

# THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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All ignorance is dangerous, and most errors must be dearly paid. And good luck must he have that carries unchastised an error in his head unto his death.

—SCHOPENHAUER.

## Another Bradlaugh Story.

SOME years ago, at the conclusion of one of my lectures in Manchester, a member of one of General Booth's regiments mounted a seat at the back of the hall and told the audience of certain things I had said to him when I belonged to the Salvation Army. It was more of a revelation to me than to the audience, because for all that they knew I might have at one time belonged to the Salvation Army. Some of the people laughed, others seemed amazed; personally, I was simply interested. This Salvationist presented me with a problem in psychology that was not easy to solve. The man was not lying, in the sense that one deliberately manufactures a false statement and passes it off on others as truth. He did not appear to possess either courage or ability enough for this. He did not say it in my absence, when sheer recklessness of statement might be the true explanation. He said it to my face; he knew me when I was in the Salvation Army and made public the confidences I then entrusted him with. In some strange manner the man had persuaded himself of the truth of his story, and how he reached this point is a question I have often turned over in my own mind when dealing with other religious individuals whose statements have been on a level with that of my Manchester Salvationist.

I was reminded of my Manchester experience by reading a passage from a sermon by the Rev. R. J. Campbell, which appears in the *Christian Commonwealth* for May 11. The story now in question, I hasten to say, is not Mr. Campbell's, he merely repeats it, but in repeating it, he clearly considers it in all probability true. Mr. Campbell drew the attention of his congregation to a book called *From the Bottom Up; the Life Story of Alexander Irvine*. Irvine was a soldier who, as a young man, went to hear Charles Bradlaugh lecture. Although carried away by the power of the orator, he felt that "the conclusions were so sad and dark that nothing was left if they were true." So, at the end of the lecture, he put a question to Bradlaugh. Here it is:—

"When I got command of my voice I said, 'I want to ask Mr. Bradlaugh a question. I have very little education and little opportunity to get more, but I have a peace in my heart. I call it belief in God—I do not know what else to call it—and I want to ask Mr. Bradlaugh whether he is willing to take that away from me and deprive me of the biggest pleasure in my poor life and leave nothing in its place.' Mr. Bradlaugh rose from his chair and came forward, laid his hand on the lad's shoulder, and amid a most impressive silence said, 'No, my boy; Charles Bradlaugh will be the last man on earth to take a pleasure from a soldier boy, even though it be his belief in God.'"

I do not know anything of this Alexander Irvine, but I know something about Charles Bradlaugh, and I feel fairly certain that if the question was put, whatever Bradlaugh said in reply, he never said that.

Can anyone conceive Bradlaugh, ever ready to sacrifice himself for what he believed to be true, replying in public with a banalistic "Charles Bradlaugh will be the last man on earth to take a pleasure from a soldier boy, even though it be his belief in God"? Why, Bradlaugh's whole life was devoted to taking from people this particular pleasure of belief in a God; and he would certainly never have made himself so ridiculous as to practically say that, while he felt quite justified in arguing against the belief in God, so far as most people were concerned, he drew the line at attacking the faith of a "soldier boy."

If the incident ever occurred, Bradlaugh would have been far more likely to have pointed out, generally, that all people feel pleased with their beliefs, but that a belief only yields pleasure so long as we think it to be justified by facts. Convince a man that a special belief he has is false, and he ceases to derive comfort from it; but he does derive comfort from the new belief that supersedes the old one. And, in particular, he would probably have pointed out that the belief in God yields, on the whole, quite as much pain as pleasure, as much terror as delight, while productive of much social misery, cruelty, and injustice. Alexander Irvine's version of Bradlaugh's reply is the answer of a coward, and his worst enemies never accused him of being that. To those who know Charles Bradlaugh the story carries upon its face its own refutation. It is suitable for the mission hall, it is typical of the mental vacuity of the travelling evangelist, it is characteristic of the sentimental sloppiness of the ordinary parson, but it resembles Bradlaugh to the same extent that an issue of the *War Cry* resembles a volume of the Synthetic Philosophy.

I may now leave this "Christian soldier" and turn to Mr. Campbell. For Mr. Campbell's comment is also, in its way, a revelation. He says:—

"That story is to Bradlaugh's credit as well as to the young soldier's, and I will venture to say that the argument employed by Mr. Irvine was almost the only argument worth advancing in favor of the Christian's faith in a God of love, a Heavenly Father."

There are at least three points about this reply worth noting. First, Mr. Campbell thinks the story is to Bradlaugh's credit. What he thinks is a tribute to Bradlaugh's character is a revelation as to his own. The rule, it doesn't matter what you believe, so long as you are comfortable, is a common one; but is it a good one? Most emphatically not; and on his thinking it over again, I should not be surprised if Mr. Campbell agrees with me. To refrain from telling others what one believes to be true for fear of disturbing the mental sluggishness which they mistake for happiness, is about the poorest rule that one can lay down either for one's own or for other people's guidance. I repeat, I do not believe that Mr. Campbell, after due deliberation, would say that this was good advice, and yet, if the story is to Bradlaugh's credit, it means this or nothing. Probably the unexpressed idea in Mr. Campbell's mind is that it is good for an Atheist not to attack Christianity, no matter on what grounds his abstinence is based.

The story reflects still less credit on Mr. Irvine. Out of sheer contemptuous pity one can conceive a strong man refraining from pushing a weak one to the

wall in an intellectual encounter. But what of the man who whines out to be saved from the truth because it may shatter some of the idols he has been worshipping? The question is essentially that of the mental coward; of the man who wishes to be guarded from the truth because of the fancied pleasure he gets from cherishing a lie. The brave man does not ask for what is profitable, but for what is true; or, if profit enters into his calculation at all, it rests on the conviction that ultimately the truthful and the profitable coincide. Yet it is precisely to this element of mental cowardice that Christianity has always appealed with the greatest effect. While the doctrine of hell was believed people were terrified into assenting to Christian teaching. When that belief weakened, the plea was set up that the Freethinker had no right to rob people of a belief that yielded them happiness. And when that does not avail there is the still more direct appeal to cowardice, that religion keeps people within the bounds of decency, and we must beware in breaking the barrier lest we liberate a torrent that will sweep away civilised society. It is an appeal to fear all through. Had people been better trained they would have realised that morality can gain no real help from a lie, that when a belief shrinks from conflict it is already on the decline, and that character is only strengthened when it acquires the capacity of facing facts, prepared to take the world for what it is and make the most of it.

More remarkable than either the tribute to Bradlaugh's character or to Mr. Irvine's, is Mr. Campbell's comment that this "soldier boy" employed "almost the only argument worth advancing in favor of the Christian's faith in a God of love, a Heavenly Father." And this is what the New Theology has come to! This is the theology that laughs at dogma, that talks largely about a religion that will meet the demands of science and philosophy, and stand four square against all the unbelieving winds that blow! Verily, the mountain has labored and brought forth a mouse. For, note, the only argument worth advancing in favor of the Christian's faith in God, is the cowardly whine, "I feel peaceful, and please don't disturb me"! Well, if this is "almost the only argument worth advancing" in support of a fundamental article of Christian belief, what, in the name of all that is reasonable, are we to think of the others that are in vogue?

There are three phases in the Christian's dealings with unbelievers. The earliest and crudest was to represent him as an agent or an incarnation of the Devil himself. In its way this was complimentary both to the Devil and to Freethinkers. It at least emphasised the fact that the pick of the world's intelligence was not on the Christian side. And, curiously enough, the Devil is always represented in Christian history and literature as a more intellectually attractive person than the devout believer. Succeeding this early phase came the picture of the unbeliever as a monster of moral depravity—a theory which that shining example of episcopal vacuity, the Bishop of London, appears still to regard with some affection. The Freethinker was one who rejected Christianity either because he desired an excuse for his immorality, or because his depravity blinded him to the beauties of the Gospel. Time passed, Christianity became weaker, and Christians more outwardly complaisant, with the result that it became the fashion, with a certain type of cleric, to depict the Freethinker as quite a normal person, with a kindly interest in his fellows, but, alas! sadly mistaken in his estimate of Christianity. Mr. Campbell is evidently a representative of this latter class of believers, and imagines he is flattering great Freethinkers by placing them on the level of unreflective and intellectually emasculated pietists. Personally, I prefer the earlier phases. Whether the Freethinker was painted a monster of mental malignity or of moral depravity, he was at least left a man. The last phase presents us with a mere caricature of one. Great Freethinkers have not usually been able to

bequeath to posterity much in the shape of worldly possessions. But they have bequeathed to us the tradition of manly bravery and unswerving devotion to truth. And if we permit Christians, in the interests of a stupid sentimentalism, to rob us of this and to bring our dead down to their level, we shall be left poor indeed.

C. COHEN.

### Prayer Indefensible.

IN a recent number of the *Christian World*, the well-known writer who signs himself "J. B." puts in an earnest and eloquent plea for the belief in the reasonableness and efficacy of prayer. This is, however, not a new plea, but the old and familiar one in a form supposed to be better adapted to the requirements of to-day. What the writer endeavors to show is that prayer is by no means an unscientific mental exercise. All the scientific attacks upon prayer, which were so common fifty years ago, were due, we are informed, to a grave misunderstanding of the true nature and sphere of prayer. Whether this is true or not will immediately appear; but meanwhile we must call attention to the fact that "J. B." is not at all a reliable guide. For example, he says: "We remember Huxley's challenge of a quarter of a century ago. He proposed a scientific test as to the curative effects of prayer in our London hospitals, and appeared to imagine that an experiment of this sort would settle the question." Such a test was proposed, not by Huxley, but by Tyndall nearly forty years ago. His proposal was that certain hospital wards should be set apart to be prayed for, to the exclusion of all other wards. Of course, the test was angrily denounced as positively blasphemous. The divines opened all the vials of their wrath and poured their contents upon the unfortunate head of the impious proposer of such a scheme. "We doubt," says "J. B.," "if any scientist of repute would propose the test now. The misconception on which it rests has been too sufficiently exploded." Naturally, it would not be worth while for any scientist of repute to make a similar proposal now, because he knows exactly how it would be received. All the preachers in Christendom would howl him down with opprobrious epithets, resorting to such sublime logic as the following: "Why, sir, your God-insulting proposal is as unjustifiable in the spiritual realm as it would be in the physical realm for a man to seek to make ice in the hot room of a Turkish bath."

Now, in this connection, "J. B." makes a most damaging concession. He says:—

"A man may pray till all is blue, but if he is at the moment falling from a precipice, gravitation will settle matters with him at the bottom. You cannot by any spiritual effort prevent fire from burning or water from drowning. That, says our scientist, is how things are; and, moreover, it is how things should be. To suppose that the desires, the ideas, of a feeble, narrow-minded mortal could alter the cosmic laws would be to introduce inextricable confusion, would reduce everything to chaos. All which, of course, is perfectly true. The mistake is in supposing that this touches in any essential point the doctrine and the practice of prayer."

That the concession is a damaging one is abundantly shown in the last sentence of the above extract. If there is no power in the Universe that ever interferes with the operations of natural law, why on earth do the Churches pray for the recovery of the sick at all? Is it not true that behind the practice of praying for the sick lies the belief that God can and does modify and reverse the order of Nature in response to the fervent supplications of his people? The Bible abounds in instances of alleged direct answers to such petitions; and it is the emphatic teaching of the New Testament (James v. 15) that "the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick." Jesus, too, is represented as saying to his disciples (John xvi. 23), "If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name." Does

it not follow, then, that "J. B.'s" concession is in direct opposition to both "the doctrine and the practice of prayer" in the New Testament and practically throughout the whole history of the Christian Church? The truth is that this modern apologist is logically compelled, by his scientific knowledge, to surrender a large portion of the Biblical "doctrine and practice of prayer," and yet has the audacity to declare that the surrender does not touch such doctrine and practice "in any essential point." In other words, prayer, according to him, can only be preserved and justified, in these days, at the expense of withdrawing it from every sphere in which its supposed results can be subjected to a thorough, scientific investigation. "Prayer," he adds, "lives in one realm, and physical science in another. The two realms are intimately related, and they do not contradict each other. But the laws that govern them are different." "J. B." does not know that there are two realms; but even if he did he would have no right to affirm that the laws which govern them are different. Professor Henry Drummond believed in the existence of the two realms; but he published a large book with the object of convincing everybody that the laws which govern them are the same.

But let us see how "J. B." works out his thesis. As a matter of fact, he does not develop it at all, but contents himself with blindly dogmatising upon it. He declares, for example, that "the brain, the blood, and the nerves are not the thinker, nor his thought." Then he exclaims triumphantly, "You can weigh the brain, but you cannot weigh a thought." No, you cannot weigh a thought, or tell the color of an inspiration, simply because you cannot catch it, any more than you can catch the ether. "J. B." does not know that a thought has neither weight nor measure; all he knows being that, as yet, science has not succeeded in dealing with it. Neither can he adduce the slightest evidence that the brain, the blood, and the nerves between them are not the thinker. We are quite sure that he cannot prove that there exists in the whole Universe a single brainless, bloodless, and nerveless thinker. Yet of his dogmas "J. B." is bold enough to say: "These are truths too obvious for discussion. The best scientists frankly admit them." Nothing of the sort. That such blind dogmas are "truths" transcends human knowledge. We challenge "J. B." to name one "scientist of repute" who, as scientist, "frankly admits them." As philosophers, some scientists assume them to be truths, absolutely without evidence, while others reject them, equally without proof.

Now, it is purely on a foundation of gratuitous metaphysical assumptions that "J. B." erects his whole doctrine of prayer. He assumes that man is, or has, an inner personality, capable of existing apart from, and independently of, the physical organism; he assumes the existence of a Divine or infinite personality, who exists and thinks and acts without a material organism of any kind; and he assumes that prayer signifies the coming together, in conscious and blissful fellowship, of these two personalities. Usually, "J. B." cannot find language sufficiently severe in which to ridicule the vain imaginings of metaphysicians; but he cannot conscientiously challenge the conclusion that his own doctrine of prayer is a wholly metaphysical structure. It is all very well to say that, "keeping to the practical, to what we do know, which is the only sure line for us, when we pray we must accept a Personality," because "we cannot adore oxygen, or offer petitions to the law of gravitation." But to accept a Divine personality is to transcend what we know. Whether such an infinite personality exists or not, it is not an object of knowledge. You merely assume that it exists, clothe it with your own qualities, unnaturally or supernaturally magnified, and then you fall down and adore it. In the last analysis, that exactly is what the worship of God means. It is self-worship, self-communion, the presenting of petitions to an idealised image of the worshiper.

On the assumption that "J. B.'s" infinitely perfect and benevolent personality exists apart from, and independently of, the physical Universe, would not the laws of the spiritual world be as inexorable as those of the natural world? The reverend gentleman says that "prayer is communion with a person," fellowship with the infinitely perfect personality, that it "is a travesty of the idea to suppose it means saying to God, 'Do this, or that,' 'Give me what I want,'" and that "genuine prayer comes in the first instance not from man, but from God," and, in reality, "is the gracious circulation of Divine ideas through the human soul." Again we must remind our friend that this is nothing but naked dogmatism, and possesses no evidential value whatever. Besides, it contradicts the dogmatism of Jesus and his apostles, as recorded in the New Testament. The Lord's Prayer is a series of definite petitions. To pray is to ask, seek, knock, and it is only they who do so, receive, find, and obtain entrance. The saints were to make their requests known unto God. Paul was continually making supplications on behalf of his converts, and in Hebrews we read that, in the days of his flesh, Jesus himself "offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death." Jesus and his apostles knew quite as much about prayer and praying, to say the least, as "J. B." does. But, surely, to pray for salvation, for grace, for strength, is quite as absurd as to ask for rain, or sunshine, or recovery from an illness, because, if there are spiritual laws, they must be fully as unchangeable and inexorable as natural laws.

The efficacy of prayer is a theological delusion. A man may be all the better for communing with his nobler nature, for zealously cherishing high ideals and worthy ambitions; but the notion that appeals to a Supreme Being insure his intervention on one's behalf is at once an insult to such a Being and a self-deception of a ruinous nature. "J. B." quotes the farmer's saying in Meredith's *Rhoda Fleming*: "For pray, and you can't go far wrong." But the Fleming family, in spite of all its Bible reading and praying, did go very far wrong. Many people who pray have noble characters and perform magnificent deeds; but others who pray with equal sincerity and fervor have bad characters, and revel in wicked things. It would be a radical mistake to give prayer the credit for the nobility of the former, or to hold it responsible for the vileness of the latter. What we need to realise is, that many of the best people living to-day never pray, and never feel the need of praying. Their one ambition is to realise, and give expression to, the best of which they are by nature capable, to learn by experience and study and observation what the laws of life are, and do their utmost to obey them. Supernaturalism is both historically and experimentally already an exploded bubble.

J. T. LLOYD.

### The Physical Basis of Memory.

IN his *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding* the philosopher Locke very justly observes that "The pictures drawn in our minds are laid in failing colors." The subtle and complex problem of memory is of extraordinary interest. Were all the difficulties involved in this psychological puzzle satisfactorily solved, a firm and enduring foundation would be established for the complete understanding of the nerve vibrations which are indissolubly linked with mental manifestations in all their wondrous forms.

In common with all great problems of permanent interest, memory phenomena receive their fullest explanation when surveyed from the standpoint of organic evolution. In classic Greece, Aristotle, following his predecessor Plato, conferred upon memory such functional processes as coincided most closely with his own philosophical views; but in this, as in all other questions he examined, this great Greek

thinker displayed more practical understanding than his master. With rare power of psychological analysis, Aristotle postulated three laws of association—namely, contiguity in time and space, resemblance, and contrariety. Memory images are by him referred to the centre of the circulatory system, the heart, in which he supposed them recorded, the images being registered and remembered, and not the objects from which they took their origin. Aristotle considered the matter from a comparative point of view, recognised memory as a possession of the lower animals; but inasmuch as the processes of memory involve time, those animals only that are provided with a sense of time possess the power of memory. He also clearly distinguishes between memory and reminiscence, and fully realises the distinction between imagination and memory. Remembrance is necessarily of past experiences, but imagination is not thus restricted or confined.

If we scan the philosophy of antiquity as a whole we find painstaking and unprejudiced attempts of the leading thinkers to provide a physical basis of memory. The inconclusive results of their analysis were not due to their want of logical power, but to their ignorance of the structure and functions of the nervous system.

From the decline and fall of Pagan civilisation and culture down to the eighteenth century little or no progress worthy of record was made in this department of psychology. Although memory, to the almost entire exclusion of judgment, was the all-essential requisite for what passed for education in the Middle Ages, nothing of value or importance to its study was contributed during that sterile period. And so late as the end of the seventeenth century Locke added nothing of moment to the subject. Among moderns, Descartes (1696-1750) appears as the pioneer who adumbrated the physiological aspect of memory processes. He concluded that shadows of objects were imprinted upon the brain, these impressions indirectly serving the animal spirits in recollection. This was undoubtedly a giant stride, as it recognised the part played by the brain as a mediator in memory. This fruitful idea was elaborated by Malebranche (1698-1715) and by Bonnet (1720-1793). Malebranche noted the close connection of habit with memory—a relation now accentuated through the experimental work of contemporary psychologists. And in developing this thought Bonnet derived all ideas from the senses. Albeit physical in its nature, memory nevertheless finds a physical correlative in the vibratory motions of the nerve-fibres, or in sensation. Condillac, who followed, dealt boldly with the problem, and, increment by increment, the path was prepared for the application of the scientific method which now bids fair to ultimately banish all mystics and obscurantists from the domains of mental phenomena.

Psychology will never become a true science until it is firmly based upon physiology. A working knowledge of the processes of living matter is an indispensable condition if we are to solve any outstanding problem in the psychical field.

When, in 1876, Hering read his essay on "Memory as a Common Function of Organised Matter," he made a vast contribution towards the elucidation of the subject. As a physical basis for memory he enunciates the doctrine of "traces," and functional disposition of nerve-matter. He saw that all known modes of consciousness are functionally dependent upon the brain. He propounded the opinion that memory is not confined to the central nervous system; that the sympathetic system also stores memory impressions that are derived from the external world, and that the power of retentiveness in some degree or other is the common property of the sum-total of living matter. Hering was convinced of the existence of the unbroken continuity of memory—in its widest and deepest sense—from the earliest dawn of life to the twentieth century.

When, as a result of exercise, muscles develop, not only are the fibres and cells enlarged, but they multiply in number. When a cell has increased to a

given size it splits into two daughter cells, which each inherit the memory life of the parent. The cell itself—both in the animal and vegetable kingdoms—has transferred its stored experience to *two* organic units. It is a logical and necessary inference, therefore, that acquired, in addition to congenital, characteristics were transmitted. When the single cell is transformed into the double daughter cells they may be said to possess the impressions gathered by all previous generations of cells in their ancestral line, and in that way "remember" what happened to the parent cells. Thus regarded, memory becomes a never-ceasing process, and the entire biological series is indissolubly connected through the unbroken transmission of all the modifications set up in living things from the inception of life to our own period.

Viewed in this manner, memory becomes a continuous process, and the evolutionary chain of living matter is built up in terms of the reproductive faculty inherent in the primal organic form. This theory provides an explanation of the vexed question of instinct. The innate reproductive faculty of the chick enables it to automatically repeat the customary performances of the hen, when chickens are hatched and reared under conditions which absolutely preclude any possible imitation of the parent bird. The marvellous web-spinning power of the spider was slowly and steadily acquired by countless generations of spiders, until it became indelibly fixed as organic memory. "The experiences registered upon plastic organisms, even if unconscious, are immortal." Those that leave an impress upon organic substance will be remembered so long as life endures.

The eminent French physiological psychologist, Ribot, has dwelt upon the changes set up by environmental influences upon the nerve elements, at the same time emphasising their dynamic associations. Secondary automatic movements, such as walking or reading, are the outcome of previous deliberation. In these and kindred examples the nerve structures furnish the phenomena of retention and reproduction. Consciousness with the allied ability to reproduce in time relations would, if present, constitute complete memory of what has been *mentally* forgotten, though *organically* remembered.

Surveyed, then, from this standpoint, memory phenomena are inseparably associated with hereditary transmission. If the impressions gathered and garnered by the living world in the course of its evolutionary advance are retained in the form of a tendency to display themselves in a special manner, then all the multitudinous manifestations of organic modification are justly regarded as reproductions of the registered remembrances of the race. This interpretation furnishes a firm foundation for the doctrine of Recapitulation, inasmuch that during its embryological development, in the modifications it undergoes, the animal foetus displays the outward and visible sign of past physiological and psychical growth. From the primal morn of life's dawning the protoplasmic substratum, with all its subsequent accretions, has treasured for future service the totality of the impressions which the incident forces of its environment successively stamped upon its sensitive structures. In the organic and inorganic departments of nature alike, the totality of matter and energy remains constant.

Even when lost to consciousness, the remembrance of things past is materialised in structural fabrics which enable the organisms possessing them to favorably adapt themselves to the constantly varying conditions of their existence. In this sense organisms bear in eternal remembrance the wondrous long experiences of life's chequered ascent from its simplest and most structureless beginnings to the most finished phase of evolution their special order or class has reached. What wonder, then, that the child inevitably displays so striking a resemblance to its begetters? When philosophically viewed, what reason exists for imagining that the functionally wrought modifications which plants and animals manifest fail to register themselves in the descen-

dants of the organisms that display them? Were they thus to fail in reproducing these results of physiological changes, then an unlooked for break must occur in the eternal chain of cause and effect. In strict logic, therefore, we are driven to conclude that when we meditate upon the marvellous phenomena of memory processes—subtle and complex to a degree—that the term “immortality” must be applied to them so long as the living organisms that perpetuate them endure.

T. F. P.

### National Secular Society's Annual Conference.

#### ANNUAL REPORT.—BY THE PRESIDENT.

In presenting this Annual Report, with the Balance-sheet, to the present Conference, the Executive finds it still necessary to repeat an old warning. Neither the Report nor the Balance-sheet covers anything like the whole work of the Society or of the movement which it mainly represents and embodies. The Branches of the Society, throughout London and the provinces, are all autonomous, carrying on their own operations and raising and expending their own funds. The Central Executive exists to do certain collective work which the Branches cannot do separately. This work has never, except on special occasions, involved a large expenditure of money. It must also be borne in mind that a good deal of the most expensive work is now undertaken and financed by the Secular Society, Limited; including costly series of lectures and the principal part of the Secretary's salary. The expenditure of that Incorporation amounts to several hundreds of pounds per year, nearly all of which represents effort running parallel to, and in harmony with, that of the National Secular Society. The Incorporation also makes grants of money to the N. S. S. Executive and Branches which are in need of greater financial assistance than the Executive is able to render.

During the past year the Secular movement, like all other intellectual and advanced movements, has suffered to some extent from the immense preoccupation of the public mind with politics. Apart altogether from the intrinsic importance of the questions in dispute, there is so much fierce excitement in political struggles—especially of the character of those now going on in Great Britain—that other, and sometimes far more important, discussions appear tame and uninteresting. Human nature is still so full of combativeness that it is very doubtful if even Jesus or Paul—to say nothing of mere uninspired orators—could hold a public meeting together if a dog-fight were started in the immediate vicinity. This side of human nature, of course, has its special advantages, but it also has its special disadvantages. When it is duly, or unduly, stimulated it is apt to overwhelm everything else. Man is nothing without his passions, but they are certainly more useful as a fire in a grate or stove than as a conflagration throughout the house. Yet in spite of the drawback referred to the Secular movement has held its own extremely well. Messrs. Cohen and Lloyd, for instance, report excellent, and in some cases growing, audiences in various parts of the country, and the President reports particularly crowded meetings at Manchester. It is gratifying to learn, also, that the circulation of the *Freethinker*—which is, for all practical purposes, the Society's organ—has been well maintained.

It is as well perhaps to state in this connection that the large, gratuitous advertisement of the Society in the *Freethinker* has drawn a considerable number of new members, and will doubtless continue to do so for some time to come.

New Branches of the Society have been formed at Renfrew, Bishops Auckland, and Nottingham—where an active Freethought propaganda has been carried on at outdoor meetings, in which Mr. Joseph Bates (formerly of Boston) has participated.

It is pleasant to report that the reunited Liverpool Branch is in a good position and is working with harmony and success. Slight echoes of old controversies have been heard; and one member, who refused to sign a cheque liberating a small sum of money, long locked up, for the use of the Central Executive, had his name removed from the Society's books; but the main stream of the Secular movement in Liverpool flows on steadily in its proper channel—thanks very largely to the skill and energy of the Branch President, Mr. John Hammond. Owing to the loss of its resident lecturer, the Branch is in some ways at a disadvantage, which can only be compensated for by fresh zeal and enterprise. Mr. Percy Ward has migrated to America, where it is hoped he will have a bright, useful, and lasting career.

The Glasgow Branch has had excellent Sunday meetings throughout the winter, and has organised propagandist lectures at Paisley, Falkirk, Renfrew, and other places in South-West Scotland. Considerable activity has also been shown at Edinburgh. Some work has been done on the Tyneside, but not as much as could be desired. A public debate was organised by the Newcastle Branch at Anckland between Mr. C. Cohen and a Christian minister. The same Branch was looking forward to a lecturing visit from the President in April, but the engagement had to be postponed until the autumn in consequence of his illness. Regular and successful work has been carried on at the Secular Hall, Manchester. Several N. S. S. lecturers have occupied the platform of the Leicester Secular Society, which has always existed on an insular basis—out of connection with the N. S. S., but by no means out of friendship with it. Lecturing activity has somewhat abated in South Wales, owing to a certain difficulty in obtaining halls, but the lectures which have been organised have been well attended. Very large meetings have been held again in the Birmingham Town Hall.

Turning to London, it has to be noted that the Annual Dinner, at the Holborn Restaurant, which happened to take place on January 11—the President's birthday—was a record gathering; the company, which numbered 223, including several visitors from the provinces; and the occasion being marked by appropriate and (as such things should be) inexpensive presents to the President and his wife. Three successful social gatherings have likewise taken place at Anderton's Hotel, under your Executive's auspices, and have done much to cement the London Freethinkers' together.

With regard to the open-air propaganda, which is carried on so extensively in London during the summer, and is productive of so much good, the Executive, by way of encouragement, undertook to grant two shillings per lecture to each Branch that applied for the same. This has been found a great help by some of the poorer Branches; that is to say, by Branches working in poor districts, where even large audiences necessarily yield but small collections.

In the way of special expenditure the Executive voted £5 to the testimonial being raised for Mr. James Rowney, who has done a large amount of open-air lecturing in London during many years. A subscription of 100 francs was voted to the International Freethought Federation. A similar subscription was voted to the Ferrer Memorial fund. A subscription of £5 was voted to the Secular Education League, and a further sum of £2 3s., representing one half the net cost of a public meeting held at the Essex Hall after the annual meeting of members—Lord Weardale presiding, and Sir Henry Cotton, Mr. George Greenwood, M.P., and Mr. G. W. Foote being amongst the speakers. Your President guaranteed that half-cost in order to ensure the holding of a public meeting, which was really requisite, although the League's object is not now prominently before the public. But it will be so again, perhaps sooner than some suppose, and victories are won by preparations during times of peace as well as by strategy and valor in time of war. Nor can any public movement hope to win support without advertising itself in legitimate ways.

The Executive incurred much expense over the reopening of the Boulter case. It will be remembered that Mr. Boulter weakly gave an undertaking not to repeat such language as he had been found guilty of under an indictment for “blasphemy” at the Old Bailey. He appears to have been careful for some time, but eventually he broke his own undertaking, and he was called up for judgment. As on the previous occasion, your Executive undertook the legal costs, and also the expenses of Mrs. Boulter's home during her husband's imprisonment. Mr. Justice Darling, who sat on the bench, sent Mr. Boulter to prison for one month. This sentence, after the serious summing-up and grave warnings of Mr. Justice Phillimore, who presided at the original trial, practically reduced “blasphemy” prosecutions to a comic-opera level.

Mr. Boulter was subsequently prosecuted under the London County Council bye-laws for using “improper language” while lecturing on Clapham Common, and fined the maximum amount of £10 besides costs. Such a prosecution was no special concern of your Executive. This was broadly hinted in 1908. The National Secular Society is bound to resist, and if possible frustrate, every revival of the infamous Blasphemy Laws, which were framed and maintained for the protection of Christianity against frank and thorough-going criticism; but it is not bound to uphold every man's right to use whatever expressions he pleases in a place of public resort. Where opinions are not aimed at—and no other speaker has been molested—a speaker must bear his own responsibility in regard to his choice of language. Moreover, it has never been the policy of the National Secular Society to raise funds for the payment of fines. It is a very poor martyrdom which can be shared out amongst others,

even to the exclusion of the martyr himself. How differently did the men and women act whose valiant fight against the Blasphemy Laws forms one of the most glorious chapters in the history of Freethought.

A far graver matter is the persecution of the Secular movement at Birmingham, which has just reached its climax in connection with the Town Hall lectures. Many years ago the N. S. S. Branch held very successful Sunday evening meetings in one of the Board Schools. The success of these meetings was, indeed, the real cause of their undoing. Had the N. S. S. lecturers addressed a handful of people they would have been safe in their insignificance, but when the hall was crowded, and people were sometimes turned away from the doors, it became necessary to do something for the protection of the Christian faith. False and absurd charges were trumped up by the bigots, and the Branch was deprived of the use of the building, or of any similar building in Birmingham. Thus the too successful meetings came to an untimely end. And the attempt to raise an effective protest showed that organised Freethought had no friends—not even amongst the organised Socialists. But the Secularists had still left the occasional use of the Town Hall, which was granted, as it had been for many years, by the Lord Mayor. During recent years four Sundays during the winter had been granted. Audiences grew larger and larger—and the bigots felt again that something must be done for the protection of Christian faith. Their first step was to raise factitious complaints as to the literature sold at the Town Hall meetings. A list of criminal publications was drawn up for the City Council. It included the *Freethinker* (of course!) Paine's *Age of Reason*, Ingersoll's lectures, and Blatchford's *God and My Neighbor*. The result was that the Secularists were prohibited from selling literature at all at their Town Hall meetings. Still the meetings went on increasing in size, and the conspiracy of silence on the part of the press was broken in order to mention that fact on the occasion of Mr. Foote's lectures in October. The meetings themselves, therefore, had to be attacked. Complaint was made as to the title of one of Mr. Cohen's lectures in November. It was a title perfectly legitimate in itself, but in the circumstances it gave the bigots their opportunity. And they made the most of it. When the Branch made the usual application for four Sundays next winter, the Lord Mayor referred it to the Estates Committee, who replied that it "could not be acceded to." They assigned no reason, probably because they wished to avoid the worst odium of their action. Mr. Foote being consulted by the Branch, saw the necessity of forcing the Estates Committee's hand. He advised the Branch to make a fresh application for the use of the Town Hall on one Sunday in October, for two lectures by the President of the National Secular Society. The denial of that application would have been an undisguised act of bigotry. Accordingly an answer came from the Lord Mayor granting the application. It was a movement along what may be called the line of least resistance. And thus the case now stands. It is obvious that Birmingham Christians have no idea of toleration. They cannot understand that Secularists, who pay rates and taxes, and perform all the other duties of citizenship, are entitled to the rights of citizenship. Nor is this frame of mind confined to Birmingham. It exists throughout England, and is one of the greatest dangers which the Freethought party has to encounter.

Freethought has often more to fear from public bodies than from private bigots. One man will sometimes hesitate to do what a committee will do cheerfully. Moral responsibility is so little and so light when it is shared amongst a number of "respectable" persons. Even now it is patent that the Lord Mayor of Birmingham is more amenable to considerations of justice and fair-play to minorities than are the Estates Committee or the City Council. At Camberwell, too, where Councillor A. B. Moss has made such a gallant fight against the exclusion of the *Freethinker* from the Free Libraries reading-rooms, it may be doubted whether a single person in authority (say the Mayor) would take upon himself the whole responsibility of excluding a periodical solely on account of its opinions; for everybody knows, including its traducers, that the *Freethinker* is no more "obscene" than the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Morning Post*, or the *Daily Mail*,—but, indeed, far less obscene if the disgusting details of criminal and divorce trials are taken into account. Democracy has its advantages, but one of its disadvantages is the difficulty of reaching its conscience through the barriers of its religious prejudice and intellectual indifference. Asking a public body to respect the mental and moral rights of minorities who are not dangerous on polling days is too much like asking consideration from a shark or a tiger. The way in which the *Freethinker* has been dealt with for nearly thirty years—from the time of its prosecution for the fictitious crime of "blasphemy" down to its present exclusion from public free libraries, rail-

(Continued on p. 330.)

## Acid Drops.

In Port Sunlight—where the soap comes from—a church exists under the care of the Rev. L. H. Mills and Mr. C. Hook. A *Monthly Messenger* is also issued by these gentlemen, the issue for May being signed by the former, who places before his readers "Some Religious Facts"; and, as this is a stock of which religion has a notoriously weak holding, one turns to the article with some interest. A glance, however, proves that the most interesting feature of the facts is the writer. For he seems to labor under the curious delusion that if certain facts in connection with Christianity are admitted, the Christian interpretation of these facts is admitted also. Common as this delusion is, it is none the less a delusion. Mr. Mills says both the Church and the New Testament are facts, and if the Church was not founded by Christ, and if the New Testament did not originate in the way Christians believe it did, what other explanation is there? "Unbelievers, on these points," says Mr. Mills, "seem to have nothing to say." This is the wildest delusion, and Port Sunlight must in some mysterious way be cut off from the world not to be aware of the fact that unbelievers have a great deal to say on both these points. They trace the development of the Christian Church from the Pagan Churches that preceded it, and they have traced the growth of the New Testament in a manner that is rapidly commending itself to many Christian scholars—although not to Mr. Mills!

More of Mr. Mills's facts are the Christmas Calendar, Easter, and Christmas. We call this year 1910, therefore "it is fair to assume that 1910 years ago, or thereabouts, something happened of sufficient importance to justify a change of reckoning of time." Mr. Mills may be surprised to learn that it was not for more than five hundred years after the supposed date of this alleged happening that the "Christian Calendar" was adopted. Over five hundred years after the alleged birth of Jesus the monk Dionysius thought it was about time to settle the date; and as numerous other savior-gods had been born on December 25, the birth of this one was fixed for the same date. And even so conservative a writer as the late Dean Farrar admitted that the calculation was wrong. Either Mr. Mills is misleading his readers or his knowledge of ecclesiastical history is decidedly faulty. If he will be good enough to inform his readers that the birthday of Mithras, of Horus, Bacchus, Adonis, Hercules, and others, all occurred on the 25th of December, they may begin to see there is another explanation of Mr. Mills's "fact" quite different to the one suggested. So, also, with Easter and Christmas. If they "testify to the historical reality of Jesus Christ," they must also testify to the historical reality of Mithra and others, with whose names both Easter and Christmas were connected long before Christianity was heard of. Nay, the very name of Easter is that of the Saxon goddess Eostre who was worshiped for many generations before Christianity was born.

Mr. Mills has only two more "facts" wherewith to stagger Port Sunlight unbelievers. The first of these is "Christian experience." Christians believe they are comforted and inspired by their faith. Quite so; and Mohammedans believe the same of theirs. Jews, Parsees, Buddhists, Mormons, believe the same of theirs. Even the drunkard may believe the same of his special solace. Are they all right? If not, why not? What special quality is there in the Christian experience that makes it superior to other experiences? They cannot all be right; is it not possible they are all wrong? Mr. Mills says we are asked to believe that millions of people are all deceived. Well, but this is exactly what the Christian asks us to believe concerning the followers of every religion except his own. And if the vast majority of the earth's inhabitants can be deceived, what is there startling in the belief that the fraction represented by the Christian world can be deceived also? We do not question the belief of Christians in the comforting power of their religion; we only deny that it has any relevancy in the discussion as to the truth of their religion.

Finally, we come to the fact of Christian civilisation—the most civilised nations of the world. Japan, with only one-fifth of the destitution per 100,000 of its population, would probably question the truth of this. So, also, would China. And unless we regard the mad scramble for wealth as signs of civilisation, both countries might reasonably argue that Christians mistake a difference of civilisation for a qualitative distinction. But suppose we grant that the nations calling themselves Christian are the most civilised nations. Does it follow that the cause of their civilisation is Christianity? What essential connection is there between

the development of sanitation, the spread of education, the invention of the printing-press, the discovery of steam, the growth of science, and Christian beliefs? Take all these non-Christian things away, and what becomes of *Christian* civilisation? Mr. Mills says without Christianity we might have become another Turkey. A Turk might reply that without the baleful influence of the Christian nations Turkey would have been much better conditioned than it is. And we say that without secular science we might easily be as Christian Abyssinia is, and as some of the miserable communities of Eastern Christians still are. Mr. Mills should reflect that the most advanced nations in the world have the least Christianity about them. Above all, before fulfilling his promise of returning to the subject again, he should strive to make acquaintance with what Freethinkers really have to say against his creed. If Port Sunlight soap was not better than Port Sunlight religion, we are afraid the whole concern would soon be in the bankruptcy-court.

During the Anglo-Japanese Exhibition a Branch of the Y. M. C. A. is to be opened at Shepherd's Bush, and the Committee propose taking the Japanese to see Dr. Barnado's Homes, in order "to give them an insight into our Christianity." The Japanese, not being fools, may probably reflect that a Christian civilisation which finds so many waifs and strays on the streets is not a very great thing, and a "Heavenly Father" who permits this to occur also offers opportunities for improvement. A visit down some of the slums of East and West London might also be instructive to the Japanese visitors, and would certainly give them a more complete view of "Our Christianity."

Christians are the same all over the world, playing the same game, and making themselves similarly ridiculous. From a report in a South African paper, the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, we see that the pious party in Kimberley are greatly upset over the existence of Sunday Municipal Concerts. A deputation of clergymen attended the Council, and asked for the discontinuance of the performances. They did not allege that any moral harm was done, but the concert "deleteriously affected the attendance at public worship." Either people stayed away from church to attend the concerts, or they left the church early—before the collection was taken, we presume—for the same purpose. One of the clergymen gravely suggested that all that people needed on Sunday was to attend church and then take a quiet stroll before going to bed. How delightful the world would be if these people had their way! A sympathetic member of the Council said if the concerts were continued applause should not be permitted. Evidently the speaker thought that if the proceedings were only dull enough they might look religious. The Council, we are pleased to see, eventually decided to continue the concerts. The Isaacsteins, and Rosenbaums, and other *Christian* residents in Kimberley will thus be able to enjoy their Sunday evening music as usual.

Rev. James Ferguson, of Corstorphine, near Edinburgh, was assaulted by a footpad the other Sunday evening while he was returning from church. As a believer in the book which commands him to turn one cheek when the other is smitten, and not to resist evil, Mr. Ferguson promptly put the thief on his back with "a couple of well-directed blows." He afterwards explained with pride that he "did not learn the noble art at the university for nothing." Quite so; nor does he preach the opposite gospel for nothing. We admire the reverend gentleman's promptitude and courage, but we have grave doubts as to the scriptural character of his proceedings. He should have won the footpad's love by giving him his watch and chain, and taking him home to supper.

The Bible, said Judge Willis at a meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society, has "permeated our literature with high ideals, changed our laws, and sanctified our judges." It is a pity that a great many cobblers won't stick to their lasts instead of fathering ridiculous statements, such as this one. What indebtedness had any of our greatest writers to the Bible more than to any other book with which they came into contact? We are not referring to the Hall Caines and Mario Corellis of literature, who are credited with "lofty ideals" chiefly because they "sensed" and used the Bible as a marketable asset. But some of the noblest men and women of Shakespeare have no more to do with the Bible than with Old Moore's Almanack. They are drawn directly from Pagan sources, and are often frankly Pagan in their estimate of life. As for the effect of the Bible on our laws, we challenge Judge Willis, or anybody else, to name a single instance in which the influence of the Bible on legislation can be clearly traced, in which that influence has not been in the direction of brutalising legis-

lation, or retarding humane improvements. We would advise Judge Willis to stick to the Bench, or to seek some recreation for his spare moments other than making statements only worthy of an uneducated local preacher.

The Rev. H. T. Andrews must have displeased many of the clergymen present at a meeting of the Congregational Union when he told them that "Sabbatarianism was dead, and no efforts of theirs could ever resuscitate it." He also told them it would be a bad day for the Church if Christianity and Sport were ever placed in competition with each other. Those who talk so glibly about the hold Christianity has upon the people will do well to reflect, on the opinion of an expert, that if it opposes football and golf, or sport in general, it will go under. And the sting of the statement lies in its truth. Christianity has to-day so little real mental life about it, it is so much a matter of custom and social fashion, that any direct opposition to something the bulk of the people take a genuine interest in would wreck it altogether. But what a collapse! The religion that once had the power to order life, and could burn a man for a difference of opinion, is forced to avow itself weaker than the demand for a game of football. Such fallen greatness is almost enough to command the forbearance of pity.

The dear, delightful Bishop of London says it takes a great deal to make an East-end lad blush. If the Right Rev. Father in God has tried the East-ender with the stories of "Lot and His Daughters," "Ezekiel's Banquets," and other "blue" yarns, and still failed to produce the blush, we guess he'll have to give it up.

Present-day life is too comfortable is the opinion of some members of the Baptist Union. They needn't worry; all their friends and neighbors who are not Baptists will have a very uncomfortable time in the next existence.

The death of Mark Twain and of Björnson makes us take stock of the living authors of eminence. Whom have we now? The best known are Anatole France, Tolstoy, Maxim Gorki, D'Annunzio, Maeterlinck, Hauptmann, Sudermann, Hardy, and Shaw. With the exception of Tolstoy, all these writers are Freethinkers.

The Rev. R. Fotheringham, of Blackheath, has been writing on "Tennyson" in *Lloyd's Weekly News*. With the characteristic unction of the "cloth," he says "the sweetest singers, and perhaps the purest souls on both sides of the Atlantic, have been men conspicuous for their strong religious faith—Longfellow, Lowell, and Whittier in America; Wordsworth, Browning, and Tennyson in England." We hope that it will not annoy the reverend gentleman if we point out that Longfellow was a Unitarian and Tennyson was an Evolutionist and a disbeliever in eternal torment. If Christianity be true, those men are in the red-hot-poker department, alongside of Shelley, Meredith, and Swinburne. The Rev. Mr. Fotheringham's faith is strong enough; but he might petition the Throne of Grace for a little more knowledge.

A writer in the "Office Window" column of the *Daily Chronicle* suggests that some enterprising publishers should issue a cheap edition of the Apocrypha, similar to the popular editions of Borrow, Marcus Aurelius, and Rabelais. The Apocrypha is "blue" enough to form a companion volume to Rabelais; but if people want cheap, unornamental filth, they can find sufficient to make a bronze statue blush in a fourpenny edition of the Holy Bible.

The Rev. G. W. Perkins possesses a fine and untrammelled imagination. Unburdening his manly bosom at Leigh-on-Sea concerning Froethought, he recently said, or shouted: "The greatest sceptic, the most hard-and-fast Agnostic, was always haunted by the idea that there was something in his beliefs, some principle which he held dear, which would fail him at a moment when he least expected it, and bring his whole edifice of ideas and beliefs about his ears, leaving him with nothing to hold by." Dear Brother Perkins will never know the difference between a sceptic and an Agnostic; but we can assure him that the average Freethinker, whose ears are not so long as Mr. Perkins's own, will take the risk of anything falling about his ears, and will not look to a dead Jewish Carpenter in his hour of trouble.

"The Christians to the lions!" used, many centuries ago, to be a phrase of some import. They sometimes get there to-day, for we notice that the former headquarters of the Y. M. C. A. has been turned into a Lyons' Restaurant.

The gush and hysteria displayed in the English press concerning the death of the King seems to have amused some people. An American was turning over the *Daily Telegraph* in a train. He found page after page devoted to the one subject. At last, in sheer despair of finding any ordinary news in the paper, he said: "Well, gentlemen, if Jesus Christ had shot the Holy Ghost your newspaper men couldn't have made more fuss."

Rev. J. Mellis, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of England, says the reconciliation of science with religion is in sight. Science is finding a place for prayer in the cosmos of which we are a part. Why, certainly; but whether the place found is favorable to the Christian claims is quite another question. And science finds a place for everything—even for such intellectual back numbers as the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church

Funds are needed in aid of the new cathedral, Cape Town, South Africa. On this the *South African Review* has the following striking comment—it is headed "Cathedrals versus Starvation":—

"It is indeed true that wealthy South Africans, whether living in Johannesburg, Kimberley, or London, have not in the past been very lavish in their gifts to South African institutions of any kind, and as for our hospitals they seem to be unaware of their existence. And it can scarcely be said that wealthy South Africans in London give too much to the hospitals in England; let us say, rather, that they give too little to the hospitals in South Africa. Against every sovereign given by South Africans to institutions in England, how large a sum is sent to South Africa by people in Great Britain who have never seen this country! So large a sum, indeed, that, bearing in mind the appalling poverty in England, it seems sinful on the part of the senders to send it and sinful on our part to receive it. Take the case of the new Cathedral in Cape Town. The portion already erected has been built largely with English money, and all the time there are hundreds of thousands of children in London alone crying for food. It seems to us little short of a disgrace that we should rely, under any conditions, on oversea help to build a Cathedral in Cape Town, but particularly under the circumstances we have mentioned."

We consider it little short of a disgrace that *any* funds are raised for the glorification of God while it is anywhere needed for the benefit of man. But the Churches will agree with General Booth that there is no such thing as dirty money, and solid cash from any quarter, no matter how obtained, is always welcome.

The Rev. Frederic Spurr, of Melbourne, in a leading article in the *Baptist Times* for May 13, "confidently affirms that the religion of Jesus Christ is *slowly* but surely coming to its own." What an amazing thing "its own" must be, since it is coming to it by way of arrested progress and even decided retrogression. Mr. Spurr himself admits that "it is advancing, by seeming defeat, along a way of pain." Isn't this arrant nonsense? And now mark, this slow coming of Christianity, by a backward road, to its own, is accomplished without the Holy Ghost, for Mr. Spurr, speaking of himself and Christians generally, says, "We have forgotten the Holy Ghost." Religion is decaying, but its very decay, this man of God argues, is but the beginning of its all-conquering life. It is visibly going down the hill; but that is only its Divine way of climbing to the summit of the mount of triumph and glory. What will a clergyman not say when advocating a lost cause?

Mr. C. Silvester Horne says that "the supreme fact about every man, whatever be his place in society and history, is his attitude to religion." We agree; and that is the only apology needed for the existence of the *Freethinker*. We believe that religion is exerting a baneful influence upon individual and social life, and it is our one ambition to do all within our power to abolish it. Born of superstition and nourished on ignorance, it has become the deadly nightshade of the world, especially of Christendom. Under it, hypocrisy and lying and bigotry and persecution have always flourished naturally, and poisoned the very roots of conduct. Our attitude to religion, therefore, is one of uncompromising hostility and opposition, and this is "the supreme fact" about us.

Mr. Jesse Bree, of Leicester, has made an interesting discovery concerning the first man, Adam. In a letter that fills a column and a half of the *Midland Free Press* for April 30, he tells us all about it. It is usual to label the father of us all as a coward, because, when face to face with God after the fall, he put the blame on his wife, saying, "The woman, whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." But Mr. Bree assures us that Adam uttered those words, not because he was craven hearted, but because he was a brick. When he discovered

that his wife had sinned, he knew that he loved her much more than he loved God; and like the true hero that he was, he much preferred to stand with her in her sin and share the punishment, than to remain in God's favor at the cost of losing her. After all, Adam was much more sensible than the world has ever regarded him.

When the Welsh Revival began it was confidently predicted that in a short time it would set the whole world on fire. Instead of spreading, like a prairie conflagration, that emotional flame suddenly went out like a rush candle in a strong draught. At present, the Rev. Seth Joshua, a prominent minister in connection with the Welsh Forward Movement, is conducting a revival in Lancashire, and we are informed that "there is a great melting of hearts among the people—even more so than was seen in the Welsh Revival." One of the workers, filled with enthusiasm, writes: "We know what exactly it will lead to—a state of deeper religious indifference than that which preceded it." Every revival does but hasten the complete dissolution of the Christian religion.

Mr. R. J. Campbell regrets that Mr. Blatchford fails to see that, "without faith in the eternal destiny of the soul, the things he is striving for are not worth accomplishing." Indeed! It appears to us that, whether one believes in the "eternal destiny of the soul or not, it is well worth working to see that those around us have sane minds and healthy bodies. We much prefer the sentiment of another preacher that, whether there be a God or not, it is still better to tell the truth than a lie, better to be honest than a thief, better to do one's duty than to shirk its performance. We do not imagine that Mr. Blatchford will be seriously affected by Mr. Campbell's regret. He and others will only see in it one more piece of evidence as to the essentially demoralising influence of Christianity. And the better the natural character the more harmful is the influence of the creed.

The newspapers say that the Pope has ordered his tomb. The Holy Father had better order another for the Christian religion.

The wholesale slaughter of thousands of sea-gulls for millinery purposes continues. The eagle eye of Providence can only see sparrows fall.

The clergy take a great interest in forcing their attentions on patients in hospitals. They should rather occupy themselves with petitioning the Throne of Grace to mitigate its special loving kindness to the hospital patients.

It is curious that the readers of the *Referee* should so enjoy the sentimental excursions into theology made in its columns weekly. One would scarcely expect to find among sporting men that politics and literature should be rank outsiders, whilst the betting is 100 to 1 on Jesus Christ.

Mourning suits for Court use are being sold at £25 if of velvet, or £20 if of cloth. Is this the country which pretends to worship a carpenter-god?

The *Book Monthly* suggested that Mark Twain should have a monument in Westminster Abbey. In a properly constituted Anglo-Saxon Valhalla Mark Twain doubtless has a right to a memorial; but Westminster Abbey is but a church and a heritage of mediævalism, and as such would have been regarded by the great American humorist as "a back number."

The *Southend Telegraph*, in reporting a sermon by the Rev. G. W. Perkins, the President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, at Leigh-on-Sea Wesleyan Church, quoted the reverend gentleman as saying that "Wesley had received his greatest inspiration, had started on his life's work as the result of listening to a sermon by Martin Luther." As Luther died in 1546 and Wesley was born in 1702, the editor of the *Southend Telegraph* is a bit of a wag to suggest this miraculous meeting of two great men; or perhaps the poor reporter went to sleep during the sermon.

The spirit which inspired the fulsome and nauseous dedication of God's Holy Word to that padded and half-forgotten buffon, James I., is by no means dead. Most of our publicists seem to have lost their backbones. With Robert Blatchford writing in the Tory press, Will Crookes eulogising royalty, and Bernard Shaw advocating the wearing of mourning favors for the late King, the attitude of a common soldier in the Army of Liberty is simply one of sheer amazement.



## Mr. Foote's Engagements.

(All early dates cancelled until further notice.)

### To Correspondents.

**PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: 1910.**—Previously acknowledged, £210 17s. 7d. Received since:—T. Raff (Australia), £2; A. E. Gibbs (Cape Colony), 5s.; An Old Worker, £1.

**SHILLING MONTH** (the Figures mean the number of Shillings).—A. W. Mann, 2; J. H. Poyer, 2; G. Yard, 1; J. Poyer, 1. Per Miss Vance:—Mrs. Crummey, 3.

Will correspondents please note that all letters not meant for Mr. Foote personally, but which contain matter of an editorial character, notices of meetings, etc., should be addressed "Editor of *Freethinker*"? Otherwise they cannot be dealt with in time for the following week's issue of this paper.

Mr. Foote thanks the Kingsland Branch for its letter of sympathy and good wishes.

G. R. BALLARD.—Thanks for essay, but as you will have seen, something has already appeared on the subject, and we do not care for a repetition.

G. BEDBOROUGH.—We quite agree with what you say about the ridiculous story concerning Bradlaugh which appears in the *Christian Commonwealth*. You will see we have an article dealing with the matter in the present issue.

H. J. WHIPP.—If you write to Mr. T. Robertson, 6 Mansion-house-road, Langside, Glasgow, he will be able to give you all the information you require. Mr. George Kerr must have a lively imagination, and his disregard for truth should entitle him to the job of a travelling evangelist. The Glasgow Branch of the N. S. S. is neither for nor against Socialism. Politics is outside the scope of its operations, but there are a number of Socialists belonging to it. The Branch officials will be surprised to learn that among its members is "a good proportion of rich men." They may regret it is not true.

R. H. ROSETTI.—We regret that the date of the Laindon meeting was omitted from the "Sugar Plum" in last week's *Freethinker*. We remind those who intend going there that the date is May 21. The other matter is as we expected; and, under the circumstances, good feeling, as well as other considerations, impose submission.

D. BAXTER.—There is no immediate intention of republishing "Abracadabra's" but the author, as well as others, may bear in mind your suggestion that "The Narratives in Genesis" and "The Sayings of Jesus" would serve a useful purpose if issued in a single volume. We quite share your appreciation of our contributor's efforts.

W. P. ADAMSON.—Thanks for the Press correspondence, which we have preserved.

A. W. W.—Thanks for your impressions of the St. James's Hall meeting. With regard to the criticism of what you saw and heard outside in the street,—the paper announced in that vulgar way was not the *Freethinker*, and the person announcing it had no connection whatever with the meeting held inside.

A. D. MACLAREN.—Many thanks for cuttings, which will be useful.

THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the secretary, Miss E. M. Vance.

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.

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## Sugar Plums.

The National Secular Society's Annual Conference is over, and deserves to be chronicled as a most successful one. There was a good attendance of delegates at the morning and afternoon meetings, although several Branches were not represented that ought to have been. The proceedings

throughout were characterised by a good-humored spirit of give and take that augurs well for the movement, and proved that Freethinkers in exercising their right of mutual disagreement are able to do so with a recognition of the devotion of each to a common cause. The welcome to Mr. Foote was, as was only natural in view of recent circumstances, marked by a warm note of personal good feeling, and the Conference felt that he acted wisely in not overstraining himself by officiating at both morning and afternoon meetings. A full report of the Conference proceedings will appear in these columns, the first instalment of which is published in the present number.

There was a splendid meeting—considering the brilliant summer weather and other counter attractions. The floor of the large St. James's Hall was completely filled, and a large number of people occupied seats in the balcony. A sustained storm of applause greeted the President when he rose to speak, and was renewed again and again before he reached the conclusion. All the other speakers, Messrs. Moss, Heaford, Lloyd, Davies, and Cohen were in excellent form, and their efforts were rewarded by the attention and applause of an audience that paid them the compliment of sitting indoors for over two hours on a warm evening. A pleasing addition to the arranged programme was made by a brief speech from Miss Kough, whose pleasant voice and thoughtful matter gave great hopes for her future work on the Freethought platform. Our readers will be in a position to form their own judgment on the general character of the speeches by the report that will appear in our next issue.

On Monday Mr. Wilson, who has so often played the part of a Secular providence when his services could be of use, generously placed a brake with a pair of handsome horses at the disposal of a number of the provincial delegates. These enjoyed a pleasant drive to Kew, Bushey Park, and Hampton Court, returning in the evening to the Bay Malton Hotel, to meet several members of the Executive, and to while away the time with music until the hour came for many to catch their return trains. Altogether we believe the Conference of 1910 will not rank among the least enjoyable or the least serviceable of the Society's gatherings.

We are asked to announce that the Wood Green Branch of the N. S. S. is commencing a regular course of evening lectures at Enfield. To-day (May 22) Miss Kough lectures for the same Branch at Jolly Butchers' Hill, at 11.30. We hope there will be good meetings at both places.

Mr. F. Schaller, a member of the Society's Executive and open-air speaker, has, we regret to say, been for some time annoyed by the attentions of a too zealous advocate of muscular Christianity. The first of these annoyances, which have taken the form of personal violence, occurred some time ago, when the man was bound over to keep the peace—thanks to Mr. Schaller's plea for leniency. On the second occasion a policeman refused to interfere. On the third occasion, May 13, his assailant was taken to the police station, and duly brought before the magistrate, Mr. Mead. The man was again bound over to keep the peace, the magistrate properly cautioning him that if he offended again he would be sent to prison. But Mr. Schaller also reports a remark made by the magistrate that was distinctly improper. He told Mr. Schaller that he had no right to talk against a religion which is held to be sacred by other people. This is a strange doctrine—particularly in view of the words in the Coronation oath. And it is still stranger law. We beg to assure Mr. Mead that Mr. Schaller, or anyone else, has a perfect legal and moral right to talk against any religion he pleases so long as he does so with regard to decency and decorum.

The dearest deaths are the best. We are born for action; I would have a man act and go on with the duties of life as long as he is able; and then, let death find me planting my cabbages, but not concerned at his approach, and still less that I am leaving my garden unfinished.—*Montaigne*.

Camels and Christians receive their burdens kneeling.—*Dod Grile*.

Intellect is the swiftest of things, for it runs through everything. Necessity is the strongest of things, for it rules everything. Time is the wisest of things, for it finds out everything.—*Thales*.

way bookstalls, and other channels of publicity and circulation—should be an object lesson to those who fondly fancy that the Christian superstition is ever to be civilised willingly. It is like all other superstitions. The only way to civilise it is to destroy it. And as we only propose to do that by discussion and enlightenment, it is vital that we should do our utmost to keep those avenues of progress open as widely and freely as possible. Secularists will sooner or later—and sooner rather than later—have to give this matter their earnest consideration.

Look at the Ferrer case. It is a supreme illustration, which the world will not soon forget, of the spirit that Tacitus (if the famous passage is authentic) recognised in the primitive Christians. It was a spirit of hatred—all that a cultivated and thoughtful Roman understood as "humanity." The Christians were the enemies of the human race. So they are still, as far as they are Christians. The assassination of Ferrer, in cold, callous contempt of the protests of the civilised world, shows what Christianity would do in every country where it possessed the power which it wields in Spain. Let there be no mistake on that point. It is true that Ferrer was murdered judicially, but that only makes the crime worse, for it adds hypocrisy to cruelty. The organised Christianity of Spain had long wanted to put this great Secular Educationist out of the way. It had made strong efforts to do so. At last its sure opportunity came, and it butchered him without a shadow of hesitation or a tremor of remorse. Surely in presence of this brutal crime it is clear that Voltaire's great motto is the proper one for all Freethinkers—"Crush the Infamous." The infamous is Christianity, and to crush it is the only way to earthly salvation.

When the noble Ferrer was in the hands of the powers of mental and moral darkness, your President knew what so many others barely thought possible—namely, that Ferrer would be shot as promptly as a hurried court-martial could manage the business. Therefore, in your name, he called upon the London Freethinkers to assemble at St. James's Hall on the approaching Sunday night and denounce Ferrer's murderers. The hall was packed with men and women who all paid for their seats. No meeting could be more valid than that. It was the first and most effective protest made in London, and it was organised by the officers of your Society.

Your Executive resolved to open a subscription towards the proposed Ferrer Memorial, and started it with a donation of 100 francs (£4), but the vagueness of the proposals emanating from Brussels and Paris were such that it was difficult to elicit much response in England. The only memorial of real importance would be the continuation of Ferrer's work in Spain. Perhaps the whole matter will be adequately discussed at the forthcoming International Freethought Congress, at which the N. S. S. should be well represented.

Incidentally it may be mentioned that the late Mr. Frederic Bonte would have rejoiced to see our Society well represented at Brussels. He was born and reared in Belgium, and belonged to an old Belgian family of the strictest orthodoxy. He had been a Catholic priest, and he drew a pension to his last hour as ex-chaplain of an English prison. Technically, he appears to have been a priest to the very end, for he does not seem to have formally resigned or to have been formally excommunicated. The probate office insisted on his being described as the Rev. Frederic Bonte. But his admirable and striking pamphlet, *From Fiction to Fact*, remains to show how he passed from Catholicism to Atheism; and his proved will (with Mr. Foote as an executor) made the Secular Society, Ltd., his residuary legatee.

Amongst the distinguished Freethinkers who died during the past year were the great Norwegian writer, Bjornsterne Björnson, and one of the first of American writers, Mark Twain. Of course, the old conspiracy of silence was maintained with respect to these eminent authors. The newspapers were careful not to mention their religious heresy. A candid reference to Björnson's really pronounced Freethought managed to make its appearance in the *Athenæum*, however, over the signature of Mr. William Archer, the well-known critic and editor of the English edition of Ibsen. According to Mr. Archer, who evidently wrote with knowledge on this subject, Björnson went through a period of "spiritual unsettlement" after 1875:—

"Hitherto he had stood on the ancient ways in religious thought, or rather sentiment. His early religious training had been reinforced by the influence of the Danish theologian Bishop Grundtvig; and when he took up his abode at Aulestad, it was partly with a view to a deeper cultivation of his religious life, in concert with certain Grundtvigian friends and neighbors. But his concentration on spiritual problems led to quite unexpected results. Bit by bit, during the next five years, his sentimental religiosity fell away from him, and he emerged from the struggle a disciple of Herbert Spencer, and even, it might be added, of Charles Bradlaugh."

Mr. Archer is to be congratulated on the honesty of this passage. He might have added—but perhaps he was not aware of the fact—that Björnson had an immense admiration for Ingersoll, whose masterly Essay on the Christian Religion he translated into Norwegian. With regard to Mark Twain, it is obvious from his writings that he was far from orthodox, although it may be difficult to quote explicit passages proving him to have been a complete Freethinker. But it is on record that he also "loved" Ingersoll, and he was in the habit of ordering Freethought books from the office of the New York *Truthseeker*. He had for some time been a subscriber to that outspoken journal, and "had [as the editor says] just signified his intention of continuing so by renewing his subscription."

It is customary before concluding the Annual Report to glance at distant parts of the English-speaking world. A considerable spread of Freethought is reported in South Africa, and requests have been made for a lecturer to be sent out there. Mr. W. W. Collins, one of your Society's vice-presidents, still lectures on Sunday evenings to large audiences at Christchurch, New Zealand, and ably continues his monthly periodical, the *Examiner*. No one seems to arise to carry on the work which the late Joseph Symes had to drop at Melbourne. Buddhist priests in Ceylon, who are Atheists and Moralists, are making successful headway against the Christian missionaries. Indians educated in England, or benefiting by a Western education in their own country, are advocating Freethought amongst their own people. Turning to America, we find that Mr. Ellis still publishes *Secular Thought* at Toronto, but organised Freethought is under a heavy cloud in Canada. Many Freethought organisations are formed, or are forming in the United States, and many Freethought periodicals have sprung up of late years, but the leading place is still held by the New York *Truthseeker*, so ably conducted by Mr. George Macdonald.

In closing this report your Executive wishes to congratulate the Society on the spread of its principles—gradually but surely—through the life and literature of the nation. In periodicals and books, in the growth of Sunday freedom, in a hundred and one ways, the development of Freethought is indicated. It is admitted that the late Edward the Seventh, who was the head of the Church as well as of the State, was anything but a devoted religionist. On the other hand, the Christian Churches are more divided than ever; and the New Theology in the Protestant world, and Modernism in the Catholic world, are loosening the bonds of dogma and preparing in their own manner for the great day of Humanism.

## National Secular Society's Annual Conference.

THE Annual Conference of the National Secular Society was held at St. James's Hall, Great Portland-street, W., on Whit-Sunday.

The following is a list of the delegates who attended, with the Branches they represented: Thos. H. How and Robert W. Brooks (Bethnal Green), R. G. Fathers and W. Dodd (Birmingham), C. Cohen (Glasgow), W. H. Spivey and Mrs. Spivey (Huddersfield), S. J. Cook and W. Bradford (Islington), S. B. Savill and E. Neary (Kingsland), W. McKelvie and J. Hammond (Liverpool), Richard Johnson (Manchester), M. J. Charter and T. H. Elstob (Newcastle), Alma Stanley, E. A. Charlton, and Mrs. Charlton (North London), Ralph Chapman, Joseph Fothergill, and J. T. Horsman (South Shields), R. H. Rosetti and H. Thurlow (West Ham), C. Ivatts and W. Stewart (Wood Green), A. Allison (Woolwich), S. Samuels and F. Schaller (West London).

A goodly number of vice-presidents and visitors were also in attendance.

### MORNING SESSION.

The President (Mr. G. W. Foote) took the chair at 10.40. In opening the proceedings, he said: Those here for the first time will pardon me for stating that we are not here for the purpose of winning dialectical, or any other, victories over each other. We are simply here to confer about proposals of a business character respecting the past year, and of proposals that may be made with regard to the future welfare of the National Secular Society. Naturally, we shall differ from each other on some points. If we did not, indeed, there would be no need for conferences at all; but we can all express our differences without the slightest heat or animosity. We should welcome differences rather than resent them, and however much we differ we must all give each other equal credit for wishing the success of the movement (hear, hear)—in other words, we are here for the purposes of friendly consideration of topics in which we are all

commonly interested; and if that spirit guides our counsels this morning and this afternoon we shall not have met in vain, and the interests of the National Secular Society will have been promoted. (Applause.)

The Minutes of the last Conference having been taken as read, the next item on the Agenda was the Executive's Annual Report, which was read by the President. It was formally moved, seconded, and carried with acclamation. (This Report appears in another part of the *Freethinker*.)

Financial Report:—On this being formally moved and seconded, Mr. Bradford said he would like to ask how it was that the income was not shown on the one side with the balance of expenditure underneath it.

Miss Vance explained that the Balance-sheet was in the same form as it had been for years, and it had been prepared by a professional auditor. The income and expenditure was quite clearly shown, and if any further explanation were desired regarding the figures, she would give it. After some little further discussion it was carried unanimously.

Election of President:—Mr. Foote vacated the chair, and it was taken by Mr. Cohen. The Motion was moved by the Bethnal Green Branch, seconded by the Kingsland Branch, and supported by the North London and West Ham Branches.

Mr. T. Thurlow, in supporting the motion, said they were all pleased to see Mr. Foote amongst them. As the fighting head of the party Mr. Foote was as much the natural President as the head was the natural chief of the body.

Mr. Schaller, speaking for the West London Branch, said, as one who had attended the Executive Council meetings for a number of years, he had had ample opportunity of seeing what an enormous amount of work Mr. Foote was capable of doing. One splendid piece of work which he had carried out was the formation of the Secular Society, Limited. At the Executive meetings Mr. Foote always said the very best thing at the proper moment, and when he brought before that body the draught scheme of the Secular Society, Limited, it needed practically no alteration, and it stood to-day as a monument of his patience and ability, and has been the means of securing for the cause very substantial bequests.

Mr. Cohen said he quite agreed with what Mr. Schaller had said. They all relied upon Mr. Foote's judgment. They all meant to stick to the President as long as he would stick to them, and they were pleased that there were no indications of divorce proceedings being initiated by either member of the union.

The motion was put by Mr. Cohen and carried with great enthusiasm.

Mr. Foote then resumed the President's chair, and said: Fellow members of the National Secular Society,—I thank you once more for electing me to what I regard as the most honorable post in England. I know that there are posts which are better paid, that attract a far larger measure of public attention, and that do not lead either to a Press conspiracy of silence against the occupier, or submit him perpetually to political and, very largely, social ostracism; but I have never objected to these things because I reckoned with them when I first set out as a fighter in the ranks of Freethought. I have learned to despise—I am not quite sure that I have learnt, I fancy it must almost have been born with me—this attitude of the little shallow people in the world who fancy that they, in their multitudinous social swarm are higher in the scale of being than the few who take the trouble to think for themselves, and have the honesty to state their conclusions. You know I have been in the doctor's hands lately, and one always runs risks in these things. If you are on the operating table about an hour and a quarter, well, of course, it must mean a shock to the system. But I have recovered—at least to this point of recovery, which the doctor himself thinks has been wonderfully rapid—and I suppose that one of the reasons is that I had a good constitution to begin with, for very few would ever start out in the ranks of Freethought, fighting near the front, without some advantage of that kind. I have also brought, in consequence of living a life too active for many vices, clean blood to the operator and to nature who looks after the healing. You know we are all very wicked men who stand near the front in Freethought; but, as I told a man I once met in a railway train, who was talking about Bradlaugh's vices, considering the amount of work Bradlaugh had to do from the time he got up in the morning and the time he got home the following morning (it was frequently 2 or 3 o'clock, as it was when he was struggling for his seat in the House of Commons) he must be a man of astonishing activity to get through it all. Work, at any rate, keeps one out of mischief, and I hope to go on for many years fighting for the old cause. (Applause.) Outside my own domestic sphere, which of course is my own privacy—every man, however public, is entitled to that—during the week before the operation and during all the time since I can cheerfully say, as Charles Bradlaugh told me when he

lay upon that sick bed which was when he was nearly broken to death, the things that troubled me least were the convictions of my life. No shadow of doubt of our principles ever crossed my mind from the first moment to the last (applause), and if I had never emerged into the light of consciousness again, if I had gone into the eternal repose, my last moment of consciousness would have been one of comparative cheerfulness. The fight I had undertaken I had carried through with the best of my strength and judgment. I would have liked to do better, but I had done my best, and if death were a leap in the dark, and I had to meet what they call God, I could have said to him with the same cheerfulness, "I do not know that I fought against you on earth, I did not know anything about you (laughter); I fought against what people said about you, which I could not believe, and which I now take the opportunity of saying I trust is not true. But although I fought against this picture of you, I fought all the time for the truth as I saw it, and the good as I saw it, and if that does not entitle me to your company, I will cheerfully go some other way." (Laughter and applause.) Well now, with regard to the future, there are occasions like this, when one comes back to one's own people, where one is entitled to say just a personal word or two. Of course I am not entirely my old self. I am getting back my strength surely, day by day. I have begun work for the purpose of this Conference, but I propose to take a holiday right away and to stay away for some weeks, although of course I shall not be absolutely idle during the time. My pen will still be at work in the *Freethinker*, although I am leaving the practical editorial burden upon the spot on Mr. Cohen, who has so generously stepped forward, and whom I thank for the cheerful way—one might sometimes even consider it the too cheerful way—in which he does what he is asked to do, and does it because if he had not been asked he would have volunteered. (Applause.) I thank Mr. Lloyd, who has helped with the work on the *Freethinker*. I thank all the others who have done their share; and I feel that when I step back at last upon the quarter deck again, the old ship will be sound and seaworthy, and that with those who have kept in my place in my absence I shall still be the captain of the ship and navigate it through perhaps perilous waters in the future as I have had to navigate it in the past. (Applause.) But after all, you and I, what are we? Comparative nothings of an hour; the cause is the great thing. Let us all be loyal to that, and however and wherever one dies, whether it be on a bed or in a ditch, the consciousness that we have been loyal to that impersonal cause, living before any of us and surviving every one of us, will be the greatest consolation available when man faces, as he can but once, the great perhaps. (Loud applause.)

Election of Vice-Presidents:—This was moved by the President, seconded, and carried. On a motion by the Executive, seconded by Mr. Cook, Mr. T. Shore was elected a Vice-President; and on the motion of Mr. Foote, seconded by Mr. Fathers, Mr. Horace V. Parsons was also elected a Vice-President.

Election of Auditors:—Messrs. Savill and Rosetti were re-elected as Auditors.

Motion by Renfrew Branch:—This was formally moved by Mr. Cohen, in the absence of a delegate. Mr. Bradford said he thought it was unnecessary. Mr. Stewart thought it would be quite sufficient if the announcement were made in the *Freethinker* of the names and addresses of Branch Secretaries, with places and times of meeting, once every six months instead of three months, as in the motion. He thought the idea was very good, as anyone reading the *Freethinker* and wishing to join the local Branch of the N. S. S. would know where to apply. After some little further discussion the motion was carried as put.

Motion by Mr. Victor Roger: "This Conference is of opinion that in any suggested reform of a Second Chamber it is imperative there should be an abolition of the hereditary principle, and also that no Bishop or Archbishop of the Church of England should be entitled to a seat therein by reason of his ecclesiastical functions." Mr. Victor Roger said he thought it was almost necessary to apologise for having anything to say about the House of Lords at a meeting like that. For the last twelve months the subject had been dealt with *ad nauseum*; but he thought Freethinkers were bound to take notice of one feature of the House of Lords, namely, the fact of the bishops and prelates who sat there by virtue of their office. They were paid by the State, and yet they wrecked measures brought up by the House of Commons, who were the true representatives of the people. Such a proceeding would not be tolerated in any other sphere of life.

Mr. A. B. Moss said he had great pleasure in seconding the Motion because of the vicious influence of the bishops in the House of Lords. They had always been in favor of aggressive warfare, while in educational matters their influence had been of a very vicious and very unwholesome

character. The Archbishop of Canterbury, it would be remembered, played a very prominent part nearly two years ago in trying to so alter the Education Bill that religious dogmas could be crammed into the minds of children for three-quarters of an hour every day. The fact was, that the bishops were not of this world. Their allegiance was to the next world; consequently, as they knew nothing about this world practically, they were simply a stumbling-block to progress. When viewed in that light, unless sent to the House of Lords for other than their ecclesiastical functions, they had no right there at all. (Applause.)

Mr. Davies said he should support Mr. Roger's Motion, but he thought it might have been made a little wider. He considered that, in any reform of the House of Lords, it should be made impossible for any minister of religion—not particularly a minister of the Church of England—to sit there because he was a minister. Men like General Booth and Dr. Clifford would be more intolerable than bishops of the Church of England.

Mr. Cohen thought if the Church of England were excluded the others would stand very little chance.

Mr. Foote said there was some force in Mr. Davies' criticism, as the bishops had for some time been making a strong back-stairs effort to get the Nonconformists to agree to their churches being represented in the House of Lords; and, if this came about, he thought the last state of Freethinkers would be worse than the first. He would much rather trust the Archbishop of Canterbury—at least, as far as he could see him—(laughter) than he would General Booth, who would have all Freethinkers in prison in five minutes if he had his way, or possibly something even worse than that might happen to them—they might be sent out through the S. A. Emigration Agencies. (Laughter.)

Motion by Mr. C. Cohen: "That this Conference views with deep regret the growth of the spirit of militarism among the nations of Europe, and while recognising in this a crowning proof of the inability of the Christian religion to promote the higher interests of civilisation, deploring the encouragement given to the war spirit in this country by political leaders, and the waste of national resources in warlike preparations; and further regrets the absence of a wise and far-seeing statesmanship which, by promoting a better understanding between nations, would pave the way for the substitution of arbitration for peace in all international disputes." Mr. Cohen said they had no doubt all observed, with extreme regret, the growth of the military spirit and temper in this country. It was shown very curiously in the official notice regarding the King's death, where it was stated that everybody was expected to wear decent mourning. This was the force of fashion and the power of humbug, and was another illustration of the growth of the military temper, the arbitrary temper, which seemed to be creeping over things in England. It was also seen in the Boy Scouts,—a sort of cheap, disbanded, pantomime troupe. The Church was fostering this military spirit, as it always had done. This was a crowning proof of the inability of religion to give us the higher elements of a civilised life. Japan would never have gone on the military career it did but for the actions of the Christian nations of the world. China was moving in exactly the same direction; and when Christian greed and example had made China a military nation, when, as in the natural course of things it combined with its natural ally, Japan, then perhaps some of the other nations would regret the bad example they had set. The general spirit taken up by politicians of all shades was the preaching of the necessity for warlike preparations. From one point of view there was something in it. It was necessary to be prepared for war; but preparations against attack were only too often the occasions and incitements to war, and in spite of all that was said there was no nation better able than Great Britain to set the example in staying the increase of armaments. It could no doubt be brought about if England would surrender the right she claimed to the capture of commerce at sea during times of war. The only way to bring about peace was to aim at a better understanding between the different nations of the world. (Cheers.)

Mr. Bradford said he had very great pleasure in seconding the resolution. It appeared to him that the question was one which, although not exactly in their line, they were justified in taking up, as militarism had always been combined with the religious question. He happened to have spent a little time in the late unlamented volunteer corps. He joined it with the idea that it afforded a fine chance of producing a force capable of defending the country in case of invasion, but he found the only idea which pervaded the volunteers was sheer love of militarism.

Mr. Stewart also supported the motion.

Mr. Shore said the question of the Boy Scouts was a most important one. Although it was denied for a long time that it was deliberately intended to imbue boys with the military spirit, it was now admitted that was the intention. He

hoped everyone who had a boy at school would protest against such an evil influence, and if necessary withdraw the boy from the school. He had long felt that the N. S. S. would most probably be left alone in England before very long in its advocacy of peace, and in carrying a resolution of that kind he hoped the Conference would feel it was something more than a mere academic declaration. He said he was possessed of a very concrete form of mind, and was always concerned to give a practical turn to such a discussion. He hoped that what had been so long urged on Freethinkers in connection with religious education would be repeated now with relation to this evil movement of the Boy Scouts. Let every parent insist on withdrawal from any share in the movement.

The motion was then put to the Conference and carried unanimously.

(To be continued.)

### Unpublished Letter of Thomas Paine's.

[The following letter from Thomas Paine appears in the New York *Truthseeker* for April 16. As it throws some light on Paine's life in Paris, and his relations with Washington and other American leaders, we believe it will be of interest to our readers. Quotations from it have appeared before, but its appearance in the *Truthseeker* is the first time it has ever been printed in full. The letter is undated, but was written in 1795.]

SIR,—I have borrowed two hundred and fifty French crowns of Mr. Monroe at Paris, and agreeably to my arrangement with him the money is to be repaid into your hands in America, and I have given an order to Mr. Benju. Franklin Bache to pay that sum to you upon my account.

It was my intention to have returned to America the latter end of the present year (1795) but the illness I now suffer prevents me. I owe this illness (from which I have not much prospect of recovery) partly to Robespierre and partly to Mr. Washington. This perhaps may surprise you, but I have good reason for saying it.

The present convention of France was elected for the express purpose of forming a Constitution, and they invited by a public decree the Assistance of Foreigners of any Nation. To me they were more particular, by electing me a Member of the Convention, and giving me, as they have done to some others, the honorary Compliment of French citizen. But they required no oath of Allegiance, nor of any other kind, from me, nor have I taken any. I consider a Constitution as a thing distinct from Laws and from the Government that is to issue from it, and that a Man of any Nation may assist in such work without any transfer of Allegiance from the Country to which he belongs. It would be otherwise if he became a part of the Government afterwards, because in that case an oath of Allegiance would be necessary or would be required. My intention was to continue in France no longer than until a Constitution should be formed and then return to America.

Of the violent Measures that followed, what is here called, the revolution of the 31 May, 1793, you cannot be uninformed. Towards the latter end of Decr. of that year a Motion was made and carried to exclude foreigners from the Convention, in Consequence of which I was excluded. A decree had been passed some time before for putting all foreigners in arrestation who were born in any of the Countries at war with France. It was on the ground of this decree that I was imprisoned, having been born in England. I had no other defense against the effect of this decree than that of being reclaimed as a Citizen of America. The Americans then in Paris went to the Bar of the Convention for this purpose but did not succeed. I believe, however, that their interference stopt, at least for a time, any further measures against me. But when six or seven Months had passed away and Robespierre saw that the American Government took no interest upon my account but silently connived at my imprisonment, he ventured to go a step farther and to propose a decree of accusation against me for the interest of America as well as of France, as you will see by the protrao to the Second part of the age of reason to which I refer you.

The violent illness I was seized with in the Luxembourg where I was imprisoned rendered the execution of this intended accusation impossible, for I was not in a Condition to be removed. This preserved me until the arrival of Mr. Monroe, which happened a few days after the fall of

Robespierre. The fever was then just beginning to leave me, but in too weak a state to set up. When I was informed of the arrival of Mr. Monroe I expected to be soon at Liberty, but you will judge of my surprise when I was informed by a letter from Mr. Whisesides, late of Philadelphia, that Mr. Monroe had no instructions from the President, either verbally or in writing, nor any kind of authority whatever from him for reclaiming me as a Citizen of the United States, nor for taking any interest upon my account, nor even enquire anything about me—that the want of this authority obliged him (Mr. Monroe) to proceed with caution, lest if he hazarded a reclamation, the committee (which was still composed of the Robespierre Party) should reject it upon discovering that he was not authorized to make it.—This prolonged my imprisonment from the time of Mr. Monroe's arrival the beginning of August till the 4th of Novr. following when I was liberated as a Citizen of the United States. In the mean time from the want of everything that was necessary to promote a state of recovery, and from the approaching cold season and the want of fuel in the prison, an abscess began to form itself on the left side which has continued ever since. About two months ago I had considerable hopes of a Cure and intended returning to America, but since then it has taken a Malignant turn, accompanied with a fever that confines me to my Chamber. I know that Nature is ingenious in Cures, but seeing that at the end of the year I am become worse instead of better, I do not entertain much hopes of being able to return to America. I have however the consolation of having held up long enough to finish the Second Part of the Age of Reason and a small piece entitled Dissertation on the first principles of Government.

It would be agreeable to me to live, but if it is not to be so I can quit Life with as much tranquility as any Man that ever passed that scene for I have done an honest part in the World. But it is not agreeable to me to remember that I owe part of my present Condition to the ungrateful neglect of a Country, at least of its Government, from which I had a right to expect better things. Mr. Washington has not served America with greater zeal, nor with more disinterestedness than myself, and I know not that he has done it with better effect. He may perhaps console himself on the cold and callous line of office and say—that Mr. Paine was a French Citizen and therefore he, as President, had nothing to do in the case.—But he ought to have informed himself if this was the Case or not, and had he made the enquiry he ought to have done, he would have found it was not the case, for I was imprisoned as a foreigner born in England and that foreigner was a citizen of America; but had it been otherwise it would not acquit him of ingratitude. He ought at least to have said to somebody—enquire into the case of Mr. Paine and see if there is anything we can do for him; but Mr. Washington has not so much as done this and his not doing it has been interpreted by Robespierre into connivance at my imprisonment and would have been fatal to me if he had lived but a few weeks longer. I ought not to have suspected Mr. Washington of Treachery, but he has acted towards me the part of a cold blooded traitor. Whether he has done this to gratify the English Government or to let me fall into destruction in France that he and his faction might exclaim the louder against the French Revolution or whether he hoped by my extinction he might meet with less opposition in mounting up the American Government, I trouble not myself to know; It is sufficient to me that I know the fact, and any reason he may give will involve him in reproach he will not easily shake off.

When I was released from Luxembourg as Citizen of the United States, Mr. Monroe invited me to his house where I have been ever since. I wrote Mr. Washington a letter by Mr. Letombe French Consul but on the request of Mr. Monroe I withdrew it. I was the more easily prevailed upon to do this as it was then my intention to return to America the latter end of the present year (1795) I should had I returned, have applied to Mr. Washington and Mr. Randolph for copies of any letters respecting me which they may have written, though I very well know they have not a scrap to give. As the state of my disorder prevents my return I have written to Mr. Washington to send me copies of such letters if he has any, and that I may not be prevailed upon a second time to withdraw the letter I have sent it off unknown to any person here under Cover to Mr. Bache for though my residence in Mr. Monroe's house makes a delicacy in the Case I cannot abridge myself of my independence upon that account. He therefore knows nothing of that letter or this otherwise than respects the repayment of money. As there was occasion I should write to you upon that account. I have filled up the whole sheet with what you would not otherwise have been troubled with; but I have long felt a wish to make somebody acquainted with the Case for I know that when men have done injustice, as I conceive Mr. Washington has done by me, that they are apt to do more to justify the first.

As to your National Affairs I mean those contrived and conducted in the dark Chamber of the American Government, there will I think be an explosion by & by. They do not conduct matters with that candour and uprightness that is necessary to secure and preserve National Character. America is falling fast into disesteem. The Ministers of the Neutral Powers that are here I mean those of Sweden and Denmark speak of her with reproach, as having no stable character. I know not how France will construe the Treaty of Mr. Jay, but the prevailing opinion is that it is an attempt to throw America into the scale of the Coalized Powers. I think the states will see the necessity of shortening the time of the Senate and new modeling the Executive Department. It is too much on the plan of European Courts and Mr. Washington appears to be too fond of playing the old Courtier.

Remember me to Mr. Jefferson.

THOMAS PAINE.

### Pungent Passages.

[From *The Thief of Virtue*, by Eden Phillpotts.]

"WRONG?" [queried Ouldsbroom] "stuff and nonsense. 'Might's right' where the women are concerned, or any other sort of fighting, and your blessed God's always on the side of the strong. Look at yourself. B'ant you one of His pets, and always have been?"

"I hope so and believe so," answered Mr. Twigg. "And if so, there's a very good reason. David never saw a righteous man begging his bread." (P. 49)

"'Tis a fool's trick to ask Providence to help you. Providence haven't got time." (P. 64.)

"Ride roughshod and don't think to interest God Almighty in your affairs, because you won't—not Him nor anybody else. He only remembers one thing about us, and that is when we've got to die. Then He rules us out of the book. And all this stuff about eternity is bosh too. For, if he cares for us anywhere, He'd care for us *here*; and if he was a just God, He'd let us start fair, and not handicap half the world to hell from the beginning." (P. 65.)

"Why for don't you pray? I've heard you fetch a very tidy prayer more'n once on a Sunday."

"A woman don't want to hear her husband pray—she knoweth a bit too much about him." (P. 79.)

"She's [Gertrude Crymes] all right, though, how you can see this swarm [of children] getting as thick as bees round you, and fear nought, I don't understand."

"'Tis nothing," answered Crymes. "They come gradual and take their places. I b'ant in the least troubled for 'em. I don't turn a hair for one of 'em. No good being a God-fearer like me, if you'm going to fret your gizzard about your offspring. Tho'm the Lord's work, not mine. I do my appointed part by 'em, and look for Him to do His. Why, I might so well fret about having six as Ouldsbroom do about having only one. But I know my place better." (Pp. 142-3.)

"Mark Baskerville [declared Twigg] was an Atheist, and be lost for it, I'm afraid, under chapter and verse of the Book. Bible's clear enough, though 'tis the Church of England fashion nowadays to pretend plain English b'ant plain English. If you want naked Bible you must come to us" [Little Baptists]. "He was a very good young fellow, and never hurt a fly in his life," said Ouldsbroom. "Everybody liked him, but you, out of your narrow, frost-bitten heart, can damn him off-hand."

"Not me, neighbor, damnation's God's business, not man's. 'Tis the case of a young fellow strong in works but weak in faith." (P. 152.)

"But—but—oh, Tiger, it's stung me!" cried Martin. He had sat by the way and turned down his stocking. The mark of the viper's fang already showed livid above his ankle. Martin had turned very white, and stared in front of him without making any effort to move. "Come, come," cried the elder. "For the Lord's sake, doan't 'e sit gazing there! Us must get back to your father this instant moment." The wounded boy rose and hastened. Tiger took his hand and hurried him along. "We must trust in God," said Martin. "Not yet—not yet," answered the other. "There's a lot of things to do afore we come to that. They'll make a terrible pucker about it. But trust your father to save 'e." (Pp. 159-160.)

"To pray for the dead be one step more foolish than to pray for the living," said Saul Hext. (P. 284.)

E. B.

Inquiry is human; blind obedience brutal. Truth never loses by the one, but often suffers by the other.—*William Penn.*

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

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OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 3.15 and 6.15, C. Cohen, Lectures.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15 and 6, F. A. Davies, Lectures.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Ridley-road, Kingsland): 11.30, C. Cohen, "Christianity's Collapse."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill Fields): 3.30, W. J. Ramsey, a Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford): 7, E. C. Saphin, "Christianity and its Christian Critics."

WOOD GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Jolly Butchers' Hill, opposite Public Library): 11.30, Miss Kough, "Women and Freethought." The Green, Enfield: 7.15, H. Dawson, "More About the Gods."

WOOLWICH BRANCH N. S. S. (Beresford-square): 11.30, A. Allison, "Thus saith the Lord."

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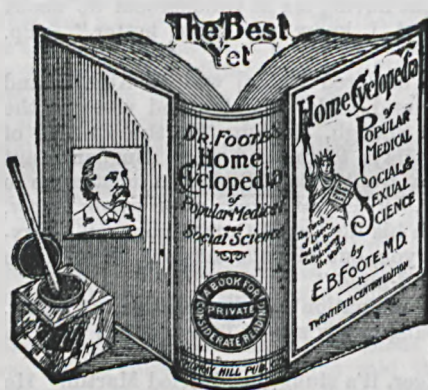
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