing his sympathy with a certain movement, "how much dost thou sympathise?" The moral is obvious. How much does each of us sympathise with Freethought? We can all do something—either by speech, by pen, by work, or by purse. Let us see that, whatever we can do, it shall be done; and, if we do not then succeed in putting the finishing touches to our task, the fault will, at least, not lie at our doors.

C. COHEN.

The True Method of Inquiry.

ONE of the principal points upon which Freethinkers differ from orthodox Christians is, that the former demand proof where the latter are content with assertion. Of course there are some questions in reference to which proof may be impossible, but in that case the Freethinker avoids all dogmatic allegations, contenting himself with giving merely an opinion. Not so with the Christian; he boldly asserts that certain views are true, without being able to give any proof that they are so. This, no doubt, has been the cause of the opposition offered by theologians to legitimate free inquiry. They have always been very sensitive to the criticism of their faith, and resent the invasion of Freethought into the precincts of their religion. Thus we find that, while those who seek for truth, regardless of the consequences, hope to extend the area of inquiry, those who are bound to an unchanging belief are thereby induced to act as if they considered they had ample grounds for fearing unbiassed investigation. Hence the many efforts which Christian exponents have made to stifle Freethought criticism. It thus becomes a duty of all friends of progress to expose and oppose all attempts of interference with the fullest development of man's reasoning powers. Secularists should never forget the importance of calm investigation in their endeavors to arrive at truth, and also the fact that the enemies of mental freedom are always on the alert to control or curtail its exercise.

It would, perhaps, be difficult to name any *one* thing that has produced greater mischief and misery in the world than theological interference with the free exercise of the human mind. Yet this has been, and still is, the most congenial occupation of orthodox believers. But why do we assert that this conduct is morally wrong (we had almost written criminal)? Because personal experience and the records of history furnish the proof that our assertions, unlike orthodox allegations, are based upon fact. It has been demonstrated again and again that the soundest conclusions that fallible man can arrive at result from free and unbiassed discussion. Unfettered investigation, instead of being obstructed, should, in the interest of truth and justice, be encouraged. Fortunately, despite the power of the Church, men have arisen who demanded proof rather than empty statements. In Greece, long before Christianity was known, there were many philosophers who preferred argument to emotion, and intellectual liberty to traditional beliefs. Greece has been aptly termed the "home of mental freedom." So much was this the fact that it has been said: "When man would do a deed of worth he points to Greece, and rushes on where life is lost and freedom won." It was reserved for Christianity to substitute faith for reason, belief for examination, and assertion for proof. At the advent of Christianity modern science was in its infancy, the spirit of inquiry was active, and intellectual investigation was rife. The erection of the Cross was followed by a disregard of all the best elements which have contributed to modern progress. It was not thought necessary by the adherents of the Church even to attempt to prove their allegations. They assumed that they had *the* truth on their side, and those who differed from them were deemed to be in error. For instance, the Christian Father, Tertullian, proclaimed that the Old Testament was a divine revelation and the only standard of truth, and whatever was not in agreement therewith was false. No evidence was given to substantiate this extravagant and mischievous statement. Every new truth was condemned as an innovation, and its proponent denounced as an enemy to the public good. Celsus in the second century, and Porphyry in the third, were victims to this theological arrogance. The leading scientists of the early Christian era, like their successors, had to brook the effects of the same exclusive spirit.

The result of these groundless assumptions was the ignorance and degradation of the Dark Ages, caused by a corrupt Church, whose bigotry was only equalled by its audacity. The promoters of the Reformation were not slow to emulate their Christian predecessors in their assertive policy, as the history of Luther and

Melanchthon too plainly testifies. Even the Nonconformists, who had suffered through the dogmatism of their Protestant brethren, manifested a narrow-mindedness towards the Deists and the Unitarians which was indicative of egotistical assumption. The truth is that all ecclesiastical history teaches one lesson—namely, that each section of the Christian profession has opposed free inquiry when led to investigations outside its particular domain, and reached conclusions opposed to its own. It is only those who have escaped from theological darkness into the light of reason who can realise the difference between living under the yoke of orthodoxy and breathing the air of true liberty of thought. Moreover, the customs and ceremonies of the popular faith divert men's minds from appreciating the freedom of inquiry, and also from recognising the justice of allowing each person to believe what his reason tells him is right without being ostracised for so doing. Orthodoxy presents a sad picture of the doleful lot of the human race, with a dismal past and a terrible future. The contemplation of such a picture, and the disputes that are constantly arising as to its meaning, are far more likely to cause disruption than cohesion throughout society. But supposing orthodox views *could* hold people together (which they never did, and from their very contradictory nature never can), and from their very contradictory nature never can), what would be the cost of so doing? The sacrifice of mental freedom, rational cultivation, personal independence, and obedience to the demands of reason for those of faith. Such are a few of the alternatives should orthodoxy be once more supreme in our midst.

There is a passage in the writings of Laplace (*Systeme du Monde*) which expresses a truth of great value in all intellectual investigations. It is this: "Truth and justice are immutable laws of social order. Far from us be the dangerous maxim, that it is sometimes useful to mislead, to enslave, and to deceive mankind." Secularism has no sympathy with the double dealing that was so prevalent in the primitive Church, and which is still to be found practised in Christian propaganda. Our motto should be: "Say what you mean, and mean what you say." Sincerity of expression is the index to honest conviction. The true spirit of inquiry demands that old doctrines and institutions should be adapted to the new light which has been discovered, or else discarded as being incompatible with the requirements of the times in which we live. Enlightened views of things are still growing, and more rapidly, and over a wider area than at any previous epoch of our history. It is this power of Freethought and unfettered investigation that marks the progress which has been made in spite of theological opposition, and which surely will be more useful and more lasting than the effects of an antiquated superstition. When we contemplate the many changes that have taken place in what is termed the religious world, the giving up of doctrines once held dear and essential to Christianity, we are reminded of what Butler said of the Puritans. They made it appear—

As though religion was intended
For nothing else but to be mended.

CHARLES WATTS.

France, England, and International Criticism.

It is about a year and a half since the world, and especially the English-speaking world, was tremendously excited over a miscarriage of justice which concerned a certain French officer of artillery. The re-trial of Dreyfus at Rennes was followed with such an intensity of interest in England and America that the inimitable Mr. Dooley remarked it was a pity the proceedings were not conducted in English; it would have so facilitated the army of English and American journalists engaged. Personally, being in England at the time—it was September, 1899—I remember how, in restaurants, trams, trains, and elsewhere, you heard and read of nothing but of Dreyfus and Esterhazy and Du Paty de Clam, and the rest of those who afforded the public such a unique opportunity of examining the military type in all its nakedness. If you took a 'bus

from Fleet-street to Charing Cross, it was ten to one the driver, if you sat near him, confided to you his private opinion about the Bordereau. And the burden of it all was the iniquity of the French. In the North of England I heard a number of commercial travellers and an old grey-haired gentleman discussing the case, and the old grey-head made the characteristic remark: "Thank God, such a thing could not happen in England, monarchy as we are." I believe the gentleman had, in his day, been a bit of a Republican. But the undertone of most of the comment was a self-complacency that "we" were not as the French.

To one who could pause to reflect as to what the British public, in its turn, had permitted and sanctioned, the carnival of British Pharisaism was almost as revolting as the French military turpitude. The people who were rolling their eyes in horror every day at the latest lie or fraud committed by the General Staff had never been excessively troubled when Irish political leaders were thrown into gaol on fraudulent charges by British Ministers. And almost in any year there might be gathered from the records of the British Government in India or in Ireland cases which quite equalled, if they did not surpass, the Dreyfus case for organised duplicity and brutality. But in these cases the air was not rent with cries for justice, and no such successful fight was made for truth as Zola and his friends made in France. It is for such reasons as these that I have before contended that, all the circumstances considered, France came better out of the Dreyfus affair than most other countries at their present stage have come, or would come, out of similar crimes. Other nations could "sin" as France sinned, but not many others could as rapidly "repent" as France repented, or as quickly recover their mental balance.

Indeed, England herself, at the very close of the Dreyfus affair, was furnishing an interesting exhibition of every phase of folly which her journals were loudly condemning in France, with, if anything, less excuse than Frenchmen might have pleaded for the folly of their own countrymen; for, in almost every instance, the English absurdities were several stages worse than the French. There was really nothing inherently impossible or improbable—though English journals professed so to regard it—in the proposition that foreign Powers used their secret-service money to buy information about the French army. Indeed, not merely was there nothing absurd about the proposition, but such is notoriously the practice of all the "civilised" Powers to-day; and there was nothing, therefore, outrageously far-fetched in the anti-Dreyfus case, that foreign Powers would naturally move heaven and earth to save their tool, with the object, at least, of encouraging similar tools in their employment. I am not, of course, arguing the anti-Dreyfus case. I am merely contending that it did, on the surface, hang together, and hang together much better than the English press at the time, as a whole, was willing to allow. In fact, one could not deny the truth of the epigram made by someone at the time, that the average Frenchman, knowing nothing of the Dreyfus case, was firmly convinced that Dreyfus was guilty, and the average Englishman, knowing less, was equally firmly convinced he was innocent. Certain it is that thousands of Englishmen believed in the innocence of Dreyfus on infinitely less grounds than thousands of Frenchmen had for believing in his guilt.

But if we take the fictions which at that period imposed on the English public, we shall find them remarkable for their incoherence and obvious absurdity. One small story, for instance (and it was a sample of many retailed in reputable newspapers in those days), was that President Kruger once placed a Kaffir servant-girl between two planks, and then sawed her in two. The political fiction widely accepted by very reputable people was that President Kruger, at the head of a mainly peasant State, without a standing army, and relying solely on citizen-soldiers who had to be hurriedly drawn from their ordinary avocations—a system of military organisation, actually advocated by many democrats in Europe on the specific ground that it lessens the tendency to warlike aggression to a minimum—the suggestion was that President Kruger, with this military organisation, was seriously desirous, at the age of eighty or thereabouts, of emulating Napoleon or Alexander, and

setting out on a career of conquest. Since those days we have seen how the mob and the mob-press, which imagined itself to be moved by human sympathy for the sufferings of Dreyfus, has received, unruffled, news of how British officers have dragged women and children from their homes which were afterwards burnt, have herded these women in prison-camps, and half-starved them in order thereby to bring pressure on their male relatives in the field to surrender. At the worst, the Dreyfus case concerned but the ruin of one man; we have latterly in these countries become hardened, by familiarity, with the ruin of whole populations. And as the torture of Dreyfus was all in the interests of the French Army, so the latter torture is all in the interests of "good government" and British "supremacy." And in the course of the latter *affaire* every absurdity and every fraud which the French General Staff provided for the delectation of France has been surpassed by the absurdities and frauds greedily swallowed by Englishmen. Things which would be laughed at coming from General Mercier or General Gonse were solemnly debated over as political wisdom when they came from the *Times* or Mr. Chamberlain.

So far for the general parallel between the conduct of France and England; but we have had some more particular parallels. When, for instance, Zola raised his voice for Dreyfus, it was said in England that the mere fact of so eminent a citizen as Zola suggesting a doubt as to the guilt of Dreyfus ought to be sufficient to secure a re-trial. There is, however, in England a Mrs. Maybrick, who has been imprisoned for years, and about whose guilt numbers of eminent British citizens—including, it is said, the late Lord Russell of Killowen—had, and have, the gravest doubts. But Mrs. Maybrick remains in prison; there is no legal machinery whereby she can be re-tried, and no English Zola has come forward to rouse public opinion as public opinion was roused in France. The Maybrick case, as compared with the Dreyfus case, indeed, illustrates one of the reasons why so much was made of the latter. The sufferings of Dreyfus, and the heroic struggle of his wife on his behalf, no doubt stirred the hearts of men and appealed to their human sympathy; but the real reason why the thing achieved such notoriety, and why Frenchmen made so much of it, was that the Dreyfus affair formed the battle-ground on which two opposing political interests fought. Back of it all lay the struggle between the militarists and the Republicans, between those who wished to make the army the master of the nation and those who regarded the army and its officers as the nation's servants.

And that the types of politicians who carried on such a wordy warfare over the prisoner of the Devil's Island exist elsewhere than in France, a recent English case, which forms an exact parallel to the Dreyfus one in all essential aspects, serves to demonstrate. One can only hope that in other countries the anti-militarist party will prove as strong as, all things considered, it has proved in France. The English parallel to Dreyfus is what has now come to be known as "l'affaire Colville." The main facts of this affair are pretty well known. General Colville held a command in South Africa, and was, it seems, highly commended by Lord Roberts in some of his early dispatches. Colville, however, was in the neighborhood of Lindley at the time when a body of Yeomanry were surrounded by the Boers there. He received from the officer at Lindley news of his plight, but, for one reason or another, did not go to his assistance. Afterwards General Colville returned home. It seems that he was tried—behind his back—for his conduct in the Lindley affair, and acquitted, and was given a command at Gibraltar. After some time in that position he was tried again—again behind his back—and condemned; this time he was virtually dismissed from the army in disgrace. Now it is obviously impossible for an outsider to pass any judgment on the military problem involved. General Colville may be incompetent at his trade, or he may be merely an average specimen of the British military man, not, it would seem, a being of startling ability at the best. Indeed, it is rather remarkable, in view of the oft-declared superiority of British to Boer methods of government, that, at any rate, so far, the intellectual victory, the victory of "brains," alike in the diplomatic conflict and the military conflict, has been conspicuously with the benighted Boers.

Here, however, it is not the military aspect, but the political and moral aspect of the Colville affair, that we are concerned with. Colville, for his delinquencies, great or small, was, like Dreyfus, tried behind his back, and, like Dreyfus, condemned without being heard in his defence. Naturally his friends brought the matter before the House of Commons, and there was a debate. And what was the case of the Government? Exactly, in every detail, allowing for differences of environment and temperament, the case of the accusers of Dreyfus. Colville had been condemned—the case was closed; if every officer asked for a fair trial, discipline would be impossible. Mr. Chamberlain characteristically adopted the dialectic of the French militarists, and declared that any re-opening of the affair would be tantamount to a censure of Lord Roberts. Parliament dare not supervise the actions of its military servants lest it offend these high and mighty personages, and to call in question their actions was almost "insulting the army." The latter phrase may not have been actually employed in the English Parliament, but its equivalents certainly were.

The moral of it all is that, even in condemning our neighbors' vices when they are gross, we run the risk of overlooking our own. Self-criticism and self-discipline are the beginning and the end of wisdom and of morals. And in the political field most nations to-day have enough to occupy their energies in keeping their own hands clean without removing the dirt from others. For even in the case of gross and palpable crimes like the Dreyfus affair and the Transvaal War it is really doubtful whether international criticism does more good than harm.

FREDERICK RYAN.

National Secular Society.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN GLASGOW.

THE Annual Conference of the National Secular Society was held in the Secular Hall, Brunswick-street, Glasgow, on Sunday, May 26. Most of the delegates were met by members of the local Branch as they arrived on the previous day at the various railway stations in the city, and the Northampton colors were used as a means of identification.

THE MORNING SESSION.

The first sederunt of the Conference commenced at 10.30 a.m. Mr. G. W. Foote, President of the N. S. S., occupied the chair, and he was accompanied on the platform by Messrs. Charles Watts, C. Cohen (vice-presidents), and Miss E. M. Vance (secretary). The following delegates were present:—Mr. and Mrs. J. Knowles, Blackburn; Mr. C. Cohen, Bethnal Green; Messrs. H. P. Ward and N. T. Pitt, Birmingham; Messrs. J. Sullivan and R. Wharrier, Bedlington; Mr. George Robertson, Edinburgh; Mr. H. Smith, Farsley; Mr. J. Stace, Finsbury; Messrs. J. F. Turnbull and A. M'Crone, Glasgow; Mr. W. H. Spivey, Huddersfield; Mr. and Mrs. Pegg, Manchester; Mr. T. Thurlow, West Ham; Messrs. J. T. Horsman and R. Chapman, South Shields; Mr. G. Thwaites, Stockton-on-Tees. Among the visitors present were Mr. and Mrs. Mumby, Mr. J. G. Dobson, Mr. M. Christopher, Mr. and Mrs. Gott, Mr. and Mrs. J. Greeves Fisher, Mr. R. Johnson, Mr. Bailey, Mr. Sunderland, Mr. Dewar, and Mr. E. Treharne-Jones. The hall, being spacious and well adapted for debating purposes (the seats are arranged in a semi-circular fashion, and rise tier above tier as in a theatre), was comfortably filled, and the various speakers were heard with little or no difficulty.

Mr. G. W. FOOTE, in opening the proceedings, trusted that, although differences of opinion might occur in the course of discussion, the utmost harmony and goodwill would prevail.

As is usual at Conferences of the N. S. S., the minutes of last year's Conventions were held as read, and adopted unanimously.

EXECUTIVE'S ANNUAL REPORT.

Mr. FOOTE read the Annual Report of the Executive as follows:—

The past year has not been a brilliant one for any advanced Society. Public interest has continued to be greatly absorbed by the war in South Africa, and a fresh diversion was caused by the operations of the Christian armies in China. The disturbance of trade, and the pressure of increased taxation, have also diminished the demand for luxuries; and, unfortunately, in such a case, it is intellectual movements of all kinds that are the first and principal sufferers. Speaking generally, it has

been difficult to draw satisfactory audiences to Secular meeting-places, and in many places the propaganda has languished to the point of extinction. Happily, however, there are signs of a change for the better in this respect. During the latter part of the winter an improvement in the size of audiences was perceptible. It is also cheerful to note, from information furnished by the proprietors, that at least one Secular periodical—the *Freethinker*—has held its own throughout the long adverse period, and has steadily maintained what appears to be its almost indestructible basis of circulation.

A natural result of the unpropitious state of affairs during the past year appears in the Balance-sheet. Members' subscriptions and donations are represented by a comparatively small figure. But a larger income has accrued from other sources. The Secular Society, Limited, has been a good friend again, having practically saved the situation by its pecuniary assistance. A considerable amount has also been received from the Twentieth Century Fund. Thus the Balance-sheet shows a much increased income and expenditure; and what is even more gratifying, the deficit of £99 16s. 9½d. has been reduced to £25 2s. 4d.

Beginning with London, the Executive has to record that the propaganda has been fairly well maintained there. Sunday evening meetings have been held regularly at the Athenæum Hall in the West and the Camberwell Secular Hall in the South; the open-air lecturing was conducted with vigor and success in Parks and other open places during the summer; and special Sunday Demonstrations were held, which were addressed by Messrs. Foote, Watts, Cohen, Moss, and Heaford, and attended generally by enormous crowds of well-behaved people. One of these Demonstrations was arranged for West Ham, which lies outside the London area; and, as it was spoiled by a tropical flood of rain, a later gathering was organised in the Stratford Town Hall, proving a perfect triumph, in respect to both numbers and enthusiasm. The Branch in that borough arose out of the agitation caused by the exclusion of the *Freethinker* from the reading-room tables of the Free Libraries, and has thus far had a reasonably prosperous existence.

During the winter a special effort was resolved upon in the metropolis in connection with the Twentieth Century Fund. Messrs. Watts and Cohen were engaged for six months, other lecturers were also available, and the President promised to take an active part in the enterprise. It was intended to hold free meetings on Sundays, as well as on week-nights, in various parts of London, making collections towards the expenses, and meeting the deficit out of the Fund. Some very successful meetings were held at the Aldgate Baths, and the audiences elsewhere, especially on Sundays, went on increasing. But it was found that the cost of halls was very great, and that the most suitable meeting-places were steadily refused for Freethought lectures. The experiment had, therefore, to be partially abandoned, and the services of Messrs. Watts and Cohen were extended as far as possible to the provinces. The President, however, who suggested this effort, and delivered several of the lectures gratuitously, is still of opinion that it was worth attempting, and that it will have to be renewed. For the present the Executive is centralising the summer propaganda in the open air. The lecturers' fees—no very excessive amount—are guaranteed from the Central Fund, which receives all the collections taken up at the meetings; and a common lecture list is printed for the whole metropolis, with its eight outdoor stations and thirteen lectures every Sunday. A vast number of people are reached by these lectures, and if such a work is worth doing—as it undoubtedly is—it is worth doing with method and efficiency. It should be added that arrangements are already being made to supplement these with another series of Freethought Demonstrations.

Prior to the London School Board election, in November, the Executive convened a Conference of the friends of Secular Education. It was held in the large hall of the Club and Institute Union, and was fairly attended by representatives of Secularist, Ethical, Radical, and Socialist organisations. It was boycotted, however, by the press, which was generally pledged to the support of the official Moderate and so-called Progressive candidates. The question arose whether the N. S. S. should run one special candidate, at any rate, in a selected division; but it was negatived on the ground of want of time and insufficiency of means; and all that could be done in the circumstances was to ask the Secular Society, Limited, to make a grant towards the election expenses of the Socialist candidates already in the field who included Secular Education in their programs. Four candidates were assisted in this way; and it was worthy of notice that the one who gave the most prominence to Secular Education at his meetings—namely, Mr. George Hewitt, in the Tower Hamlets—polled by far the highest number of votes, and only just failed to win a seat on the School Board.

Under the auspices of the Executive a Children's Party was organised, and a large number of little ones enjoyed a day in the country. The Annual Excursion was made by special train to Brighton, and was thoroughly successful. The veteran Mr. G. J. Holyoake was brought from his residence to address the excursionists after tea, and delighted them with a characteristic speech. The Annual Dinner was

held as usual at the Holborn Restaurant, and was well attended.

Mention should be made of the fact that the Freethought Library, which used to be located at the old Hall of Science—which was thought to have disappeared mysteriously, and even (by some) to have been spirited away by the designing President, assisted by the unscrupulous Secretary—has been restored to the control of the Executive, and will, when it is weeded out and added to, be available to the members. It is not necessary, and it might not be politic, to dilate upon this subject. Enough has been said to stop the mouth of scandal; not, of course, permanently, but at least on this particular point.

A severe loss was sustained by the Society through the death of the honorary treasurer, Mr. Samuel Hartmann. Mr. Hartmann's colleagues were not allowed the opportunity of paying him a last mark of respect at his funeral. They will continue, however, to preserve for him a place of honor in their memories. His strong though unostentatious love of the cause, his readiness to serve, his practical spirit, his broad toleration, his good sense, and his cheerful temper had endeared him to all who had the privilege of sitting with him on the Executive. Besides taking his share of the work, he had always been a generous subscriber. According to his means, he was one of the best financial supporters of the movement. When the Treasurer's Scheme was started he promised and paid a donation of £50 for the first year. This was a proof of his own earnestness in the matter, and if others had been of the same mind the scheme would not have been a failure.

In accordance with a resolution of the last Conference a Freethought Demonstration was held in the Birmingham Town Hall on Sunday, October 21. The Branch was responsible for the local expenses, which amounted to about £13, and were nearly covered by the collections. The other expenses, which were somewhat larger, were defrayed out of the Twentieth Century Fund by the President—no other being just then available. The effort was thus a costly one, but it was a magnificent success, and such things cannot be done for nothing. The Demonstration in the evening was addressed by Messrs. Foote, Watts, Cohen, and Ward; and, in point of numbers and enthusiasm, it was everything that could be desired. Probably the gathering together of such a fine audience was worth more to the cause than a long course of small meetings. In addition to the Demonstration, Mr. Foote volunteered to give a lecture in the afternoon, which was remarkably well attended, and was reported in the local press. Altogether it may be said that the experiment was eminently satisfactory; and, if funds permitted, it might usefully be repeated, not only at Birmingham, but at every other great centre of population in the kingdom.

The Birmingham Branch, it will be remembered, was ousted from its former meeting-place at the Bristol Street Board Schools in consequence of a movement of bigotry which worked through ridiculous and trumped-up charges. After a lapse of twelve months—the period of exclusion specified in the School Board's resolution—the Branch applied again for the use of the same building for Sunday lectures. The application was granted on condition that there should be no sale of literature at the meetings. This condition did not apply to other Societies in the city; it was specially aimed as an insult at the Branch, and the Birmingham Secularists refused to accept the use of the building on such contemptuous terms. They preferred to retain their self-respect, although their meetings have to be held in a less suitable and advantageous place. Fortunately, the Branch has enjoyed the services of Mr. H. Percy Ward, who has been stationed there for some time as lecturer and organising secretary. He made a gallant fight for a seat on the School Board, and polled well in spite of very serious disadvantages, including the boycott or hostility of the local press, and the difficulty of operating over such a vast area. Mr. Ward may fight again, and, whether he wins or not, his efforts will at least be fruitful from a propagandist point of view.

The Branch at Manchester has had a hard struggle during the period of the war fever, but it has held its own bravely in spite of a heavy financial strain. The officers and committee of this Branch are to be congratulated on their energy and devotion. The same disadvantage has obtained, rather more severely, at Liverpool, and some members of the Branch were in favor of striking, but the majority were determined to uphold the old flag, and the Branch has been to some extent reorganised. Coming further north, to the city in which this Conference is being held, it is inspiring to find that the Glasgow Branch has been continuously successful. The week-night lectures in the neighboring towns have had to be partially discontinued during the bad time of the past year or two, but the Branch's own Sunday meetings have been uniformly well attended, with very large audiences on special occasions. Its members' list has increased, and its financial condition is flourishing. Here in the commercial capital of Scotland, at any rate, there is a living proof of what may be done by courage, enterprise, devotion, and harmony; and it is to be hoped that this splendid example will be imitated by Branches in other parts of the country. Difficulties and

trials will come in the natural course of things, but there is profit as well as dignity in meeting them with a proud self-reliance.

Fresh activity has been displayed in South Wales, where lectures have been delivered by Mr. E. Treharne-Jones, who recently left the Church of England pulpit for the Freethought platform. From enquiries made by your President it appears that Mr. Treharne-Jones has been opposing Christianity as a pure labor of love, in the interest of truth and common honesty. He certainly did a very bold thing in leaving the Church and in remaining on the spot to oppose what he had previously taught. It is not difficult to see that avenues of profitable work will be closed to him, and that he will have a very uphill struggle if he continues his anti-Christian propaganda. In these circumstances he is surely entitled to the respect, the gratitude, and the good wishes of all Freethinkers.

During the month of September an International Freethought Congress was held in Paris, at which your Society was represented by Messrs. Victor Roger and W. Heaford. The meetings were very interesting, and something practical was done by forming a Company to carry on an International Freethought journal. *La Raison* is ably and brightly conducted by M. Leon Furnémont at Brussels, and M. Victor Charbonnel at Paris. M. Charbonnel is an ex-priest and a speaker of great eloquence, as well as a vivid and incisive writer.

At the last Conference a resolution was carried to the effect that a fund should be raised to assist Mr. Joseph Symes, of Melbourne, in visiting this country. Your President has been in communication with Mr. Symes, who would much like to see England again, but has now abandoned the idea on account of the insuperable difficulty of finding a substitute during his absence. The *Liberator* and the Melbourne platform must be upheld, and Mr. Symes will not hear of any interruption in the work to which he has given the best years of his life. His friends in the old country will be glad to hear that he is once more located in the Science Hall from which he was excluded several years ago. The place was in the hands of hostile trustees, and was finally sold in the open market as though it had never been built by the money of Freethinkers for the organisation and propaganda of Freethought. It now belongs to a friend and admirer of Mr. Symes, who allows him the use of it on almost nominal terms. This arrangement, however, is obviously precarious; and the history of the Science Hall at Melbourne should be a lesson to the Freethinkers of this country—and a lesson to be remembered when they are asked to engage in similar enterprises.

Turning to America, it is gratifying to note that the authorities have been induced to sanction the opening of the Buffalo Exhibition after one o'clock on Sundays. This triumph of the spirit of rational freedom is very largely, if not mainly, due to the efforts of the Freethinkers connected with the American Secular Union, with the able assistance of Dr. M. D. Conway.

In closing this Report, the first in the twentieth century, the Executive ventures to express a hope that the present Conference will inaugurate a new period of vigorous and successful activity in the history of the Freethought movement. The spread of Freethought ideas is apparent on all sides; and a compact organisation, backed up by large numbers, and supported with adequate resources, should be able to make those ideas a practical as well as an intellectual power in this country.

FINANCIAL REPORT.

The Financial Report was read by the Secretary, showing a total income of £501 12s. 10½d., and a reduced deficit of £25 2s. 7d. as against £99 16s. 9½d. the previous year.

Mr. FOOTE said that the Almanack account was in a very flourishing condition, and that was in large measure due to the gratis advertisement which had been given it in the *Freethinker*. There was an item which had not been included in the Report, and it required some explanation to show why that was so. Mr. S. Hartmann, their late treasurer, who had devoted much time and energy to the cause, had died very suddenly, and at the time of his decease there was a sum of £21 5s. in his possession which belonged to the N. S. S. On his estate being realised, however, it was found that his financial affairs were not in a satisfactory state, and they could only hope that his executors would, in a short time, make good that amount owing to the Society.

Mr. PEGG (Manchester) wondered why the Balance-sheet had not been sent to Branches sooner. It was unreasonable to expect delegates to be able to discuss its contents in an intelligent manner if they received the printed paper only a few days before the Conference went into session.

Miss VANCE explained that the Branches themselves were responsible for the delay. It was an old complaint. How could a Financial Report be drawn up if the contributions did not arrive at the proper quarters in reasonable time, in order that the parties responsible for drawing up the Report and printing it might forward it in good time to the various centres?

Mr. PERCY WARD asked with whom, and in whose interest, the balance of £110 2s. 6d. shown in the Benevolent Fund, was banked, and why no interest on that amount was stated in the Report?

Mr. FOOTE replied that, since there was really no balance in the Benevolent Fund, but a deficit, the absence of interest was obvious. It was only a few days ago that the Secular Society, Limited, made a considerable grant to the N. S. S., and that was the reason why a balance appeared in the Report. That sum was banked in the interest of the N. S. S. by the Secular Society, Limited, as a sub-account, for the very good reason that it would be safer in the hands of an incorporated society than in those of an individual treasurer.

The Report was subsequently adopted.

ELECTION OF PRESIDENT.

At this point Mr. Foote vacated the chair, and Mr. CHARLES WATTS moved, seconded by Mr. J. F. TURNBULL (Glasgow), that Mr. G. W. Foote be re-elected President.

This motion met with unanimous approval, the mover and seconder testifying to the able and earnest manner in which Mr. Foote had acted as President in past years.

Mr. FOOTE thanked the Conference for his re-election. It was eleven years since the great Charles Bradlaugh retired from the N. S. S. presidency, and he (Mr. Foote) had occupied it throughout that period. He and the Society knew each other well by this time. Between such old friends there was little to be said and much to be taken for granted. He would make no other promise than that he would do his best, as in the past, to promote the Society's interests and sustain its reputation. (Applause.)

ELECTION OF VICE PRESIDENTS.

Mr. FOOTE formally moved the re-election of the following gentlemen nominated by the Executive as Vice-Presidents:—George Anderson, E. Bater, C. Cohen, W. W. Collins, J. F. Dewar, J. Grange, T. Gorniot, W. Heaford, A. B. Moss, James Neate, J. Partridge, S. M. Peacock, C. Pegg, W. Pratt, E. W. Quay, Victor Roger, J. H. Ridgway, T. Robertson, F. Schaller, W. H. Spivey, H. J. Stace, Joseph Symes, T. Thurlow, J. Umpleby, E. M. Vance, G. J. Warren, Charles Watts, W. H. Wood.

Mr. M'CRONE (Glasgow) seconded.—Adopted unanimously. On behalf of the Executive it was formally moved by Mr. Foote that F. Wood (Camberwell) and Victor Charbonnel (Paris, editor of *La Raison*) be added to the list of vice-presidents. The standing orders having been suspended for the purpose, Mr. Foote also moved the addition of the names of W. B. Thompson (New Brompton) and Léon Furnémont (Brussels, editor of *La Raison*). Both motions were carried unanimously.

Donald Black and John F. Turnbull were nominated as vice-presidents. Mr. Charles Watts supported the nomination, and complimentary words were added by Mr. Foote. The motion was carried with applause, and both gentlemen briefly returned thanks for the honor, which they would prize highly.

The Birmingham delegates nominated Charles Steptoe, who was also elected a vice-president.

ELECTION OF HON. TREASURER.

The Conference, on a motion by the Executive, seconded by Mr. PEGG (Manchester), agreed not to appoint another treasurer, approving the method adopted by the Executive on Mr. Hartmann's decease, of banking the N. S. S. funds with the Secular Society, Limited, in a special sub-account.

ELECTION OF AUDITORS.

Messrs. W. B. Thompson (New Brompton) and G. J. Warren (London) were elected auditors for the ensuing year.

Mr. H. Percy Ward, on behalf of the Birmingham Branch, moved:—"That the Executive should not warn Branches against engaging any particular lecturer on their platforms without accompanying the warning with a written statement of the reasons." Reference was made to the case of a certain lecturer against whom the Executive had issued a warning. Considerable discussion ensued, and it was pointed out that the Executive had only in substance given a piece of serious advice, which the Branches were at liberty to disregard if they chose, and that it would be a curious state of things if the Executive could not do as much, when it had the power to expel a member from the Society. On the Birmingham motion being put only three hands were held up for it, and it was thus lost by an overwhelming majority.

The next motion taken was that of the Birmingham Branch:—"That the necessity be urged upon the Executive of extending to the provinces the scheme of Freethought propaganda that is carried on in London." After some discussion it was decided that this motion should be regarded as included in Motion 12, which stood against Mr. Cohen's name on the Agenda; and as it was then nearly half-past twelve, the Conference adjourned for luncheon at the North British Hotel where nearly sixty "saints" sat down to a capital repast.

(Continued on page 346.)

Acid Drops.

THE truly great are enraptured just now with a new fad which is called Christian Science. Earls and countesses patronise it, and it is quite the newest and most fashionable caper. A ha'penny paper, says the *Sunday Chronicle*, has just published a series of articles from the pen of a real nobleman explaining exactly what it is. I have read the articles, and I know just as nearly what Christian Science is as I did before. These are the sort of articles to read in hot weather. They do not oppress the intellect.

Lord Dunmore, the author of these dissertations on the newest variant of the old religion, extols Christian Science as a healing agent. He says that its essence is in the purification of thought. Thought wrongly directed is the cause of all disease, spiritual and physical; the Christian Scientist healer, having his thoughts rightly directed by a long course of self-purification, heals the sick and converts the sinful by re-directing their thoughts in pure channels. Therefore, all that is wanted to make the world a paradise is a new and pure form of thought. The chief difficulty is that, as thought needs brains, mighty few people can ever be intellectual enough to be Christian Scientists. How great a blessing that is I quite realise.

"Lord Dunmore," according to the *Sunday Chronicle*, "thinks Christian Science a lot better as a healer than the most skilled physicians. He sneers at the Christians who place more reliance on a box of pills than on the power of Him who rules the universe. I suppose the Christian Scientist professes, by thinking hard enough, to cure all diseases, from lunacy to cancer. But I am still left in some doubt as to how much really hard thinking must be done to mend a broken leg or a fracture at the base of the skull."

"Nevertheless, the powers of the Christian Science healer are really amazing. Lady Abinger gives an illustration, and, with my instinctive reverence for all people wearing titles, I decline to say a word of disparagement. She had a horse which was very ill, and several vets. tried to cure it without success. At last she telegraphed for a healer, who came down from London, directed the ailing horse's thoughts aright, and quite cured him in two days. This success should stimulate the enthusiasm of the Christian Scientists. Having obtained sway over the horse, why should they not try more stubborn tasks? Why, for instance, should they not operate on the ass? Or do they prefer to deal solely with the two-legged variety of that family?"

Continuing his articles on "Christian Science" in the *Daily Mail*, Lord Dunmore points out that Jesus declared that the healing of the sick should be one of the signs of belief in him. This is quite true, and the Peculiar People act upon it in their own families. And what is the result? They are arrested, charged, tried, sentenced, and imprisoned as criminals. These people are sincere, while the Christian Science folk are mostly half-hearted hypocrites. If they were not so, they would stand up for the Peculiar People when they are attacked. But they do nothing of the sort. They leave all that to the Freethinkers.

Lord Dunmore takes the position that suffering is the result of sin. Well, if this be so, it is often one person that sins and another that bears the suffering. But the truth is that there is plenty of suffering in the world, especially from disease and want, that has no direct relation to sin at all. It springs from conditions over which the individual has no more control than the dwellers in an Alpine village have over the descent of an avalanche.

Dr. Paget having been promoted to the Bishopric of Oxford, the Deanery of Christ Church is now vacant, and a good many clerical mouths are watering at it. It is worth £3,000 a year, with "a most delightful residence and garden." Dr. Moberley is generally expected to be the new Dean. We should think he would be able to "bear his cross" pretty serenely in such a snug shelter.

Duelling is considered honorable in Germany, especially in military circles. We are not surprised to read, therefore, that two lieutenants, before fighting a duel the other day, took the Sacrament together. One of them received a bullet in the hip, which will disable him for life. That is all the good the Sacrament did him.

Rev. Charles Sheldon, of *What would Jesus Do?* fame, has turned his attention to the servant-girl question. His view is that servants should be treated as members of the family. This is easy enough in a pious book, but not so easy in practice. Jesus Christ ought to have kept a servant, and left a record of how he got on with her, so that we might know the way to follow him in this respect.

Says the *Rock*: "God is still afflicting South Africa."

This is open to various comments, the chief one being—Why should God afflict his creatures so? Perhaps he doesn't, being non-existent.

Curious methods are being adopted for raising funds for Truro Cathedral, if we may judge from a paragraph in the *Western Morning News*. At Saltash a variety entertainment organised by the vicar, the Rev. C. Preedy, was recently held on behalf of the Cathedral Building Fund. Amongst the items on the program were a costume dance, a skirt dance, a tamborine dance, and a dramatic sketch, in which the domestic troubles of a young married couple "were portrayed with delightful freshness."

There is nothing specially heinous about any of these performances. It is, on the contrary, rather refreshing to find that at Saltash no antiquated Puritanism prevails. But what do the Bishop and chapter of Truro think about "skirt dancing" for their building fund? Why not start a "sweep-stake" or a "raffle"? Either might answer as well.

"We are beginning to feel that it is well for the truth to be known." Thus Rev. Dr. Marcus Dods writes in the *British Weekly*. He is commenting on what he calls Professor Schmiedel's "notorious article" on the Gospels in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. He says "it is not English, but German, and so advanced that it is only a passing incident." But is there nothing reliable from the Fatherland—even in the way of criticism? And why should the fact of its being "so advanced" be suggested as a reason for describing it as a "passing incident"? There is nothing "passing" about it, except in the sense that it is a "passing bell" to belief into more than doubtful records.

For some time now Dr. Schmiedel has occupied the attention of critics and inquiring thinkers. The criticisms which were unfavorable have had but the effect of directing increased attention to the now famous volume ii. of the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, with all its destructive criticism.

Rev. Dr. Watson, preaching at Liverpool, dealt with the recent criticism of the Gospels by Schmiedel and others. He prophesied that the New Testament would undergo, during the next twenty years, as thorough a testing as had been given to the Prophets. Of this there can be little doubt. The Prophets have been disposed of in regard to their general reliability. The Gospels, which are equally amenable to criticism, will be reduced to the same doubtful condition.

"The critics," says Dr. Watson, "may deprive us of the Fourth Gospel, even of all the four." But he thinks that text after text would be handed in with "names appended in blood." No doubt; that would be easy enough in view of the massacres, bonfires, and other tortures which Christians have provided for each other in past centuries, and for heretics too. There is plenty of blood—a trifle too much—about the Gospels and the Old Testament—and about Christian history as well. Dr. Watson would have done well to refrain from any such observation, and especially he might have spared his allusion to what he calls "the obvious limitations of all literary criticism." There are no such limitations as he suggests. He, no doubt, only observes the need of limitation when the criticism is applied to Holy Writ.

The most amazing estimate of a modern character has just been made by Mr. Edmund Gosse, who describes the late Dr. Creighton as combining "something of Voltaire with something of St. John the Evangelist." One would like to know what those somethings were. There was nothing of Voltaire, though the late Bishop of London contrived to make a few small jokes, which were not Voltairian at all, lacking the great French philosopher's brilliant wit and deadly irony. Edmund Gosse, who is an authority on many things which are literary, has made a little mistake in this latest pronouncement.

A Yorkshire clergyman had been taking an eager part in a cricket match on Saturday, and next morning thoughts of the stirring contest would creep in, for, much to the amusement of some hearers, he said, very solemnly, after the first lesson: "Here endeth the first innings."

Whistling on the Sunday has but recently been tolerated in Scotland, and even now we learn that in many Scotch villages no whistlers would be allowed on the Lord's Day. In Tonga and Iceland it is considered to be disrespectful to the Lord. Arabians hold a similar belief, for they say that it takes forty days to purify the mouth that has been puckered in a whistle. And even on the Continent an offshoot of this feeling against whistling is to be found, for in North Germany a boy whistling in the evening is quieted by the remark: "Hush! to whistle in the evening is to make the angels weep."

Bessie, the nurse-girl, an Episcopalian of enthusiastic temperament, had not seen the big yellow chrysanthemums on the parlor-table until she brought the baby in to be

inspected by the lady donor of the flowers. "Ah, ma'am, ain't they just beautiful!" said Bessie, posing with raised hands. "My heart always do be lifted up by them scrazy anthems!"

No wonder the Orientals have formed a crusade against Christianity. A St. Petersburg telegram states that the priests of the three principal Oriental religions—Mohammedanism, Buddhism, and Brahminism—have formed, with the Sultan's tacit consent, a common league to combat Christianity.

"It's only when Bill's drunk that I can bring him to church." This was the explanation offered on a Bank holiday to a clergyman in the East-end, who rather objected to the bemused bridegroom brought up by a widow who was supposed to be the blushing bride. The ceremony, however, was eventually performed, Bill's appearance at church, drunk or sober, being considered sufficient for the time being.

The Church Missionary Society wants three hundred workers in the foreign field without delay. There are only sixty candidates, according to its lamentation.

A village curate tells how a poor woman was one day grumbling over all her woes, and he remonstrated with her. "Oh, come now—come my good woman," said he, "you must allow that Providence has been very good, upon the whole—very good indeed—to you!" To this remark she replied: "So 'E 'ave, sir—so 'E 'ave mostly. I won't deny it; but I sometimes think 'E 'ave took it out in indignation!"

Rev. J. R. Broughton, Oaks Rectory, Taunton, says: "I reckon a man has to 'homilet' for himself or talk the usual pulpit twaddle, which, as it seems, is an offence to men and angels." We respond for men, Quite so. What the angels may think—if there are any angels—is a point upon which we can offer no opinion.

The *Rock* replies to a correspondent who sighs: "Oh, for a Protestant Scott or Dickens!" The *Rock* says: "As a matter of fact, Dickens had at times a strongly-marked Protestant leaning, though as a rule his clergy and ministers suggested that the author had scant sympathy with either party in religious controversy." The concluding portion of this reply probably arrives pretty near the truth.

The *Fatal Opulence of Bishops* engaged the attention of the Church Conference of the Deanery of St. Pancras, held in St. Michael's Mission Buildings, Greenland Street, N.W., on Tuesday evening, May 14, when the following resolution, after ardent discussion, was carried by twenty-three votes against eighteen: "That reform is needed in the style of residence, stipend, and title of our Diocesan Bishops."

The *Bradford Observer* refers to the Deity as "the universal painter and decorator." This was in connection with welcoming the Liberal Federation. The universal painter and decorator, if we look around, does not seem to have been remarkably busy—not even in Bradford for the reception of the Federation.

Sir Charles Warren, who has been addressing a May meeting, observed that on board a crowded transport it would often happen that men would gather together in bands in different parts of the ship and sing hymns, but the moment a light was brought to bear upon them, and they could see each other's faces, it was all over. In the same way, it was most difficult to make the men sing out at a soldiers' service. If the officers all joined in, then the men would make the responses and sing the hymns from their heart, but not otherwise.

"The moment the light was brought to bear upon them and they could see each other's faces" they probably smiled, as the ancient priests did, according to a well-known classical allusion.

"Filius," writing to a Church paper, says: "I have heard more than one sincere Agnostic bitterly regret that he had not had any religious training." How, then, did he happen to become an Agnostic? It is the religious training which often dispose men to scepticism. That an Agnostic should regret that he had not been subjected to it is obviously absurd.

Three hundred and eleven clergymen and ministers hold shares in five of the principal British breweries. There are 178 who hold "Guinness." In Sweden it is an offence against the Constitution for ministers of the Gospel to have any financial interest in distilleries.

The Bishop of London seems to be an advocate of religion being confined to one day in the week only. This, indeed, is

(in the opinion of the *City Press*) the sole meaning that can be attached to the remarks he made at the festival of the Sons of the Clergy. The livings of the City, he said, must be regarded in the future in the light of pensions, and bestowed on aged clergy who have rendered at least thirty years' good service in the slums. In other words, the City is to be the workhouse for the worn-out, a home of rest for the broken down, and a retreat for those who are anxious to retire on their laurels.

What is the Lord doing that he does not look after the deplorable condition of the great Oakley Rectory, Kettering? It seems that the roofs and walls are so dilapidated that his own man of God, the Rev. A. G. Tomblin, has to sleep with a coat on and an umbrella over his head to keep off the rain and wind—both of which are supposed to be sent by the Lord of All, for whom the Rev. Tomblin preaches.

The Rev. W. Millington, rector of Cottingham, after praying against sudden death, died suddenly in his rectory garden.

Is the Press gagged by Romanism? is the question to which the *Methodist Weekly* has been addressing itself. Romanists themselves make pretensions as to influence they are able to exert on our newspapers. A correspondent of our contemporary draws attention to the entire suppression of reports of a sensational police-court case dealing with very flagrant conduct on the part of a Romish priest. The omission can scarcely have been accidental.

The *Cheshunt and Waltham Weekly Telegraph* has just been enlightening its readers on the subject of the Sovereign's relationship to the Anglican Church. Criticising a statement made by a Waltham Baptist minister, Rev. G. Kilby, who, in a Sunday morning address to his young people, is reported to have said that "the Sovereign is the head of the Church," our contemporary observes: "Of course, there is, as Thomas Moore says, 'A sense in which the Sovereign is the head of the Church, but that is the sense in which he is the head of every spiritual, civil, municipal, or other institution in the country recognised in its position as lawful, or established by law.'" According to the Church authority here quoted, the Sovereign is, then, head of the Anglican Church simply in the sense in which he is head of the Wesleyans, the Congregationalists, or any other legally-recognised religious body. It is absurd to suppose him head of any church or chapel.

It will be seen from the following request, says the *Umpire*, issued to members of that worthy body, the Actors' Association, that their sub-committee hope to leave this world a better place than they found it: "The Sub-Committee of the Council of the Actors' Association would be obliged if you would let them have a reply, by return, to their letter requesting you to act as a missionary on behalf of the Association. They have already received prompt and favorable replies from almost every other member applied to."

But this request is obviously open to some such answer as: "Dear Sir, I regret that, as I have no fixed religious convictions (in common with a large percentage of the profession), I am unable to do as your post-card suggests." The Actor-Missioner is a new type indeed! Perhaps the Association Missions will be as a counterblast to the Salvation Army, which is reported to have started a "Salvation stage," presumably of the "Blood and Thunder" order.

Sunday sailing on the Clyde has been the subject of some excitement. The announcement that the steamer *Duchess of York*, known as the "Sunday Breaker," begins her Sunday sailings on the Clyde, calling at Dunoon, has made the Town Council of Dunoon resolve to keep the pier closed as usual, and some exciting scenes are looked forward to when the steamer seeks to land her passengers, who will require to climb over spiked palings and gates at the pierhead.

The anti-Sunday trading mania has attacked Chesterfield now, says the *Sunday Chronicle*. The police have found that butchers, ginger-beer vendors, greengrocers, grocers, ice-cream, newspaper, and sweets sellers, tobacconists, photographers, and milkmen—over one hundred persons in all—had persistently offended against the peace of our Sovereign Lord the King and his liege subjects by selling articles on the Sabbath Day. The Council has, therefore, instructed the Chief Constable to caution and proceed against these shameless criminals. In the interests of morality the Council has also forbidden the sale of lemonade and tea in the park on Sundays. Which only shows how little wit one need have to be a Councillor in Chesterfield.

If these people sell goods on Sunday, it is because other people want to buy them. Were there no buyers, there would be no sellers. The supply is proof of a demand. If the demand for intelligence were greater in Chesterfield at election time, there would be more of it on the Council. Men who can hold it sinful to buy and sell tea and ginger-beer in a park on Sunday are really too saintly for this sorry world.

To Correspondents.

- E. B. RUSSELL.—Thank you for sending us the report. We are pleased to see it, and have referred to it in "Sugar Plums."
- J. HERRINGTON.—Mr. Bottomley's paragraph in the *Sun* on Mr. Foote's trial before Judge North was noticed in the *Freethinker*. You must have overlooked our reference. We should be glad to think, as you appear to, that the Freethought millionaire was coming along. He is certainly wanted. It is only with fairly large resources that anything very decisive can be done nowadays.
- TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND.—J. Herrington, 1s.
- J. G. STUART.—Order executed. Thanks for cuttings; also for your interesting and encouraging letter. We are pleased to hear that you so enjoy reading the *Freethinker*, and that you have found our *Infidel Death-Beds* and *Darwin on God* and Mr. Cohen's *Foreign Missions* so useful in your discussions with orthodox friends and acquaintances.
- W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings. Your letter will appear in our next, owing to the pressure upon our space this week of the Conference Report.
- YOUNG FREETHINKER.—Discussion is, as you say, always more or less interesting. We welcomed the letters from Mr. Alcock and Mr. Coles. Both write courteously, and their letters enable Freethinkers to see how Christians look at certain questions, besides affording an opportunity for effective replies. Some malignant idiots do not appear to understand intellectual hospitality. Mr. Charles Watts informs us that he was accosted the other day by a man in the street, whom he had seen at meetings, and who told him that it was said that Mr. Alcock or Mr. Coles, or both of them, had given Mr. Foote money to let their letters appear in the *Freethinker*. Of course this report is without a shadow of foundation. Moreover, it is very ridiculous. Freethinkers boast their love of discussion, and a clergyman is really an official representative of the orthodox side. We are always glad to see one coming along.
- OWING to Miss Vance's absence from London we are, unfortunately, unable to print this week the usual list of outdoor lectures in London. The stations will all be going as usual, and Freethinkers who visit them will find lectures being delivered by one or other of the N. S. S. speakers.
- J. LAID.—Better let Mr. Watts and Mr. Alcock settle the points raised between themselves in the discussion. Thanks all the same.
- J. YOUNG.—Hardly as suitable for our columns as your verses usually are.
- J. R. W.—Rather out of our line.
- G. STECHER, 16 Hind-street, Poplar, London, E., with reference to a correspondent who wanted to know something about the present condition of Mormonism, says that he will be happy to furnish information to any applicants.
- W. NELSON.—Scarcely a Lecture Notice. We have given you a Sugar Plum.
- E. R. W.—Held over as desired.
- JAMES NEATE.—It is very wicked of your Branch to flourish so famously in Victoria Park when you are supposed to have been annihilated by a certain Christian Evidence champion.
- W. C. LONG.—Pleased to hear you were so delighted with our article on "Dreyfus and God." We exchange with *La Raison*, so the editors of the International organ can notice the article if they choose.
- W. RICHARDSON.—What is the "Metropolitan Discussion Forum"? Please give us some information. It is necessary before we can insert Lecture Notices.
- H. R. C.—Thanks for your trouble in the matter. It was curious, as you say, that Jehovah should torture a faithful servant, like the Secretary of the Christian Evidence Society, with such a slow and painful disease as cancer. Gratitude seems to be as rare in heaven as it is on earth.
- PAPERS RECEIVED.—*La Raison*—*Progressive Thinker*—*Public Opinion* (New York)—*Publishers' Circular*—*Yarmouth Mercury*—*Glasgow Daily Record*—*Literary Guide*—*Awakener of India*—*Boston Investigator*—*Blue Grass Blade*—*Watford News*—*East Anglian Daily Times*—*Freidenker*—*World's Advance Thought*—*Truthseeker* (New York)—*Sydney Bulletin*—*Manchester Courier*—*Crescent*—*Two Worlds*—*Secular Thought*—*Formby Times*.
- THE National Secular Society's office is at 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C., where all letters should be addressed to Miss Vance.
- FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C.
- THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.
- SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS:—Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements*:—One inch, 4s. 6d.; half column, £1 2s. 6d.; column, £2 5s. Special terms for repetitions.

Sugar Plums.

THE Athenæum Hall, Tottenham Court-road, will be closed on Sunday evenings during the summer. Mr. Foote will give due notice of the reopening. Arrangements are being made at present for a series of Freethought Demonstrations on Sundays in the London parks and other open spaces. Mr. Foote will superintend the organisation of these with the N. S. S. secretary, and probably speak at all of them. In this way he will be able to reach a far larger number of people than could be attracted within doors at this time of the year. Moreover, it will be an agreeable change to him as well as to his auditors. The fresh open air of a spacious park, in the summer at any rate, is preferable to the hot and dusty atmosphere of a London hall.

The National Secular Society's Annual Conference, which was held at Glasgow on Sunday, went off happily in every respect. Owing to the distance, and the rather bad times, there was not a good representation from the South of England, but the North and the Midlands were fairly represented. A list of the delegates will be found in the Report. Amongst the visitors we were glad to see Mr. and Mrs. Mumby (Newark), Mr. and Mrs. Grange (Bradford), Mr. and Mrs. Gott (Bradford), Mr. Sunderland (Bradford), and Mr. E. Treharne-Jones, who came from South Wales at our special request. We had some conversation with Mr. Jones, whom we met at Glasgow for the first time, and were much struck with his earnestness and sincerity. He is bent on delivering some open-air lectures in the Rhondda Valley, and we hope he will have the cordial co-operation of the local Freethinkers in this enterprise.

The Glasgow friends were indefatigable in looking after the comfort of visitors to the Conference, meeting trains, fixing up hotel and other accommodation, and seeing their guests about the city and through the Exhibition. The platform at the Secular Hall was tastefully decorated, and the President, when seated, was half-hidden with flowers.

The evening public meeting in the large hall of the Waterloo Rooms was a splendid success. The fine audience was most appreciative and enthusiastic, and the speakers were all in good form. The only drawback was the indisposition of Mr. Charles Watts, which prevented him from filling his place on the program. His friends will be glad to hear that it was nothing serious, or rather nothing dangerous. We believe he is himself again now. Mr. Cohen was not looking as well as he should either, and we were glad to hear that he was to spend a holiday with Mr. T. Robertson, the Glasgow secretary, in a quiet and healthsome spot by the sea. Mr. Ward also bore traces of fatigue. Altogether, it seems that Freethought advocates are not allowed to rust out. It seems rather too generally assumed that they are made of unbreakable material.

The statement made by Mr. Foote re the Freethought Twentieth Century Fund at the N. S. S. Conference will appear *in extenso* in an early number of the *Freethinker*. Meanwhile those who promised subscriptions, but have not yet sent them, are requested to note that the Fund closes absolutely with the present half-year—that is to say, on the last day of June.

The Bethnal Green Branch had a fine meeting in Victoria Park on Sunday afternoon, and Mr. Davies's lecture on Thomas Paine was much applauded. The Sunday evening lectures in Victoria Park begin to-day (June 2), and the local "saints" are requested to make a note of the fact. Mr. Cohen will be the lecturer both afternoon and evening.

The East London Branch holds a monthly members' meeting this afternoon (June 2) at 3.30, at the Stanley Temperance Bar, 7 High-street, Stepney. After the business is transacted there will be a discussion on "The Causes of the Boer War," in which the Government policy will be attacked and defended. Members are invited to attend and take part in these monthly discussions.

The Sheffield Secular Society goes on excursion to-day (June 2). Members and friends will meet outside Victoria Station at 1 o'clock for the 1.15 train to Wortley, whence the party will walk to Stainbro', where tea will be taken, and thence to Birdwell for the 7.53 train home.

An important half-yearly meeting of the West London Branch will be held at "The Victory," Newham-street, Edgware-road, on Thursday, June 6, at 8.30 p.m. Members are earnestly requested to attend.

The *Torquay Directory* reports a very unusual sort of

"sermon" by Mr. E. B. Russell, M.A., in Unity Hall, on a recent Sunday morning. The text was "the foolishness of preaching," and Mr. Russell showed how the power of the pulpit had waned with the growth of intelligence and the spread of education. Formerly the clergy told people how to die, but that gospel was now played out. The clergy would only be able to get congregations in the future by telling people how to live, and inspiring them towards a high ideal of conduct and character. It would be interesting to know what the local clergy think of Mr. Russell's "sermon." It is intended for their good, though, however they take it.

Mr. Cohen's pamphlet on *Foreign Missions* is highly praised in the June number of the *Literary Guide*. The reviewer says that Mr. Cohen "completely demolishes" the Foreign Missions idol of the Christian Churches. "He sears it with the scathing logic of facts, overwhelms it with the testimony of undeniable figures, and crushes it with arguments which no advocate of missions can answer." "We should like," the reviewer says, "to see this very able pamphlet widely circulated among members of the Christian Churches. If they could be induced to read it, the mixture of fraud, folly, and useless self-sacrifice known as missionary enterprise would soon dwindle to more modest proportions."

Reviewing another recent publication, the *Literary Guide* says that "Mr. Foote and the Freethought Publishing Company deserve the thanks and support of all Rationalists for presenting the world with this wonderfully cheap Twentieth Century edition of Paine's great work"—the *Age of Reason*. "The biography and annotations by Mr. Foote" are said to be "of great value and interest," and to be "characterised by all his accustomed literary grace and power." It is added that "the book should circulate by the hundred thousand wherever the English language is spoken."

Rev. Dr. A. J. Harrison has written, and published through Messrs. Cassell and Co., his autobiography, under the title of *An Eventful Life*. Dr. Harrison had many debates with Secularist leaders; one with Mr. Foote, and several with Mr. Bradlaugh. He was always a gentleman; and, although the following reference to Mr. Bradlaugh is probably not logical or orthodox, it does credit to Dr. Harrison's heart: "I liked him from the first; I loved him at the last. We were alike in this: neither of us ever knew when he was beaten. If either ever came to believe it, which is doubtful, it was only because other people said so. Peace to his memory. I prayed for him for twenty years before his death; and I pray for him still. The greater part of his life was an unconscious fight for Christ, and I expect to find him with Christ if I ever find myself where Christ is. 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me.' Amen, Lord Jesus, it was like Thee to say that; and Charles Bradlaugh knows now for whom he fought. I am a little lonely without him. May we grasp hands beneath Thy throne."

Secular Thought (Toronto) deserves better support than it seems to be receiving. "In Canada alone," the editor says, "do the Freethinkers seem to be going to sleep and allowing their one journal to die for want of sufficient support." Probably the apathy in Canada is largely owing to the want of platform advocacy. Journalistic work is invaluable, of course, but it does not arouse the same enthusiasm as effective oratory. We should like to hear that the Freethought cause in Canada had found an eloquent platform apostle.

The N. S. S. Conference Report occupies so much of our space this week that we are unable to give the usual supply of paragraphs and other "broken" matter. This will be atoned for, however, in our next issue. We may add that the Conference Report was produced by two members of the Glasgow Branch, who are to be congratulated on their work, and to whom we beg to tender our best thanks. Their copy required some editing in the interest of absolute accuracy, but that was inevitable in the case of a summary report, and on the whole we were agreeably surprised to find how well the "Two Glaswegians" had performed their generous task.

How to Help Us.

Get your newsagent to take a few copies of the *Freethinker* and try to sell them, guaranteeing him against copies that remain unsold. Take an extra copy (or more), and circulate it among your acquaintances. Leave a copy of the *Freethinker* now and then in the train, the car, or the omnibus. Display, or get displayed, one of our contents-sheets, which are of a convenient size for the purpose. Miss Vance will send them on application. Get your newsagent to exhibit the *Freethinker* in the window.

The National Secular Society.

REPORT OF ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

(Concluded from page 342.)

AFTERNOON SESSION.

On resuming, Mr. C. COHEN moved:—"In view of the changed and changing conditions of Freethought propaganda, this Conference is of opinion that steps should be taken as early as possible to (a) equip and train Freethought advocates, (b) found a central library for the use of the same as well as for lay members of the Society, and (c) supervise from headquarters in a more efficient manner the conduct of the propaganda in London and the provinces."

Mr. COHEN said that a change had come over Freethought propaganda during the last twenty or thirty years. There was a time when the fact of a man calling himself un-Christian was sufficient to call public attention to him, but since then the whole level of propaganda had reached a higher stage. The great defect that confronted the Secularist propagandist was that he had to work for a living during the week and give the balance of his time to Secularist work, and thus they got a lower standard of work from him. What could be done to remedy this defect? The Churches took good care to train their men. At present we stand as the only party in Great Britain that took no steps to train our men for their work. Then came the second point. There was the question of a library, which could be fairly and easily met by obtaining a fair number of books by purchase or presentation. Now came the question of funds to keep men who were coming into the movement, and if they did as they had been doing they would have to starve themselves or sell themselves to the Church. He said that something ought to be, and could be, done if adequate means were forthcoming.

Mr. SUNDERLAND (Bradford) spoke of the motion as an abstract resolution, which would not work out in practice.

Mr. THURLOW (West Ham) said that any changes should be of the nature of evolutionary changes. They must remember that the work of Freethought was being done by other agencies than those they represented that day. They had to remember Huxley and others, who, though perhaps not working on the same lines, still did the same work, and perhaps more effectively than they did now. Some of their speakers were too fond of dabbling in scientific subjects, and spoke on them with more confidence than even a Huxley. It was not always a question of books. He objected to the motion as being academic and unpractical.

Mr. WATTS supported the motion, but remarked that Mr. Cohen had omitted to tell them how it was to be done. It was quite true they could not do all that they desired, but he did not share the opposition to the study of books.

Mr. THURLOW, on a point of order, said he did not make use of the word "study," but merely referred to young lecturers making use of scientific terms they did not understand.

Mr. WATTS (continuing) advocated the importance of each one taking his or her share in the work, and of supporting existing agencies.

Mr. PEGG supported the motion, especially with regard to the supervision from headquarters, in a more efficient manner, of the propaganda in London and the provinces.

Mr. SULLIVAN (Bedlington) thought that if the local secretaries worked with greater energy there would be no necessity to obtain lecturers from headquarters.

Mr. CHAPMAN (South Shields) spoke in defence of the secretaries. He thought steps should be taken to get the public to attend meetings, and these would form a sufficient training ground for the future members of the Freethought movement. It was not more lecturers that were required, but more of the public to hear the lecturers.

Mr. COHEN replied that men were starved out of the movement, and that, although £10,000 were given to the Society to-morrow, they had not the men to do the work. The motion was carried.

CONGRATULATIONS FROM BELGIAN CONGRESS.

At this point Mr. FOOTE read the following telegram:—"Belgian Freethinkers' Congress send your Conference fraternal greetings." (Loud applause.)

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND.

Mr. FOOTE made a statement as to the Twentieth Century Fund, which will appear in an early number of the *Freethinker*, and asked whether the Conference wished the Fund to be continued or wound up.

Mr. Chapman moved that the Fund should be closed.

After some discussion it was agreed, on Mr. Foote's suggestion, that the fund should be closed at the end of the present half-year, Mr. Foote remarking that no such sum had previously been collected for the movement.

Mr. Cohen moved:—"That the best thanks of this Conference be tendered to the Secular Society, Limited, for undertaking the issue of the Twentieth Century Edition of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* in first-rate style at the low price of sixpence; and that this Conference urges Freethinkers throughout Great Britain to do their utmost to put this work into circulation amongst the masses of the

people." He thought that the book was turned out with great credit to the publishers, and next to the edition of Mr. Moncure D. Conway it was the best edited and best printed edition that had been issued to the public. The Free-thought Publishing Company had now under consideration the publication of Ludwig Büchner's *Force and Matter* at 1s.

Mr. FOOTE stated that the issue had cost nearly £200, and appealed for support for the Free-thought Publishing Company.

Mr. THURLOW moved Motion 14, which was carried:—"That the Freethinkers of this country should be strongly advised to give all the pecuniary support they can to existing agencies, which are quite numerous enough in the present state of our affairs, and all of which are greatly in need of funds for their operations."

Mr. FOOTE moved:—"That, in view of the very great assistance which the N. S. S. has derived from the Secular Society, Limited, this Conference expresses the hope that Freethinkers will remember this Society in their wills, and as liberally as possible, whether the bequests be large or small; and that Freethinkers may be assured that such bequests will be legally secure, and will certainly be applied to promoting the purposes for which they are intended." He said that the Secular Society, Limited, had already been remembered in several wills, and it was certain that the Society would receive bequests, but the more that was done the better. They ought to have a few thousand instead of hundreds. By this means they would realise much larger sources of income.

Mr. SPIVEY (Huddersfield) seconded, and the motion was carried.

Mr. WATTS moved:—"That the N. S. S. participate in the effort that is being made by a distinguished Continental committee to raise a memorial of Auguste Comte in the form of a statue in the city of Paris."

Mr. THURLOW seconded.

Mr. FOOTE followed in support of the motion, which was carried.

Mr. FOOTE moved:—"That the Executive be instructed to consider and report upon the whole question of Branches, subscriptions, and membership, with a view to securing an increased revenue and a more satisfactory list of adherents."

He suggested that all Branches should be instructed to send a list of members to the Society, so that, in the event of the suicide of any Branch, a list of the members of that Branch might be available, and something done to revive it.

Mr. STACE seconded.

Mr. THOMAS ROBERTSON suggested that the amount to be sent by Branches to headquarters should be reduced from one shilling to sixpence per member, and he was of opinion that, instead of the Society in London being a loser thereby, their funds might possibly be swelled, as a greater number of subscribers would result from such an arrangement.

Mr. THURLOW moved that a vote of thanks be given to the Glasgow Branch for the pains they had taken to make the Conference a success.

Mr. CHAPMAN, in seconding, suggested that London should have a greater share of the Conferences, as it is conveniently situated.

Mr. THOMAS ROBERTSON replied for the Glasgow Branch.

Mr. JOHN TURNBULL moved that a vote of thanks and congratulation be given to Mr. E. Treharne-Jones for his heroism in leaving the Church and joining the Free-thought movement, and appealed to the party to support Mr. Jones in his struggle.

Mr. PEGG seconded, and said that in leaving the Church a man makes considerable sacrifices, and he should be made to feel that the change has been, not for the worse, but for the better.

This was carried with applause.

Mr. JONES thanked the Conference for the manner in which the motion had been received, and in the course of his remarks he supported the suggestion that lists of members should be sent by all Branches to headquarters. He had great difficulty in the matter in South Wales, and would have had the work made easier if such a list had existed in a central place like London.

Mr. FOOTE then closed the Conference with a few appropriate words, which were warmly applauded.

THE EVENING DEMONSTRATION.

Between the hours of four and five, while the second session was transacting business, the beautiful weather which had prevailed in Scotland for the past fortnight, scarcely a drop of rain falling during that period, was broken by a much-needed shower. This change contributed, no doubt, to the immense success of the evening demonstration in the Grand Hall of the Waterloo Rooms, as fine weather, especially on Sundays, has the effect of making people prefer walking in the open air to stuffing themselves up in a dusty hall. The Waterloo Rooms is seated for 1,500 people, and little short of that number assembled to witness the proceedings. It could be easily inferred from the remarks heard on all sides that many ladies and gentlemen were present who had never before attended a Free-thought meeting. Mr. Baxter sold a large quantity of Free-thought literature, while Mr. Gott appeared to be reaping a copper harvest in the distribution of his summer number of the *Truthseeker*. A string band of ten performers, under the direction of Mr. F. W. Turnbull (who comes of a

musical family, and is himself an exquisite cornet player), gave several selections from "Maritana," which were received with great satisfaction by the audience.

Mr. G. W. Foote occupied the chair, and he was supported by Messrs. Watts, Cohen, Ward, D. Black, and J. F. Turnbull (Glasgow).

Mr. FOOTE, in opening the proceedings, remarked that they had been holding in Glasgow the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society. That Society was established many years ago by a great and distinguished man, but one who had been subjected to a great deal of persecution and misrepresentation—namely, Charles Bradlaugh. (Applause.) It was likely they would hear opinions expressed by the various speakers which would not meet with general approval by those present; but if there were any who desired to hear more of those opinions they could do so by attending the Secular Hall, 110 Brunswick-street, where Free-thought lectures were delivered on Sundays during the sessions of the local branch of the N. S. S.

Mr. PERCY WARD, who was well received, said that, as Freethinkers, they could look back with satisfaction at what had been accomplished in the past in the warfare against superstition, and could also look forward to the future with the expectation that the battle would be even more productive of good results. Science had met superstition in the open field and had won. Priests had to alter their doctrines so as to keep pace with the progress of rationalistic thought. The Higher Criticism was picking holes in the fabric of supernaturalism. Hell was undergoing a process of dis-establishment, and becoming so cold that it would be necessary to wear an overcoat when one got there. (Laughter.) Darwinism had relegated the stories of the Fall and the Devil into the region of barbarous myths. The Free-thought propagandist used as weapons the findings of modern science. Scientists such as Darwin, Haeckel, Huxley, and Clifford had all shown that there was nothing supernatural about the world; while the keen intellects of such men as Thomas Paine, Richard Carlile, George Jacob Holyoake, Charles Bradlaugh, R. G. Ingersoll, and G. W. Foote had, through the means of cogent reasoning and common sense, completely shattered the time-begrimed imbecilities of supernatural religion. And these men had suffered for trying to make men free and rational beings. Mr. Holyoake had undergone nine months' imprisonment for suggesting that God should be put on half-pay during a time when distress was rife; while Mr. Foote had suffered the hardships of twelve months' incarceration for criticising in a fearless and sarcastic manner the absurdities of Christianity. He (Mr. Ward) considered the work which Secularism had set its mind on accomplishing was the grandest movement in the world; and he hoped that everyone interested in it, as he was, would give the best energy of their life, the best reason of their brain, and the best passion of their heart to further the cause of intellectual freedom. (Loud applause.)

Mr. C. COHEN, in the course of a very humorous address, delivered in his usual cool and convincing manner, pointed out that Nature was no respecter of the speculative opinions of anybody. Prussic acid produced the same disastrous results if introduced into the body of either a sceptic or a believer. A religious enthusiast had no more power to annihilate the forces of Nature than had a Secularist. If a large number of parsons desired to go to Australia, they would pin more faith in securing a safe voyage by engaging an Atheist captain who knew navigation than employing a captain who knew his Bible well, but was deficient in nautical knowledge. Religion, indeed, was not a potent factor in practical, every-day life. Priestcraft endeavored to make people turn their eyes towards a hypothetical New Jerusalem in the skies, while they coolly proceeded to pick their pockets. Secularism taught that, until the masses were educated and freed from the shackles of superstition, no satisfactory attempt could be made to solve the social problem.

During the course of Mr. Cohen's speech it was observed that Mr. Watts was very ill at ease, and at the conclusion of the address he left the platform.

Mr. G. W. FOOTE then rose, and said it was with deep regret he had to announce that Mr. Watts, whom he had intended calling upon to speak at this juncture, had not been at all well during the day, and he had become so much worse only a few moments ago that he was compelled to retire from the meeting. He (Mr. Foote) was sure that the meeting would, with him, extend its deepest sympathy to Mr. Watts.

Mr. FOOTE then proceeded to give his own address, which was one of the most powerful and eloquent he has delivered in the city of St. Mungo. Again and again did the audience cheer vociferously, until the building shook with the reverberations of applause and laughter which were evoked by the logic, sarcasm, wit, philosophy, and earnestness of his words. In the course of his speech he said Atheists were much misrepresented and vilified by the men of God and their satellites. While in prison he heard two gaol birds give vent to the opinion that, if Atheistic principles were allowed to be sowed broadcast over the land, no one's property would be safe. (Laughter.) Mr. Foote endeavored to make his audience understand that the Atheist did not go about the streets buttonholing everybody, and saying, "Have you heard the

latest news? There is no God!" (Laughter.) The Atheist simply contended that, if God had an objective existence, he (the Atheist) did not know that illustrious personage; and was of the further opinion that, if the divinity were desirous of dispelling the darkness which enveloped his personality and bringing himself into the range of human experience, he was quite fit, if almighty and beneficent, to do so without employing the assistance of intermediaries. Nor did the Atheist wish to loosen the bonds of morality. There was no logic in the position of a man who, having loved and cherished his wife and children while a believer in God, should, on finding out that the Lord of Hosts was a figment of the imagination, go home and assault his wife and children, and become a *roué* or a drunkard. The real fact of the matter was that the actions of men were controlled by their emotions, not by a belief in some gaseous being at the back of all phenomena. Atheism neither affirmed nor denied the existence of a future life. Like its attitude towards the God-idea, it knew nothing about the matter, and no evidence had yet been forthcoming to clear up the mystery. Again, some people were of opinion that Secularists aimed at destroying the sanctity of the Sabbath and converting it into a day of work rather than of rest. That was not so. Secularists aimed at rationalising the Sabbath—making it a day of healthy, intellectual pleasure—a day when a man with his wife and family might spend a few hours in country or at coast, away from the poison-laden atmosphere of the crowded and smoke-begrimed city. The Sabbath was the day on which the parsons filled their coffers, and that was the secret of their opposition. In the course of his powerful peroration, Mr. Foote pointed out the inconsistency of the clerical fraternity in teaching Jesus's doctrine of the blessedness of the poor. If that doctrine were true, then all the archbishops and bishops in the Church would have a warm time of it in that brimstone lake which they were so fond of describing. Mr. Foote concluded a brilliant speech with a thrilling flight of oratory describing the great mission of the Religion of Humanity, and retired from the platform amidst a tremendous outburst of applause.

TWO GLASWEGIANS

Man His Own Providence.

(Continued from page 332.)

THIS universal possession of human reason was all that nature gave, or all that God gave. The world has made advance just in proportion as it has trusted its reason; it has halted in the mighty progress just in proportion as it has discredited or ignored its reason. Let us be fair with the influences and benefactions of religion. Let us concede to them all that may be justly claimed, but let us not for a moment believe that they have ever been to this world a source of knowledge or an element of progress. They have been chains, they have been impediments, they have been obstructions in the way of the advancing race. Infidelity comes to be simply falseness or disloyalty to one's own reason. Infidelity is not lack of belief, in any just acceptance of the term; infidelity is believing a thing in opposition to evident reason or the moral sense. In the current use of the term, the Infidel is the one who does not believe the commonly-accepted doctrines of religion; but a man may believe all of those things and be an infidel, in the profoundest sense, to the highest obligation nature ever laid upon man.

FOLLY OF COMPULSORY BELIEF.

It is folly to think that a man ought to believe anything. The only compulsion of belief is that which is brought by clear thinking and by inexorable reason. There cannot possibly be any virtue in a belief; there cannot possibly be any demerit, or lack of virtue, in the want of a belief. The time will come when men in the Church and out of it will know that it is more dignified and more worshipful, and more honoring to an infinite wisdom, for a man to stand fair and fearlessly, and absolutely refuse to believe anything and everything unless it compels its own belief by its resistless reasonableness. It is not easy for men to separate themselves from the tradition or the superstition that there is a necessity—a moral necessity—in belief.

The belief in any doctrine may be the extreme of infidelity. Suppose a man were to say he believes in the immaculate conception, or suppose he says that he believes that God is angry every moment with the sinner. If he is honest in that, he simply represents a condition of mind that is abnormal, and that cannot be classified with the rational, the sane, or the just. There is a certain function performed by a religious

belief which answers in many people's experience for the arduous task of thought. When a man believes a thing, or thinks he must, he is simply elevating some other man above himself, and is worshipping, paying his homage, not to a God, but to some human being that he has practically deified. Let us suppose that all the current doctrines of religion are true; let us suppose that the five points of Calvinism are absolutely correct; that the Bible, in all of its statements, is inerrant, and without any admixture of error; that the threat is true and real; that every man that disbelieves these doctrines will be sent into everlasting darkness—what of it, if all are true? What does it matter to a rational being?

WHAT CAN THE RATIONAL MAN DO?

Suppose one was in the agony of despair about his sins, and trembling in an awful and nameless fear before his conception of an angry God, what could he do in those circumstances? How could he believe what is unbelievable? How could he force upon his reason what is unreasonable? We shall have to distinguish sometime between the religious mood and the rational mood, between worship in the old sense and calm, just thinking; and if those things are all true, then there is no escape for the man that is candid and sincere. Hell awaits him, and to hell he must go. Suppose he does go there; suppose that is the doom of the honest-thinking man. If it gives a just and infinitely wise God any satisfaction, if it redounds to the glory of an infinite being, to know that in the remedyless and meaningless punishments of hell honest souls are suffering forever, what can the rational man do but continue to suffer? I will believe, if those things are true, if the determination of an endless destiny is to be made upon the accident of a belief or the want of a belief in unbelievable things—I have faith enough in the great infinite to believe that if he ever can be reached by a delegation from hell of honest and candid men who will represent to him the facts in the case and the grounds upon which they were technically doomed, I believe the infinite will make an amendment in his everlasting government and depopulate hell. I cannot think that there is any great good coming to the world through persistent belief in the unbelievable. I cannot think that the mission of the Church, or the function of worship, or the highest destiny of ecclesiasticism, with all of its splendid organised powers, is simply to hush reason into a slumber. I cannot believe that the world is to be lifted up and advanced that way.

FREETHINKERS MISREPRESENTED.

There are multitudes of people who think the man that is not religious, in the old sense—the Freethinker, the Liberalist—has no aim in this world but one of destructiveness; has no inspiration but to tear down. Thousands of people look with extreme unkindness, and are sometimes betrayed into unloving speeches about the people that discard all of the old. I want to say to them that beneath the so-called infidelity of every infidel, beneath the doubt of every Freethinker, back of and justifying the giving up by every emancipated man of the old dogmas, is this profound, passionate belief that the world never can attain to its highest and best so long as it builds its hopes upon a falsehood; that it is being kept back, hindered, obstructed by the old beliefs. I should be far from saying that the influence of the old religious beliefs is aggressively bad; I do not think the Church makes anyone any worse, and that is saying a great deal. But I do believe it stands in the way of progress, and is unable to make the world any better. There are people who are suspicious about Freethinking. They say the world is not ready for it yet; that society, as it is organised now, needs the restraining influence of a strong ecclesiasticism; that there may not be any hell, but it is useful to keep some within bounds; that the flood-gates of evil passion, wickedness, and crime would be thrown open, and the world would be inundated with lawlessness, if these restraints were taken away. There are multitudes that honestly believe that. Let me state that same belief in other language: This world is so organised, man is so much the victim of wickedness and wrong, the infinite power is so limited and abridged, the eternal laws of consequence are so lax and so poorly administered, that the great structure of morality must be founded upon

alsehood and built up with deception. That is the statement of the same thing in another way. For one, I will believe that the old world is so nearly sane that truth in all things is wholesome and helpful and elevating, and can be trusted, and ought to be trusted. I will not believe that the ultimate emancipation and perfection of man requires the perpetuation of a single falsehood, or the bowing down to any myth and believing it to be truth. It is for this reason that the great names in the past have become as stumbling-blocks to the human world.

JESUS CHRIST NOT A BENEFIT TO THE WORLD.

I believe that Jesus Christ has been more of an injury to this world than a benefit, not because of any imperfection or defect in the man, but because of the fact that men have used his name without reason. If he had intended that he was to be idealised and deified, if he had ever imagined that he was to be a symbol inscribed upon all the banners of Christendom, can any doubt that he would have taken pains to write accurately and in detail the things that he believed and taught and wanted his followers to teach? The fact that he permitted himself after the space of a few months—at the outside three years—to pass utterly out of sight; the fact that he left no manuscript, indited or dictated no writings whatever, was willing to go and perform his mission, and then go and, if need be, be forgotten; the fact that he lived and passed out of this world that way, is suggestive at least of the conclusion that he expected to be eliminated as far as his personality was concerned. Confucius was wiser than he, for he taught and wrote and left it. Socrates was wiser than he, for he taught and wrote and left his writings. Jesus walked by a light that was within himself, and not by a borrowed light, and, however divine or gracious that great life may be, that light that shone in him can shine for no other.

THE LIGHT MUST SHINE IN EVERY BRAIN.

Man is made in such a way that he cannot walk well or bravely by borrowed light. Tradition, repetition, the sounding repeatedly of great names, do not constitute illumination. If men were to follow Christ in a rational way, they would do as he did with the teachers that preceded him: find what they can in his teachings that recommends itself, and endeavor to see for themselves if it is truth. Merely to repeat, to follow in the old slavish sense, is another way to escape the arduous toil of thinking. To believe upon the authority of any great name is mental slavery. In the real sense, the light that was given to every man carried with it an individual responsibility upon every man for the truth. It is the only way that truth could come to this world. A revelation would not make it known. As Thomas Paine pointed out with clearness in an argument that never yet has been successfully attacked, if the Bible were a revelation, it could, in the nature of things, be a revelation only to those that had it at first hand. It must for others and in all time be only hearsay, only gossip. We could not know that they were inspired, even if they knew it themselves. The light must shine in every brain; the real illumination for everyone must come from within, and this places the dignity upon every human soul. Here is the difference: the believer must repeat what somebody else has said, and swear he believes it; the individual thinker must find for himself what is truth, and believe it simply upon the responsibility of his own reason.

If a man is ready to be dignified, to stand erect and free in this universe of God, he has outgrown the Church, and is ready for the joy that comes to the free-thinking soul; if he has not, if he has no time, if he is intellectually narrowed, if he prefers to believe, if he wants the soothing and soporific influences of faith, he should go to the revival meeting, leaving his reason, and get religion and salvation at once. The fact is, a man should get away from the idea that he is responsible in any sense for the existence of this universe, or the wisdom of God, or even for the eternal destiny of his own soul.

(DR.) J. E. ROBERTS.

—*Truthseeker* (New York).

(To be concluded.)

Correspondence.

"THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST."

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—But that Mr. Watts appeals to me in some places, I would willingly leave his article to be its own reply. It lies in six paragraphs, the first two of which need no notice. The third winds up by asking me "to refute" what he says. But here stands my difficulty. Mr. Watts often, as in this very paragraph, loses himself in a cloud of words which mean anything or nothing, and thus may safely defy refutation. I submit that every *clear definite* charge brought against Christ from start to finish of his essay has been hunted down and shown to be worthless. Paragraph four, like the two first, aims at nothing, and arrives at nothing. Paragraph five condemns my remarks on his treatment of perfection, which I am content to let stand or fall for what they are worth. But I beg to state, in addition to what I have said, that in his lengthy discussion of perfection Mr. Watts demolishes himself, for he wrote (May 5): "Before a person can decide what is perfection, he should be perfect himself." I now ask him to tell us whether he himself is perfect, or whether he has been trampling on his own theory. He can select which alternative he pleases. Near the end we have enlarged on the terrible grief and sorrow which weighed down Christ, before and during the crucifixion. Our critic must be slenderly equipped for the controversy he undertook if he does not know the Gospel explanation of the above. This is that Christ's death was a mysterious atonement, whereby the innocent took the place of the guilty. Why justice demanded such an atonement we shall learn fully hereafter; at present we know enough to be aware this death was not the death of an ordinary martyr. *Dale on the Atonement*, a well-known treatise, is well worth consultation on this point. Paragraph six opens clearly enough, and the cause is that Mr. Watts thinks he has caught me tripping at last on a side issue. He writes: "Will Mr. Alcock give me his authority for saying that Christ's friends, who thought He was beside Himself, subsequently changed their minds?" What I said (May 12) was "Christ's relatives"; and, if my questioner will turn to Acts i. 14, he will find the information he seeks. There we read the disciples continued in prayer with "Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren." I am a poor reasoner, according to Mr. Watts; still, I should be sorry, before I had asked a man's authority for a certain assertion, to indulge in a premature triumph by suggesting the wish had been father to the thought, etc. The end discusses Christ's riding into Jerusalem, and I shall offer no remarks thereon, as it is unintelligible to me, and I find my difficulty is no private property. Thus "Ex-Acolyte" writes last week: "No sane person for one moment thinks that Mr. Watts expects us to believe that Christ" rode both animals. Then, as exponent of what was meant, "Ex-Acolyte" gives his own theory, saying: "I read it that he was showing the ridiculous aspect of the story." The only meaning I can attach to this is, that the writer believed Mr. Watts suggested what he knew to be untrue, with the object of perpetrating a coarse joke. I leave the matter between both gentlemen.

"A. E. E." suggests I am wrong in thinking Christ's power is, on every side, enabling men to break the bondage of sin. But, assuredly, the fate of the two persons mentioned is no disproof of what I teach. Every true Christian knows the reason of their fall was neglecting to seek continually the strength which Christ is able and willing to give; and, further, the true Christian is aware that multitudes of reformed sinners are day by day seeking Christ's strength and finding it sufficient.

HENRY J. ALCOCK.

A very pretty enterprise is that which a trio of scientific savants is engaged upon. It is no less than a search for the Garden of Eden. The three gents are two Russians and an American, and they appear to have got on the right side of a capitalist named Jessup, who is willing to spend 50,000 dollars on the project. Well, I have heard of some ventures in my time, and have heard how fools and their money get parted; but this scheme seems entitled to the flour mill. Of course, it is suggested that, if the surmise of the scientific searchers is correct, the Garden of Eden will be discovered on American territory, and, consequently, Adam will be an American. Therefore the patriotism of the Almighty Dollarists has been aroused, and they have started out to find the Garden. So far the enterprise sounds fairly reasonable, but when I tell you that the expedition is now on its way to Klondike, in which cold and frigid region they expect to come across Adam's grave, I think you will agree that this is quite a laughing matter. Why, if one only remembers enough to bring to his mental vision all the pictures of the Garden of Eden he has seen, he would be certain to pooh-pooh the idea of Adam sitting on an icicle patting a polar bear. And one has only to think of the stories of Klondike, with its snowy wastes and its fields of ice, to scout the notion of Adam going about without a fur-lined overcoat. No, this Klondike theory won't wash; it's too hard and frost-bitten to wear; and I can only come to the conclusion that Jessup has got more money than he knows what to do with, and that the other fellows are in need of a bit.—*Sporting Chronicle*.

A wise man conquers circumstances; but a fool is afraid of his own shadow.—*Seneca*.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

[Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on Tuesday, and be marked "Lecture Notice," if not sent on post-card.]

LONDON.

THE ATHENÆUM HALL (73 Tottenham Court-road, W.): Closed for the summer.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell-road): 7, J. R. Macdonald, "Ethics and the Public Life."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, W. Heaford, "God, Man, and the Bible."

STATION-ROAD (Camberwell): 11.30, W. J. Ramsey.

PECKHAM RYE: 3.15, W. J. Ramsey.

BROCKWELL PARK: 3.15, F. A. Davies; 6.30, F. A. Davies.

CLERKENWELL GREEN: 11.30, A lecture.

EDMONTON (corner of Angel-road): 7, A lecture.

FINSBURY PARK (near Band Stand): 3.30, A lecture.

HAMMERSMITH BROADWAY: 7.30, A lecture.

HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30, A lecture; 3.30, A lecture; 7, A lecture.

MILE END WASTE: 11.30, A lecture; 7.15, A lecture. June 5, at 8.15, E. White.

STRATFORD (The Grove): 7, A lecture.

VICTORIA PARK: 3.15, A lecture.

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH: H. Percy Ward—11, in the Bull Ring; 3, Camp Hill; 7, Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street; Wednesday, in the Bull Ring at 8; Friday at Nechell's Green at 8.

CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday-school.

GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): 6.30, A lecture.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, F. J. Gould, "The Death of Socrates."

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): Excursion.

Lecturer's Engagements.

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham.—June 2, Birmingham.

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