

THE Freethinker

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If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties.—BACON.

More Christian Humbug.

THE Comedy of Passive Resistance goes on merrily. There is a full house to witness the performance, and the actors' friends in the auditorium greet it with rapturous applause. The rest of the audience regard it with various feelings. Some think it rare fun as unintentional farce. Others look upon it as a cynical outrage on common sense and common decency.

Since our last week's article in reply to a letter of remonstrance from a member of the company, called John Clifford, we have noted a number of other points calling for criticism. One of these was the observation of the Bishop of St. Asaph in the House of Lords. This gentleman implored both the great religious parties to come to an early understanding; otherwise, while they were fighting each other, the Secularist would steal the key of the schoolroom. Such a consummation, from the Bishop's point of view, was *not* devoutly to be wished, but above all things to be dreaded and averted. Naturally his lordship yearns to have everything the way the Church of England wants it, and to overwhelm the Free Churches in the present struggle. But if he cannot have the best he would like the second best, and that is a compromise with the *particular* enemy, rather than a surrender to the *common* enemy. Better go halves with a domestic rival than lose all to a foreign foe.

The next point is this. The May meetings of the Manchester United Methodist Free Churches have been held at Southport. A resolution was passed protesting against the Education Act, and recording the unalterable determination of the meeting to contend for justice. And what, forsooth, was justice? The Nonconformist policy as against the Church policy. Simply that and nothing more. The Rev. E. D. Cornish, who seconded the resolution, scorned the idea of any compromise with the Anglican party. He referred to what they had lost by the compromise of 1870. He said that the Free Churches must now fight for their own hand, and carry their own program in spite of all opposition. This attitude was further championed by the Rev. David Brook. But that gentleman was a little more wily. He believed that a compromise was possible, and blandly suggested the Nonconformist policy of Bible teaching as just the very thing. He was confident that such a compromise—that gave nothing to the Church of England except what it gave to the Free Churches—would be "acceptable to ninety-five per cent. of the nation." There was the other five per cent., of course, whom the reverend gentleman referred to as "Jews and Roman Catholics," and for whom "special arrangements could be made."

Now this Methodist preacher must be very ignorant of the facts, or have very hazy ideas of arithmetic, if he fancies that Jews and Roman Catholics together form only five per cent. of the population of England. As for such persons as Freethinkers, Secularists,

Agnostics, Atheists, and Rationalists, he apparently thinks their existence is imaginary. At any rate, he leaves them quite out of his calculation. Perhaps he does know of their existence as actual human beings, who have children, and pay rates and taxes, but considers them too abominably wicked to be taken into account. We rather incline, on second thoughts, to regard this as his view of the matter—for a reason we shall refer to presently. Meanwhile we desire to say a word or two about those "special arrangements" for the Jews and Roman Catholics. We deny that any "special arrangements" are so much as possible for the Roman Catholics, except granting them their own schools; and if that is done, why should not every other denomination have its own schools likewise? Jews could be protected by the Conscience Clause. But that is not a "special arrangement." It is what obtains universally. And we venture to suggest that if the protection of the Conscience Clause is a good enough "arrangement" for the Jews, it is good enough for the Nonconformists. Yet these people cry out to the heavens against this very "arrangement."

We come now to our reason for believing that this Methodist preacher is conscious of the existence of a dangerous number of unbelievers. He observed that a certain Church clergyman "would be better served if he worked in harmony with the Nonconformists of the town than by seeking to neutralise their efforts, and leave the power to fall into the hands of the party which contended for a purely secular system of education." This is the warning of one wolf to another. For God's sake don't let us fight each other and give a chance to the sheep!

The Methodist plan, like the Baptist and Congregational plan, is to control public education in the interest of Christianity; and to inflict any amount of "special arrangements" or downright injustice upon their opponents that may be necessary to that object.

The Free Churches and the Anglican Church, in suggesting the advisability of a mutual arrangement, remind us of Herod and Pilate in the Gospel story, who made up their old quarrel before the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Never was there a more precious display of Christian humbug than what is seen now on the part of these Nonconformist leaders. They deserve to be soundly whipped, and we hope they will be so. Not that we love the Church of England. But that Church is comparatively open and straightforward. It has the law of the country, and some sort of historic reason, for calling itself a national institution; it has never voluntarily foregone any of its privileges, and never pretended that other bodies could possibly have the same rights as itself. It has always declared its intention to capture the nation's children if it could. The Nonconformists call this priestcraft when it is directed against themselves. But when they have a chance of acting in the same way against Non-Christians, they call it wisdom, justice, and toleration. We consider ourselves, therefore, amply justified in applying to them the word "humbug." Their policy is humbug, and they are humbugs—at least in this matter; and we shall go on telling them so until they mend their ways.

G. W. FOOTE.

Immortality.—II.

(Continued from page 323.)

MR. SCHILLER, as I have said, without actually affirming a personal belief in immortality, yet argues that it is as justifiable as most of our other beliefs, and moreover professes to prove this on "the sole ground of reason." This he does, not by discussing whether immortality is a fact, a procedure that is expressly disclaimed, but "whether the science of ethics needs this conception for its own benefit." This, it may be noted at the outset, is in one sense begging the question at issue. People have been so long nurtured in the belief that another life is necessary to atone for the existence of this one, and that the needs of morality demand another existence, that their prejudices are bound to be excited in favor of such a plea, and so obscure any really rational consideration of the subject. Our conscious interpretation of the moral sense is what it is as the result of education, and as that has been predominantly religious, the religious interpretation, in the absence of a very careful analysis, must always command the larger measure of support.

The ethical argument, as stated by Mr. Schiller, is that "without immortality it is not possible to think of the world as a harmonious whole, as a moral cosmos. To show this, one has not to appeal to anything more recondite than the fact that in our present phase of existence the moral life cannot be lived out to its completion, and it is not permitted to display its full fruitage of consequences for good and for evil. Whenever might triumphs over right whenever the moral development of character is cut short and rendered vain by death, we are brought face to face with facts which constitute an indictment of cosmic justice, which are inconsistent with the conception of this world as a moral order. Unless, therefore, we can vindicate this order..... we have to abandon the ethical judgment of the world of our experience as good or bad; we have to admit that the ideal of goodness is an illusion of which the scheme of things reckons not at all."

Now I quite fail to see why if the cosmos is not a "moral cosmos"—by which Mr. Schiller means an extension of human moral ideals to the universe at large—why there is not a harmonious whole. The universe is consistent and harmonious so long as certain general principles can be shown to be of universal application, or, in other words, so long as its phenomena can be brought under some sort of generalisation. But it by no means follows that in order that this may be done generalisations that apply to specific and restricted phenomena shall be applicable to all. No one, for instance, would argue that unless biologic laws are applicable to the universe at large a harmonious cosmos is an impossibility. Anyone that reasoned in this way would be told that these "laws" were only framed to cover phenomena of a necessarily limited character. And this holds true also of morality. Morality is obviously something applicable only to human, or at most animal, society. Moral laws as much as biological or chemical laws are framed to cover a special group of phenomena, and it is therefore, perfectly illegitimate to make their validity dependent upon their applicability to the whole universe. The only thing that would warrant this would be if the universe displayed the same phenomena as those found in human society. And this is obviously not the case.

Mr. Schiller's argument, in brief, is dangerously like begging the question. The universe, he argues, cannot be a coherent whole unless it satisfies our moral demands. But such an argument obviously rests on the assumption that moral laws *are* applicable to the universe at large. It is not a conclusion reached by an examination of the facts, but something assumed to start with. And having assumed this, it is simple enough to argue that our reason is

not satisfied unless it is so. But so soon as moral principles are restricted to their legitimate sphere, the assumed necessity disappears, and Mr. Schiller can only repeat that he finds it a necessity. And to this one need only reply that almost any and every assumption could be justified in the same manner. Mr. Schiller can only justify his theory by extending the sphere of ethics to an area over which it has no application whatever.

The moral argument for immortality is, we are told, that "if death ends all, the moral life cannot be lived out, moral perfection is impossible, and the universe cannot be regarded as at heart ethical." Personally, I see no reason why the universe *should* be regarded as at heart ethical, any more than being at heart blue or green. But we can pass on to the other points raised in this summary. What is meant by saying that, if this life is all, moral perfection is impossible? If it means that none of us are at death as wise or as good as we might be if we lived much longer, the statement is a mere truism; but then why should we expect things to be different to what they are? The ultimate question is not what we would like to be true, but what is true. The reply would probably be that there is present with us a conception of a better moral condition than that we have actually reached, and that some allowance must be made for this; there is a feeling of moral dissatisfaction. Granted; but is this any more than one aspect of the general phenomenon of a reaction against unpleasant stimuli? Whether the dissatisfaction be mental or physical, it is certainly this. There would be as little sense of imperfection in the presence of complete adaptation as there is a sense of unpleasantness after eating when one is possessed of a healthy digestion. All that the feeling of moral dissatisfaction points to is adaptation that is only partial. That it points to an existence in some other state is a quite gratuitous and unwarrantable assumption.

And so long as development exists, so long must this feeling of dissatisfaction exist also, whether here on earth or elsewhere. A *perfectly* moral character would be one in which the sense of moral striving was altogether absent. It would be complete equilibrium; and that is only another term for stagnation. In such a condition there could be no consciousness of moral perfection, any more than one is conscious of possessing a liver when that organ works healthfully. So that Mr. Schiller is really faced with this problem. If the state hereafter is to be a state of *moral development*, the same sense of imperfection will exist then as exists now, and the demands of the moral sense (as interpreted by Mr. Schiller) are not met. If, on the other hand, complete perfection is gained, then Mr. Schiller, in order to reach a condition where complete moral satisfaction is *felt*, is arguing for a condition where no such satisfaction could exist.

But to those who argue that an after-life is not essential to morality, Mr. Schiller replies that "It is idle to say that goodness is not wasted, because the results of actions reverberate throughout the ages." The *good*, he says, persists, but *character* is an inalienable individual possession, and "Whatever worth we assign to character, that worth is lost to the world if immortality be denied"—a declaration that causes one to reflect how few of our philosophic writers have learned to apply the principles of evolution in a thoroughgoing manner. For what is character but a general term summing up a number of feelings and instincts by means of which the human animal adapts itself to its environment? Shut out from the conception of character the thought of adaptation to society existent, and that is to exist, and what is the value of character? It would be of no value whatever. Clearly, therefore, the value of character is dependent upon a continuance of the present human environment; and if a man lived on, say, thirty or forty years after losing his character, the disaster would be a grave one. But transport human character to some other stage of existence, and wherein lies its worth? A

character fashioned to meet the requirements of earthly life, transported to a state where, hypothetically, none of the conditions of earthly life obtain, would be of no value whatever. So that while Mr. Schiller argues for a future state in which the conditions are different to what they are on earth, he is also arguing for the perpetuation of a character which can only be of value so long as the conditions remain unaltered.

I have no doubt that Mr. Schiller would reply that his conception of a future life does not involve the conception of a state where the conditions are radically different to such as now obtain; but this seems to me an added confusion. Our character, such as it is, is moulded in conformity with conditions where reward and punishment do not follow with the mathematical precision of an ideal order. The law of heredity, and the fact of social aggregation, prohibits this. And any state where these principles do not operate, a state where might never triumphs to any degree over right, where evil-doers never succeed, and wrong-doers are always punished, is a state radically different to that to which our character is adapted.

Mr. Schiller's argument that the conception of immortality "indefinitely deepens the significance of life" strikes one as a mere piece of rhetoric. He asks us to think of what is "involved in the assertion that character is permanent and indestructible, and passes not from us however the fashion of our outward life may change. Think of it, that we can never escape from ourselves, from the effect of our deeds on our character, and that every deed leaves its mark upon the soul which may be modified, but can never be undone to all eternity."

Now, whatever force there might be in the above is quite lost when one bears in mind that Mr. Schiller has himself pointed out how socially inoperative the belief in immortality is. However irrational the form of this belief has been in past ages, there can be no question of its having been held earnestly and, in the vast majority of cases, without question. And if under such conditions the belief was not enough to secure a high level of conduct, it is hardly to be hoped that it will have any more beneficial influence when it is held under modern conditions.

Moreover, Mr. Schiller overlooks the fact that whatever force there is in his argument applies equally well to the materialistic position. For on either thesis, annihilation or perpetuation, we can never escape from ourselves while we are ourselves. Every deed does leave its mark upon the character, and this can never be completely wiped out while life lasts; and as life, whether it be of seventy years' or a million years' duration, covers the whole period of consciousness, the argument is as good when used by an unbeliever as when it is used by a believer. The truth is, however, that the ennobling effect of the belief in immortality is as much a myth as the teaching that people are always thinking of the importance of an after-life. It never has had an ennobling effect, and never will have. The good men who have believed in it would have been good without it, and the bad ones have never found it any serious check on their wickedness. Finally the thesis is upset by two considerations. The world *does* grow, on the whole, better; and the amount of unbelief current in society is steadily on the increase.

C. COHEN.

"Is a Man a Machine?"

THE above question is reminiscent of the bitter controversy between the advocates of Determinism and of Free-will to which all the ages have been compelled to listen. It has always been admitted that man has a will; but while the one school maintained that this will was bound, the other contended, with equal confidence, that it was free. The controversy rages to-day quite as fiercely as ever.

Practically all the scientists are firm believers in Determinism, while practically all the theologians are Free-willers. Strangely enough, theoretically or logically, some of the most distinguished divines, such as Augustine, Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards, have been thorough Determinists. By "freedom" Augustine understood, not "the power of willing either good or evil, but the power of willing good." This power Adam lost when he fell in the Garden of Eden. Since that sad day man's will has been by nature enslaved, so that until he believes in Christ and is born again, he can only will to do evil, and, in consequence, theoretically a Christian has power to will nothing but good. He who believes that God governs the world cannot consistently advocate Free-will; nor can a believer in Free-will harmonise his belief with the fundamental doctrine of the Divine Sovereignty.

It is wonderful to think with what sublime ease the theologians contradict themselves on this subject. In his Manchester Lecture, entitled, "Is a man a Machine?" Dr. R. Waddy Ross, Theological Tutor at Didsbury College, says: "Over against this theory that a man is a machine, stands an opposing theory, which makes a man a self-governing and self-determining unit in a community of units like himself, all related to and all under the gracious control of a supreme God." In the name of all the wonders, how can a man be a self-governing and self-determining unit if he is under the gracious control of a God who is supreme? Does not external control, however gracious, of necessity make self-government and self-determination absolutely impossible? Can any one be, at one and the same time, both governed by another and self-governed? Dr. Ross himself says, a few sentences before, that it is not absolutely necessary that there should be any connection between a man and an external source of power or influence before we can get him to work. But if a man is "under the gracious control of a supreme God," how can he be independent and free? If we live and move and have our being from and in God we cannot possibly be self-determining agents. The Divine Sovereignty, so vigorously defended by the Calvinists, is utterly irreconcilable with the Human Freedom, so enthusiastically taught by the Arminians.

Dr. Ross clings to the notion that Man is a dual being, composed of two parts. "The one part is the body, compacted of many tools and instruments, a machine than which man has not yet been able to devise one capable of more or of more exact uses. The other is something, not body, and therefore inaccessible to the senses, but able to use, and actually using, the body in a number of processes and for a variety of purposes." This something is, of course, what theology calls mind, soul, or spirit, which is declared to be a distinct creation of God. According to Dr. Ross it is this mysterious something that constitutes "the self of a man," and enables him to say, "I know," "I feel," "I will." This self of a man, Dr. Ross further assures us, "is distinct from, although it underlies, the different states of consciousness, and therefore the man himself is not made up of conditions of knowing and feeling and willing, but is something, a vital substance, that runs through all these states, but is also transcendent over them, and not exhausted by them." Now, it is in this "vital substance" that Dr. Ross discovers the possibility and the fact of Free-will. "The self of a man is able to choose amongst the various influences that play upon it from without and the various suggestions that arise within to invest anyone that he likes with superior force, and thus to make it a motive." What is gained for the argument by the assumption that the self of a man is distinct from the different states of consciousness, it is difficult to perceive. A vital substance inbreathed into the body by God would of necessity be in a state of bondage to the body. It would have no power to act independently. If there is a spiritual entity within us it has to pass through this world a miserable slave, and glorious

beyond description shall be its emancipation at death. It is indisputable that the character of a man's actions is invariably determined by his organic quality, and that every man receives his organic quality as a legacy from his ancestors. We are just exactly what the past has made us, and any change that may take place in us will be due to the influence of environment. Is heredity as affected by local circumstances that makes one man a philanthropist and another a murderer. According to Dr. Ross the self of a man is stronger than and can assert its independence of both heredity and environment. "Heredity," he says, "does not give anything that is unalterable." It is true that environment may somewhat modify the fruit of heredity, but nothing can utterly destroy it. We are told that "many a man has risen from the slums to almost every kind of eminence in the state and country"; but what is it that accounts for the difference between one man and another? Why do not all the denizens of slums rise to greatness? Is it the fault of the soul or of the body? If the body is to blame, then the soul cannot be free; but if it is the soul that is at fault, then the guilt must lie at the door of the maker of the soul. If will is a faculty of an immaterial and invisible soul, the responsibility for all the will does must rest on God, its creator.

In any case, the will is not free. On the assumption that it is a faculty of the mind and that the mind is distinct from the body, we must conclude either that God creates souls or minds of different sizes and qualities, or else that in almost every instance the soul is handicapped by the body. But is it not much simpler and more logical to regard the will as a function of consciousness, which man exhibits in common with all the higher animals? The existence of the soul, as a vital substance or entity distinct from the body, is a pure assumption supported by no evidence whatever, but contradicted by several important facts. Self-consciousness is the grandest product of evolution. We can trace its growth and development until it reaches its culmination in man. Infants have no consciousness, and students of child-life tell us that they do not develop it until they have begun to speak. Now, will, as a function of consciousness, is exercised by all the higher animals; and it is clear that the will of a dog does not differ in kind from that of a man. Everybody has seen a dog weighing alternatives and hesitating before making his choice. In man consciousness is more refined and complicated than in the highest animal below him; but in kind it is precisely the same. Man acts from himself. He is an organism that must live its own life and obey its own laws. Describe to me the quality and quantity of a man's organism, and I will undertake to predict how that man will act under given conditions. Professor Haeckel says: "We now know that each act of the will is as fatally determined by the organisation of the individual, and as dependent on the momentary condition of his environment, as every other psychic activity." Against this statement Dr. Waddy Ross produces not a single argument. He merely makes a few assertions which have been made a thousand times before, but not one of which bears on the subject in dispute.

He asks: Are inherited qualities "unalterable? Do they determine and fix the subsequent character of the man?" Then he answers: "There is a life of St. Peter to be found in incidents recorded in Holy Scripture; and the changes that were wrought in the character of that apostle alone are a sufficient witness to the contrary. You hardly need other witnesses." What changes were wrought in the character of Peter? The New Testament records none. To the last he remained the same impulsive, volcanic, noble-hearted but cowardly man that he was at the first. There is nothing to indicate that he ever ceased to be what heredity and environment had made him. On one occasion Jesus himself is said to have designated him as Satan. On the night before the crucifixion he is reported to have angrily denied all knowledge of his Master. Many years

afterwards he played the coward at Antioch, for which crime Paul publicly reprovved him. And yet, in spite of all this, Dr. Ross audaciously asserts that the changes wrought in his character alone are a sufficient witness against the law of heredity!

Another example cited is the case of John Bunyan. I must give the very words:—

"Here, for example, is a man, a drunkard, and I suppose bad in many other respects. At last he finds his way into jail, a drunken tinker; but to-day that man is known as John Bunyan, the writer of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He managed to discover some means of effectually overcoming the deplorable and vicious and weak environment of his early life."

That picture of Bunyan is historically false. John Bunyan's father was much superior to most in the class to which he belonged. He lived in a fixed residence, and sent his son to a village school where he was taught reading and writing. From the beginning John Bunyan was pure, sober, and good-principled; and although often indulging in fun and frolic, there is no evidence that he ever did anything that was really wrong. He certainly never deserved to be called a drunkard; and it is too bad that at this time of day a minister of the Gospel should so characterise him. Bunyan inherited genius, and it is his genius alone that has given him a place among the immortals. But it was his environment that made him a Puritan. Heredity gave him his genius, and environment his form of religion. But there is absolutely nothing in the life of John Bunyan to prove the freedom of the will. If a man rises from the slums, it is because he has not inherited the slum-character and has been brought under the influence of a better environment. But the majority never leave the slums, because they are hopelessly in the grip of the slum-character and the slum-atmosphere, or because the slum has entered into their blood.

Dr. Ross asserts that "God and the Spirit of God, with the gracious influences which he pours persistently into human life, are integral parts of the environment of every man," and that if we "leave out these unseen forces we of necessity get into all sorts of perplexed reasonings and hopeless conclusions." But if these unseen forces are present and at work, if God is persistently pouring gracious influences into human life, why are there slums at all, why is there such a thing in existence as a vicious and corrupting environment, why are human beings allowed to degenerate? Our reasonings are more perplexed and our conclusions more hopeless when we assume the reality of such forces than when we deny it. Such an assumption makes the slums and bad environments utterly inexplicable.

Towards the close of his lecture Dr. Ross waxes exceedingly pious and emotional, and preaches a touching little sermon on the possibility of salvation for the lowest and most abandoned people. "No man need despair," he says, "so long as a single shred of humanity remains about him. If he has any power to change his purpose at all, there are aids, human and divine, awaiting him, by means of which he may triumph over himself and over every vice that cleaves to him, and become worthy in the eyes of God and of his fellows." That sounds ineffably sweet, and its only fault is that it is not true. Dr. Ross knows well that there are tens of thousands in England to-day who are lost beyond the hope of recovery. Their organism is incurably diseased, and the environment intensifies the incurableness. No appeal touches them. No proffered help can avail with them. They are the scum and refuse of their kind. Nor can you blame them in the least. It is their misfortune, not their sin, to be what they are. Others may be, others *are*, to blame for this condition, but not they. To say that their will is free would be to mock their despair. The only liberty they have is the liberty to obey the law of their organism. Their strongest desires are thoroughly depraved, and consequently all their actions are bad. So far as they themselves are concerned there is positively no hope for them. All that it is possible to do is to change their environment, improve the outward conditions

of their life, and provide good education for their children and their children's children. The fact is that we all follow our strongest desire, and that all desires inhere in the organism.

Of course, there are others not quite so low down in the scale who may be materially helped by a change of environment. Many a drunkard, for example, has been reclaimed by that means. But the emphatic point is that the will invariably follows the most imperative desire. Many a man says: "Had I known, how differently I would have acted." But at the time of acting he did not know, and therefore could not have acted differently. As soon as a man realises the disastrous results which have flowed from a certain chosen course, he exclaims, "Oh, I could have made a better choice." But at the moment of choice the results were hidden from his view, or he deliberately shut his eyes to them, and hence he could not have made another choice. This point is always forgotten or ignored by the advocates of Free-will.

JOHN LLOYD.

Europe and France Before the Revolution.

"ALL power comes from God." This old-fashioned doctrine still survived in the eighteenth century, and it even lived after the Revolution. When Napoleon crowned himself King of Italy, he used the ancient challenge, "God has given me this; let every man beware of touching it!" It did not so much matter what shape the power took. France had a monarchy; Austria was an empire; Britain a limited monarchy; Holland a republic. In each case the people had their national pride. As Montesquieu said, "I am a good citizen; but I should have been the same no matter where I was born. I am a good citizen, because I love the government under which I was born." This national idea governed France also. When it burst into revolution with the cry of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," and seemed ready to embrace all mankind in one brotherhood, it paused; it recollected that it was France, and, in a spirit of nationality, tried to conquer Europe. And up to a certain point I should recognise a genuine good in this sentiment. We do right to work towards a universal Western republic; but it must be a federation, a co-partnership. Each nation should preserve its genius and manners. France will still be the France of Joan of Arc and Zola; England still the England of Shakespeare and Darwin.

How can Christian Europe honestly condemn the passions of revolutionary France? What sort of a political conscience had Europe itself? Take the case of the Austrian succession. The Emperor of Austria before his death persuaded the princes of the different states in his territory to agree to accept his daughter Maria Theresa as Empress after his decease. As soon as he was dead the arrangement collapsed, and a war took place. Amid the confusion Frederic of Prussia annexed Silesia to his own dominion. It is true the people of Silesia were Protestant, like the Prussians; it is true they were, on the whole, better off under the new conditions. But was it right to do an international violence to snatch a national advantage? Or take the case of the partition of Poland. The government of Poland was not excellent. But it was not on that account, it was simply in lust of acquisition, that Russia, Austria, and Prussia divided between them (in 1772) a large limb of Poland. The rest was devoured in 1793 and 1795. Our fathers, in the last century, expressed a generous sympathy for the Poles; but since we have been ourselves so busy in the partition of Africa we have found it convenient to forget them. Old Julian Harney, the Chartist, once showed me a little box of red dust taken from the grave of the patriot Kosciusko. I hope the British heart will preserve a liberal thought for Poland till, purified by sorrow, it resumes its place as a self-governed state.

In the eighteenth century kings and peoples were miscellaneously shifted like draughts on a board.

About 1700, a Bavarian ruled Spain; a French Bourbon ruled Naples; an Austrian ruled Milan; and, not long afterwards, a Brunswick courteously took Britain in charge. Kings and princes were readily removed. Just as our Queen Elizabeth had beheaded Mary Queen of Scots, and the Puritan Cromwell beheaded Charles, so the Czar Peter, in 1718, had his own son beheaded for high treason. In 1762, the Czar Peter III. was assassinated in prison; his wife opened a brilliant career as the Empress Catherine. And when Catherine had come to the throne by steps red in a husband's blood, the Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, who was no friend of the dead Czar, expressed her satisfaction by saying she bowed gratefully before Divine Providence. European governments everywhere stooped to trickery. They bribed the mistresses of royal personages; they had paid spies in hotels and theatres; they opened letters during passage through the post; they paid a good living wage to the skilled artisans who knew how to stop State couriers on lonely roads. Eighteenth-century wars were frequent and merciless; the very name of one—the Seven Years War—is a satire on civilisation.

Revolutionary France, therefore, was but illustrating the general vices of Europe when it presumed overmuch on its national sentiment; when it disregarded the rights of neighboring populations; when it beheaded its own king; and sought to establish its influence by war. The merit of France was that, besides committing the old European sins, it expressed new and fertile ideas. It taught the world what political freedom was; it elevated the welfare of a nation above the interests of aristocracies; and showed how men might dare and suffer in the service of an ideal.

Glance at the internal condition of France; but first note how France differed from England in political temper. In England, the nobility and the people resisted royal conceit and tyranny. In France, the people and the kings had combined against the feudal chieftains. France was open to invasion and needed a centralised defensive power. France had great kings, such as Henry of Navarre and Louis XIV. When Louis XIV. said "*L'état, c'est moi*"—I am the State—it was not in vain-glory. The French people willingly embodied in their king the courage, generosity, talent, and hope of their own character. The king towered above all the local Parliaments of Paris, Bordeaux, etc. But there were no great kings after Louis XIV., who died in 1715. Louis XV. was the friend of harlots rather than of France. Louis XVI. loved making locks rather than reigning. While the failure of the kings was in process, D'Argenson wrote (in 1743), "Revolution is certain in this state." Mobs rioted for bread. Priests quarrelled over dogmas. In forty years, 45,000 *lettres-de-cachet* were issued—documents authorising imprisonment without trial. At one time the Paris Parliament remonstrated with Louis XV., and when the king betrayed his annoyance, Paris was placarded with bills—"Long live the Parliament! down with the king and bishops!" and for a whole week the midnight streets were patrolled by guards lest an insurrection should occur. The history of France for three-score years before the Revolution teems with premonitions of the storm. In other words, the revolutionary movement was the result of large social motives, and not the sudden madness of a few Freethinkers.

There were three estates in France—the clergy (whose character I sketched in a previous paper); the nobility, and the free-men or *bourgeoisie*, the lowest-class laborers not counting; just as in this country we attach no political value to the tenants of workhouses. The gilded gentry, numbering some 140,000 persons, owned about one-fifth of the soil of France. Just as a French lady once remarked that God Almighty would think twice before he ventured to damn a person of quality, so the provincial intendants (tax-surveyors) dealt gently with the aristocracy. The Duke of Orleans—a rich man—said with a smile, "I settle matters with the Intendants, and pay just what I like." The nobility

drew large incomes from rural lands and spent them on town mansions. They took little share in local affairs; and, if they served the State at all, did so in the Church or Army—with Sword or mass-book. M. Taine, who hates the Revolution, tells us that the nobles died magnificently in the days of the Terror. No doubt; but gentlemen with nice manners and ample courage ought to pay their proper share of the taxes.

The third estate—the burgesses—included merchants, tradesmen, officials, farmers, and the like. Though many of them imitated the chivalry of France by evading taxation, the bulk of the national revenue was drawn from the middle-class. They paid largely when Louis XIV. spent £30,000,000 on a palace, and Louis XV. spent £8,000,000 on a mistress.

The lowest step (not a genteel "estate") was the peasantry, whose faces were blackened by toil and sun; whose dwellings were often hovels without windows; whose food was buckwheat and chesnuts. Many of the peasants did indeed own small plots of land, but their ownership was vexed by feudal arrogance. Only the nobles might fish in the stream, or hunt over the land. Only at the nobleman's mill might the peasant grind his corn—in consideration of fees. Fees were demanded at toll-gates, bridges, markets, fairs. The noblemen could claim the peasant's unpaid labor (*corvée*) to gather harvests; and the central government requisitioned the *corvée* for mending high roads. All men under forty must serve in the militia; no peasants escaped the militia agent; the rest could slip through the official meshes with some ease. Add to all these burdens the Taille, or capitation-tax; and the Gabelle, or salt-tax; and the Revolution is no mystery. M. Sorel, a very able historian, does indeed observe that France was no worse off than some other European countries; it was even better; but its conscience was livelier, and its people were more capable of feeling a common sentiment; hence the greater readiness of France to explode in wrath. But things were bad enough in La Belle France—beautiful France. In the year 1777, a million beggars disgraced La Belle France.

And over the scene the cross of Christ gleamed proudly.

F. J. GOULD.

Correspondence.

FREETHOUGHT IN AUSTRALASIA.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Perhaps you will permit an old friend, and one who helped to start the *Freethinker*, to say a word in your paper respecting Australasian Freethought. I have lived here for over twenty years, and not been idle. The fights, lawsuits, work, struggles through which I have passed would, if recorded, fill volumes. After a few years of unparalleled prosperity and success, we have had, and still have, a period of intellectual drought and commercial deadness. In New Zealand business seems good; in Australia it is the reverse, with no sign of improvement.

Whatever faults may have been committed by Freethinkers, and by myself in particular, Freethought showed no sign of drooping or decay in this State until the land boom came and burst, a little over ten years ago. We owe all our disasters to that and the evils which sprang out of it, and to others I will mention directly. For ten years Australia has been living from hand to mouth, has been suffering every species of commercial disaster, has been losing her population, and been exhibiting all the symptoms of demoralisation, financial and political.

The giant evils we now suffer from are mad legislation, wholesale sport, gambling, and Socialism in its most insane forms. If you ask what is the staple trade of Australia, I should say Sport—in the forms of politics, Socialism, horse-racing, holidays out of number, and an almost universal determination to avoid honest work at any cost. We have in Australia and Tasmania about 4,000,000 of people, and our madcaps have created and are running no fewer than seven Parliaments to govern that handful of people! We had six of them before, and two or three years ago the worst knaves in the country created the so-called "Common-

wealth" to secure fat sinecures for themselves. I did my best to expose the trick, and told them they would curse the thing before five years were over. To-day I know no one but the lucky knaves who is not sick of it.

Worse still, Trades Unionism here has fallen into the hands of the worst of sharpers, who have been elected to our swarm of Parliaments, especially to the Federal one. There the Ministers are mere tools of the Socialists, who compel them to make laws fixing wages; forbidding a man to work more than so many hours in his own shop; compelling shopkeepers to give a half-holiday on Wednesdays, and to take such themselves (whether they are solvent or not); forbidding tradesmen to teach their sons their own trades or to apprentice more than a certain number of boys to other trades. Not only so, but our Socialists, who prate gushingly of the "Brotherhood of Man," compel their tools in Government to forbid any colored man to land here; nay, even Europeans and English skilled workers; nor must a vessel be permitted to trade to our ports which has a colored seaman, etc., on board. Our Socialists have raised the mad cry of "A White Australia!" one of the very blackest crazes ever known. So far do they carry it that shipwrecked seamen and passengers with any color in their skin are forbidden to land on our shores! They may drown!

What, you may ask, has all this to do with Freethought? Very much indeed. Australians are so deeply submerged in the mad things I mention that they have neither thought, time, nor money for anything rational. Frivolity is the order of the day; we are submerged in a flood of it, and few there be that can rise to the surface.

It will not surprise you to learn that I have been compelled to suspend the *Liberator*, after running it for nineteen years and nine months. All over Australia there is a dearth of money; and I fear our suspension may be permanent. I still continue my Sunday night lectures.

Recently I have come into possession of a farm of nearly thirty acres, and thither I expect to remove almost at once. I hope to be able to work six days a week there, and come up to town (a distance of about thirteen miles) for Sunday lectures. My new address will be "Liberator" Farm, Reserve-road, Cheltenham, Victoria, where I shall be delighted to see you and yours when you come this way.

I am not discouraged. My work has gone into Australasian life; I have had as much success as any man could expect, and I am not worn out yet by a long way. Until the present flood of madness subsides I can do but little. An opponent of Socialism is here hated as bitterly as an opponent of Christianity. Both are religious, infallible, dogmatic systems, mad in their nature, maddening in their effects. I oppose both, and have two armies against me now where there used to be but one.

I wish one of your younger men would visit us and supersede me. It is terrible to be before the same audience for twenty years upon the stretch. But I see no help for it.

With best wishes for your success,—Yours truly,

JOSEPH SYMES.

Hall of Science, Melbourne,
April 6, 1904.

Acid Drops.

The London *Express* is responsible for the statement that Old Dowie, prophet and Zionite, *alias* Elijah the Restorer, while occupying the most expensive state-room on board the *Adelaide* from Australia to Europe, and living in the very lap of luxury, let his tip to the stewards on leaving the vessel consist mainly of tracts which he had specially blessed. What a treat it must have been to a steward expecting a couple of "quid" to hear Old Dowie say, "Have a tract."

Old Dowie is going to have another campaign in London, and "the Zion guards" are drilling nightly, by way of preparation, we presume, for the medical students. It is to be hoped, however, that these energetic but misguided young men will leave the new Elijah alone. They had better not attend his meetings at all; but, if they must go, they should keep quiet, as all civilised persons do at such gatherings. Old Dowie may be the greatest fraud on earth, but he is entitled to a fair hearing at his own meetings. The denial of this is sheer savagery.

Rev. Walter D. Hankinson, of the Baptist Church, Kilbarchan, puts forward an extensive program. Among other things, he hopes to arouse many who are now "religiously indifferent" to inquire honestly and earnestly "What is Truth?" But is he not rash in raising that dangerous question?

Rev. W. Cunliffe, of Farsley—according to a *Daily Mail* paragraph, derived apparently from the *Yorkshire Post*—is a person of some originality. He has taken to giving chemical experiments in the pulpit, which he presents to his congregation as miracles, and on the strength of which he asks them to believe the miracles of the Bible. The reverend gentleman fancies that by analysing a piece of sugar he alters the established order of nature. But this is not what scientific men mean by altering the course of nature when they object to the idea of the miraculous. It would be an alteration of the course of nature, for instance, if Mr. Cunliffe got into the seat of a pair of jockey scales and weighed nothing. Of course we mean without trickery. It would be an alteration of the course of nature if he suddenly left the earth and took to floating in the air. It would be an alteration of the course of nature if he worked hard, wasted tissue, took no food to repair the waste, and continued in good fighting trim as though he had eaten three good meals a day. We hope the reverend gentleman understands now.

Mr. Cunliffe ingenuously remarked that you may analyse a bit of sugar, but you cannot put the elements back into sugar again. That, he said, was God's work. But how does this throw any light on the Bible miracles? Turning water into wine, for instance. Elements exist in wine that do not exist in water; and how could those elements be added, and added chemically, not mechanically, by mere verbal hocus-pocus? Perhaps the reverend gentlemen will explain.

Mr. Stephen Coleridge spoke well and eloquently at the annual meeting of the National Anti-Vivisection Society. Some parts of his speech were very noble. But he need not have dragged in Christianity as he did, or even the name of "God." Those who uphold Vivisection profess Christianity as well as some of those who oppose it. We are not aware, however, of any important voice in favor of Vivisection within the ranks of Freethought. Of course we are very sorry to have to say anything sectarian in relation to a humane cause, but it is sometimes necessary by way of remonstrance.

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has just held its annual meeting. Earl Roberts, who presided, said that such cruelty was not confined to the lower classes, some of the worst crimes being amongst people in well-to-do circumstances. Unfortunately, the Society, which was doing so much excellent work, had now to meet a deficiency of £15,000. This is far from good news. But the worst news of all is that such a Society is so urgently needed in Christian England.

We not only live in a new century, but in new times. How many people, if asked if Englishmen had a national festival, would not stare astonished and hesitate which to name—Christmas or the August Bank Holiday? But the gentlemen who are now pulling the national wires have discovered a "national" festival—St. George's Day; and notably enough the leaders of the "festivities" are the priests of the hideous brick-shed the Romanists have built adjoining the Victoria Station—and the English Church Union.

By a very characteristic perversity these people have adopted the red rose as the emblem of St. George. They are cocksure it is; and the *Morning Leader* has a gratuitous hit at North Britons who would assume that its prevalence on St. George's Day was a compliment to Lancashire. This is cool. In actual fact the English red rose is a revolutionary emblem and commemorates the fall of feudalism and the destruction of a "Legitimate" despot at the battle of Bosworth Field, when the descendant of a bastard grandson of Edward III. deposed the direct line and founded the Lancastrian House which still occupies the throne, and which gave the democratic, revolutionary, and reforming red rose of Lancaster to England as its national emblem.

And here are people making sickening attempts to revive a sentiment which never existed—Romanists and "Anglo-Catholics" making despicable efforts to foist on Englishmen a spurious enthusiasm for an Arian bishop whose great achievement was a merciless persecution of Catholics; a man every educated person in the country knows to have been an all-round rogue and to have got his start in life as a bacon contractor—and a fraudulent one—for the army.

Not only has the red rose nothing whatever to do with St. George, but St. George himself has really nothing to do with England. He came to England as an asset of Guienne, of which province he was patron, when that province went to a Count of Anjou, who was elected successor to the Crown

of England, as part of the dower of the lady he married—the divorced wife of a King of France. But St. George, who, as well as a swindler and a Catholic-harrier, was a soldier, cleared us out of his protectorate, and allowed a farm wench to take the remaining provinces of the dower from us and to crown a Frenchman as their king. Nevertheless these idiots are asking Big-Englander, Jingo, Mafficking Londoners to screw up a gush about him and his day!

Christians have a way of multiplying themselves like a stage army. This is particularly the case with the Nonconformists. First, there are the separate Churches—Wesleyan, Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregationalist, &c. Next, there are the Free Church Councils, on which all the separate Churches are represented again. Then comes the Christian Endeavor Movement, in which the separate Churches are included again. This movement has been holding its Convention in London, making use of Exeter Hall, the City Temple, and other well-known places of religious assembly—and, at the same time, affording a large number of pious people the opportunity of a Whitsuntide holiday. On Whit-Monday the Endeavorers had a demonstration in Hyde Park. We understand that Jesus Christ was present, but was unfortunately not visible to the reporters.

The Bishop of London has got his way at last with regard to the old church of St. Mary, Aldermary, in the City of London. It is to be pulled down, and the site sold in order to build two new churches in the suburbs, to which "the former inhabitants of the parish have migrated." Some of them, if Christianity be true, have gone a good deal further than the suburbs.

With this church of St. Mary, Aldermary, go the tombs of the two fellow actors and friends of Shakespeare's who saw the First Folio through the press, and but for whom some of the greatest of the plays might have been lost to the world.

The good Armenians—poor, helpless Christians!—seem to be at it again. According to a Reuter telegram, seventeen villages have been destroyed by Armenian insurgents in the district of Sassan, and more than six hundred families have taken refuge at Mush.

Emperor William says "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." Who said he was? Why should he be ashamed of his best friend?

The Kaiser declares that "God will stand by us" if Germany is ever attacked. That is what the Czar said to his subjects when the war opened with Japan, but up to the present he seems to have been a false prophet. Generally speaking, when a man gets behind God, he has a poor case.

A short while ago a great fuss was made over the awful poverty of the Anglican clergy. The *Daily News* had blood-chilling tales of vicar's wives taking in washing, and whole families starving while their father, the vicar, was sent to prison for his grocer's bill. This was very far-fetched—to avoid offensive language—how far-fetched the reader may judge by the following advertisements which appeared in the *Guardian* of April 20.

An incumbent is wanted in a country parish with a population of 300. Salary £190. £3 13s. a week! Curates are offered £170, but in general get about £150; that is, they average £3 a week. Where less money is offered a house and garden, furnished rooms, or even board and furnished rooms are offered with the salary; and sometimes a young man not fully ordained is offered the appointment. Starving! What would George Stephenson, or even Nasmyth or Carlyle have said to a start in life of £2 a week and lodgings free?

The clergy are so starving that in this one number of but one Church paper there are thirty-nine notices of clergymen required, and only seven of those who want employment, while several of these are in some way unfit for ordinary ecclesiastical work. Surely this should stop all the talk about a "starving clergy." A man who can't save 300 souls on £3 a week in unlimited time, should throw the whole thing up and try to get fat as a bus-conductor.

The way in which the question of Secular Education continually crops up in Nonconformist gatherings is a phenomenon full of cheerful significance for Freethinkers. At the meeting of the Congregational Union last week the Rev. Mr. Gibbon announced himself in favor of Secular Education in State schools. The *British Weekly's* comment on this is

that "It is noticeable that the Assembly always jumps at these declarations with a quite devouring pleasure. And yet the notorious resolution of the Free Church Council was passed by an enormous majority." Presumably the solution of the puzzle is found in the operations of Dr. Clifford and his immediate circle who dominated the Newcastle gathering.

The Rev. Dr. Goodrich is another one who deserves honorable mention in this connection, as does also Dr. Guinness Rogers. The latter speaker said: "More than thirty years ago Dr. Dale and I fought this battle, and carried on this platform the very principle for which my friend Mr. Gibbon has so eloquently contended to-day. This principle was—'Nothing but Secular education by the State.'.....If only we had been solid on that in those days, we should never have seen this new Act, and until we are solid on that principle we shall not win." This is sound doctrine, and we commend it to all. It was the fact of the Nonconformists selling themselves in 1870 that paved the way for all subsequent trouble, and it is only the principle of Secular education that can offer any permanent solution. Dr. Rogers's private opinion of the hypocritical antics of Dr. Clifford should be interesting.

Dr. Clifford, speaking at a meeting of the Passive Resistance League for Dalston—held, by the way, in a chapel—is reported to have said that "he was waiting to see what the Government was going to do with Wales. If they tried coercion Rebecca would appear again." Rebecca, we believe, was the slang name given to the Welsh wreckers and lynchers some fifty years ago. Is this the policy that Dr. Clifford and the rest of the Passive Resisters intend to fall back upon?

The awful sum of £10,000 per week, Dr. Clifford says, is being spent by the London County Council on sectarian schools. But this is only a part of the truth. Every penny devoted by the London County Council to education is spent on sectarian schools. All schools are sectarian where religion is taught. There cannot be any "unsectarian" religion until all people accept one faith in the same way.

Dr. Clifford is invited to take note of the fact that there does not exist one single Christian church in Great Britain. There are Presbyterian churches, Wesleyan churches, Congregationalist churches, Anglican churches, and Roman Catholic churches. But where is the Christian church? We never saw one; we never heard of one. Even within what is called Christianity there is nothing but sectarianism. And to talk about "unsectarian" religious teaching in the face of this fact is the veriest absurdity.

One Passive Resister who appeared at the Stratford Police Court and objected to pay fourpence, for which the bench had to issue a distress warrant, was Mr. Cecil Draper, schoolmaster of the Council School, Capworth-street, Leyton. This gentleman explained that he held a government diploma to teach in any school, but the Education Act barred him from teaching in hundreds of them. Mr. Draper is not out of a job at present; still, he has our sympathy. It must be a great hardship to feel that there are only some 14,000 schools in which you could possibly find a job if you wanted one. We frankly admit the grievance. But what about the Freethought teachers with government diplomas, who find a difficulty in obtaining suitable situations, not only in the thousands of schools from which Mr. Draper is barred, but also in the thousands of schools which are open to him?

The Bishop of Ripon is very much concerned about the population question. The steadily diminishing birth-rate in England "gives him to think," as they say in France. He urges upon us all to obey the primal commandment, "Be ye fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth." He will be happy when our rooms, and our very staircases, swarm with pledges of affection; though you wouldn't always think them so if you heard the way they are talked at. Dr. Boyd-Carpenter calls upon the British race to be "what God meant it to be." For which trumpet call God is doubtless very grateful. It must be unspeakably reassuring to the Almighty to feel that his intentions with respect to the British race are not to be frustrated; or, at least, that the Bishop of Ripon will do his level best to see that Omnipotence gets its own way in this matter.

How those Atheists do commit suicide! Talmage used to say so, and Dr. Torrey says it now. The latest suspicious case is that of Percy Swan, a South Norwood jeweller, who was found dead in a wood, having climbed a tree sixty-six feet high and fallen from that elevation. A Bible was found on his body with some two hundred passages underlined.

Revivalist Torrey's old trick of lying about his religious (or irreligious) opponents is being turned against himself. And he doesn't like it. A report was spread in Dublin that he had publicly stated that *he knew* "his mother was in heaven and his father in hell." Revivalist Torrey says it is "an absolute lie," and "a most cruel one." He believes his mother and father are both in heaven. Of course they are. How could anyone connected with Revivalist Torrey be in the wrong place? The idea is positively absurd. Evidently this Dublin story is a lie; but Revivalist Torrey is in the habit of lying about better men than himself, and perhaps it will do him good, indirectly, to take a dose of his own medicine.

The Church of England does not seem to be as near disestablishment now as she was thirty years ago. But she is now warned, apparently for the last time, by the Rev. F. B. Meyer. This gentleman, who is a leading Passive Resister, speaking recently at a Free Church demonstration against the Licensing Bill, said that "the Anglican Church had a great chance to retrieve the ground she had lost in the last decade, and to show herself the true friend of the people. If she missed this chance he doubted whether the Almighty would give her another." Mr. Meyer is evidently a bit of an authority on the Almighty's intentions. Anyhow he was loudly applauded by the assembled Free Churchmen, who were extremely pleased at something. Perhaps it was because the Church of England had another chance; perhaps it was because she had only one.

Mrs. Besant prefers India as a place of residence, but she visits this benighted Western land occasionally, in order to illuminate it with Oriental moonshine. Recently she lectured at Hampstead, and a Church parson was announced to take the chair, but his Bishop got in front of him with a prohibition. We hear that the Theosophists (poor things!) were bitterly disappointed. The Rev. A. M. Lilley, however, has little to complain of. He got a double advertisement.

Here is an advertisement from a Capetown paper:—"Lost.—At Mr. Gipsy Smith's Meeting, on Thursday Night, a Gentleman's Tweed Overcoat, taken by mistake from the gallery occupied by the choir; kindly return same to the Caretaker." There is something very ingenuous about this advertisement. Evidently (Mr.) Gipsy Smith's soul-saving eloquence made a small impression on the new caretaker of the overcoat.

ART AND FREETHOUGHT.

Your correspondent "G. D." informs your readers "that Mr. Geo. Trebells.....makes one mistake when he says that no artist since the fifteenth century has had the courage to *paint Freethought pictures*." Allow me to reject this as being a statement I have not made. In my article on Vassili V. Verestchagin I said that since the Reformation "In Western Europe no artist ventured to *attack existing conventions*—to do so would be certain starvation." Pictures directed against such a dead-and-gone terror as the Inquisition are not attacks on "*existing conventions*."

I had Mr. Watts in mind while writing my article, but did not claim him as an assailant of existing conventions, because he carefully kept his individualistic pictures from the public all the long years that he had a status to maintain; and when that status was unassailable the most emphatic of his pessimistic works was hung in St. Paul's Cathedral as a devotional object. In regard to "Jonah," "C. D." can scarcely be acquainted with current phases of "religious" art if he supposes Watts's "satire" is taken as anything but *devotional intensity* by the contemporary religious world.

"C. D." wished me to give him the name of a *Freethought* artist of the fifteenth century. I said that the draughtsmen of the fourteenth and fifteenth century produced the woodcuts which spread the *Protestant Reformation* among the people. It must be remembered that what we now call *Freethought* was equally impossible under the Reformers as under the institutions they overthrew. Nevertheless there were Freethought drawings, if no artist bid for the Reformed stake by making their production a profession. Albert Durer drew "infidel" pictures. He depicted the Virgin sitting on the floor on a cushion while Joseph was dead drunk asleep, with his head on the table, supported by a great half-gallon tankard. He put the Virgin seated on the crescent moon with a cushion, to prevent its sharp edge cutting her. He drew her with a cat-monkey—an emblem of Venus—beside her. Similar cuts at the heart of theology are to be found on all hands; but these are not the things I mentioned. I had in mind simply the work which aided the Protestant Reformation—done by such men as Durer and Lucas van Leyden in such works as "The Gospel for the Unlearned" and "Christ and Antichrist."

GEORGE TREBELLS.

To Correspondents.

- W. P. BALL.—Thanks for your ever-welcome cuttings.
- JAMES NEATE.—Sorry to hear that Mr. Thresh was too unwell to lecture on Sunday in Victoria Park, and that you were unable to get anyone to take his place—probably owing to so many being away at the Leeds Conference.
- A. H. KOHN.—The reference to Mrs. Besant's geographical position was corrected in last week's *Freethinker*. You probably overlooked it. Thanks all the same.
- R. SIMPSON (Cape Town).—Shall be pleased to receive South African press cuttings whenever you can send them.
- Dr. E. B. FOOTE, senior (Larchmont, New York).—We heartily reciprocate your good wishes. We shall do ourselves the pleasure of writing you a decent letter very shortly. Meanwhile believe that you are one of the brightest of our American memories.
- Mr. JAMES MARSHALL, late of Forest-gate, E., is requested to send his present address to James Neate, 385 Bethnal Green-road, N.E.
- F. R. T.—Pleased to hear you found our reply so satisfactory; also that you have just been delighted to come across some volumes of our old magazine *Progress*. What you do to assist the cause in your own way is well worth doing.
- A. P.—Thanks for the *Sans-Gêne* cartoon. We may find it useful some day.
- L. B. GALLAGHER.—Thanks for cuttings.
- A. YATES.—The opposition to the use of chloroform, at the time of its introduction, especially in cases of painful confinement, is referred to in Draper's *Conflict Between Religion and Science*. We are not able at the moment to give you quotations from particular sermons, but if we come across them we will let you know.
- W. MOORE.—Always glad to receive cuttings.
- FREETHINKER.—See paragraph. The reverend gentleman is a considerable oddity. Thanks.
- THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.
- PERSONS remitting for literature by stamps are specially requested to send *halfpenny stamps*, which are most useful in the Freethought Publishing Company's business.
- 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.

A brief notice of the National Secular Society's Conference appeared in Monday's *Yorkshire Post*. The *Leeds Mercury* gave more attention to the evening public meeting in the Theatre Royal, which it admits was "largely attended, the stalls, pit, and circle being filled." It also says "There was a strong vein of humor running through the Chairman's speech."

"We cannot help suggesting," says *Secular Thought* (Toronto), that the Secularists of England will be wanting in duty and self-respect if they do not send Mr. G. W. Foote to Rome as their delegate." Our Canadian contemporary may be reassured. Mr. Foote will go to Rome if he wants to. He is not dependent on the so-called British Committee, which only represents a small section of the Freethinkers of this country, and from which he withdrew on account of its irresponsible character. All the same Editor Ellis is thanked for his good opinion.

"A deputation from the Leeds Branch of the National Secular Society," says the *Leeds Mercury* of May 17, "waited upon the Property Committee of the City Council yesterday afternoon, and sought permission to sell literature and make collections in the public parks and recreation grounds of the city. On a division the Committee decided by a close vote to recommend the Council not to grant the request." We understand the majority against the Secularist application was five, and we hope this majority will be

reversed when the vote is taken on the Council. It is simply monstrous that all Societies holding meetings on Woodhouse Moor should be allowed to sell literature and make collections, with the sole exception of the Leeds Branch of the National Secular Society. A power used to discriminate against certain classes of citizens, merely on account of their opinions, is the most odious form of tyranny. It was never contemplated that the Property Committee of the Leeds City Council should usurp an intellectual censorship. The common rule of procedure, whatever it is, should apply to the Secularists as well as to other bodies. To act otherwise is to punish certain citizens arbitrarily, without law, without trial, and without evidence. We earnestly hope the Leeds City Council will decline to back up its Property Committee in this act of impertinent despotism. Surely it will follow the sound example of the London County Council.

Submitting to the law, while you are free to agitate and vote for its alteration, is one thing; submission to the personal caprice of bigoted officials is quite another thing. We have held all along that the Leeds Secularists are perfectly justified in offering practical opposition to what is a gross attempted outrage on their rights of citizenship. If all other bodies are allowed to sell literature and make collections at their meetings (not elsewhere) on Woodhouse Moor, it is insane presumption to say that the Secularists shall not do so too. The Secularists have a right to do what other bodies have a right to do, and they should exercise the right, leaving those who resent it to find their own remedy. In such a case, it is not the Secularists who use force; the force is used against them. This would be clear enough if the police were instructed that Secularists were not to be allowed to walk within half a mile of (say) the Town Hall. There is no law to that effect; the instruction to the police would be a mere wanton exercise of accidental power; and the Secularists would be fools and cowards if they paid it the slightest attention.

Mr. H. Percy Ward, who was doing a week's open-air propagandist work for the N. S. S. Executive before the Leeds Conference, wrote to us immediately after the Property Committee's decision was recorded. "Last night," he said, "we both sold literature and made a collection, and we intend to persist." Which is the right spirit.

The letter from our old friend and colleague, Mr. Joseph Symes, which appears in another part of this week's *Freethinker*, is not very pleasant reading, except as far as it testifies to his invincible gallantry. Unfortunately we cannot see our way to advising any young English lecturer to go out to Melbourne. The prospect is too black there at present, and such a lecturer would be better employed at home. But if Mr. Symes wished to visit his native land again, or even to leave Australia altogether, we should be pleased to ask the Freethought party to render him some practical assistance. That he has had to suspend the *Liberator* does not surprise us. Most men would have dropped it long ago. We have seen from its pages what demands it made on the dogged courage of its conductor. In some respects we think more cheerfully of our old co-worker located on a farm. We hope it will prove a great success. And it will be that if it brings him freedom from financial worries, a life more in healthy touch with mother nature, leisure to read and think, and a reasonable certainty of bread. Mr. Symes amongst his cabbages may feel something like Diocletian on his farm, with all the cares of empire cast behind him for ever. And we should dearly like to drop in upon our dear old friend, if only to hold his honest hand once more in ours, and talk for an hour of far-off times and battles long ago.

Mr. George Meredith has addressed the following letter to the Dorking Women's Liberal Association:—

"At the present time women need encouragement to look out upon the affairs of national interest, and men should do their part in helping them to state publicly what has long been confined to the domestic circle—consequently a wasted force.

"That it can be a force men are beginning to feel. That the exercise of it is an education for them we see already in the enlargement of their views of life and the country's needs. So there is a hope that the coming generation will have more intelligent mothers.

"This holds true whatever side in politics they may take, and it is the main point. We who believe in Liberalism do not doubt that as the intellect expands and sharpens women will join with the party of progress which, without rejecting such wisdom as was given by our forefathers, aims at a condition of things in harmony with the wider and deeper knowledge we have won, the nobler ambition, the more human interest in the welfare of our fellows.

"Accept my assurance that my wishes are heartily in

accordance with the movement you are about to make. By studying public matters diligently you will soon learn to perceive that there is no natural hostility between the sexes. Their interests are one when they have learned to step forward together. It is amongst the lessons devolving upon women to teach the male kind who are not yet enough enlightened in that direction."

The Glasgow School Board has decided, though by a slight majority, that questions as to the Church connection of teachers shall no longer appear in the application forms

Of all the Gifford Lecturers the one that Freethinkers would be most interested in is Dr. E. B. Tylor, the author of *Primitive Culture*. Dr. Tylor's course of Lectures under the Gifford Trust have not yet been published. The delay seemed quite unintelligible, but it is now announced that these Lectures will be incorporated in "a new work" by Dr. Tylor, summing up the researches of his life. This is a work we look forward to with the greatest interest.

Another interesting book will be Dr. Alexander Bain's *Autobiography*, which is to be published by Messrs. Longmans. A supplementary chapter has been written by Mr. William L. Davidson. Dr. Bain, it will be remembered, died last year at a very advanced age. He knew most of the "thinkers" from Whately and Mill downwards, and his reminiscences should be good reading.

"The Passing of Conviction" is the title of an article in the *Hibbert Journal* by Professor W. Jethro Brown, of the University College of Wales. The following passage will be grateful to our own readers: "To talk of Hell to-day is hardly polite, and I have the assurance of one pastor that he dared not speak of it. 'My people wouldn't stand it for a moment.' The cosmogony of the older theologians is a jest; the educated man no longer discusses the exactitude of Genesis. Most men either think of Christ as philosopher and saint—or think of him not at all. Finally, while without the churches men profess a tolerant agnosticism which admits that anything *may* be true of God, but that nothing can be *known* to be true, the world within the churches, after surviving the attack of science from without, is undergoing the most severe ordeal of historical criticism from within."

A report comes from New Zealand that the Chief Justice of the Colony, Sir Robert Stout, is about to retire on pension and re-enter the political arena. Sir Robert Stout was once a rival with Mr. Seddon for the Premiership, but the acceptance of the highest judicial position took him out of public life for the time. He is said, in the *Westminster Gazette*, to have "alienated some of the religious Liberals by his aggressive agnosticism." He even once "attended a Secularist Congress in Melbourne, and pronounced an eloquent eulogium on the character and career of Charles Bradlaugh"—which, of course, was very shocking. Sir Robert Stout is still a Freethinker, aggressive or otherwise, and is not likely to recant his opinions, or suppress them, for the sake of the religious Liberals, who have only the same right to their opinions as other citizens. We may add that Sir Robert Stout is a brilliant debater and a powerful popular orator.

PAINE AND HIS LIBELLERS.

Paine did more to free the mind, to destroy the power of ministers and priests in the New World than any other man. In order to answer his arguments, the churches found it necessary to attack his character. There was a general resort to falsehood. In trying to destroy the reputation of Paine, the churches have demoralised themselves. Nearly every minister has been a willing witness against the truth. Upon the grave of Thomas Paine, the churches of America have sacrificed their honor. The influence of the Hero author increases every day, and there are more copies of the *Age of Reason* sold in the United States than of any work written in defence of the Christian religion. Hypocrisy, with its forked tongue, its envious and malignant heart, lies coiled upon the memory of Paine, ready to fasten its poisonous fangs in the reputation of any man who dares defend the great and generous dead.—*Ingersoll*.

GOD.

With all her tongues of life and death,
With all her bloom and blood and breath,
From all years dead and all things done,
In the ear of man the mother saith,
"There is no God, O son,
If thou be none."

—*Swinburne, "On the Downs."*

Life.

Life is like a changing day,
Sometimes gloomy, sometimes gay;
When on Fortune's car we ride,
Great our joy, extreme our pride;
When we suffer loss, defeat,
"Life," we say, "is but a cheat!"
So we feel the fleeting hour—
Pleasure's gain, misfortune's power.

Now, we walk enchanted ground;
Then, complain of life's "dull round."
Fancy joys can never end,
Think we ne'er shall lose a friend;
Yet in loyal hearts and true
Find that such their love renew:
But we daily note decay,
See that all things fade away.

Creature of inconstant mood,
Often evil, often good,
By his deeds man's life is shown,
Reaping always what is sown.
Nothing can this law evade,
Which eternal fiat made:
Would he happiness pursue,
Man the right must ever do.

Wise is he whose inner soul
Keeps his life in just control,
Thankful for each blessing given,
For the mastery hath striven;
Welcomes sunshine, unafraid,
Sees the gathering gloom or shade;
Only so shall he find rest,
Life be precious, death be blest.

GERALD GREY.

All blessings on the man whose face was first illuminated by a smile. All blessings on the man who first gave to the common air the music of laughter. Laughter is the blessed boundary line between the brute and man.—*Ingersoll*.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

THE Annual Conference of the National Secular Society took place on Sunday (May 22), at Leeds. The arrangements for the Conference had been undertaken by the newly-formed Leeds Branch, the members of which had worked with commendable industry to bring things to a successful issue. Their efforts were crowned with complete success. All the arrangements were of a satisfactory character, the proceedings of the Conference being characterised by remarkable unanimity.

The Conference was held in the Theatre Royal, Lands-lane, in which the public meeting was held at night, reference to which will be found elsewhere.

The Morning Session opened at 10.30, the chair being taken by Mr. G. W. Foote, who was accompanied on the platform (the stage) by Miss Vance, the Secretary, and Messrs. C. Cohen and J. Lloyd. The Chairman's table was rendered specially attractive by a beautiful bouquet of flowers representing the Northampton colours, presented to the Conference by Mr. Greevz Fisher.

The following Branches were represented:—Camberwell—F. Cotterell, F. A. Davies; West Ham—Dr. R. T. Nichols; Bethnal Green—C. Cohen; Finsbury—T. Thurlow; Birmingham—R. G. Fathers, J. Partridge; Bradford—J. W. Gott, W. Kay; South Shields—R. Chapman, T. Horsman; Newcastle—T. Elstob, W. Wright; Glasgow—J. F. Turnbull; Manchester—S. L. Hurd, J. G. Dobson, C. Pegg, Mrs. Pegg; Leeds—J. Greevz Fisher, G. Weir; Liverpool—J. Hammond, W. C. Schweizer; Coventry—R. G. Fathers, J. Partridge.

In addition to members of the Leeds Branch, there were many visitors from other parts of the country, among whom were Mr. Hugh Howson (Newcastle), Mr. H. P. Ward (Liverpool), Mr. H. Rotheven (Huddersfield), Mr. G. Thwaites (Stockton-on-Tees), Mr. John Grange (Bradford), Mr. Victor Roger (London), and Mr. R. Johnson (Manchester).

In accordance with the usual custom, the minutes of the last Conference as printed in the *Freethinker* were taken as read.

The President then introduced the Annual Report, which ran as follows:—

ANNUAL REPORT

The past year has not been specially eventful, but the Society's work has been carried on steadily, and on the whole there has been some progress; and any progress is a matter for satisfaction while this country, like others throughout the civilised world, is suffering under the wave of reaction which, for the past ten years, has made things difficult for all "advanced" parties. This wave of reaction has recently been referred to by Mr. Goldwin Smith; who, however, with a slight change of metaphor, says that "Such back-streams are not unexampled in the current of history," and expresses a belief that the misfortune is but temporary. A belief of this kind is one which every friend of progress would be glad to share. But whether Mr. Goldwin Smith is right or wrong in his view of the immediate future, it is undeniable that the reaction which is complained of is not partial, but extends over the whole scope of public affairs, and is certainly not least apparent in the field of politics. Never was there a time within living memory when it was so difficult to move the masses by the inspiration of great principles, or to stir them up to a vital interest in a high and noble policy. The fact must be admitted that the whole nation has fallen for the present on a lower level of thought and feeling. The craving for physical excitement and sensuous entertainment is well-nigh universal; and the death of a thinker like Herbert Spencer excites in the general mind an emotion which is probably a thousandth part of that which is excited by a cricket test-match or the performance of a popular football team.

(One result of this state of things may be that the best friends of progress will ask themselves whether too many hopes have not been placed upon the rather perfunctory work of the elementary day schools; whether by forcing the pace the education of the nation's children was not overshadowed by the rivalry of religious sects; and whether a training in the idea of citizenship, and in the value and importance of a wise social order, might not usefully take the place of some of the drill-sergeant mental culture which obtains in the existing system of state education. But these points will doubtless arise in the discussion that is to take place at this Conference on the present Education struggle; and no more need be said about them now.)

During the past year the Society has lost two of its Vice-Presidents by death. Both of them resided in London. Mr. E. W. Quay was one of the old Hall of Science stalwarts. Mr. E. Bater, who died by accident, being knocked down and killed by a cab on Christmas Eve, was as sturdy and true a Freethinker as ever drew breath, and intensely devoted to the hard work of the Secular movement. He will long be missed by his colleagues on the Executive.

It will be seen by the Agenda that two London Freethinkers are nominated as Vice-Presidents to fill the places of those recently lost, as well as two Liverpool Freethinkers who have long and honorably been connected with the Branch in that important city.

Losses of this kind are inevitable. On the other hand there are personal gains. And the most important of these during the past year has been the accession of Mr. John Lloyd to the Secular press and platform. Mr. Lloyd, on approaching your President in the first instance, was very cordially welcomed; but he was told, and more than once, that the road of service to Secularism was far from being strewn with roses, that it was indeed often very thorny. He was plainly given to understand that there was hard work and scanty emolument. But he was not to be warned off by any such terrors. He elected to throw in his lot as far as possible with the National Secular Society, and the series of articles in the *Freethinker* relating his mental journey from Christianity to Atheism was his introduction to the party in general. Mr. Lloyd has since then proved himself an able and eloquent advocate on Secular platforms in various parts of Great Britain, and his weekly articles in the *Freethinker* are read with great pleasure. Approving voices have been heard even from South Africa, where Mr. Lloyd was not long ago a highly popular Christian preacher.

Mr. Lloyd's conversion to Secularism has been treated by the Christian press in England with an unbroken conspiracy of silence. Let the most obscure and insignificant "infidel" return to the Christian fold, and there is immense rejoicing, or at least immense advertisement. The fatted calf is killed, and everything else is done to give *éclat* to the happy event. But let a popular preacher join the ranks of Freethought, and not a whisper of the fact is heard in Christian circles. Apparently it is thought that what is not admitted does not exist. But this ostrich policy is, in the long run, as futile as it is ignominious. And in order to render it so as speedily as possible in the present case, the Executive had the story of Mr. Lloyd's conversion printed in pamphlet form. Press copies were sent out, but not one of them was noticed. The sincerity and power with which it was written made no

appeal to the recipients. It was their business to burke Freethought, and they did their miserable duty. Nevertheless the pamphlet is being read, and it will open the eyes of some into whose hands it falls. In any case, it puts in a permanent form the history of a brave man's passage from the darkness of superstition to the light of truth, from the fetters of Theology to the freedom of Humanity.

Another pleasant feature of the past year was the Presentation to Mr. C. Cohen, to which your Executive subscribed the sum of £25. The sum of £200, collected through the *Freethinker*, and generously completed by a cheque for £45 from an anonymous donor, was presented to Mr. Cohen at the Annual Dinner in January. It was neither payment for past services, nor a retaining fee for future services, but simply a recognition of Mr. Cohen's work for the movement; an appreciation—not magnificent, but practical as far as it went—of the steady loyalty of his character as well as the ability of his advocacy; and a kind of appeal to destiny that he might long continue to labor for the cause to which he has given so much of his life already.

New Branches of the Society have been formed at Coventry and Leeds. The former was started at a very successful course of lectures by the President, followed up by a visit from Mr. Cohen. The Coventry Branch starts with a gratifying number of members, and has already succeeded in gaining permission for the *Freethinker* to lie upon the Free Library reading-room tables. The Leeds Branch starts on the heels of a lively agitation in this city. For some time past Leeds has been quite a storm-centre of Freethought. This has been in consequence of the extraordinary and unintelligible conduct of the police. Whatever the reason is—whether the impulsion of a bigoted Chief Constable, who fancies himself divinely commissioned to persecute unbelievers, or the prompting of outside bigots who keep carefully in the background—the fact remains that the police have gone out of their way to advertise the Secular movement. Their first step was to take proceedings against those who sold literature or made collections at Secular meetings on Woodhouse Moor. Under a bye-law, which could never have been intended to do anything but preserve good order and prevent common begging and trading on the Moor, permission appears to have been granted to all other bodies to sell literature and make collections at their meetings. But when the Secularists applied for what ought to have been a merely formal permission they found themselves met by a point-blank refusal. They then asked themselves whether they were bound in conscience to respect the decision of the authorities, and they decided very rightly that they were not bound to do anything of the kind. A definite law which applies to all citizens, and is not directed against any particular section of them, may well be submitted to in the interest of social peace, as long as means are left to agitate and vote for its alteration. But a law which is applied discriminatingly, and is used so as to give privileges to some and to inflict disabilities upon others, sins against the first condition of civilised jurisprudence. To obey it voluntarily is worthy of fools and cowards. And as the Leeds Secularists belonged to neither of these two classes, they decided to do precisely what all other citizens were allowed to do. For this they were prosecuted by the police. Messrs. Gott, Pack, and Weir were repeatedly summoned to the Police Court, where, as it fortunately happened, they found themselves in the presence of a Stipendiary Magistrate who showed no inclination to be made the catspaw of bigotry, but rather resented being called upon to enforce the letter of a law which was so clearly in opposition to its spirit. The fines, which he could not help inflicting, were made as light as possible, and the police were plainly given to understand that he considered their action to be partial and vexatious, if not absolutely insincere. But instead of being deterred by the Magistrate's judgment, the police proceeded still further in the same direction. They started a prosecution for "blasphemy" against Messrs. Gott, Pack, and Weir on account of the *Truthseeker*. Here again the Magistrate showed himself a true friend of common sense and fair play. It was mainly by his action and attitude that the prosecution collapsed. The intended victims of this ridiculous manœuvre bore themselves bravely enough—as is always to be expected when Freethinkers are attacked; but if the Magistrate had been himself a foolish bigot, instead of wise and tolerant, they would certainly have been committed for trial. Which fact, by the way, should lead to the remembrance of how inestimable is the value of a strong and sagacious man at a critical juncture, where the interests of liberty and justice are at stake. It was the action of a Speaker of the House of Commons, who understood his real duty and did it, that put an end to the long disgraceful attack upon Charles Bradlaugh, and allowed him to exercise his constitutional rights in the British parliament. It was the action and attitude of the Lord Chief Justice of England that turned the tide of bigotry when the editor of the *Freethinker* was

brought from prison to plead against a second indictment for "blasphemy." And it was the action and attitude of the Stipendiary Magistrate at Leeds that nipped the latest hypocritical prosecution for "blasphemy" in the bud.

The National Secular Society's Executive, while regretting some circumstances of the case, had not the slightest doubt as to its duty. "Blasphemy" is an artificial crime. It is one that only Freethinkers are ever prosecuted for committing, and it simply means lacking respect for the doctrines of their opponents. Moreover, it is these opponents who prosecute them, try them, sentence them, and lock them up in jail. A law which permits one party of religionists to imprison its intellectual adversaries, is not one to be tolerated for a moment by any Freethinker who understands his own principles. And when such a law is sought to be put in force, it is not opportune to discuss the merits of the publication against which it is directed. Your Executive passed a resolution of protest against the prosecution, and authorised the President to take any steps in its name that he thought necessary to assist in vindicating the right of free speech so wantonly attacked. The state of the President's health at the time did not permit of his going to Leeds except under the stress of a great necessity. But the expenses of the spokesman of the defendants were paid so that he might come up to the Society's headquarters for a consultation. Far more than this would have been done, had it not been for the collapse of the prosecution by the withdrawal of the police from a position they should never have occupied.

One fact in connection with this case is worth emphasising. For the first time in the history of "blasphemy" prosecutions the press gave no sort of encouragement. This is a reassuring phenomenon. It indicates that the "blasphemy" laws are on their death-bed. They may be kept alive for a considerable time by the skill of pious physicians, but it is improbable that they will ever rise and do any more mischief.

A very different fact is the recent decision of the Property Committee of the Leeds City Council. In response to an application from the new Leeds Branch of the National Secular Society for permission to sell literature and make collections at its Woodhouse Moor meetings, the Committee has decided to recommend the Council not to grant the request. According to the *Mercury* it was "a close vote." Consequently there is room for hope that the City Council may not adopt the Committee's recommendation, but follow the sound policy of the London County Council, which respects the equal rights of all the citizens of the metropolis, and is attended with universal satisfaction.

One small matter arising quite accidentally out of the Leeds case may be referred to in this connection. Some years ago the President, being appealed to on the matter, and having necessarily to act upon his own judgment, gave orders that all the literature at the evening public meetings of the Annual Conference should be sold from one common book-stall, without favor and without exclusion; and that other persons were not to be allowed to go through the meetings selling this or that special publication. This elementary law of justice, to say nothing of decency, has been loudly complained of by one person, who represents himself as having been turned out of the Conference meetings, simply because he had to submit to a common rule of procedure. The Executive has endorsed the President's judgment in this matter, and probably the Executive's judgment will be endorsed by the Conference. There is doubtless a great deal to be said for Anarchism as a philosophy, but it is hardly tolerable in the practical conduct of public assemblies.

Turning to a more agreeable matter, it is pleasant to record that some of the Society's Branches have carried on their work very successfully during the past year. The Glasgow Branch takes the first place. Its Sunday evening meetings have been crowded, and people have sometimes been turned away from the doors. There has been a very large sale of literature, a number of thoughtful and earnest young men have become members, and the Branch closes the winter session with a splendid balance in hand. During the summer it carries out an active outdoor propaganda. Altogether the past year has been the most prosperous in the Glasgow Branch's history. The Liverpool Branch has experienced quite a revival; partly through the exertions of a good Committee, and partly through the constant services of Mr. H. Percy Ward, who has been engaged as the Branch's lecturer and organiser. The Manchester Branch has held its own, but appears to be hindered from making fresh progress by lack of funds. The Birmingham Branch has had to confront great difficulties in consequence of the bigotry of the School Board in refusing it the use of a room for its meetings, and thus excluding it from the common privileges of citizenship. It has had, however, some fine meetings in the magnificent Town Hall—granted by the courtesy of the Mayor. Some of these meetings have listened to lectures by your President; others, of the nature of demonstrations,

have listened to addresses by him and by Messrs. Cohen and Lloyd. The whole cost of the second series of meetings, as far as the speakers' expenses were concerned, was borne by the Secular Society, Limited. This Incorporation also made a grant of £120 to the N.S.S. Executive. It has likewise borne the cost of many meetings at the Queen's Hall, the Printers' Hall, the Camberwell Secular Hall, and the West Ham Town Hall.

The West Ham meetings, held in the Stratford Town Hall, were splendid in point of numbers, and remarkably enthusiastic. They indicate what might be done if Freethought had as good opportunities as the popular superstition. Well-known halls in great public thoroughfares, adequately advertised, could easily be filled with listeners to the gospel of Freethought. The difficulty, of course, is obtaining the halls and paying for the advertisement. But this is a difficulty which should be overcome in course of time. Meanwhile the lesson should be laid to heart that boldness, and not timidity, offers the best prospect of success.

While dealing with London a minor case of persecution should be referred to. Unfortunately the wise rules laid down by the London County Council do not obtain in the Royal Parks, where the regulations are made by irresponsible officials. The consequence is that in Hyde Park, where there is a perfect Babel of public meetings on Sunday, Freethinkers are often treated unfairly. The most recent case is that of Mr. J. Toope. Mr. Toope called on the policeman to assist him in keeping order at his meeting in the face of deliberate and noisy interruptions. The policeman, however, preferred the easier task of arresting Mr. Toope for being interrupted. This scandalous travesty of justice was resisted as far as possible. Your president authorised the employment of a solicitor to defend Mr. Toope at the Police Court. A good fight was made on his behalf, but the magistrate was worse than the policeman. He treated Mr. Toope as a criminal to start with, his speaking at all against Christianity being an unpardonable offence; and in spite of law and sense Mr. Toope was bound over for twelve months to keep the peace, which others had broken. A security in £5 being also required, your Secretary (Miss Vance) stepped into the breach, and thus saved an innocent man from being haled off to prison. It should be mentioned that Mr. Toope is not a member of your Society. He defence was entirely a matter of principle.

We have now to deal with a question of the greatest importance, with regard to which there is a notice of motion on the Conference Agenda. During the past year England and Wales have been agitated by the Nonconformists, who have lost a battle in their ecclesiastical war with the Church of England. That battle was fought over the new Education Act, which the Nonconformists are moving heaven and earth (and sometimes another place) to get repealed. It is to this end that they have organised the Passive Resistance movement. Their calculation is that they will paralyse the government by their refusal to pay rates. It is extremely improbable that they will do anything of the kind. It is more likely that they will succeed in disfranchising themselves and giving the Government a fresh lease of power. Be that as it may, your Executive have taken the view that the Nonconformists are the worst sinners in this Education struggle. They invoke principles which their own policy outrages; and their clap-trap, hypocritical cries about the "rights of conscience" and "unsectarian teaching" are simply disgusting. While religious teaching is allowed at all in the public schools, no principle is involved in the question of more or less. That is merely an ecclesiastical dispute between rival sects. Your Executive has insisted on the truth, which is growing more and more obvious, that the only possible solution of this problem is Secular Education. This idea informed the Manifesto it issued in the previous year. The same conception prompted it to co-operate in organising the Demonstration in the large Queen's Hall. That Demonstration was also promoted by the Trades Union Parliamentary Committee, the Social Democratic Federation, and other bodies. It was carefully boycotted by the London press. But it was a large and important meeting in spite of all disadvantages. Mr. J. M. Robertson, who delivered an excellent address, was one of the principal speakers; and the marked enthusiasm of your President's reception showed that the London democracy was beginning to recognise religious teaching in the public schools as the one great obstacle to all reform of our Educational system.

Another notice of motion on the Conference Agenda relates to the International Freethought Congress which is to take place in September at Rome. More than twelve months ago what was called a British Committee was formed, of which your President and Messrs. Cohen and Roger were members. In the course of time your Executive, which had elected some additional representatives, inquired why no meetings of the Committee were held. Another inquiry was made a

month or two later without result. At last in the month of December a meeting was called in circumstances which your Executive could not tolerate. Considering, further, that with few exceptions the members of the Committee were self-appointed, or placed upon it by the secretary, who was also self-appointed, your Executive resolved to withdraw from all connection with the so-called British Committee, and to arrange for a separate representation at the Rome Congress. The National Secular Society has long been associated with the International Freethought Federation, has subscribed to its funds, and has been represented at the Congresses it has convened at Paris, Brussels, and elsewhere. One of these Congresses was held under the immediate auspices of your Society in London. For these and other reasons it is desirable that the Society should be independently and strongly represented at Rome, and your Executive hopes that this view will commend itself to the Conference.

On the financial side of affairs, it will be noted that the Executive's income from members' subscriptions is not large. But this has always been the case. The Branches do their own work, have their own funds, and keep their own balance-sheets. Their contributions to the central fund can never be very considerable. The major part of the Executive's income has always been raised in other ways. During the past year the Secular Society, Limited, made a handsome grant of £120, besides grants to some Branches and to the Leicester Secular Society. This Incorporation, indeed, has once more saved the situation; which is a fresh tribute to its necessity and usefulness. Had this Incorporation existed earlier it might have saved the loss of a property at New Brompton. The Secular Hall there, in which the Chatham Branch operated, has been sold by the Trustees, into whose hands it fell by the peculiar constitution of the Society. They have apparently banked the balance left after discharging all liabilities; but this seems to be but a temporary expedient in the face of remonstrance; and it may reasonably be assumed that "finis" is written to the history of the New Brompton Secular Hall. Certainly the work of the Branch had been carried on for some time amidst many discouragements. Still, if the property had been vested in the Secular Society, Limited, it would not have been alienated from the Secular movement.

As this annual report is being closed a letter reaches your President from one of your vice-presidents in the southern hemisphere. Mr. Joseph Symes has had to suspend the publication of the *Liberator*, which he had maintained at Melbourne for nearly twenty years; but he still continues his Sunday evening lectures in the Hall of Science. Mr. Symes's old friends in England will deeply regret to hear of this misfortune. At the same time they will feel all the more profoundly what a gallant battle he has fought out there against desperate odds: and they will long for an opportunity of meeting him once more in the land of his birth.

It would be wrong to close this Report without a reference to the controversy excited by Mr. Robert Blatchford's attacks on Christianity in the *Clarion*. All the freshness in them, of course, was the freshness of Mr. Blatchford's style. But it was something to see the war against the popular superstition carried on in a way that compelled attention. Mr. Blatchford could not be ignored; not because he had made any philosophical or scholarly discoveries, but because he happened to have fifty thousand readers. The Christian ostrich therefore withdrew its head from the sands and began spluttering what were meant to be replies. Nothing could be feebler. From an intellectual point of view the game is up. Christian apologetics are absolutely demonstrated to be merely excuses for those who desire, for whatever reason, to linger in the fold of faith. The whole controversy has done, and will yet do, immense good. It has given a great fillip to the Freethought cause. It has once for all broken the cowardly silence which Socialist and Labor leaders have kept with regard to the great question that underlies all others. Is man made for earth or heaven, for this world or the next? Is he a pilgrim or a citizen? Should he trust in Faith or in Reason? Is morality natural or supernatural? Is it the individual or the race that lives beyond death, and, in the sublime language of Shakespeare, may "lay large bases for eternity"? These are the questions that ultimately carry all others with them. And happily these questions are once more being vividly addressed to the popular mind. But it is the distinction of the National Secular Society to have kept these questions alive in the cold and darkness of neglect, and never to have despaired of their immortal vitality.

After one or two questions had been asked, and a suggestion made that a deputation from the Executive might be appointed to wait upon the local authorities with reference

to the sale of literature on Woodhouse Moor, the Annual Report was adopted.

Miss Vance, as General Secretary, then read the Financial Report, which was also adopted, some of the delegates remarking upon its creditable character, inasmuch as so much work had been achieved with comparatively little means.

The Conference next proceeded to the election of President for the forthcoming year, Mr. G. W. Foote vacating the chair, which was temporarily taken by Mr. C. Cohen. The re-election of Mr. Foote was proposed by Mr. T. Thurlow, on behalf of the Finsbury Branch. Mr. Thurlow said he did this with the greater pleasure as he was one who originally opposed Mr. Foote's election to that office when he was selected by the late Charles Bradlaugh. He had lived long enough to see that he was mistaken, and that Mr. Bradlaugh's judgment had been vindicated by the manner in which Mr. Foote had filled the office of President for so many years. The motion having been seconded by Mr. Turnbull, on behalf of the Glasgow Branch, it was then put and carried unanimously.

In acknowledging his re-election, the President said that when he was first elected to the office he had only promised one thing—to do his best. This he had always done, and while doing so had welcomed counsel from all who were able and willing to give it. No man of any positive quality in such a position could help making some enemies, but he believed he had also a good many friends. He had not tried to please everybody, and he did not intend to. He had tried to do what was right; that he should continue to do, and trust to the verdict of time on his work for the Secular movement.

The next item on the Agenda was the election of Vice-Presidents. After the ratification of the existing list, the following were added at the suggestion of the Executive: Messrs. J. Barry and H. Cowell (London), J. Ross and J. Hammond (Liverpool). Mr. Hammond on returning thanks on behalf of himself and the other newly-elected vice-presidents, said that both he and they would take this honor as a fresh incentive to renewed efforts on behalf of Freethought. The cause had made considerable progress during the past few years, not only in organisations, which inadequately represented the growth of Freethought, but also in the churches themselves.

(The Report of the Conference resolutions and discussions will appear in next week's *Freethinker*.)

THE EVENING PUBLIC MEETING.

A splendid audience assembled in the Theatre Royal in the evening to listen to the Freethought speakers announced on the big bills that were well-posted on the city walls. The *Mercury* report noted the large attendance. There must have been some 2,500 people present, and nine out of ten of them were evidently sympathetic. But there were some dissentients, and a few of them were what the *Mercury* calls "good-humored" in their interruptions; that is to say, they were persistently ill-mannered. Recognising this element in the meeting, the President departed from his usual practice of winding up the evening's oratory. It seemed necessary to get the meeting well in hand straight away. Mr. Foote succeeded in doing this, and the audience was wound up to a high pitch of enthusiasm, in which the interrupters were simply overwhelmed. Mr. Percy Ward followed with an excellent speech, well-conceived and well-expressed, and heartily applauded. Mr. John Lloyd came next. He was in first-rate form and was delighted with his reception, which he said atoned for the coolness, and even the desertion, of former friends, who resented his honest change of opinion. Mr. Lloyd was heard with profound attention and loudly cheered on resuming his seat. Mr. Cohen followed with the best speech he has yet delivered at a Conference meeting. He was in his best form from beginning to end, and his audience fully appreciated the fact. Finally came Mr. Davies with a brief, bright speech, that the interrupters tried in vain to spoil. The President then dismissed the big meeting with a few words that apparently sent all, including the interrupters, away in a good temper. A satisfactory collection was taken at the doors by Miss Vance and her assistants, the seats being too close together to allow of collectors going through the meeting.

A WISE PRAYER.

Let not this weak, unknowing hand
Presume thy bolts to throw,
And deal damnation round the land
On each I judge thy foe.
If I am right, thy grace impart,
Still in the right to stay;
If I am wrong, O teach my heart
To find that better way.

—Pope,

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on Tuesday and be marked "Lecture Notice," if not sent or postcard.

LONDON.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7, Dr. W. Sullivan, "Tears in Human Things."

WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall, High-street): 11.15, Dr. Coit, "Modern Spiritualism and the Ethical Religion."

WOOD GREEN ETHICAL SOCIETY (Fairfax Hall, Portland-gardens, Harringay): 7.15, By members, "Books I Have Found Most Helpful."

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 3.15, Mr. Davies.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S.: Station-road, 11.30, W. J. Needes, "The Basis of Morality"; Brockwell Park, 3.15. A Lecture; 6, W. J. Needes.

EAST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Mile End Waste): 11.30, C. Cohen.

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (The Grove, Stratford): 7, F. A. Davies.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Hyde Park, near Marble Arch): 11.30, W. J. Ramsey; Hammersmith, 7.30, W. J. Ramsey.

COUNTRY.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): Outdoor Propaganda: Islington Square, 3 and 7 (if wet, in the Hall), H. Percy Ward; Taesday, 8, Edge Hill Church.

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, Willie Dyson, "Ethics: Absolute and Relative."

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, Market-place): 7.30, Annual Meeting, Election of Officers.

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