

# THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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PRICE TWOPENCE

*Force in matters of opinion can do no good, but is very apt to do hurt, for no man can change his opinion when he will, or be satisfied in his reason that his opinion is false because discountenanced.*—JEREMY TAYLOR.

## Freethought and Reform.

CRITICISMS of direct Freethought propaganda take, in the main, two forms. First, there is that of the Christian who objects to it because he disbelieves in the end at which it aims. To him, religion in general, and Christianity in particular, is so vital to human welfare that any attack upon it calls for the strongest possible resistance. Against this, as a position, no legitimate complaint can be raised. As a Christian, no other policy is possible; and, however much we may disagree with it, it has an undeniable claim to respect.

Another class of objectors stand upon a somewhat different level. It is more a criticism from within than from without, and is raised by those who agree with the end we are seeking to realise, but differ with the means adopted. In one form it expresses itself in a complaint that a fighting body like the N. S. S. does not sufficiently interest itself in political and social questions. I need spend very little time in discussing this point. Individually there are, I may safely assume, no keener students of social and political problems than are to be found in the N. S. S., while the abstention of the Society from political movements as a body is simply due to the desire to concentrate upon a single question the largest possible amount of attention. Were Secularists sufficiently numerous, there could be no objection to dividing Secularists into as many sections as there are political and social parties. But in face of the division of strength, that this would mean, when all our energies are taxed to meet and, if possible, overcome a strong and united enemy, would result in ineffectiveness so far as our work as Freethinkers is concerned.

Not that militant Freethinkers underestimate the importance of social questions. On the contrary, this is to them the most important of all problems, the one to which all others converge. If religious beliefs were held in the same detached way that one might believe in the human occupancy of Mars, whether Christianity lived or died would not be a matter of any great concern. It is not a congenial task to have to spend one's time demolishing beliefs that are intrinsically on a level with fairy-tales. To have to live, even for a brief period, upon the mental level that can accept such stories as historic realities, is not an exhilarating experience. If we do this it is because we see how seriously religious beliefs interfere with social progress, and our interest in the last leads us to pay special attention to the first. Were we less of social reformers we should also be less concerned with destroying theology.

Why not, then, leave theology alone and go on with the work of social reform? If this could be done we should be only too happy to follow the advice. But, in the first place, we cannot afford to leave theology alone. Religion, Christianity, touches life at too many points for this policy to be either

possible or profitable. The immense power of the Christian Churches, their financial and other resources, make it a practical impossibility for us to touch life in any thorough manner without running foul of religious claims and rousing the hostility of religious organisations. Every attempt at reform proves this; every failure lends it greater emphasis. In any reform of the marriage laws, in any readjustment of the legal status of women, in any attempt at improving our educational machinery, even in attempts to improve our land system, we are brought face to face—often in a manner more patent than pleasant—with the power of the Churches.

And next, leaving religion alone means, in practice, with those who profess to adopt the policy, leaving Freethought alone. It means that those who are Freethinkers are to keep their own opinions unexpressed, while those who profess religious views are left at liberty to air their opinions both in and out of season. All over the country there are societies which owe their strength to Freethinkers, but in which religious persons not only vent their opinions on religion, but frankly make it the avowed basis of the particular social work the society exists to promote. And meanwhile the non-religious members keep their opinions to themselves, and so endorse, by their silence, views which they know to be false. And by this they understand keeping religion out of political and social movements! Well, they are doing nothing of the kind. They are simply playing into the hands of the Churches. They are saving religion from attack by reducing themselves to silence, and they are enabling religious people to pose before the world as social reformers, when their real interest lies in quite a different direction. Let them force religious people to maintain the same silence as themselves, and then see how long any social organisation in the country will be favored with their co-operation.

When pressed in this manner a defence is offered which, if it be granted as sound, condemns not only Freethought propaganda, but nearly every other propaganda, so long as it aims at changing people's conception of things. It is this attack—offered as a defence—that my present purpose is to examine. It is said that in making a direct attack on Christianity we have mistaken the real nature of the problem with which we have to deal—we have failed to grasp the nature of the forces in operation. Our attack on Christianity, they tell us, is a waste of time, because it is the social and economic conditions that determine people's religious opinions; and, while these remain unchanged, Christianity is secure. But modify these conditions, and we at once effect a corresponding modification of opinion. They claim that religion is always a reflex of the real world, and that the real world consists of certain material conditions we must aim at controlling. And they point to the influence of material conditions on mental and moral phenomena as proof of their contention.

Now as man is primarily a material organism, ultimately dependent for mere existence upon securing a certain quantity of food, upon climatic and other material conditions, it follows that the maintenance of life is a question of these essential conditions being fulfilled. It is also true that the existence and persistence of ideas and beliefs must

always bear a more or less definite relation to the surrounding medium. The Agnosticism of Herbert Spencer, for example, could not exist with a society of Bushmen, nor would Voodooism stand a chance of acceptance among cultured Europeans. Or, again, badly nourished bodies, or over absorption in a struggle for the bare means of living, will have a strongly deterrent influence on intellectual development. Real culture implies leisure, and leisure involves relief from the severer forms of economic pressure. All this is perfectly sound doctrine, and, in stating it, our critics are saying nothing that I, for one, cannot heartily endorse. It is in the implications drawn from this teaching that I believe lies the error.

So, too, when we are told that if we change the social and economic conditions we modify, to a corresponding extent, the body of opinion. Here, again, I agree. If we change social and economic conditions. There is much virtue in that "if."

About the bald proposition, as it stands, there is really no dispute. The issue is joined on the question of whether we can really change economic conditions without effecting a prior change in our beliefs concerning those conditions; or, to put the same issue in another way, whether ideas do not themselves form a portion of the environment as powerful as purely material forces. Of course, if by "social and economic conditions" is meant *all* the influences bearing upon man, the statement, to a scientific student, is a mere truism, and is of value only against those who occupy an antiquated, unscientific, spiritualistic position. But if the generalisation is intended to cover geographical position, climate, quantity and quality of the food supply, rate of wages, conditions of housing—in a word, the purely material conditions of life, then it must be pointed out that this ignores a very important and a very potent aspect of life. For I hope to show, not that there are phases of human life that cannot be made to rest upon economic conditions, but that, even were this the case, at one stage of human evolution further development has the inevitable effect of powerfully modifying the influence of the purely material part of the human environment.

The truth is that while assent to the proposition that morality and religion is determined by the social and economic conditions is gained on the broad ground that the organism is the product of all the forces bearing upon it, it is applied in a much narrower sense, and only one set of forces is really brought under consideration. Other factors, quite as real as the material ones, of growing importance are ignored. The error is precisely that of Herbert Spencer when dealing with certain late phases of social development. Just as in these cases, when speaking of the "fitness" that determines survival, he has in mind only biological fitness, so this particular criticism under consideration considers at most biologic qualities and ignores psychologic ones. It is true the expression "social forces" is used, but that in practice is made coextensive with the economic forces and the more material aspect of class groupings. Or if the psychic side of life is considered, it is only as a mere reflection of the other. Whether the psychic may not act upon the material, and even in time dominate the material, is a question seldom if ever considered. Yet the principle of action and reaction is as true here as elsewhere. Ideas do arise out of material conditions, but in turn they react on material conditions, and, as I hope to show, become of increasing importance as society develops. For the whole story of human evolution is the growing power of the human mind. It is the growth of mind, the organisation of knowledge, the growing power of the intellectual, the æsthetic, and the moral in the affairs of life that supplies us with the real key wherewith to solve the problem presented to us by a survey of human culture.

C. COHEN.

(To be continued.)

## God's Care.

IN his "Bible Talks" in the *Sunday Strand* for April, the Rev. G. H. Morrison, M.A., of Glasgow, makes a bold attempt to convince the readers that God loves and cares for mankind. It is really to a simple sermonette, based on the words, "He careth for you" (1 Peter v. 7), that the reverend gentleman treats us in the four columns and a half devoted to the subject. He is deeply impressed by the sweet simplicity of the text. "It is like a sentence from a childish spelling-book." To Mr. Morrison the Bible is the Word of God, in which there are "deep things which the wisest will never fully understand," and "mysteries so profound and awful that we can only bow the head before them." But a little child can understand the words of the text, and grasp the truth it contains. And yet Mr. Morrison bemoans the fact that, at this very day, the world at large does not believe in a God that loves and cares. If we only had such a belief, he says, "it would send us singing into the dreariest hour." "I want you to waken," he continues, "to some new assurance that the words of our text are literally true." Then he considers, "firstly, some of things that make it hard for us to believe that God can care for us, and, secondly, some of the things that help us to believe that he does care." It stands to reason, of course, that if God exists he must love and care for his creatures; but Mr. Morrison *assumes* that he exists, and then endeavors to prove that he loves and cares. In the same way he *assumes* that whatever the Bible says is true, and imagines that he establishes the truth of his text by adducing a few other Biblical statements which appear to confirm it.

Let us examine the alleged helps to a belief in God's care first. The first help is the recollection that God made us. "How ever fallen from the high original, remember you are his handiwork," says Mr. Morrison. But that is a Biblical statement unsupported by a single evidence. Indeed, there are many data on which we would be justified in denying it altogether. Unconsciously, no doubt, yet most effectively, Mr. Morrison insinuates that the Deity is a stupendous bungler. Listen:—

"Now I once gave to my young child a present that was one of the most perfect of its kind imaginable. It was most beautifully made, and flawless, and just the kind of thing a boy would covet. But by-and-bye he made one for himself that would not have fetched a shilling in the market—and it was that one which became all his care. My brother, I do not want to be hard on you; but perhaps you would not fetch a shilling in the market. You are beginning to get old now, and you know the flaws, and you have never lived just as you ought to live. But then *God made you*—every part of you—every faculty and organ you possess—and just because he made you, you can lay it on your heart that he cares for you."

If there were a God, he would not appreciate the compliment paid him in that extract. We are so badly made that many of us would not fetch a shilling in the market; and yet, because we are his workmanship, however imperfect and worthless, we may take an oath that he cares for us. We are full of flaws and scars and festering wounds, and we have never lived just as we ought to have lived; and yet God made us, and has always loved and cared for us. This can only mean that the Divine Being blundered sadly in making us, and totally failed to take care of us afterwards.

The second help to a belief in God's care is more ludicrous still. "Bear in mind," says this preacher, "not only that he has made us, but that he has also suffered for us. He has made for us the greatest of all sacrifices, and there is nothing so fosters love as that." When has God suffered for us, and how? What is the greatest of all sacrifices which he has made for us, and when did he make it? Mr. Morrison gives us a very pretty sketch of a mother who has two little children, one of whom is strong and healthy, with sturdy limbs and bright eyes, and the other fragile and weakly, with wan cheeks and thin

body. She loves them both. "And yet the child who is ever on her heart, in a very agony of tender love, is *not* the one whose song is through the house, but the other, who is too weak to sing. For him she has to waken in the night. For him she has often to deny herself. For him she has to suffer and to sacrifice in a way that you would never dream of when you meet her." That is a truly beautiful picture; but to say that it is a copy, on a small scale, of what God is and does, is to set in bold relief the undeniable fact that a God who has to suffer and make the greatest of sacrifices, because of the tragic failure of his own work, is not worth having, and would be his own disgrace. Of course, Mr. Morrison is not speaking from knowledge and experience, but from hearsay and Biblical report. "I believe," he says, "that God cares for every sparrow." But no one who knows anything about the sparrow would dream of believing any such thing, and Mr. Morrison believes it simply because he regards it as one of the sayings of Jesus.

The third help to a belief in God's care is the most ridiculous of the series. "And then, again," the preacher concludes, "I can believe in his care whenever I think of his greatest gift to us. Whenever I look at the Lord Jesus Christ I hear this word, 'He careth for you.'" It is probable that Mr. Morrison is perfectly sincere in all that he says about the Lord Jesus Christ; but he cannot be ignorant of the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is simply the label attached to several theological ideas, which not only differ from, but actually contradict, one another. Even if a Lord Jesus Christ did really exist, it would be quite impossible to tell what he is like, because of the multiplicity of discrepant descriptions of him that are extant. According to the theology of which Mr. Morrison is so earnest an exponent, the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to repair his Father's damaged masterpiece, to recover and rebuild wrecked humanity, to infuse new life into men and women spiritually dead, and to do all this by the sacrifice of himself. On the supposition that this is true, the question is, Why did not God exert himself earlier and prevent his work from being ruined, and so obviate the necessity of sacrificing his "pre-existent, personal, and uncreated Son"? The very idea of a Savior hopelessly discredits the Creator. In a Universe made by an absolutely perfect Being the merest mention of the word "salvation" would be an intolerable anachronism.

We are thus bound to treat Mr. Morrison's helps to a belief in the Divine care as most powerful arguments against cherishing such a belief. The manifest imperfections of the human race are but so many proofs that it is neither the product nor has ever lived under the care of an infallible Deity. Had we been perfectly made, and duly loved and cared for afterwards, we would have continued in a state of sweet perfection throughout the whole period of our existence. As a matter of fact, however, it can now be fully demonstrated that, in the theological sense, we were never made at all, and have never experienced a state of perfection. To the Biblical doctrine of man science gives the direct lie. History knows nothing of the tragedy of a disastrous fall said to have occurred near the beginning of human existence, or of the appearance on earth some four thousand years later of a man from heaven, who was more than man, and whose mission it was to turn that awful tragedy into a glorious triumph of grace Divine. Of a Divine creation, and of Divine care bestowed upon that creation, there is absolutely no historical trace. Mr. Morrison is entirely mistaken when he says that "the whole trend of scientific learning is to exalt the magnitude of God." God never once comes within the purview of scientific learning. Science deals exclusively with the existing Universe, and knows it simply as existing, subject to endless change, and under the control of inexorable laws.

The real difficulty of believing in God's love and care, then, does not arise from any peculiarity of temperament, or from a sense of the distance between God and ourselves, but from the utter impossibility of reconciling the conditions of life in the Universe

with the belief in a perfect Deity who loves and cares. Mr. Morrison touches the heart of the difficulty when he asks, "If God cares, as you and I care, will not his conduct towards us always show it?" Now, mark how, in his answer to that question, he trifles with the whole problem:—

"Yes, had we the eyes to see, I do not doubt that it would always show it. But then the pity is that we are blind, and set up the standard of our little wisdom, and judge his dealings, which are shaped for ever, by the petty estimate of sixty years. Is it possible, we ask, that God should treat us so, if he really and truly loved us?"

Now, if we have not the eyes to see God's care for us, and it does not show itself in his treatment of us, how on earth are we to know that it exists at all? It is all very well to say that "we are blind, and set up the standard of our little wisdom," and thereby judge his dealings with us; but we have no other standard of judgment. Mr. Morrison *believes* in God's love and care, though he has to admit that, judged by the only standard of which we, as reasonable human beings, are capable, such a belief is flatly contradicted by "the facts of our individual experience." Failing to remove this difficulty, the preacher runs for refuge to what he calls "the fact of sin." "It is your sinfulness and mine, my brother, that makes it so hard to credit that he cares for us." In all ages this doctrine of sin has stood the pulpit in good stead; but its days are numbered. If we are sinful, whose fault is it? If we have lost our first estate, who is to blame? Our sinfulness would be the surest sign of all that there is no God who loves and cares. But we are not fallen and sinful creatures, as Mr. Morrison so confidently describes us; we are slowly rising and developing beings, whose golden age lies, not behind, but before, them. We are a race that has risen, not a race that has fallen; a race that has been gradually acquiring intelligence for countless ages, and that is at last learning the art of utilising its intelligence for its own emancipation and uplifting. And in proportion as we learn this art we shall outgrow the weakness and the folly of relying upon the love and care of an imaginary Supreme Being, belief in whom is a direct insult to our reason and a serious hindrance to individual and social progress.

J. T. LLOYD.

## National Secular Society's Annual Conference.

Held at St. James's Hall, London, W., Sunday, May 15

### Evening Demonstration.

MR. G. W. FOOTE IN THE CHAIR.

#### THE CHAIRMAN.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this meeting is held in connection with the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society, which has taken place this morning and this afternoon in another part of this building. Our Society is not what some people, and especially the Christians, would call a large one; but I do not consider for my part that this is an important objection. The tallest giant in the world was once a baby, and in that stage probably not much differentiated from other babies. And the charge of smallness comes with a peculiarly ill grace from Christians, because they are in the habit of boasting that thirteen men—one of them God as well as Man—managed to subvert the order of the world and produced out of what they call Roman barbarism the magnificently tender and beneficent Christian civilisation of to-day. Well, now, if they began as thirteen, we may at least boast that we number more than that. Every successful movement in the world must have small beginnings. There is a time when every idea, however important or vast in its consequences, existed in a minority of one in one thinker's brain. One of the truest things that Carlyle ever said was that one man who has within him a truth which the rest of the world is without is not only stronger than any other man or any other number of men, but than all men who are devoid of its possession. (Hear, hear.)

You go down, say, to the River Thames below London Bridge; you see all the shipping there, a marvellous illustration of the commerce of this country, and you do not wonder

that it so impressed Zola, habituated to the comparatively small River Seine at Paris, and that he saw there the symbol of the British Empire. You know it had its beginning a long way west, up in the Cotswold Hills, and it is often a matter of mere courtesy to say which rivulet is really the one which starts a great river. It is a little thing at first, and as it flows along further, other small tributaries join it until it becomes a great river with capital cities upon its banks, and bearing upon its broad bosom the commerce of half the world. You say, it is still the River Thames; but it is not exactly the same thing, although it is called by the same name. Now every great movement may be likened unto that river, including Christianity itself. It began, as they say, with the man Jesus, although that is becoming a highly debatable point, and then not only Jewish ritual and ecclesiastical discipline but Roman culture crept in, Greek philosophy crept in, Eastern mysticism crept in, and all these tributaries and many more that I have not time to enumerate co-operated in making the Christianity which you read of as that great historical system which has brought Christendom to what it is to-day. And as Christianity to-day is no more like the few precepts which are attributed to Jesus than the River Thames below London Bridge is like that streamlet in the Cotswold Hills, so we have no doubt that in the course of time our ideas, growing in practice and attracting and repelling as they flow along through the territory of human life, will strengthen and deepen and broaden until at last they eventuate in a higher and nobler condition of society, infinitely superior to anything that the pioneers of to-day are dreaming of. (Applause.) I think for my part Free-thought has made in this country alone immense progress since this little chairman's hammer was held in the strong hands of Richard Carlile. (Applause.) Carlile was a man whom some men have called rough and vulgar, but it takes something more than superfine eau-de-cologne Free-thought to stand nine years and seven months of imprisonment. (Hear, hear.) Richard Carlile was as stubborn and unbendable as the Dartmoor granite of his native county. (Hear, hear.) He left at any rate a tradition of fidelity to principle, of sternness of conviction, of loyalty to truth, and that tradition has existed in the Free-thought party I think ever since. (Hear, hear.) We have gone through our most heroic period. We can hardly say now that the gaol stares us in the face. Political and social ostracism are meted out instead; but what of that? For my part, I attach no infinite significance to a seat, say, in the House of Commons amongst nearly seven hundred more or less intelligent (laughter) and more or less distinguished persons. I often think that the worst use you can put any man to who is good for anything outside is to put him inside. (Hear, hear.) The centre of change has shifted from legislative chambers, which are merely in the last result the mechanical declaration of the popular will, into that outside world of the press and the platform—the orator, the writer, the thinker. Why, one single thinker, a Darwin, a Mill, or a Spencer, may be sitting in solitude and coining his thoughts which are to govern legislators for generations unborn. (Hear, hear.)

Of course we are a small body. I know that. There is no fortune to be made in Free-thought. When we become more fashionable, our greatest troubles will commence. (Hear, hear.) Then we shall have all sorts of people rushing in to make the best of the situation. At present the Free-thought advocate who sticks to the job must be a man of conviction. (Hear, hear.) I could not say that every man in the Christian Churches is a man of conviction, because you know they find a career there. You get your education, you take your post, and you preach more or less dishonestly according to the character of your congregation. (Laughter.) But our men have no congregations ready-made by district organisation and astute social management. They have to make their own, and if they are not interesting, their audiences disappear. We are few now; we shall be more numerous, but we shall never be more honest than we were in the days of our pioneer work. (Hear, hear.)

Our cause progresses not merely in the open, but underground. At present the nation is mourning more or less sincerely its dead monarch. According to English law, he was the head of the Church of England, above the Archbishop of Canterbury himself. I can't say that the late King looked cut out for such a supreme ecclesiastical function, and I am glad to think that in his heart of hearts apparently he had no particular sympathy with it. (Hear, hear.) I observe that the Bishop of London has been uttering his usual sentimentalities, but I recollect the last time the Bishop of London preached before Edward VII. the King allowed him five minutes. (Laughter.) Well, I think that in a moment of tenderness the President of the National Secular Society might allow him an equal opportunity. (Laughter.) You notice, too, that a great many people are sympathising with the Catholics in their objection to words being put into the mouth of the Sovereign in the Coronation Oath reflecting upon their religion. Well, I sympathise with

them. I do not think that because they are bigots I should imitate their evil example. The worst thing you can do is to tell a man he is doing wrong, and then because he won't alter, do wrong yourself. (Hear, hear.) If you cannot follow your own advice, what is the use of giving it? I do not think the King of England should have any public opinion about anybody's religion (hear, hear), but I do think that there is an immense number of people in this country who feel that while the Catholics ought not to be insulted in the Coronation Oath, they ought not to insult others in Coronation Oaths where they happen to be in the triumphant majority. (Applause.) You know the young lady who became Queen of Spain, who swapped her religion for a throne. (Laughter.) Well, she had not only to renounce the abominable doctrines which she had previously entertained, but she had to declare them to be a great deal worse than the King of England in the present Coronation Oath has to declare the Catholic creed to be. Now what we want is fair play all round (hear, hear)—no privilege, no disability. That is what we fought for; that is what we fight for now; that is what we will fight for to the end. (Applause.)

Just look, too, to our great writers. Whenever you see some writer coming forward like the Poet-Laureate with his tremulous little rhymes (sniggers), you may be sure he is a Christian. Great writers like those recently dead—George Meredith, Algernon Swinburne, Bjornson in Norway, Mark Twain in America—are Freethinkers to a man.

I sometimes say to myself, How Christianity has changed in my time! Now you know it is difficult to find out what it is. (Laughter.) When I was a child, there was no doubt about that. I heard "Hell" every Sunday; now, you can't hear of it once a month. (Renewed laughter.) Hell is cleaned out. I used to have the Devil held up to me in *terrorem*, and now if you speak of the Devil you are in danger of being run in for using improper language. (Laughter.) The Bible, when I was a child, was true from what you may call the first mistake in Genesis to the last curse in Revelation. If you want to know how the Bible is true to-day, you have got to read long books, and then you don't know. (Hear, hear.) The Bible of Humanity is taking the place of the Bible of the Christian religion and of all other "revealed" religions. The Bible of Humanity consists of the wisest and best thoughts of the wisest and best men of every country and every clime. (Hear, hear.) And what of Jesus Christ? Why, a number of Christians have joined together to bring out a big book, weighing some four pounds, on *Jesus or Christ?* Christian divines are discussing whether Jesus was Man, or God, or both. A goodly number of them say he was not God. They are coming round to our point of view. You cannot find any Godhead of Jesus Christ at all at the City Temple. (Laughter.) Mr. Campbell says, "God!—Jesus God!—yes, as I am God, and as you are God, and God is all of us, and we are all God"—and God help him! (Laughter and Applause.)

And what, lastly, of salvation? When I was a child I used to think, not only by day but by night, of that narrow gate, and wonder if I should ever sneak through. (Laughter.) Well, few of us dream of it now, not even the Christians themselves. They say, as we have said all along, individual salvation is nothing. The man who wants individual salvation, and that only, is like a coward running away, if he can, to a boat to save his own miserable life when the ship is going to sink. Take your place. Go with humanity. Share its fate. Whether that fate be good or ill, your share in it will lift you above every possibility of inconsolable grief or despair. (Applause.) Who is to be saved? Why, all of us—not one, but all of us. (Hear, hear.) And how are we to be saved? By ascertaining the truth, by assimilating it into our minds, by recognising the Darwinian law of the kinship of all life, by seeing that the law of heredity, carried back into the dim and distant past, destroys all barriers of race and caste and makes the human race one great family. (Applause.) That leads us to the noble declaration of Thomas Paine; words so simple that a child can understand them; words so sublime that the greatest thinker might reverently acclaim them; words so magnificent in their intensity and scope, and so grand and true and noble that they seem to me as if they might be written in star-fire upon the brow of night: "The world is my country, mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion." (Loud and continued applause.)

MR. A. B. MOSS.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,—Let me begin, sir, by congratulating you on being able to be present here to-night after having passed through a very serious illness (hear, hear), and let me congratulate the audience on having listened to a brilliant oration from the President. There is one other thing upon which I think we may be congratulated, and that is upon a very successful Conference to-day. I think that we may well be proud of being Freethinkers, proud of the cause in which we believe, proud to hold the views which we entertain, and proud

to defend them. And let me say that as Freethinkers, collected here to-day from all parts of the country, we consider that it is an extremely good thing for us to get your encouragement to go on with this glorious work. Mr. Foote has told you that there are signs everywhere of the decay of the Christian creeds. Mr. Foote and I are both old enough to remember what Christianity was nearly fifty years ago, and we know what it was to have lived in a society composed of Christians who really did believe in the Christian religion. We are glad to know that through the work of Freethought we have emancipated even the Christians themselves (hear, hear); we have humanised them, we have made them ashamed of many of their doctrines, so that to-day they have not only given up hell-fire, in which the vast majority of the human race were to be burnt for ever and for ever, they have not only given up the Devil, but they have given up the whole supernaturalism of the Bible, they have given up the miracles of the Bible—at all events, of the Old Testament—and many of them are beginning to give up even the miracles of the New. The Rev. R. J. Campbell said the other day he had got to this position—that there was no God but Love, and any man who had Love in his heart had God in his heart. May I not say that that is a much superior idea about God than the old great Jehovah that we read of in the Bible, and in so far as Freethought has led to men entertaining a better view of God, I say Freethought is to be commended. We are Freethinkers because we claim the right to exercise our thoughts upon all subjects without intimidation from without. We know that Christianity is not the only religion in the world; it is only one of many, and when we have disposed of Christianity there will be a number of other people to come up and say, Will you give this religion a chance? We shall have to exercise our Freethought in discriminating about any religion that it may be sought to palm upon us. I am glad that not only has Freethought destroyed the supernaturalism of the Bible, but Freethought has put into our hands the weapons whereby we shall destroy all superstition. (Hear, hear.) As Freethinkers, we believe in Science—that is, we believe in Knowledge; and Knowledge is the only thing by which we can destroy Ignorance, which is Superstition. Science is therefore on our side. Literature is on our side. Every book that is written—that is practically on the road to Freethought, even though it may be written against us—supplies us with weapons whereby we may destroy Superstition. Yes, every library is a repository, really, of Freethought; and we who have the management of some of the Public Libraries must take care that the best books are put into those libraries, so that the rising generation may have the best material whereby they may combat Ignorance and Superstition. (Applause.) It is sometimes said that Freethought is merely destructive, and that the time is now come when we ought to be wholly constructive. Ladies and gentlemen, in my judgment the day for giving up fighting for the cause of human freedom has not yet come. Wherever superstition is strong enough it still attempts to coerce and crush us, and even though Christians pretend to be kind, we know that behind their kindness there is still an insidious spirit of cruelty which has always characterised Christianity; and so we say we are in favor of fighting as strongly as ever. We fight for the purpose of clearing the road for those who shall come after us. There are some here to-day whose path has been much easier and clearer than the path through which I had to strive in my youth. You owe your freedom to the great warriors of the past—the men who were prepared to devote not only all their time and talent to the cause of human emancipation, but even to die so that you might have the truth—men like Giordano Bruno, men like Voltaire, men like Thomas Paine, men like Carlile, men like Charles Bradlaugh, and to men like our President—all of whom have dared to suffer for this great cause. Yes, and what, after all, is the object for which we are fighting? Not only for human intellectual emancipation, but we are fighting in order that we may devote all our time to clearing away the evils of this world without any regard to any future one. (Hear, hear.) We see that there is enough misery in this world that requires our attention. We see that we can do good now, and we know that the more we devote our attention to the things of this world and this life, the better will this life become. Thomas Paine, as our Chairman has told us to-night, laid down precisely what religion, in its essence ought to be—to do good to your fellow-men. And just in that proportion that you strive to make your fellows happy, so do you make yourself happy too at the same time. (Hear, hear.) When I look round to-day and see what the various organisations are doing to make human life better than it was years ago, I can see the wonderful influence that Freethought has had even upon secular institutions. Look at the difference to-day as compared with, say, thirty or forty years ago, of our Sunday. Years ago, Sunday was a miserable day. We all had to go and declare ourselves to be miserable sinners

(laughter), and to try and be as miserable as we could; and, at all events, if we could not make others believe that we should be miserable, we tried to look as miserable as we could. (Laughter.) Now we have our bands in the parks, and people are influenced by beautiful music—in fact, music has become almost a religion to some. (Hear, hear.) Not only that, but we see how the parks are laid out in order that we may get a better appreciation of the beautiful in nature. Day by day life is made better even by the secular institutions of this country, and this is really primarily the work of the Freethinkers. They made it possible; and you must remember that while the people are attracted to hear beautiful music, either in the parks or in halls, they are being taken away from the churches. (Hear, hear.) The churches are nearly empty, and the clergy are beginning to wail, and I am glad to know it. (Hear, hear.) I want to see the people appreciating the good things of this world. I want life to be made better and happier for the masses, and that can be done only by good, hard, secular work. In the words of the poet,—

‘Tis not for man to look on high  
For Eden's fabled glow,  
But to clear away the weeds and make  
A Paradise below;  
And to make this world more beautiful,  
More lovely, and more true,  
And a nobler world to live in  
Then e'er our fathers knew.”

This is the ideal after which we strive, and every day we ought to try, as far as possible, to realise it. (Loud applause.)

MR. W. HEAFORD.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,—After some thirty-three or thirty-four years of active work in the Freethought Party as a lecturer, as a secretary, as an organiser, and as a journalist, I feel more impenitent in my Freethought than I was when I began, with trembling steps, my work in this great field of human activity. I feel a keener interest, a warmer enthusiasm, a deeper love, a firmer intellectual conviction in the truths of Freethought every year that I am living under its glorious flag; for we are not only clearing away the weeds from the path of the present generation, we are not only making possible a higher life, a wider measure of liberty for all in the generations to come, but we are the inheritors of the great work of the giants of thought and the giants of heroism in the past. We not only have the example of the great men who suffered for this noble work of ridding from the human mind the foul weeds of priestly superstition, of cleansing the imagination of men so that no longer shall they be darkened by the fear of holl, but that they should be made bright and beautiful with the love of humanity, but we are showing our gratitude for the men who have made possible for us the measure of liberty, the measure of happiness that we are enjoying to-day. (Hear, hear.) Ours is no small or puny cause. A cause which has been identified with freedom in every country, a cause which has been illustrated by the heroisms of men on the battlefield, of men on the scaffold, of heroes in prison, is not a cause of which we, at the beginning of the twentieth century, need to blush. We know we are in the line of the great heroes of the past, and we know that the great cause which has sustained our predecessors is sustaining many of our co-workers in this country and in other countries. We were perhaps apt to think that the age of Freethought martyrs was over when the prison doors opened and George William Foote once again enjoyed his liberty under an English sky, but we know that the old tiger of Christian ferocity can be as cruel and malignant when it has the power in these days as ever it was in the past. And therefore, on the principle that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, we are eternally vigilant, watching the antics of the theologians and resisting in the political, in the social, in the educational field the encroachments that these traditional enemies of mankind are making upon the liberties of the human race. The last time—and I believe it was the first time—that I spoke in this hall was when we had a magnificent meeting here in order to express the indignation of English Freethinkers at the foul and brutal murder of Francisco Ferrer. (Applause.) We must not imagine that because Ferrer was murdered in Spain by the dominant Christian clergy there, the same crime would not be committed here if the same ecclesiastical circumstances prevailed in this country. (Hear, hear.) Therefore I re-echo the principles and sentiments of those who say that the days of destructive work are not over yet, and that we must fight on to-day, that we must be as watchful to-day as ever the Bradlaughs or Voltaires were in the past, remembering this, that if only the same state of affairs, the same intellectual darkness, the same ecclesiastical supremacy, were once again replaced in this country there would be the same crimes, the same butcheries of Freethinkers that disgraced the history

of Christianity in bygone ages. We are therefore quite impenitent in our Freethought. Not all the concessions of the New Theology (laughter) or of Catholic Modernism, not all the concessions of this new-fangled semi-Freethought or semi-Rationalised Christianity, which is now masquerading in the pulpits of to-day and in the columns of the so-called Christian Press of the day,—not all these concessions would disguise the fact that if only the pall of darkness fell thick enough over the eyes of the people the same crimes would be perpetrated, and the dungeons of the Inquisition and the fires of Smithfield and all the horrors of Christian persecution in the past would once more be revived here. We have nothing to be ashamed of in being Freethinkers. It is a glorious name. It is the name that unites the bravest, the freest, and the most heroic minds in all ages, and in this age too. It is the great bond of unity between all that is most progressive in this country and in all other countries. It is the common platform on which the advanced men of every land can unite against the dominant form of superstition prevailing in their land in the hope that, by-and-bye, bit by bit, by the victories won decade after decade, generation after generation, century after century, we may ultimately drive out the enemy of Christian superstition from the mind of man and so cleanse the imagination of man from these errors that we shall stand in this world as in a great temple, rich with every harmony of beauty, and enjoy all the mighty advantages that culture and leisure and refinement can give to mankind, and would have conferred upon mankind in large measure generations ago if Christianity had not stood in the way and prevented the upward progress of ideas. (Applause.) We therefore hold to the principles of Freethought with a firmer faith to-day than ever we held them in the past, because we know that in proportion as we are true to those principles that emancipated our forefathers and have emancipated us, so we shall win a larger measure of happiness for future generations. (Loud applause.)

MR. J. T. LLOYD,

who was received with loud cheers, said: Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,—After the eloquent words to which we have already listened this evening, I scarcely know what to say. The little speech I had been elaborating in my mind for some days past has been already delivered, and I do not know how to strike out in a new line. The defenders of the Christian faith base most of their arguments, as you are aware, on the assumption that there is within every human being what they call a religious instinct, which was planted within us at our creation, or, as the New Theologians tell us, upon our emergence from the animal conditions to the distinctively human state. Consequently, they reason quite cogently and logically, the religious instinct is absolutely indestructible. No doubt it was considerably weakened by that tragic fall in Eden, but it was by no means blotted out. To oppose Christianity is, therefore, to rise up in rebellion against human nature itself. A belief in God and in a future life is, they assert, an instinct; and to endeavor to dislodge it from the human mind is equivalent to trying to deprive the bird of its flying instinct. I frankly admit that this argument, as an argument, is perfectly legitimate and valid provided the assumption upon which it rests can be substantiated at the bar of reason. If supernatural religion is an instinct, we must confess that all attempts to overthrow it are doomed to ultimate failure. But is the assumption on which the argument rests capable of verification? Is the human mind endowed with a religious instinct? Before answering that question, I beg to point out that if any theory about human nature is true, you will find abundant confirmation of its truth in the experience of daily life. When we turn to the history of the Christian Church, however, we observe that the theory of the religious instinct has been universally mistrusted. In controversy with unbelievers, the religious instinct has always played a most conspicuous and important part, but in the practice of the Church it has been deliberately and utterly ignored. Now, why have all the religious sects so heartily joined hands in the vigorous and bitter policy of Secular Education? Simply because of their complete lack of confidence in the religious instinct. (Applause.) What explains the existence and the feverish activity of all the Churches, Sunday-schools, Bands of Hope, and Societies of Christian Endeavor? Nothing but a complete lack of confidence in the religious instinct. (Hear, hear.) So absolute is this lack of confidence in the religious instinct that prominent leaders, like Dr. Clifford, have, again and again, given public expression to the view that if Secular Education were adopted Great Britain would soon become a heathen country, not only devoid of religion but deep sunk in all forms of immorality and crime. Dr. Campbell Morgan said, only last week, that in his opinion London is now Satan's Seat, and that Great Britain is as Pagan as was ancient Rome. Think, he said, there are two thousand children in Sunday-schools in London alone who

never hear anything about God and Christ and a future world. What I wish to emphasise just now, however, is the fact that the practice of the Church contradicts its doctrine on this subject simply because the doctrine is wholly false. There is no such thing as a religious instinct, the belief in it being the very maddest of dreams. (Hear, hear.) Now let us for a moment consider what instinct is and how it works. "An instinct," Paley says—and a more accurate definition was never framed—"an instinct is a propensity prior to experience and independent of instruction." An instinctive action, therefore, is an action performed in response to a constitutional impulse, or inward push outwards, without any training or instruction, and often without any knowledge whatever of the end to be achieved. Such an action is the annual migration of many of our birds. Such an action is the stealing of other birds' nests by the common cuckoo. This bird shirks the responsibilities—or should I say privilege?—of sitting upon, and hatching out, its own eggs. It lays only one egg in a nest, with the result, of course, that the baby bird gets plenty to eat. Furthermore, the baby bird, before it is many days old, obeying a hatefully cruel instinct, gives its foster brothers in the nest a push out, with the result that they perish of cold and hunger, and that it secures all the food its voracious self requires. Then there is the hive-bee with the cell-making instinct, probably the most wonderful of all instincts. Now what serves my purpose is this: that though these instincts are transmitted from generation to generation, they never appear as the reward of training or instruction. When we come to examine the so-called religious instinct in man, what do we find? Has a single child ever believed in God and immortality, and become pious without having previously been most assiduously taught? Has anyone ever been known to take instinctively to worshiping God, and praying and performing other religious exercises? On the contrary, practically every child experiences the greatest possible difficulty in learning to believe in the existence of a Being whom nobody ever seen or ever heard. First of all, the parents have a go at him; then the Sunday-school teacher takes him in hand; then the day-school teacher; and, finally, the minister, who holds special classes for the conversion of the young. In the end, when the child reaches 15 or 16, he or she may profess faith in Christ, or may not. The truth is, that naturally the human mind shrinks from thinking about religion, or from taking part in any religious exercises. There is no duty which a Christian minister has to attend to more frequently than that of looking up, and trying to prick, the consciences of professing Christians who shirk church attendance and other obligations of the so-called spiritual life. The sin that so easily besets the most saintly is that of forgetting God, who sits so lightly on the back of their minds that he is perpetually slipping off; and there is nothing more difficult in the world than to re-seat him. (Applause.) Now, from such facts as these the only reasonable inference is that religion is a foreign element which never quite succeeds in acclimatising itself to the human constitution. It is never fully in accordance with us, nor we with it. At the very best man and his religion are just a little bit afraid of each other, and they are perpetually threatening to dissolve partnership; and it is the opinion of a rapidly growing number of people that man would get on much better, and be ever so much healthier and stronger and richer if the partnership were to be actually and finally cancelled. (Applause.) While the so-called religious instinct is nothing but a figment of the imagination, there inheres in every one of us a really genuine instinct—the instinct of social life—which has been so over-shadowed by the imaginary religious instinct that it has never yet had fairplay. (Hear, hear.) There is in the Bible a very splendid parable—the parable of the Sower. You will remember, some of the seed fell among thorns and it did not bear any fruit, because the thorns grew up and choked it. Well, our business is plucking out the thorns of superstition from the minds of the people, and so prepare the soil for the seed of the Kingdom of Man. (Applause.) In this grand work may we all take our part, so that the time may come when we shall have among us economic justice, social welfare, and that brotherhood, so often sung by Meredith, which is the very essence of a happy human life. (Loud applause.)

MISS K. KOUGH.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,—Only so recently as last Sunday, at the close of an address that I delivered in Victoria Park to a very cold audience—I mean physically cold—an opponent got on to the platform and said that if it were not for Christianity I should not be occupying the platform that afternoon. Of course, I quite agreed with him. But what he really meant was, that it was due to Christianity that a woman was able to stand up in this enlightened twentieth century and address an audience at all. As Freethinkers, we know that it is in spite of Christianity.

(Continued on p. 346.)

## Acid Drops.

The *Literary Post* is unfortunate in its choice of writers, a leading article on the *Letters* of John Stuart Mill, in a recent number, being evidently the work of one of these gentlemen whose knowledge of a subject is got from the book they happen to be reviewing. It is the usual combination of ignorance and prejudice, with a dash of wilful untruth to give it a flavor. It will be remembered that Mill, in his *Three Essays on Religion*, praised the Jesus of the Gospels as a perfect figure, and claimed that no one had ever taught such a noble morality. This testimony, which was based on no inquiry as to the historic actuality of Jesus and the originality of the Gospel teaching, is said by the *Literary Post* writer to be "far enough removed from the militant and abusive Atheism which had its chief popular exponent in Charles Bradlaugh."

Nothing can be more amusing and more instructive than the vaporings of your average journalist when he is trying to write something that will please his semi-religious reader. If a Freethinker is zealous for the truth as he knows it, if he is very much in earnest and lets it be seen that he means what he says, if he is not afraid to draw blood from an opponent, the objection is raised that he is militant and aggressive, and is guilty of the worst possible manners. But if Christians are perfervid, if they destroy your rest with the jangle of their church bells, ruin your nerves with the braying of trombones and cornets, and the dismal howling of their hymns by scrofulous evangelists, if they waylay you with tracts setting forth the awful punishment of unbelievers, they are not reproved for their wretched manners; they are not aggressive—they are simply zealous and sincere believers. For the average journalist many words have no fixed meanings; everything depends on the point of view.

If we admit that *militant* and *aggressive* are correct adjectives to apply to anyone who is very much in earnest about ideas you do not happen to care for, it is quite different with the word *abusive*. When you say of a man's manner that it is abusive, you either mean that he buttresses a bad argument by insulting his opponent or you say what is untrue. Now, nothing could be wider of the mark than to describe Bradlaugh as abusive. If he ever used strong language it was under great provocation, and was justified by a gross and circumstantial clerical lie. His manner was invariably temperate and courteous. Even when he had an incompetent opponent to deal with he would treat him with great leniency. Every Freethinker knows from sad experience that scurrility and vulgar abuse are the favorite weapons of the Christian.

We are not likely to forget the great and good man, Thomas Paine, was called a "dirty little Atheist" by the pious hustler, Roosevelt. Spencer, in his *Study of Sociology*, quotes an example of religious scurrility from the *Church Herald* of May 14, 1873. It is worth reprinting, and should be read in connection with an article on Mill in the *British Weekly* by the pietistic, pharisaical Nicoll. The *Church Herald* wrote as follows on the death of John Stuart Mill:—

"Mr. J. Stuart Mill, who has just gone to his account, would have been a remarkable writer of English if his innate self-consciousness and abounding self-confidence had not made him a notorious literary prig.....His death is no loss to anybody, for he was a rank but amiable infidel, and a most dangerous person. The sooner those lights of thought who agree with him go to the same place the better it will be both for Church and State."

If the *Literary Post's* writer can find a passage in Bradlaugh's writings that any unprejudiced man would call abusive, we will present him with a copy of Trench's *Study of Words*.

The Rev. Dr. Jowett says that Atheists are *spiritually* blind. So they are; and they pride themselves upon the fact. Not believing in the existence of spirit, they certainly do not believe in spiritual vision. It is true they have no sense of God, but Dr. Jowett is quite mistaken when he contends that they have no skies and no awe. Their life is exceeding spacious, and full of poetic beauty and imaginative splendor, and they need never experience a dull moment. Furthermore, their life is real, in that it is life lived in the pure light of reason. In other words, Atheists are the only people who are intellectually awake, whose one aim is to walk, not by faith, but by knowledge acquired through the intellect. Christians, on the contrary, are *intellectually* asleep, and the bulk of their life is spent in dreamland.

It will be interesting to see how the Rev. R. J. Campbell will arrange his little difficulty with the Congregational

Union. Mr. Silvester Horne, M.P., speaking at the Assembly meeting, made a characteristically hollow profession of Christian love and brotherhood and then proceeded to attack in a childish virulent manner all the critical principles for which Mr. Campbell stands. The latter gentleman, we believe, is a Celt. To the Celtic temperament consistency and logical precision are alien and distasteful. We once knew an Irish poet who called himself an Atheist yet thought he had a belief in a God. Mr. Campbell is doubtless quite honest. It is only a superficial observer of human nature that would suggest insincerity and quackery. Besides, the Congregationalists or Independents, to which body Mr. Campbell belongs, have no written articles of belief, and, therefore, there is no fixing precisely what a man may or may not believe. Still, they call themselves Christians, thereby implying a belief in certain dogmas—the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection of the Son of God. Anyone who "restates" (a *British Weekly* euphemism for "rejects") these doctrines to suit his own notion of what is rational, should not keep the name of Christian nor associate himself with a group which has no share in his opinions. Mr. Campbell wants to be a sceptic and Christian at the same time. It is a pity he is not a Professor of Divinity at Oxford or Cambridge. He could then hold any belief he liked.

We are pleased to see Mr. R. J. Campbell emphasising the fact that the Progressive League is primarily a religious body, and also that "persons of no very pronounced religious sympathies" are better outside. Doubtless recent events have taught him that the large majority of Christians are not content to have their religion preached as an adjunct to the Socialist movement, or to see in a scheme of main drainage the chief fruition of the vicarious death of Jesus. We quite agree with Mr. Campbell that persons who "are out of sympathy with Christianity" are "in the wrong place" in joining Mr. Campbell's party, and we hope that Mr. Bernard Shaw and others who have been coquetting with City Templeism will see that its leader indicates a course it should have been quite unnecessary to advise.

Mr. Campbell's advice emphasises a point that all intelligent reformers will do well to take to heart. It is apparently the opinion of many that they may, by keeping their own opinion on religion in the background, and joining various Churches for social work, be advancing social development and weakening religion. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Churches gain far more than they lose by such tactics. To begin with, they reduce to silence those who would otherwise play the part of active assailants. Next, they gain the credit for interest in social reform that as often as not they are without. Their real concern is with religion, and as soon as their interests in this direction are served those who have aided them are invited to step outside—and stay there. The wildest of all delusions is that cherished by certain social organisations of mushroom growth, that they can capture the Churches. The Churches may capture them, and in certain instances appear to have done so. It may one day dawn upon non-Christian social reformers that common sense and self-respect suggest that in suppressing their own opinions on religion in order to gain the co-operation of Christian Churches they are reducing themselves to the expedients of an emergency, to be thrown on one side when the emergency has passed, or another of a different nature has developed.

Mr. Campbell also announces that for the future he will cease to interfere in political matters, but will concentrate on pulpit work. Other clergymen, please copy.

"Laicus," of the *Methodist Times*, is an exceedingly interesting and racy writer. Unfortunately, however, his views of things are often warped by his theology. For example, in his article on "Power and Beauty" for May 19, he says: "There is ugliness in the world, as we all know; but ugliness comes from man. It is the result of man's sin." That may be good theology, but, judged by informed common sense, it is sheer nonsense. How an intelligent gentleman like "Laicus" could write such stuff is a mystery. He continues thus: "Disease is ugly, selfishness is ugly, ingratitude is ugly, evil temper is ugly." On his own showing, then, there must have been plenty of ugliness in the world prior to man's appearance. Moreover, if such things are ugly, it follows that ugliness comes, not from man, but from the Creator in whom "Laicus" so firmly believes. It is he who must be held responsible for whatever qualities manifest themselves in his creation.

Pastor Russell, the American preacher who has been holding forth at the Albert Hall, says that collections are not

necessary when one preaches against hell. "How to spend the money that comes to me," he says, "is one of the problems of my life." Well, we have been preaching against hell for many years, but our experience is not exactly that of Pastor Russell's. And if preachers find that preaching against hell brings the money in so plentifully, we should say that Pastor Russell will make more converts among the clergy, than among those of the laity, who still believe in the eternity of "hell's hot jurisdiction."

Both Robert Moase (of Hackney) and his wife suffer from being unequally yoked. The former is a Roman Catholic and the latter a Protestant. Moase was summoned recently for using threats against his wife, and explained,—

"Me and my wife frequently have words over our little boy's religion. I am a Roman Catholic, and I want my little boy to be brought up the same. My wife's a Protestant, and wants her way with the boy."

Neither appears to trouble about what the little boy in question really needs. As is usual in such matters, there is much talk about the rights of the parent and no consideration whatever for the rights of the child. The magistrate told Mr. Moase, a religion that led to quarrelling was not worth a brass farthing. Quite so; only as all religions do lead to quarrelling their moral value is correctly placed in the magistrate's estimate.

The Rev. Dr. Campbell Morgan contends that no one can be an honest student of the Bible unless he is absolutely free from prejudice. On the assumption that Great Britain is a Christian country, no such person can be found within its borders. Dr. Morgan must be aware that no child born and bred within the atmosphere of the Church can be expected to treat the Bible without prejudice. In the home from earliest years, in the Sunday-school, in all church services, in the minister's Bible-class, everywhere the child is told, times without number, that this volume is the very Word of God. How on earth is it possible for anyone so trained to approach the discussion of the book devoid of bias? It is only once in a while that such people are ever enabled to emancipate themselves from the bondage of superstitious reverence for the Bible. And yet Dr. Morgan is quite right, and the only legitimate inference is that *Christians, as Christians, cannot be honest students of their own Scriptures.*

The Rev. Mr. Rattenbury is progressing, though he has still much to learn. He is sufficiently advanced to concede that "when a man leads a *really* moral and upright life" he has nothing to fear. Of course not; but the reverend gentleman is still under the delusion that such a man "has laid hold upon the Unseen, however little he may realise it." After all, there is nothing strange in this, especially when we bear in mind that it is the preacher's profession to talk with the utmost cocksureness about things concerning which he possesses absolutely no knowledge.

The Christian missionary is invariably at the bottom of internal disturbances in the East. A Tokio paper, *Yorotsujo*, in an editorial, writes, as follows: "Although the foreign missionaries deny the fact, they are responsible for all the troubles against the Japanese in Korca. It is they that spread false reports of the Japanese administration in the Peninsular."

Dr. Drysdale, at the Presbyterian Synod held at Cardiff, told his fellow clergymen that the Jewish mission was both insulting to the Jews and a waste of good money. It was only turning bad Jews into worse Christians. For the good Jew, the only one worth converting, said Dr. Drysdale, "the Christian is no better than a Pagan."

Rev. W. T. Walker, of Glasgow, announces the publication of a book, entitled *The True Christ*. We suppose this will settle the matter once for all.

The following, from the Melbourne *Argus*, affords a refreshing contrast to the views of some of the English Labor advocates and to the gush, repeated *ad nauseum*, about "applying Christianity to social problems":—

"Melbourne Socialists crowded their hall in Elizabeth-street, last evening, and vociferously applauded Mr. F. Hiatt (secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees) in his contention that "Christianity is philosophically unsound, unscientific, and economically useless from the working-class standpoint."

We commend this to our pious Laborists in the home country.

The *Guardian* is distressed almost to tears. The hustling illustrated journals were irreverent enough to compete for

the best snap-shot of the consecration of the Bishop of Norwich; the worst part of a bad business was that they selected the most awful moment—when hands were laid on the unctuous holy head of the newly made bishop. It is not suggested that the proprietors and editors of these wicked but enterprising journals are Atheists.

Under "Recent Wills," the *Guardian* tells us that the Rev. Dr. Andrew Fausset has left an estate valued at £39,378, the Rev. O. Smith-Bingham £114,349, the Rev. E. Kerslake £50,514. This is an average of nearly £70,000 for three preachers of the gospel of poverty.

In glaring contrast to these enormous fortunes is the case of a poor person who writes to the *Guardian* that after twenty-six years of hard work his income does not reach £2 a week. Having to do all his own house repairs he has no time for study, and is, in consequence, an ill-read and ignorant theologian but an expert carpenter.

The *Daily Mirror*, in its issue of the 16th inst., published a leading article on the late King's death, and quoted a magnificent passage from the Atheist poet, Swinburne. The verse was taken from the poet's elegy on Charles Baudelaire. It is significant that when men are brought face to face with death they often forget their theology and turn to a wise Secularism.

Dr. Horton said recently that "his great desire was that the Sunday papers should be used for bringing the Gospel to the mass of the people." We are afraid that the *cause celebre* of Joseph v. Joseph and the Holy Ghost would not be so attractive as up-to-date divorce cases.

Another child has been born to the Spaxton Messiah, Smyth-Pigott. The infant, a girl, has not yet been named, but it is said by the *Daily Chronicle* that it will be christened "Comet."

Our readers will be familiar with the name of the Neapolitan Camorra, the great Italian criminal organisation. Although criminal it is exceedingly pious, and has its own chaplain. This person, a priest named Viltuzzi, has been for some time in the hands of the authorities, and is now reported to be dying in the prison infirmary. The criminal population of Naples, we read, are greatly excited at the approaching death of their "spiritual" leader. We do not expect they will have much difficulty in finding a successor for the post.

The newest "immortal" is not the late Edward VII., but M. Brioux, the author of *False Gods*.

*Punch* has published an "In Memoriam" number relating to King Edward VII., and it is not the least funereal publication of its kind. Just fancy a "comic" paper being able to cull so much solemnity from its pages. No wonder the English people wallow naked in the religion of the "Man of Sorrows."

A horse named "The Sinner" won a race recently. Off the racecourse some "saint" would have beaten him by a neck.

Owing to the King's death a military band was countermanded at a seaside resort, and its place taken by a private band which wore mourning clothes. "What band is this," asked a spectator; "the First Royal Undertakers?"

A writer in the *New Age* says: "Heretics are not now burned, but they are barred." A very true remark; and it is the duty of Freethinkers to see that this boycott is broken down.

Principal Forsyth avers that it is not his custom to descend to personalities, but he admits that once in print he deplored that "so good a comrade and so fine a preacher" as Mr. Campbell "should have been lost to the pulpit of the Gospel through influences that got their scope from his lack of acquaintance with the mighty matters he rushed in to handle and damage." Well, it would be extremely difficult to utter a meaner and crueller personality than that. Dr. Forsyth denies that he ever called Mr. Campbell "a quack" and "an adventurer"; but surely in that extract he calls him a something much worse—a man who has ceased to preach the Gospel. Dr. Forsyth knows what the Gospel is, and preaches it; but those who differ from him do neither. How beautiful a grace is Christian humility! How sweet a sentiment is brotherly love!



## Mr. Foote's Engagements.

(All early dates cancelled until further notice.)

### To Correspondents.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: 1910.—Previously acknowledged, £214 2s. 7d. Received since:—W. A. Yates, 5s.

SHILLING MONTH (the Figures mean the number of Shillings).—T. H. E., 2½.

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.

J. BRYCE.—MS. to hand. Will appear as soon as our columns are free from Conference matter.

T. T. LODGE.—The passage you criticise from the *Freethinker* of February 27 does not deny that definite knowledge may be reached either on the one side or the other of the question of a future life. It only states that, in the present state of our knowledge, one is not logically warranted in denying a future life. A belief based upon probability is quite another question. If we grant that living is a *state*, it follows, as you say, that, with the cessation of living, life disappears. But the religious person does not grant your premiss; and, in arguing against him, to base one's remarks on this is to assume the whole point in dispute.

G. HARVEY.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

A. N.—Miss Vance will be pleased to supply you or others with small parcels of literature—pamphlets and leaflets—for gratuitous distribution. The only conditions are that she be assured of the *bona fide* character of the application, and that the recipient pays carriage.

R. H. ROSETTI.—Glad to hear of your successful meeting at Laindon, and that there was a good sale of this paper and other literature.

E. A. SEAFORTH.—We are sending your letter on to Mr. Foote.

W. J. RAMSEY.—Received, but no space to deal with it this week.

W. A. YATES.—Enclosure received and acknowledged. We are delighted to hear from one who looks back with so much gratitude to the day on which he "first handled a copy of the *Freethinker*." It is such acknowledgments that repay us for past efforts and urge us to fresh ones. Mr. Foote is rapidly regaining his health, and we expect to see him very shortly back at his old post.

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.

ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.

PERSONS remitting for literature by stamps are specially requested to send *halfpenny stamps*.

THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

### Sugar Plums.

For the first time for many years we are departing from the usual custom and giving in full the speeches at the evening meeting of the N. S. S. Conference. We believe that those who read these addresses, will agree that in this matter we have acted wisely. All the speakers touched a very high level of excellence, and those who could not or did not attend the meeting will thus have the speeches placed within their reach. It is well, too, once in a while, to give the outside world some idea of what the N. S. S. platform is like. We would also suggest that the present issue of the *Freethinker* would make an excellent propagandist number, and many of our readers would do well to secure extra copies for distribution in promising quarters. We are printing an extra supply for that purpose, and those who have any desire to help both the circulation of this journal by introducing it to new readers, and also to promote the spread of Freethought, will find the present issue an excellent number for both purposes.

Owing to pressure on our space, due to the report of the Conference speeches, we have been obliged to cut down the number of paragraphs in the present issue of the *Freethinker*. Our readers will, we think, agree that their place is worthily filled. Next week we hope to deal out paragraphs with a more liberal hand.

To-day, Sunday (May 29), Mr. Cohen lectures at 3.30 from the N. S. S. platform on Parliament Hill. We trust there will be a good muster of Freethinkers present. Christians seem to be making special endeavors to make work at this station as difficult as possible.

N. S. S. Branches will please notice that delegates to the Society's Executive must be elected within twenty-one days dating from the Annual Conference. The names of delegates should therefore be sent to Miss Vance without delay.

### A Lame Dog's Excuse.

I INTENDED to write an article for this week's *Freethinker*. Mr. Cohen is still sitting in the editorial chair at the office, and I should for the time have been really but a contributor,—and I have scarcely been even that for several weeks. I find, however, that there is a certain natural truth in the old proverb, couched in theological language, that "man proposes and God disposes." God, in this case, stands for several circumstances, such as my own condition and the weather. Principally the weather. For I was so far recovered from my late illness, with its upsetting operation, that I was able to take my part, after a fashion, as President at the Whit-Sunday Conference of the National Secular Society; and I suppose I might have forced myself to go right on with my regular work. Yet I should doubtless have had to pay the penalty of so doing, and I believe I am acting for the best in following the advice of so many friends who have urged me not to overtax my growing strength, but to enjoy a period of recuperation. I left home with my wife for rest and change, which she needs as much as I do. Of course I was full of virtuous resolution to do *some* work. I had fixed upon Friday, but that was the day of King Edward's funeral, and I was too sickened with the monotonous display of artificial grief in the newspapers, and in the people about me, to be able to write at all. Besides, it was glorious weather, and I was tempted to make the most of it. Saturday started with a frightful storm; the darkness, the wind, the thunder and lightning, and the rain were so appalling that common folk might well imagine that the comet had come or the day of judgment arrived. After the storm the weather continued to be miserable till late in the evening, and I was too gloomy to begin working. I resolved to make a real effort on Sunday; but Sunday came with splendid sunshine, tempered by a fine cool wind, and the sky was a vast dome of unblemished blue, and the sea with its multitudinous waves flashed the beauty that I most love,—and how on earth (or elsewhere) could one begin working on such a magnificent day? All I could do was to "loaf and invite my soul," as Whitman puts it. And that I did. Well, it is now Monday, and the weather is grand again; besides, it is too late to get a long article in the make-up of this week's *Freethinker*; so I let the long article slide for once, and just keep up the connection with my readers through these chatty, and I dare say very inadequate, lines.

Some critical readers may think that I have offered good excuses for laziness. I tell them it was the weather. The glorious sunshine was too much for me. I remember—I shall never forget—the thrill that went through me on the day that I was able to walk by myself after my illness without leaning on my daughter's arm. Turning a corner I suddenly came upon the sea-front. Miles across were the hills of Kent, overhead was the great sweep of dappled sky, below was the great stretch of water gleaming in the sunlight. My whole being vibrated from head to foot. I could feel my limbs quivering.

Not with weakness, but with new strength and delight drawn from Mother Nature. For nearly four weeks I had been confined to my bedroom, and most of the time in bed; and an experience of that kind is necessary to enable one to feel the full force of "Out Again,"—the deep breath, the long sigh, the placid content, the soft renovation moving through one's blood and nerves, the sense that one is really alive again. Yes *alive* again. One may rise from the dead without a miracle. When the doctor called to see me a few hours after the operation, and my brain was gradually recovering from the anæsthetic, he asked me how I felt. "Like Lazarus," I replied. "What does that mean," he asked, "*thirsty?*" "No," I replied, "risen from the dead."

Believe me, critical reader, it was the weather. I am seeking fresh strength in the best way,—drinking life from Mother Nature's breast. She allows us to seek and find it there if we will. And I have always loved her passionately, though the work of my life has been in cities. When my last hour comes I should like to be in the open air, not in a room, which is like a larger edition of one's coffin; and with natural sights and sounds around me—and above all the sound of the sea upon the shore—I could die in peace and resignation. It would be the last unction of the Church to which I belong.

G. W. FOOTE.

(Continued from p. 342.)

and not because of it. Civilisation owes nothing to Christianity. Christianity took its rise at about thirty degrees north latitude, I believe, and in the region of its birth it has never been productive of any civilising influence. It was only as it came further north, and as it came to a people enjoying different influences of climate, soil, and social institutions, that it became associated with a more progressive humanity. Mohammedanism, which took its rise in the torrid zone, also developed as it came further north, when it expanded, and became associated with such civilising influences, that for long, Moslem Spain put Christian Europe to the blush. And if we are to attribute the advancement of woman to any single cause, we might more justly place it to the credit of climate, rather than religion, that women occupy a better position in the West than they do in the East. But the influence of Christianity has prevented women, even in the most civilised countries, from coming forward and bearing her share in the work of regenerating humanity. Up to quite recently it was thought that all women ought to spend their time between the Bible and the cookery-book. I think it would be a great deal better if women were taught less of the Bible and more of the cookery-book. (Applause.) In some directions the old Spartans could give us many lessons to-day. They held that the maternal function was the woman's highest function, and that it should have every opportunity of developing on the highest and best lines; therefore they trained their women both bodily and mentally until, in Sparta (famous, I believe, for 300 or 400 years, as bringing forth the finest and noblest race in Greece) the women were better educated than the men, and I think the story goes that Gorgo, the wife of Leonidas, replied to a stranger who said to her, "You Spartan women are the only women who rule men," "We Spartans are the only women who bring forth men." And that is why we are so anxious to spread the gospel of Freethought among women. One can very well understand the religious instinct referred to by Mr. Lloyd to-night, when one recalls that it impressed upon the mother that her first duty to the child is to bring it up in the tenets of the Christian religion. It amused me during the past week to come across a new monthly paper, known as the *Baby's World*, which is addressed exclusively to mothers. Sandwiched between an article written by a very advanced Socialist and another article on sanitary inspection we have a little instruction from the Rev. Dr. Magee. He tells the mothers that their first duty is to seize on the infant mind, which is as impressionable as wax, and begin to teach it something about God and heaven as soon as it can understand anything. It is first of all to be shown pictures of the Good Shepherd, Jesus, taking care of the lambs, and it is then to be taught to pray, which is its way of talking to God. Then it should be taught to say grace, and the very tiniest children can easily be taught to do this, especially by the example of other children. In that way the earliest lessons of religion will be inculcated in the infant mind. Now that is to-day, in civilised England, in the twentieth century. But we are getting on a little bit. You are teaching women something of sanitary science, you are teaching them

something about their duty to their poorer brothers and sisters; but at the same time you must have sandwiched between those two lessons something about religion. What we want to do as Freethinkers is to try and get hold of as many women as possible, so that we can instil into their minds that it is their duty as the custodians of the future generation to open widely and broadly their own minds, to let the glorious light of Freethought stream in upon them, so that the ignorance and darkness of superstition may be swept away, in order that the mothers of future generations shall do their part in bringing about the realisation of the glorious gospel of humanity and the Brotherhood of Man. (Applause.)

MR. F. A. DAVIES.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,—We know that amongst ancient people there was plenty of what we call humbug. It did not originate with Christianity. They had it before, and so carefully has it been preserved and propagated that there is more of it to the square mile in modern Christian civilisation than there was in more ancient times. Mr. Barnum wrote a book on it. It was a large book, but did not exhaust the subject by any means; so I want to draw your attention to one of the most prevalent forms of humbug, which I may call the humbug of disinterestedness. All of you, I suppose, have followed recent political controversy, and you will have noticed that the politicians whose utterances called forth the most bitter resentment were those who declared that the other side were actuated by motives of self-interest. That was hitting below the belt. Anything so crudely truthful as that was considered to be un-English and opposed altogether to the best traditions of our British public life. (Laughter.) Lord Macaulay once remarked in the House of Commons that it would be a strange infatuation if they were to legislate on the assumption that men cared as much for their fellow-creatures as they cared for themselves, and yet that is an assumption that is always being made by politicians and by partisans. The same criticism applies to theological discussion. Reference has been made here to-night to the Rev. R. J. Campbell. While his opponents were criticising his peculiar theological views and pointing out his heresies, Mr. Campbell preserved a quite saint-like forbearance. He had the best of the argument, and he smiled. When, however, Dr. Forsyth at Hull drew the attention of the Free Churchmen to the fact that the Rev. R. J. Campbell and other New Theologians were eating the bread of a Church whose doctrines they denied, then the heather was on fire at once. Criticise the Rev. Campbell's theological position as much as you like; but turn the attention of the public to his economic position as a minister of a church drawing a salary for preaching a certain doctrine, and then your criticism passes the bounds of ordinary Christian courtesy—to use the Rev. R. J. Campbell's own words. (Hear, hear.) Mr. Campbell is always telling us that "the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." In the meantime, however, parsons are not fed, like the prophet of old, by ravens, although I have heard the names of other birds mentioned in that connection—gulls, I believe, was one of them. (Laughter.) The minister of a church is a man, and he is compelled to dress and eat; he is compelled to have a salary; it is respectable that he should be married. They are in the same position as ordinary, common, human clay. They have the same ideals, lofty and otherwise. They live much about the same life. They are faced by the same moral and intellectual problems; they wrestle with them and take sides just the same as any other man, because, when disputes are worried out, "it is interest still that resolves the doubt"; and the parson takes the side upon which his interests are as automatically as any other person in the community does. I am not saying anything against them on that account. They are only men. I do not for one moment imagine that it would be possible for every man in the Church who disbelieves the Christian doctrine to come out of it. It is only the most heroic men who do that. (Hear, hear.) After all, when we say that interest resolves the doubt, we are only taking them off their imaginary pedestal, and putting them on the ordinary level which other men occupy. St. Peter, I believe, in the assumption of the Christian people, is the manliest man in the Bible, and yet we know that it was interest that resolved his doubt—something like 10,000 per cent., I believe, with a crown and throne put in as a kind of makeweight. (Laughter.) Even in that idyllic period of the Church when the faithful came forward with their offerings and laid their property at the feet of the apostles, it is only natural to assume, as Colonel Ingersoll did, that it was the apostle who suggested the arrangement. (Laughter.) When the Church founded upon St. Peter became powerful, it no longer founded upon Peter, but upon the solid basis of landed property. (Hear, hear.) The people were told that man's life consisted not in the abundance of the things which he possessed, but they got

hold of everything they could lay their hands on, and kept it as long as they possibly could. You all know how, when the Church became powerful, they wrecked and burnt and destroyed whatever heresy appeared, how bitterly they persecuted differences of opinion. But no heresy was ever persecuted so ruthlessly as those forms of error that taught men that they could bargain directly with God without employing the middlemen that the Church supplied. (Laughter and applause.) That was because it struck at the foundation of the Christian faith as represented by the priests who drew revenue from the people as a means of living. If to-day, instead of the Pagan religion, the worship of the ancient Pagan gods had survived, the worship of Mithra or of Dionysius or any other, and was in anything like the position of the Christian religion is to-day of having funds invested and churches standing upon freehold land, and a great wages fund only waiting for people to come in and preach that religion in order to handle the money, those ancient religions would be living to-day, and would be defended to-day, and there would be journals to explain how they could be reconciled with all the truths that science and history and philosophy have taught the twentieth century. (Hear, hear.) Something might be said about my own self-interest and motives as a Freethought lecturer. I attack the Christian religion from motives of self-interest. I attack it because it is the enemy of the particular class to which I belong—the common people. The Christian religion is the enemy of the common people wherever it goes. (Hear, hear.) It has crushed the common people by flattering them, and it has flattered them by declaring their natural cowardice to be a virtue. It has declared that the meek, which is another word for weak, are blessed, whereas the proper gospel should be that the weak are cursed, and the strong only are blessed. The Christian religion has cast a halo round the degrading poverty of the common people and declared it to be a state of blessedness. It has crushed out the healthy moral virtue of revolt against wrong. The morals that are taught to the people now not only by the Christians, but by those who have been influenced by Christian civilisation, and what are called Christian ethics, are immoral, and what is called immoral now will have to become the morality of future ages. (Hear, hear.) There was a story recently revived in the numerous obituary notices of Mark Twain to the effect that when he was a lad his father showed him a flower-bed in which the weeds were in an appalling majority. His father said: "Samuel, my boy, I want you to weed out that flower-bed." Mark Twain looked at the flower-bed a little while, and then said: "Say, dad, wouldn't it be much easier to flower out the weed-bed?" Now that is precisely what the Christian religion has done—it has flowered out the weed-bed. (Laughter.) The really decent people who have been kept alive to breed the future generations are a small number, a negligible quantity. The rank weeds are everywhere. The Christian religion has allowed the weeds to grow and crush out the flowers which ought to be preserved, and it will not be until we reverse the order of things and start weeding out the flower-bed that the garden of life will bloom in all its rich and varied loveliness. That will not be until we have recognised that if we are to achieve in the future any degree of real, just, fraternal society, we can only do it after the last vestige of the slave morality of Jesus Christ is banished into the limbo of exploded superstition. (Applause.)

MR. C. COHEN.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,—I shall perhaps please you, and at least humor myself by being very brief. I want to lay stress on just one point. Many years ago—perhaps not quite so long as some of the speakers referred to, because it came to be quite a patriarchal assembly when they spoke of the decades that had passed—a good many years ago, because I have been nearly twenty years trying to civilise Christians—(laughter)—I spoke at a meeting on behalf of a candidate for the old London School Board, where the Chairman was a well-known clergyman who had been dining perhaps not too wisely, but, at any rate, well. Speaker after speaker had got up and said how sure they were that the candidate was bound to get in at the top of the poll, and this clergyman leaned over to me—I had to speak next—and said, "Rub it into them that they are too—h'm—h'm—cocky." (Laughter.) I want to rub it into you to-night that it is possible for you to be "too—h'm—h'm—cocky." (Renewed laughter.) A great deal has been said to-night of the tremendous advance that Freethought has made, and, from one point of view, I quite agree with that, only I think we should all note the danger of looking at what, after all, is quite a small proportion of the Christian world who adopt advanced opinions, and ignoring the immense majority of Christians who have not adopted them at all. Mr. Campbell and Canon Scott Holland and such men are, after all, only a fraction of the Church, and we forget that beyond them there exists a large number

of Christians who have not thrown off the old doctrines, but who are only sufficiently ashamed not to boast about them. They have got a skeleton in the cupboard, and while they have not the courage to clean the cupboard out, they have just got sufficient family pride to say as little about it as possible. (Hear, hear.) Even beyond that class, I want to draw your attention to another and larger class of people who have given up belief in any formal superstitious doctrines, but who yet remain, to all practical intents and purposes, superstitious human beings; and this represents a standing danger to the best elements of our civilisation. (Hear, hear.) For this huge mass of people is much in the same case as if one drains a river and then leaves it a marsh which may spread disease all round. We have drained off a lot of the definite superstitions, but there is that immense mass of unregenerated human nature still, and any turn of the political wheel, any unexpected combination of social circumstances, may give the astute leaders of Church and Chapel a chance to once more re-awaken the flame of religious bigotry in this country. Now, I suggest that we have got to pay attention to that, because the critical days of Freethought are not yet past. The Christian Churches are not going to give up in a hurry, and they are not going to give up without a struggle. The day of our hardest and bitterest struggle, and the day of our greatest danger, will be the day when we are nearest either ultimate triumph or a defeat that will put back Freethought for the passing of many generations. I suggest, therefore, that there is still much work for all of us to do, not merely to clear out of Christians' minds definite dogmatic beliefs, but to take those people who have lost these beliefs and put something like mental strength into them. (Applause.) The average man is a coward, and perhaps in all the world there is no place where moral and mental cowardice flourishes so much as it does in Great Britain. We have got to put backbone into the nation's mental life, if we can, and we have got to make the profession of honesty a little more tolerable, and a little more profitable, if we can. The average man is not a martyr, and you will never get honesty of speech and clearness of thought in average humanity until you make it possible for people to get through life with that tolerable amount of comfort which every normal human being desires. When I say that, I have no doubt whatever of the strength of the Freethought position. I am only pointing out the necessity for action. I believe that we hold the most powerful cards. (Applause.) I believe that we hold the most powerful weapons, but we want to use those weapons wisely, and we want to play those cards well. (Hear, hear.) One of the daily papers was pointing the other day to one of those concrete expressions of Christian brotherhood—a modern Dreadnought—describing its size, armaments, and speed, and asked whether it was possible to conceive anything more powerful than a battleship in action. Well, I can conceive something more powerful still. I believe that if the power of all the ships in the world was increased a hundredfold, and if all the Navies in the world were floating on a single keel, they would still be powerless before the ideas of peace and brotherhood that will one day bury all the Navies of the world beneath the waves of human intelligence and co-operation. (Loud applause.) I believe we are fighting with the most powerful weapon the world has ever seen, the weapon of an idea, for ultimately that is the one weapon that no Church, and no Government, and no organisation can possibly suppress. It is more powerful than a battering-ram. It is more explosive than dynamite. You may hold it back for a while, but in the long run it triumphs. I believe we have that weapon to fight all the superstition in the world, if we only use it; and I believe that against that weapon, properly wielded, no Church can stand. No church that can be conceived can stand before an idea that rests on the experience of the past, on the knowledge of the present, and which, I believe, will one day become the incarnate reality of the future. Whatever the past may have been, whoever may have had control of it, I believe the future lies on our side, and that gives us our strength. (Applause.) We are told we are not strong in numbers. Of course we are not; and, in comparison, I suppose we never shall be. The world will always have its best ideas in the possession of the few, and I hope Freethought will lead in the future as in the past. (Applause.) We are not strong in numbers, social position, or money, but we are strong in possessing that enormously powerful weapon which every accession of knowledge and every advance only tempers to a greater degree of excellence. We have that, and, therefore, I say that the future lies with us. The past has been given largely to God; the future, we hope, will be given more to Man. Just as Charles Lamb once reckoned that the hours he had given to the India House represented so many lost years, and that, therefore, he was only a young man in reality, while apparently a very old one, so I believe that one day humanity will realise that its past has been merely an attempt to live, and in the light of a fuller and freer

knowledge will awaken to its real manhood, a manhood that will be fed by all the knowledge of the past, that will be animated by all the life and love of its surroundings, and will hand on the heritage of a sane and useful ideal to the most remote future. (Loud applause.)

#### THE CHAIRMAN.

Well, Ladies and Gentlemen, this meeting, like every other, has to be formally dismissed, and I think I am justified in saying that you have spent with me a very pleasant and edifying evening—(hear, hear)—in listening to Mr. Lloyd and several other gentlemen who have advocated the cause of Freethought before you. We have had a great variety, and I, for one—for I am a most excellent listener—was very charmed with it, from the ever-youthful enthusiasm of my old friend, Mr. Heaford, to the sagacious and venerable warnings of my younger colleague, Mr. Cohen. Fortunately, Mr. Cohen came round, as we all come round at the finish, to the optimistic note, for after all, if the past is not ours in essence and in tendency, the future never can be. We all know that eventually it will if we live on in the optimistic temper. Freethought has much work to do, setbacks to encounter, dangers to face, battles to fight, and victories to win, but it has fought many battles in the past, and it has not gone under; it has been smitten, it has bled, it has stumbled in the dust, but it has always risen again with the same old fire of courage and hope in its eyes, and the same old spirit of battle in its hands; and the cause which may be said to have been inaugurated by the science of Galileo and Kepler and Copernicus and the heroism of Bruno has lost nothing in this later age by the science of Darwin and the heroism of Bradlaugh. (Loud applause.)

### Business Meeting.

#### MORNING SITTING.—Continued.

Motion by Mr. T. Thurlow:—

"In view of the grave dangers to which this country is exposed by the ill-advised action of religious propagandists, supported openly or covertly by the power of the State, this Conference strongly protests against the power of this realm being used for the assistance of any religious sect desirous of propagating its creed among those weaker nations who possess treaty relations with the British Empire."

Mr. Thurlow said their Society had always maintained that the State should not support any particular cult or party, as instanced by the attitude of their President in connection with the severance of Church and State in France; and Mr. Bradlaugh had also often stated that if he could abolish the Church by raising his hand he would not do it. Freethought was a purely intellectual matter, and must be propagated by purely intellectual means. That being so, he thought it was nearly time the ruling powers of Britain realised the fact that there were a considerable number of Freethinking citizens who objected to our military or naval power being used in the way of coercing any weaker nation, in supporting missionaries especially. The time had come when Freethinkers should demand that their views should be considered as to the nation's conduct towards weaker powers, and on the policy of forcing the religion of this country upon those who had no means of defending themselves against it.

Mr. Stewart said it appeared to him a ridiculous thing to attempt to prop up by military support what was admitted all round to be a failure, as foreign missions undoubtedly were. He had much pleasure in seconding the motion. It was thereupon carried unanimously.

Mr. Foote then announced that he thought it would be best if he took a rest during the afternoon sitting, so as to come fresh to the evening meeting; and he would therefore suggest they appoint another chairman for that session.

This course was unanimously agreed to, and on the motion of Mr. Thurlow (Bethnal Green Branch), seconded by Mr. Shore, Mr. Cohen was appointed Chairman for the afternoon sitting of the Conference.

The delegates adjourned for luncheon at 12.45 p.m.

#### AFTERNOON SITTING.

MR. C. COHEN IN THE CHAIR.

Motions re Lecture Platform:—

(a) By West Ham and South Shields Branches.

"That in the interests of the Society's work it is desirable that any member of the N. S. S. wishing to lecture regularly from its platform on behalf of Secularism, should have his or her name submitted to the Executive for approval, and should obtain a certificate of proficiency from a committee appointed for that purpose."

(b) By South Shields Branch.

"In order to encourage the systematic study necessary to qualify for a lecture certificate, and to assist in defraying purchase of books, cost of classes, etc., the Executive of the N. S. S. be requested to confer with the Board of the Secular Society, Limited, with a view to arrange for a lecture scholarship, or scholarships, to decide on the terms of qualification, and to arrange for the granting of three prizes of £20, £10, and £5 respectively, to those attaining the standard of proficiency agreed upon."

Mr. Rosetti (West Ham) said he was instructed to notify the Conference that the resolution as printed on the Agenda was not the resolution they sent up.

Mr. Cohen said, as one of the Agenda Committee, he was partly responsible for that. The Agenda Committee had to put the resolutions which were submitted in proper form, and when two resolutions from Branches were substantially of the same character it would be absurd to waste the time of the Conference in discussing both. He understood Mr. Rosetti only objected to the words "certificate of proficiency." If the Executive authorised anybody to speak, that would carry with it a certain guarantee of efficiency.

After some discussion an amendment was accepted by the Conference substituting "certificate of authorisation" for "certificate of proficiency." This, on being put to the vote as a substantive resolution, was lost.

The Chairman then suggested that the next motion, to be in order, should read "lecture platform" in place of "lecture certificate." The South Shields delegate having given place to Mr. Shore, the latter said he thought there had been just a little waste of time on the previous resolution, and it appeared to him that the case would be met exactly by the South Shields motion. The idea was not a new one. Two distinct attempts had previously been made to carry out some such scheme as the resolution proposed. They knew that there were men lecturing as Secularists who, from the point of view of holding audiences, were exceedingly clever, but as Secular lecturers they were anything but desirable. Those who had a collection of the N. S. S. Almanacks would find in the issue of 1885 the papers which were set for the examination of lecturers, drawn up by the authority of the Executive. There were means at hand for the acquirement of the special knowledge necessary to equip Freethought lecturers if only taken advantage of, i.e., through the various polytechnics and secondary schools throughout the country.

Mr. Chapman, in seconding the resolution, said it seemed to him there should be some kind of machinery in existence for the authorisation of lecturers. This was just as necessary to-day as it had ever been.

Mr. Heaford said he thought in principle they would all be agreed upon the doctrine of efficiency, but it appeared to him there were grave practical difficulties in the way if the Conference passed Resolution b on the paper. He remembered that years ago there was some sort of machinery in the N. S. S. for grinding out special lecturers (laughter), and he was ground out as a special lecturer; in fact they ground him out so small that they almost pulverised him. He remembered when there was a special lectureship founded under the presidency of Mr. Charles Bradlaugh. The aspirant to the special lectureship had to lecture in the minor hall of the Hall of Science, with Bradlaugh in the audience, and it was a terrible ordeal, for Bradlaugh would sometimes get up and oppose, and on such occasions the aspirant was all the time in mortal fear and trembling of the ordeal to which he knew he would be subjected. He should approve of the resolution if it was perfectly understood that the N. S. S. was to be the examining Board, but he certainly did not approve of delegating such powers to polytechnics or to the Archbishop of Canterbury, as Mr. Shore had implied.

Mr. Moss said lecturers were born, not made. They were like actors and vocalists. No amount of "cramming" could make a man a lecturer unless nature had fitted him for the task. If a man wished to be a lecturer he must first of all be a thinker, and must read up a special class of literature to qualify him for the position. The Secular Party had had on its platforms, and they would have again, men of great genius who had been, and who would be, incapable of passing examinations; as a matter of fact, men who had displayed the very highest faculties had received no special training apart from what they had given themselves. If a Committee could be appointed who would indicate the books which ought to be read and encourage the special study of Freethought, well and good, but he did not approve of sending men to polytechnics where only general knowledge was imparted.

Mr. Thurlow said he did not approve of the idea of Examination Boards. He agreed with Mr. Moss, that lecturers could not be made. Power of speech was a natural gift. If such a body as was suggested were set up, any lecturer who was not authorised would be an outsider, and,

for his part, he preferred to see perfect freedom of action on the part of the Branches in the selection of lecturers.

Mr. Roger thought there seemed to be a good deal of misapprehension on the matter. He understood that it was not the intention that the Executive should give them a cut and dried scheme right off, but should provide some scheme to help the young men on to the platform. The matter was proposed at the Birmingham Conference, but they were not so well able to do it then as now, because at that time funds were low.

Mr. Cohen said, before putting the resolution, that, in his opinion, something ought to be done in the Society in the direction of aiding young lecturers and encouraging higher education. Nothing was done at present, and the Freethought platform was understaffed, so that it would be a good thing to devise some method whereby young men, who were promising lecturers, could be assisted in various ways, such as by providing a scholarship or making various grants.

The resolution was then put, and carried with one dissentient.

A suggestion was then made that a Sub-Committee should be appointed by the Conference to work out the details of a scheme to further the object of the last resolution, for submission to the Society's Executive, but the Chairman ruled that this would be creating a body who would act independently of the Executive. The Executive was the supreme body, elected for transacting the Society's business from one Conference to another, and in its hands should rest the power of appointing any Sub-Committee to deal with any special matter which might crop up.

Motion by Kingsland Branch:—

"That this Conference tenders its best thanks to Mr. G. W. Foote for his lengthy and valuable services to the cause of Freethought; it desires to specially mark its recognition of his work in instituting the Secular Society, Limited, and trusts that the latter may be the means of establishing a permanent headquarters for the Freethought cause in Great Britain."

Mr. Savill (Kingsland) spoke in very eulogistic terms of the valuable services of Mr. Foote to the Freethought cause. He had very great pleasure in moving the resolution. This was seconded by Mr. Neary, and carried with acclamation.

Motions by Kingsland Branch:—

(a) "This Conference is of opinion that some arrangements of a more satisfactory nature than at present exists should be made whereby the wishes of deceased Freethinkers, concerning their interment, could be carried into effect; and that the plan outlined by Mr. Tom Shore in the *Freethinker* of March 20, 1910, should be taken as the basis of a scheme to be elaborated, printed, and distributed among Freethinkers."

(b) "That this Society should do all that lies within its power to substitute cremation for earth burial."

In moving sub-motion (a), Mr. Shore said they were all aware of the number of cases of what they might call body-snatching, which occurred from time to time. He referred to his letter in the *Freethinker* of March 20, which no doubt had received some attention from all of them. There ought to be some efficient method by which a Freethinker's wishes in regard to the form of his burial should be carried out. Just before Christmas their President was able to prevent what was no doubt intended to be a deliberate fraud at the expense of the Secular Society, Limited. Fortunately, the deceased gentleman had made two wills, which were in the hands of two people. When the time came to put the will into effect, Mr. Foote was told there was not any will; but it must have been a considerable surprise to the parties concerned when Mr. Foote drew out of his pocket a small piece of paper and said, "You are quite wrong; there is the will." Through that little device the Secular Society had benefited to the extent of £200 to £250. There had now been established an important Government Department called the Public Trustees Department. The will should, in the first place, be sent to the Public Trustee, and two letters should be written, one of which should be handed to the Public Trustee and the other left with a friend who can be relied upon to see that the wishes of the deceased are carried out.

Mr. Savill (Kingsland) supporting the resolution, said the chief thing was to let people know that by trusting the N. S. S. they could ensure that their wishes would be carried out. Messrs. Roleffs, Heaford, Roger, and Ross also spoke to the resolution.

Mr. Cohen said that, while they would all agree with the spirit and aim of Mr. Shore's motion, it did not seem to him that if carried out it would have the coercive force it was thought it could exert. Mr. Shore had, he believed, quite correctly stated the law, namely, that in only one case, for purposes of anatomical research, was there any property in

the dead body of a human being. This being so, the question they had to face was whether, when the law gave to a person an absolute right as to the disposal of a dead body, could that person contract himself out of a statutory right, or another person confer upon himself a statutory right the law did not recognise? So far as he understood the state of the law, this could not be done. What really seemed necessary was an alteration in the law recognising property in a dead body. Then funeral ceremonies might be carried out in accordance with the testator's wishes. Further, it might be perfectly true that the Public Trustee might carry out the provisions of a will so far as a Secular funeral was concerned. But the real point was, if the Public Trustee happened to be a bigot, and decided on a religious funeral, could he be forced to carry out a Secular funeral, and could any legacy be made contingent upon carrying out a provision that, as Mr. Shore pointed out, was not contemplated by the law? Again, this seemed very doubtful. The whole question seemed to turn upon the distinction between what was legally permissible and what was legally enforceable. As Freethinkers, we needed the power to enforce the wishes of a deceased person. A Secular funeral is legally permissible, but it is not in the present state of the law legally enforceable. Still, very much good might be done by people making certain legacies contingent upon their having a Secular funeral, even though the clause was not legally sound. It would at least ensure a plain and open violation of the testator's wishes, and many might shrink from that. After Mr. Shore had replied to criticism, the motion was put and carried unanimously.

Sub-motion (b) was then carried without dissent.

The motion standing in the name of the Executive, that the Society should be represented at the Brussels International Freethought Conference, was also carried.

Motion by Mr. J. T. Lloyd:—

"Bearing in mind the repeated failures of the late Liberal Government's so-called Education Bills, considering, also, the impossibility of any lasting compromise between the various religious parties, this Conference deploras the absence from the present Government's program of a measure for the disestablishment of religion in the State schools, and calls upon the Government to put an end to the educational chaos by restricting the activities of the State to its legitimate sphere, and by the promotion of a Bill securing exclusively secular instruction in public schools, apply to the country at large the principles upon which it bases its proposal for the disestablishment of the Church in Wales."

In moving this, Mr. Lloyd said the matter was not in the slightest degree controversial. The State was a secular institution, and ought to deal exclusively with secular affairs. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury had recently admitted this in a speech at the Polytechnic in Regent-street. Therefore the State should not deal with religious or so-called spiritual affairs. The principle upon which Nonconformity came into existence was the principle which the Nonconformists, as a body, were now denying,—they came out of the Church on the principle that the State had no right to interfere with religious questions, and that there ought not to be an established Church; so that, if there ought not to be an established Church, there ought not to be an established religion in the schools.

Mr. A. Allison (Woolwich) seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

The Executive's motion condemning the judicial murder of Francisco Ferrer, and condemning the Spanish government for its action in closing the modern schools, was moved from the chair, and seconded in a brief speech by Mr. W. Heaford. It was carried unanimously.

This concluded the formal business of the Conference, but Mr. T. Shore, having obtained permission, moved that a vote of thanks be given to Miss Vance for her many years' service in the National Secular Society. Her recent illness had brought home to them what a valuable servant the Society had in its secretary, and he felt they would all be pleased to take the present opportunity of placing on record their recognition of her worth.

Mr. Cohen, in seconding the resolution, said all on the Executive thoroughly appreciated Miss Vance's services. Mere book-keeping and letter-writing were the least important duties of the secretary's work. The really vital things could not be done except by one who had spent a long apprenticeship at the work, such as Miss Vance had cheerfully and honorably served. Her great value lay in her intimate knowledge of the Society's affairs, and her general tact and friendliness with Secularists all over the country. The resolution was then carried with acclamation.

A few brief remarks from the chairman brought the Conference to a close.

## 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.

### LONDON.

#### INDOOR.

NORTH LAMBETH LIBERAL AND RADICAL CLUB (28a Wincott-street, Kennington-road, S.E.): Friday, May 27, at 8.30, F. A. Davies, "The Labor Movement and the Churches."

#### OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 3.15 and 6.15, F. A. Davies, Lectures.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): F. Schaller, 3.15, "Atheism"; 6, "Christian Inconsistencies."

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Highbury Corner): 12 noon, Sidney Cook and Walter Bradford. Newington Green: 12 noon, J. Darby. Finsbury Park: 3.30, Debate between Mr. Fry and Walter Bradford, "Is there any Evidence to Prove the Existence of Jesus Christ?" Highbury Corner: Saturday, at 8, H. King and T. Dobson.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Ridley-road, Kingsland): 11.30, Miss K. B. Kough, "What Has Become of Hell?"

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill Fields): 3.30, C. Cohen, a Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford): 7, W. Davidson, "A Modern Instrument of Torture."

WOOD GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Jolly Butchers' Hill, opposite Public Library): 11.30, R. H. Rosetti, "God, Faith, and Morality." The Green, Enfield: 7.15, Mr. Thurlow, jun., a Lecture.

WOOLWICH BRANCH N. S. S. (Beresford-square): 11.30, E. C. Saphin, "The Gospel According to Smith."

### COUNTRY.

#### OUTDOOR.

HUDDERSFIELD BRANCH N. S. S. (Market Cross): 8, G. T. Whitehead, a Lecture. Saturday, at 8, G. T. Whitehead, a Lecture.

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*Secretary—MISS E. M. VANCE.*

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The Memorandum of Association sets forth that the Society's Objects are:—To promote the principle that human conduct should be based upon natural knowledge, and not upon supernatural belief, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end of all thought and action. To promote freedom of inquiry. To promote universal Secular Education. To promote the complete secularisation of the State, etc., etc. And to do all such lawful things as are conducive to such objects. Also to have, hold, receive, and retain any sums of money paid, given, devised, or bequeathed by any person, and to employ the same for any of the purposes of the Society.

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