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All truth is safe, and nothing else is safe; and he who keeps back the truth or withholds it from men, from motives of expediency, is either a coward or a criminal, or both.—F. MAX MULLER.

Man's Greatest Blunder.

MY last week's article dealt with a remark by Professor Hoffding to the effect that the Freethinker, in attacking religion, ignored one of the deepest of human needs. In that article I tried to show that this could only be accepted as true in the sense that it is among the earliest of human beliefs. Every Freethinker will admit its antiquity, but there is abundant evidence against both its veracity and its utility. Many who have despaired of establishing the truth of religion have, nevertheless, pleaded for its usefulness—if not now, at some future time. Amongst these are to be reckoned such men as Professor J. G. Frazer and the late Walter Bagehot. Both supported the thesis that, while false as a theory, religious beliefs had served to strengthen various useful customs by attaching to their infraction supernatural penalties. If this were true, the harmful customs that have been perpetuated, together with the obstruction to reform offered by religious fears, would be more than enough to balance the claim. But even though true, the apology would only apply to human societies in the very earliest stages of culture. Above these, I think it may be demonstrated that the religious idea represents one of the greatest and most disastrous blunders ever made by the human intelligence.

What is the essence of religion? The modern fashion is so to define religion that it becomes inextricably confused with ethics, or with various aspects of social life. It is, we are told in the cant phraseology of the contemporary pulpit, a life. It is what we do, not what we believe, that is important. This is quite wrong. Morality, if not anterior to religion, is certainly independent of it. Of course, what we do is to some extent affected by what we believe, and sometimes powerfully affected; but this is true of religion, not as religion, but only as one of numerous ideas. And essentially religion centres in an idea. There is a religious life only as that idea expresses itself in conduct. If we can conceive man never coming to any definite conclusions about the nature of the phenomena around him, never forming any idea as to their causes, we should be unable to conceive religion coming into existence. He would have developed as a creature of instincts only, gregarious as some of the lower orders of life are gregarious, and with habits that, although unreasoning, would preserve life; but he never would have been religious.

Religion commences when man arrives at certain conclusions concerning the causes of phenomena. If these had been conceived as modern science conceives them, then religion would never have arisen. But in the circumstances of the case this was a sheer impossibility. Early mankind finds itself faced with questions to which some answer must be found, and this answer is given by what is generally known as animism. Not that this philosophy of things is worked out as a modern theory is elaborated. The

philosophy that represents primitive man speculating on the nature of things is quite false; the conclusions that face us as religion, are in all probability reached in the semi-conscious way that even modern man registers the results of his daily experience. The attitude of a domesticated animal in the presence of unusual sights or sounds probably gives us a fair picture of the earliest type of mankind confronted with anything that roused his fears or awakened his curiosity. It is the accumulated pressure of experience that generates beliefs; a consciousness of their existence is in the nature of a discovery.

But a conclusion was reached by man. The world was alive, or rather it was made up of a number of living forces, with whom man must come to terms. This conclusion we now know to have been a radically wrong one, but it was one of the most important in the history of the human intellect. It meant that the first step had been taken in the attempt to understand the world, to give a rational account of phenomena. In reality it was the beginning of scientific thinking. Later ages have corrected the error made by primitive man, but in the beginning it had its use. It codified experience, and so paved the way for future corrections and more correct theories. But the great thing was that the world should be conceived as amenable to a plan; whether the plan accepted was right or wrong was really a matter of secondary importance. The religious hypothesis was the most important, the greatest, and yet the most necessary blunder ever made by the human mind.

Had religion—this primitive science of nature—been held as later scientific theories were held, the history of mankind would have been very different. The older hypothesis would have yielded place as later and better ones were framed. We should then be able to treat religion in the same spirit that we treat the early and discarded theories of the scientific investigator. But there were two factors that made this impossible. One was fear, the other was self-interest. All the early religions are based, more or less, on fear, and fear has remained the chief ingredient of all historic religions. Man began to worship the gods because he feared their malevolence. Nor was their anger of a discriminating character. If one person offended, the whole of the tribe might be punished; and to guard against offence became one of the most important of duties. It was in this way that the main road to improvement was blocked. To doubt the gods became a tribal offence. Heresy was the greatest of crimes. Thousands of generations have passed since, but the feelings generated in this manner persist to-day.

Next, there is the feeling of self-interest, sometimes of the individual, but very often that of a class. The thinkers among mankind have ever been the few, and there is no reason for doubting that the earlier priesthoods included the bulk of the most serious thinkers, and that the available knowledge was kept from the many in the interests of a special class. But this policy, from whatever reason adopted, involved a position of aggrandisement, and, once secured, such a position is not easily surrendered. Thus a priesthood growing in power, and clinging with all the tenacity of a vested interest to its privileges and possessions, would act as a constantly

opposing force to any new idea that threatened its security. In this way the two factors, fear of change, and love of power and possession, have combined to prevent in religion that process of modification, rejection, and addition which has been so gratifying a feature in the history of science.

Whatever utility religious beliefs possess can, therefore, only exist in the very earliest stages of culture. At every subsequent stage they act as a drag upon the mind and an obstruction to progress. This is observable even amongst savages, with whom deviation from the customary rites is the most difficult of operations. In all the early civilisations we can see how senseless customs were perpetuated, and the introduction of new ones prevented, from the same fear of offending the gods. Even freethinking Greece and Rome felt the weight of the same incubus, although the restless intellect of the one, and the practical genius of the other, reduced the obstructive influence to a minimum. A change came when various causes combined to place religion once more as a commanding influence in life, and Christianity became the established religion of the Western world. The primitive blunder was re-established, and how repressive that influence was can only be gauged by those who are sufficiently acquainted with the history of scientific ideas to know how much had been discovered in pre-Christian times. It is simply beyond question that, whatever the precise responsibility of the Christian Church, its undisputed reign coincided with the most ignorant and deplorable period of civilised history.

After Greek and Roman thinkers, Christianity. After light, darkness. After civilisation, barbarism. Starting from next to nothing, the ancient world had built up a huge fabric of actual knowledge and suggestive speculation. With this to hand as a possible foundation for further development, Christianity gave us—the Dark Ages. Against this solid fact all the apologists for the religion of the Dark Ages struggle in vain. On the most favorable view, a Church that could allow freedom of thought to be stifled, civic life and sanitation to decay, learning to die out, and the arts of civilisation to disappear, ought not itself to have survived. With such a condition of things, mere survival is little short of a disgrace; it argues, at least, passive acquiescence with what occurs. But to be in a position of power right through this period of degradation argues more than acquiescence; it is proof of participation.

There is no real escape from the conclusion that the blighting influence that rested on Europe for so many centuries was its religion. Other causes may be found, but this is the dominant one, and it sheltered and strengthened others. Consider that the death of the ancient civilisations meant not only a loss of actual knowledge; it meant also the loss of a mental habit—of the habit of facing the world as something to be studied and conquered, and its replacement by habits of mental servility and credulity. Who would trouble after knowledge when its acquisition might mean imprisonment or the stake? What was the use of considering social improvement when the Church sat enthroned above all, sucking from society its very life-blood? Europe was palsied by its religion; robbed of initiative by its belief. Ranke, a fairly cautious writer, calculates that the reign of the Catholic Church cost Europe over ten millions of lives. All these were not, of course, thinkers, but many were, and their fate offered little encouragement to others. And in the end it was the little of the Greek and Latin writings that survived the storm which enabled it to partly liberate itself from the cramping influence of Christianity.

Religion commenced in a blunder. Of the truth of that there can be no doubt. It was only one of a host of blunders that man was bound to make before he reached truth; but it became the most fatal of all. It hangs over primitive life like a pall. Having created the gods, man finds them everywhere in his path. They demand continuous sacrifice in this world; they threaten him with penalties in the

next. Every attempt at improvement meets with the same obstacle. In uncivilised and in civilised times the consequences of the initial blunder persists. It persists not alone in direct suppression, but in the perpetuation of a frame of mind that is all but fatal to orderly progress. The race has been taught to look to religion for guidance, a religion that is permeated with fear; and fear perpetuates ignorance, as ignorance in turn perpetuates fear. In earlier times the gods demanded human sacrifices. We have outgrown that, but we still continue to sacrifice the mental and moral freedom of man to the gods called into existence by the stupid blunder of our savage forefathers.

C. COHEN.

Orthodoxy Self-Condemed.

IT is an incontestable fact that all attempts to establish the truth of Christianity, when brought before the bars of logic, history, and ethics, are demonstrated to be signal failures; and by Christianity we understand the religion expressed in the creeds and conciliar decisions of the Church. From this it follows that Christianity and orthodoxy are interchangeable terms. It is sometimes maintained that the simple religion of Jesus is not exemplified in any existing Church, which may be perfectly true; but it is also true that we have no means of ascertaining what the religion of Jesus was. Even on the assumption that the Four Gospels are historical documents, there is no possible escape from the conclusion that what they contain is an interpretation of what the authors believed, or what they wished their readers to believe, to have been the religion of Jesus. The Epistles offer us two or three further interpretations of the same, and these appealed to different types of believers, thereby becoming subjects of controversy. The controversy lasted for many centuries, giving rise to unspeakable hatred, bitterness, and persecution. In the long run, the Pauline interpretation carried the day and became the organised religion of the Catholic Church. This is what is now officially meant by Christianity, the truth of which we declare to be insusceptible of verification. It is contended that it rests upon certain alleged historical facts, not one of which can be supported by a single shred of evidence. Of course, there was a time when the West bowed its knee either to an infallible Church or to an infallible Book, giving ready assent to whatever the one or the other, or both, presented as the truth. Those were the Ages of Faith, during which criticism was practically unknown. When Modernism arose in the Catholic Church and by its bold employment of the severely critical method imperilled her future, she put her foot down and stamped it out. The Anglican Church is trying hard to treat the claim of Liberalism within her own borders in the same manner; but she will not succeed because she lacks authority. The Bishops may pass what resolutions they please when they meet in Convocation, but they know well enough that they have no power to put them into operation. The clergy of the Church of England are not even required to sign the Thirty-Nine Articles. They are merely asked to make a general and vague declaration of assent to them as containing doctrines "agreeable to the Word of God."

Another peculiarity of the Anglican Church is that she pretends to be in favor of criticism while seeking to suppress it. Bishop Gore, for example, denounces the views of those who no longer regard Jesus as an infallible teacher as contrary to sound doctrine. He refers to *The Eschatology of Jesus* by Dr. Latimer Jackson, and *The Miracle of Christianity* by Dr. Bethune Baker, and says:—

"I have tried to show why I disagree profoundly with the critics in question—not because I deprecate the application of criticism to the New Testament, but because I do not think that their criticism is sound. It is based, it seems to me, on a mistaken view of natural

law, and on something much less than a Christian belief in God" (*The Basis of Anglican Fellowship*, p. 9).

In reality the Bishop does object to the application of criticism to the New Testament. He is himself a Higher Critic in relation to the Old Testament. He does not believe the Book of Jonah to be history; he admits that the Historical Books are replete with myth and legend and poetry and allegory, and he does not "wish to define, or ask anyone else to define, where history passes back into legend or myth"; he even allows that criticism has shown us "that a great part of the historical narratives of the Old Testament is not strict history, but gives us what St. Gregory of Nyssa admirably calls "ideas in the form of a narrative"; but he seems to himself "to see quite clearly the broad difference between the Old Testament as prophecy and the New Testament as fulfilment in fact." And yet he is not wholly blind to the fact that even in this holy of holies of Scripture criticism has done some good. "It has, I think, shown us that there is one pseudonymous book in the New Testament, the Second Epistle of St. Peter, and that there are discrepancies and errors of detail in the narratives of the New Testament."

So far so good, but at this point the critic is driven out by the theologian:—

"When the element of fact becomes of supreme significance, in the region of the Incarnation, there also the historical evidence is adequate and, to my mind, convincing" (*The Basis*, p. 22).

In the name of reason, what "historical evidence" of the Virgin Birth or the Resurrection is there, or can there be? Joseph and Mary were apparently totally ignorant of the former, and there is nothing to show that they believed in the latter. Dr. Sanday looks upon that extract as "one of the indications which raise my doubts as to the real flexibility and freedom from bias of the Bishop's historical criticism." The great scholar adds:—

"The wholesale and over-emphatic references to the conclusiveness of the evidence are not promising to the eye of a scholar. The wish is too evidently father to the thought. If the Bishop brought the same clear-sightedness to bear upon the study of the New Testament that he has brought to bear on that of the Old, I submit that various expressions would have been considerably chastened" (*Bishop Gore's Challenge to Criticism*, p. 12).

The curious thing about Professor Sanday is that his theology and his criticism are utterly independent of each other. As critic he has made decided progress within the last few years. He has gradually grown into the "conviction that it is impossible to draw any clear line of demarcation between the New Testament and the Old; nay, that the New Testament must be even more liable to the same kind of influences as the Old, because, whereas the Old Testament writers shaped their own methods of writing history for themselves, the New Testament writers followed throughout the model of the Old Testament." Consequently, he rejects the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, and the Ascension, as well as all other *contra naturum* miracles. But as theologian he has stood quite still all through the years. While denying the Virgin Birth, he thus writes:—

"In regard to the birth of our Lord, I would say that I believe most emphatically in his supernatural birth. I do not doubt that the birth of our Lord was sanctified in every physical respect in the most perfect manner conceivable. The coming of the Only-begotten into the world could not but be attended by every circumstance of holiness. Whatever the Virgin Birth can spiritually mean for us is guaranteed by the fact that the Holy Babe was divine. Is it not enough to affirm this with all our heart and soul, and be silent as to anything beyond?" (*Ibid.*, pp. 19, 20).

Now, will Canon Sanday be good enough to inform us what he means by a supernatural birth? Can an event be both natural and supernatural? If a birth is not natural, is it not of necessity unnatural; and is not the unnatural, by the same necessity, also antinatural? It seems to us that the erudite gentleman

strains out the gnat and swallows the camel. What is the use of denying the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, and the Ascension, which are intelligible events, however incredible, while affirming a supernatural birth, a spiritual resurrection, and a symbolical ascension, events as unintelligible as they are unbelievable? Fancy this statement being made by a real critic:—

"That the Risen Lord as Spirit still governed and inspired his Church is proved beyond question, if by nothing else, by the first-hand testimony of St. Paul—not only by his own experience, but by the experience of the Christian Church around him. All this, I repeat, is verifiable history" (*Ibid.*, pp. 20, 21).

Surely Dr. Sanday must have forgotten all about historical criticism when he penned that extraordinary sentence. All that is verifiable about the Churches organised by St. Paul is that they were composed of men and women of whom the organiser himself testified that they were contentious, censorious, disorderly, drunken, litigious, incestuous, and who are yet known to have regarded themselves as the elect of heaven, while looking down with contempt upon the Pagan world as a world abandoned by the God of love and governed by evil spirits. All this, we submit, is verifiable history, while the talk about the Risen Lord as a Spirit governing and inspiring his Church is unverifiable though very pious rhetoric.

Yes, Christianity, like every other supernatural religion, is self-condemned, and even such apologists as Dr. Gore and Dr. Sanday only succeed in making this fact more apparent. Bishop Gore says, in effect, to the critics: "We give you full liberty to demonstrate the fact that the Old Testament is made up of myth and legend and fable and poetry and parable, but we warn you that when you enter the New Testament you must be believing and reverent, treating the great miracles that find place in our creeds with humble respect, or we shall anathematise you in the name of the Lord. Our duty is to accept without question all miracles and doctrines that have been handed down to us under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." While the theologians thus prate with oracular self-sufficiency, the science of literary and historical criticism is quietly but certainly knocking away the foundation of the structure they are guarding with such zealous assiduity.

J. T. LLOYD.

Primitive Man.—V.

(Concluded from p. 342.)

"Primitive man, like the child and the animal, is at first only a bundle of wants, tendencies, instincts which, when not simply unconscious, are connected with external or internal tendencies.

"The child, who feels acutely the possession of a toy, or the deprivation of it, is not affected by the beauty of a landscape, by reason of a limited intellectual power. We know that (in spite of common opinion) a savage, even a barbarian, is not moved by the splendours of civilised life, but only by its petty and puerile sides. Its greater aspects inspire him neither with desire, admiration, nor jealousy, because he does not understand them. Bougainville, in the last century, had already remarked this fact, which has frequently been confirmed since. Speaking of the profound indifference of the Pacific Islanders to the skilled construction of his ships and the instruments belonging to them, he says, 'They treat the masterpieces of human industry as laws and phenomena of Nature.'"—PROFESSOR T. H. RIBOT, *The Psychology of the Emotions* (1897), pp. 189-190.

"It is no easy matter for a man of ordinary education to form a notion of the mental fallowness of a rustic of his own day; it is far more difficult for him to divest his mind of all its acquisitions through study and observation and reduce his ideas to the level of those of the progenitors of his race, whom we will call *Areios*."—BARING-GOULD, *Origin and Development of Religious Belief*, vol. i., p. 135.

M. BOURIEN speaks of the wild tribes of Malay, as inconstant, fickle, and erratic; this—

"together with a mixture of fear, timidity, and indifference, lies at the bottom of their character; they seem always to think that they would be better in any other place than in the one they occupy at the time. Like

children, their actions seem to be rarely guided by reflection, and they almost always act impulsively."*

Letourneau says, "The very inferior savage, like our own infant children, does not know what to-morrow means."

Major Tremearne also observes, "A wild pagan's idea of even the present time is, to say the least, hazy, and of the past quite valueless." And in exacting tribute,—

"We must necessarily be extremely lenient in all matters where time is concerned with these pagans, for most of them have absolutely no idea of any divisions of the year other than 'harvest' and 'non-harvest,' nor of the sunny hours of the day than meal-time and not-meal-time; as the *Geisha* has it, 'a month or a week or a day, sir?' are nought to the happy-go-lucky savage. In fact, these names are quite interchangeable in his mind unless connected with anything regarding his own welfare, and even then only if to his own advantage."†

We have said that there has been no tribe yet discovered without a language, but among the most primitive races it is a poor affair, like that of the Yamparicos of North America, who are said to speak "a sort of gibberish like the growling of a dog."‡

Others eke out their language with signs and gestures to such an extent that they cannot carry on a conversation without them. Sir Richard Burton speaks of "those who, like the Arapahos, possess a very scanty vocabulary, pronounced in a quasi-intelligible way, can hardly converse with one another in the dark."§ Nor is this confined to the savages of America, for Miss Kingsley says of the languages of Africa:—

"Some of them are very dependent on gesture. When I was with the Fans, they frequently said, 'We will go to the fire so that we can see what they say,' when any question had to be decided after dark. And the inhabitants of Fernando Po, the Bubis, are quite unable to converse with each other unless they have sufficient light to see the accompanying gestures of the conversation."||

The same writer says that "at least one-third of an African language consists of gesture."¶

In the light of our knowledge of the irresponsibility, selfishness, childishness, and limitations of thought of primitive man, we are in a better position to judge the claim of the late Mr. Andrew Lang, that the lowest savages have a belief in High Gods—in an immortal, powerful, moral, and kindly creative Being. Fancy creatures who cannot count the fingers of one hand, so deficient in language that they cannot make themselves understood in the dark, to whom the past and the future are a blank, as gluttonous as pigs, who love no one but themselves, whose daintiest dish is a repast of human flesh, and whose greatest pleasure is shedding human blood—fancy such beings worshiping, or having the idea of, an almighty, moral, and benevolent God! The mere statement of such a proposition refutes itself.

Pious people, who gladly follow Mr. Lang in this grotesque theory, forget that if such savages have such a belief; what becomes of their argument—if it can be called such—that without the idea of a God who rewards goodness and punishes evil, people would sink into immorality? If these utterly immoral savages believe in such a God, how is it that the belief does not restrain them from immorality?

And again, if they already believe in such a Being, why spend such enormous sums in sending missionaries out to teach the natives something they already believe?

As for the much-vaunted civilising work of the missionaries—upon which two million pounds a year is spent by this country alone—the truth is, they do a great deal more harm than good. Nobody would think of employing a missionary-educated boy in

Africa. All the missionaries do is to make hypocrites. Instead of discarding his own superstition, the native merely adds the white man's superstition to his own. Civilisation, to be permanent, is a very long and painful process; you cannot suddenly turn a savage into a civilised being by teaching him a new religion, any more than a pumpkin and a couple of mice can be changed into a carriage and pair by a wave of a wand. As Buckle, the historian, remarked, "We may as well expect that the seed should quicken in the barren rock as that a mild and philosophic religion should be established among ignorant and ferocious savages."* It is quite true, as he further remarks, "They receive the externals, but there they stop.....The rites and forms of a religion lie on the surface; they are at once seen, they are quickly learned, easily copied by those who are unable to penetrate to that which lies beneath." He further points out, "The religion of mankind is the effect of their improvement, not the cause of it" (p. 146). The truth of these remarks can be proved over and over again. Mr. Stanley Portal Hyatt, who knows the South African natives well, and has protested vigorously—in his books and in the press—against the manner in which they are treated by the authorities, also protests against the attempts to Europeanise them. He declares:—

"As a rule, the so-called education given to the natives is not only useless, but positively harmful. You cannot turn the barbarian into a civilised man in one generation, possibly not in ten generations. You may catch your Kaffir young, send him home, cut him off completely from all his old associations, send him to an English public school and then to the Varsity, ordain him a priest, even consecrate him as a bishop. But if he goes back to his village when there is some festival in progress, if he smells the blood of the sacrificial bull, hears the rattles and the drums, the lowly chorus of the dancers, it is practically certain, that before many minutes have passed, he will have stripped himself of his European garments and will have joined the yelling crowd. It is a curious and significant fact that the clothed native always wears his loin cloth underneath his other garments; it is a wholly unconscious tribute to the savage side of his nature."†

The same writer says that as "the sense of being clothed seemed to bring out all the immoral instincts in the native girls—and most missionaries insist on clothing," so the only use the educated native made of his learning was to forge the "liquor-passes," which every native is required to show from his employer before a trader will supply him with a bottle of spirits. Mr. Hyatt says:—

"The forging of passes soon became a profitable industry amongst the educated natives, practically the only industry in which they cared to engage, in which they could engage, perhaps, for it was extremely hard to find employment. No white man would risk having one in his house; they were generally regarded as a gang of thieves and forgers, and were kept at arm's length by the whole white community. Possibly, the prejudice against them was carried a little too far, but I do not think so. There were plenty of good, raw savages to be obtained, and it was absurd to run unnecessary risks by employing educated ones" (p. 27).

Mr. Lionel Deele is of the same opinion. He observes:—

"It is to be feared, again, that the results produced by missionaries, in the way of native converts, are not any high testimonial to the value of their work. Sir Harry Johnston in his book on Kilima Njaro, has given his opinion that the native Christians of the Mombasa district are liars, cowards, thieves, and drunkards. From my own experience, I should say that almost every boy brought up in a mission is the same."

He says:—

"You have only to go about Khama's capital and see a native as you approach pull out his Bible and begin to read it upside-down to understand the hollow character which is inseparable from ninety-nine hundredths of native Christianity."‡

* Lubbock, *Origin of Civilisation*, p. 522.

† Tremearne, *The Tailed Head-Hunters of Nigeria*, pp. 98-117.

‡ Wake, *Chapters on Man*, p. 143.

§ Burton, *The City of the Saints*, p. 151.

|| Miss Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, p. 357.

¶ Miss Kingsley, *West African Studies*, p. 237.

* Buckle, *History of Civilisation* (1904), p. 145.

† S. P. Hyatt, *Off the Main Track* (1911), p. 25.

‡ Lionel Deele, *Three Years in Savage Africa*, pp. 519-519.

And, as he further remarks,—

"It is very easy to teach savages to sing hymns or to repeat their catechism; some of them will learn to read and write with wonderful ease. But this is mere imitativeness, like that of the monkey or the parrot. It means nothing at all. To the native the Bible is simply a series of stories of what recently took place in the white man's country; so that, instead of assisting civilisation, the teaching of the Bible, by giving wholly false ideas, actually hinders it. The idea of the redemption of the world by Christ is utterly incomprehensible to the native, for no native has the faintest idea of self-sacrifice."*

We have said that the converted native merely adds the white man's superstition to those of native manufacture, and upon this point we can cite the testimony of Miss Kingsley, who, speaking of the mission converts, says:—

"Yet how many of these earnest people could one guarantee to have completely cast out all their belief in Ju-Juism? If I were put upon my oath to answer truthfully, according to my individual belief, I am afraid my answer would be *not one*."†

Directly the eye of the white man is off him, says Miss Kingsley, he sinks back to his old level again; and "The travellers of a remote future will find him, I think, still with his totem and his dug-out canoe—just as willing to sell as 'big curios' the *débris* of our importations to his ancestors at a high price." And she adds, "I do not believe that the white race will ever drag the black up to their own particular summit in the mountain range of civilisation."‡

Least of all by means of the missionary, for Miss Kingsley emphatically declared that "The missionary-made man is the curse of the coast," and "it is not the missionaries' intent to turn out skilful forgers and unmitigated liars, although they practically do so" (pp. 490-1).

We will next consider whether there are any primitive tribes, or races, without religion. A question over which much ink has been spilt.

W. MANN.

An Angel's Visit.

SOMEONE has suggested that the emotional excitement associated with religious "conversion," and the state of feeling commonly known as "falling in love," may possibly, as psychological phenomena, be reduced to a common denominator, and find their explanation in the same fundamental psychic law. In the same way, perhaps, such ideas as are expressed by the terms "angels' visits," "inspiration," and what we call "new thought," may be but different forms of stating a mental suggestion, the hidden springs of which are not always discernible, and which sometimes appear mysterious and inexplicable. The incident I am about to relate is one of those flashes of inspiration which often startle one by their suddenness, and which come as the solution of some perplexity without any conscious mental effort. But in order to show the force and relevancy of this heaven-sent message, it will be necessary to give some little details of my previous life and religious evolution.

Until I was well into my teens, my literary knowledge was bounded by the Bible, the Shorter Catechism, and the monthly Missionary Record. The dismal Calvinistic creed of Presbyterianism is perhaps the worst phase of Christianity upon which a child can be nurtured. The fear of the Lord, in its Presbyterian interpretation, strikes a more solemn note than in any of the other sects. The ministerial gown, the sombre visage of the elders, the solemnity of the Communion, all tend to impress the childish mind with the seriousness and infallible truth of religion.

A gentleman who recently read some of my articles in the *Freethinker*, for the first time, told me he thought I must have been trained for the Presbyterian ministry. All the education the Fates allowed me, however, was a few short years at a colliery school, which ended at the age of twelve. But if my secular knowledge was of the poverty-stricken order, I must have been a promising student of spiritual matters, as I succeeded one year in gaining the first prize of the Sunday-school for Biblical knowledge. This prize took the form of a book, with the significant title *How to Get On*. I say significant, because it represents the real ideal of Christendom. For however much the Christian may profess to set his affection upon things above, his main desire seems to be to "get on" down below.

The variance between the Christianity of Church life and what I conceived to be the teaching of the New Testament soon appeared to me so obvious that I was anxious to have some explanation of the Church's apostasy. I must have been little more than a boy when I sought an interview with the minister to ask him to reconcile the two. But if this man of God had been a wax model or a wooden dolly, I could not have got less satisfaction in respect to my difficulties. If I was to be religious at all, I could not be satisfied unless there was conformity between practice and belief. A popular preacher at that time among the Congregationalists drew me for a time into the fold of that nondescript body. But the desire to find some definite basis for my religious life tended to keep my convictions unsettled. Some time later I joined the small body known as the "Churches of Christ," which professes to find the sanction for all its beliefs and observances in the New Testament alone. In accord with their plea for a return to primitive Christianity, they repudiate the office of the priesthood, the work of exhortation and preaching devolving upon those who are moved by the Spirit, or otherwise qualified for the work. Possessing a little gift in that direction, I took my share of the platform duties; but, unfortunately, the Spirit must have moved me in the wrong direction, as the socialistic tenor of my addresses soon brought upon me the censure of the "elders." I was quietly given to understand that no interpretations of Christianity were admissible that were not in agreement with their particular Church traditions. And so I was cast out into the void, to make my way a lonely pilgrim to the gates of heaven as best I could.

I belonged about this time to a local Christian Evidence Society, which was composed of all sorts and conditions of believers, and which, needless to say, went to wreck in the seething waters of jealousy and sectarian bigotry. I set to work to study the so-called "evidences." I remember going to the Reference Department of the Public Library in the town, and, not being quite sure of the books I wanted, interviewing the old librarian. With a confidence born of blissful ignorance, I said, "I want you to put me in the way of some book or books that will definitely prove the Bible to be the Word of God." I will never forget the strange look with which he regarded me. "I'm afraid you'll have a difficulty," he said, in a slow but deliberate way which surprised me not a little. A difficulty in proving the Bible to be the Word of God! Why, was not the fact proclaimed every Sunday from ten thousand pulpits in the land? And then a horrible suspicion arose in my mind. Could it be that the old fellow was an Atheist, who by some means had got into this responsible position, and dared to suggest doubts about the Bible. But, after I had spent some six months of my leisure time in studying the subject of Inspiration, and came to realise that it rested on nothing better than theological assumption, my feeling toward the old librarian underwent a marked change.

While attending the Christian Evidence meetings, the *Freethinker* naturally came in for its share of abuse, and I have a dim recollection of buying a copy at that remote period, only to be disgusted with its contents. After the wreck of this Society, and

* Deale, *Three Years in Savage Africa*, pp. 516-517.

† Miss Kingsley, *West African Studies*, p. 482.

‡ Miss Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, pp. 513-514.

the Church had turned me adrift, I was left without any of the means of grace. In looking back over the years that followed, it is somewhat difficult to remember all the milestones of the journey, and locate their exact position. They were years of practical isolation so far as any social fellowship was concerned. I read everything I came across for and against religion, clinging to every raft or floating straw that I thought would save me from being drowned in the sea of scepticism. One of the books I read about this time was *Supernatural Religion*, and although I could clearly perceive the weakness of all the arguments used in support of Christianity, the influence of my early mental environment prevented me, I think, from fully realising the extent of my intellectual convictions. In a case of religious evolution such as I am describing, the reason often travels apace, regardless of the feebleness of our powers of adjustment. The conclusions of the intellect have for a time to contend against the forces of a previous mental atmosphere, and all the subtle ties that bind us to the past. But, with sufficient moral courage, the sympathies ultimately come into harmony with the findings of the intellect.

My progress towards emancipation was very slow; but I was not blessed with any friendly help in my lonely transition. I was living in a kind of wilderness, with the refuge of Egypt lying behind, and the promised land of settled habitation not yet reached. Every vestige of religious belief at last disappeared, but still I had not come into contact with anyone connected with the Freethought movement. Often and often I pondered upon the change in my beliefs, and wondered at my own audacity in daring to question the truth of such a hoary institution as Christianity. Years passed—years of patient study and reflection and widening thought; until one day a curious thing happened. I was walking along the street, and, as usual, meditating upon my changed condition, when I began to wonder just exactly where I then stood. Surely, I thought, there must be some paper or periodical devoted to the advocacy of the views I had come to hold as alone consistent with reason. And immediately I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Why its the *Freethinker*."

If any sceptical reader should imagine that I am merely romancing or telling a fairy tale, I can assure him that this voice was just as audible, and just as distinct as any voice that ever spoke from heaven. I have called it an "Angel's Visit" because of its mysteriousness. For, with the exception of the single instance I have previously mentioned, I am not aware that the *Freethinker* had ever crossed my thoughts during the ten years or so that followed. I could not even have told the name of its editor. And to this day, although I have often thought of the matter, I have been unable to trace any of the underlying causes which might possibly account for such an inspiration. It may be that the heavenly voices are not confined to the Joan of Arcs and the Christian mystics.

Such, then, are the somewhat strange circumstances under which I first made the acquaintance of the *Freethinker*, and which accounts for my connection with the paper. For, although I have contributed some fifty or sixty articles to its pages I have not even had speech with its editor; but they may be taken as evidence that I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.

JOSEPH BRYCE.

A Boon for Bairns.

Stories from the Children's Realm. By George Bedborough. (London: Vegetarian Union, Memorial Hall, Farringdon-street, E.C.; 1914. 6d. net.)

THERE is no literary task more difficult than the art of cultivating the interest of children in the ethical problems that surround their little lives. The child's psychology is a realm unknown, except from

the distant glimpses and happy intuitions of an elect few. In that number Mr. George Bedborough deserves distinguished place of honor. Nothing more charming in the way of story-telling for children has been done for a long time than in the thirty-two beautiful stories which Mr. Bedborough has compressed into the hundred delightful pages of this little volume. His stories are good without being "goody"; they are moral without being mawkish; and they cover a very wide field of practical ethics in a freshly original manner. And if the moral elevation is high—high till it converges upon the realm of the ideal—the literary flavor is maintained at an equally lofty standard of excellence. Unlike so many tales with a purpose, these stories neither obtrude religion upon the child's mind nor extrude it from his mental purview. And, very properly, Mr. Bedborough refrains altogether from offering to the children the bribes and enticements of eternal glory, or heavenly lollipops, as the reward for making themselves happy by the agreeable process of widening the area of happiness available for the men and animals who cross their path in life. His chosen method of influence is not the method of arid proselytism; it is a method of sympathy and sweet reasonableness applied to the numerous practical problems of character-forming which intimately affect the child at his different and varied points of contact with the social life of his fellows in the home, at the school, in the nursery, or in the playground, or which affect him in his relations with the humbler but no less sensitive types of animal life.

I should like to know that these delightful stories—which, by the way, are woven with a literary artistry that can equally appeal to the thinking adult as well as to the wonder-child (for all children, until we spoil them, are wonder-children)—could find their way into thousands of homes and be read by myriads of children. I confess without any quail of shame that I read the whole collection with eager delight at one sitting, and was fascinated by the charm and ease and naturalness of the varied groups of stories which compose this welcome volume.

The collection contains "some Dreams" (five in all), in which Mr. Bedborough shows that dreaming does not prevent the seer from keeping a wakeful open eye fixed upon the realities of the workaday world. One of these dreams, entitled "To-day: A Dream of New Year's Eve," is quite a literary gem set with poetry and sentiment and imagination. Another dream—"A Pilgrim's Progress"—is almost equally beautiful; the dream is an admirable summary in the pictorial form of allegory of some of the cruelties and absurdities that mar the life of so-called civilised man. One of these "dreams" is perhaps too obviously a tale with a purpose (though, like the rest, it is very well told): I refer to that entitled "The Isle of Vegetariana." Here, perhaps, the dietetic doctrines of Vegetarianism are too obviously pushed to the fore. On the principle that children should not be proselytised, but be left to learn their ethical truths by the logical force of the indirect appeal, it seems to me that Mr. Bedborough had better omit this story from the next edition of his book.

I have refrained from making any quotations from this book because quotation would fail to give any indication of the freshness, the *vim*, and directness of the appeal which Mr. Bedborough's volume makes alike to the child's ingenuous fancy as well as to the "grown-up's" ethical and literary taste. The stories are thoroughly secular in tone and tendency, and the terminology is commendably free from that slimy touch of theology with which no teacher of the young has the right to soil the nascent mind. Secularists and Rationalists will do well to let their children revel in these stories. My two grand-children (there is one other who as yet reads naught else but his mother's eyes) have already devoured them with gusto and profit.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

Acid Drops

If the English police, in some of their proceedings, do not become the laughing-stock of the civilised world, it will not be due to any fault of theirs. And some of our magistrates, who never ought to have been appointed to anything more important than a mothers' meeting, seem to be doing their best to help the police. At Scarborough, on May 27, a man was fined for exhibiting for sale two "profane" picture postcards. The cards were called "The Bachelor's Prayer" and "The Old Maid's Prayer," and each "depicted a person kneeling in prayer." Chief Constable Windsor submitted that "to make a comic postcard of people kneeling in prayer was profanity." He also said that he was "annoyed" by seeing the cards. They were "most improper." We have every sympathy with the delicacy of mind evidenced by Chief Constable Windsor, and we would suggest that such a chaste and sensitive person is quite out of place in the force. Necessarily the occupation of a policeman must bring him into contact with many "improper" sights and sounds, and the wonder is that, having been so many years in the force, this police officer should retain such a virginal simplicity and sensitiveness. In his interests we hope that he is near the pension age. The magistrate fined the seller of the postcards 10s. 6d. and costs. England will soon be a most delightful place—to get away from.

We wonder what would have happened to Walter Bagehot—economist and man of letters—under the rule of the Eugenists. We fancy there would never have been a Walter Bagehot, and so nothing could have happened to him. Of the value of his writings there is no question, and his keenest appreciators are found among some of the keenest thinkers of his time. Yet his mother was a widow of thirty-eight when Bagehot's father married her. By her first marriage she had three children—one died of some illness while young, another died from the effects of an accident, the third grew up insane. The mother herself was subject to occasional fits of insanity. We are afraid that Eugenists would have labelled her as an undesirable case, and forbidden marriage. Yet the offspring of that marriage became one of the sanest and most suggestive writers of his time. Anyone who has read only his *Physics and Politics* will concede this. His sister-in-law—who is his biographer—says that his standpoint in religion was really Unitarian. We should be inclined to describe it as more nearly Atheist.

Taken from a recent *Guardian* list of wills: Rev. H. Allott, £20,701; Rev. E. Brumell, Norfolk, £11,717; Rev. J. H. A. Gibson, Brighton, £38,959; Rev. G. Granville, Wasperton, Warwick, £25,199. Rev. C. E. Hammond, £3,497; Rev. F. Lear, Canon of Salisbury, £12,273; Rev. T. B. Shand, Chichester, £10,240; Rev. H. Shepherd, Hove, £76,686.

It is now understood, says the *Academy*, that "Science and religion are working on different planes to the same end—viz., the discovery of truth." We welcome the information, and should be still more pleased if the *Academy* could tell us what are the truths that religion has discovered. Up to the present, not only has religion failed to establish any truth, but it has been compelled to relinquish a great many teachings which it said were true. Of course, the clergy would like to be regarded as fellow-workers with the scientists, but it is a partnership to which only one side contributes. The other simply draws a part of the profits.

Dean Inge is not very hopeful concerning the future of church-going. In a recent volume of essays he says that:—

"The outlook from the point of view of clerical professionalism is not very hopeful. The practice of church-going is likely to decline still further, especially in Protestant Churches. . . . The Roman Catholics are likely to be more successful in keeping their congregations together, and this will give them a statistical advantage. But from this Church, more than some others, the irresistible march of modern culture and education is certain to detach an ever-increasing number of adherents."

The concluding sentence really hits the nail on the head. Church attendance is declining, and must continue to decline, because of the "irresistible march of modern culture and education." And, obviously, no church can fight against that. As we have often pointed out, it is not this or that individual or organisation that religion has to fight. It is modern culture and the better and more enduring aspects of modern civilisation that it will have to defeat if it is to live.

The Turkish Government has adopted a friendly attitude towards the sect of Devil-worshippers. Under Abdul

Hamid efforts were made to convert or suppress them. The present Government is more tolerant, and has decided to recognise their existence as a distinct religious sect. For our own part, it seems to us that worshipping the Devil is as rational as any other religious worship, and it is certainly more politic. If there be a God and a Devil, then it seems a safe game to keep on good terms with the latter. God ought to be good enough to look after his creatures whether they worship him or not. It is the Devil who ought to be placated. As it is, however, worshippers spend all their time in placating Deity, and leaving the Devil alone. Which is more complimentary to the latter than to the former.

What Secularists these Christians are! Even priests are not exempt. In a recent issue of the *Universe*, the Catholic newspaper, the following quaint advertisement appears: "Young priest dying for motor-cycle; set his heart on Douglas model V., £48; sees no chance of getting one himself for years; writes in desperation." The poor young man must be desperate, for he has forgotten the clerical cant of the value of prayer.

Biblical criticism now centres around the personality of Christ, and a fierce encounter has taken place between Mr. J. M. Robertson, M.P., and Dr. F. C. Conybeare, the latter's book on *The Historical Christ* being the subject of severe criticism at the hands of Mr. Robertson, who asks his readers to contemplate "the hysterical Conybeare" before studying the "historical Christ."

A mummy case in the British Museum was smashed with an axe by a Suffragette. This courteous action of hitting a four-thousand-years-old corpse on the nose in order to help her cause should entitle the lady to be elected an honorary member of the Christian Evidence Society.

The Cost of Wings is the title of a new book. We suppose it depends upon the church or chapel one attends, and whether a copper or a threepenny-bit is expected in the plate.

Music in the Church forms the subject of an interesting book by the Rev. G. W. Stewart. Ordinary folk are more interested in music outside the church, such as concerts on the kerb by the Salvation Army band, and a collection by the bandmaster, with the pathetic appeal, "We'll stop here till the hat's full."

The Rev. Luke Wiseman says that every supposed miracle of the Acts of the Apostles has been repeated in our own day, except the opening of prison doors and the raising of corpses. Dear! Dear! Only the quick and the dead.

A popular writer in an advanced journal remarked that Charles Darwin was "one of the greatest Englishmen ever born." Are there any Englishmen who were *not* born? What "Hosea Biglow" called "combinin' mornal truth with phrases sich as strike" has its dangers.

The clever "Asterisks" writer in the *Star* quotes a Sunday paper as saying of Satan that "There have been many who have dismissed him as a sort of Mrs. Harris—a mythological pigment." Whereupon the *Star* man remarks that "There are many, on the other hand, who say he is not so black as he is pigmented." But the mythological pigment probably means mythological pigment. So Satan has the top of the joking, after all.

The Middles x County Council has at length decided to institute legal proceedings in cases where "the provisions of the statutes of the regulations relating to the granting of music, dancing, stage play, cinematograph, and horse-racing licenses are infringed." The legal proceedings are to be in the nature of test actions against the proprietors of cinematograph shows, and if these remain true to their original intention of fighting the Council, some important developments may be anticipated. Some of the local Councils desire these places to be open on Sunday, and an amendment in favor of taking proceedings only in such cases where the local bodies concurred was vigorously opposed by the Sabbatarians, and lost. These men are quite ready to favor local option when it suits their purpose, but in this case they discovered that it would mean "throwing the apple of discord among local authorities." Mr. H. Nield, M.P., in supporting the Committee's resolution, said that "Sunday ought to be kept as it had been hitherto"—which is precisely the way in which it ought not to be kept. Picture palaces have at least made plain the fact that, given

opportunities for harmless or rational enjoyment on Sunday, harmful and irrational occupations decrease. But one can hardly expect considerations of this kind to weigh with bigots.

But picture palace owners must be on their guard. The Bishop of Chichester solemnly informed a Conference of Churchwomen that he was going to London, and intended visiting a picture palace. Bravo Bishop! This is what we call genuine moral courage. Imagine this Conference of Churchwomen solemnly considering who will beard the Devil in his den in order to find out if he really is as black as he is painted, and their relief and admiration when their own Bishop offers to run the risk! It is truly Christian. Does not the good Christian in Paris sacrifice most of his holiday-time in searching into the shady side of life in the "gay city," in order to report the evils to his friends at home? We wonder whether the Bishop will go in gaiters and shovel hat, or whether he will adopt the disguise of a layman, and plank down his "tanner" at the pay-box with an assumed air of dissipation? We would advise the latter course. Otherwise the proprietors might be artful enough to alter the program for his benefit.

The Conference in question was not called to consider the character of picture palaces. The matter arose out of a discussion about servants. The subject under consideration was how to promote the moral and spiritual welfare of servants. There was no suggestion of shorter hours or larger wages, but opportunities were to be provided for attending "Divine service." It was suggested that servants should be let out only in couples; that they should be allowed out only during the daylight; and that, when out, they should be induced to spend their time at a girls' club. Then someone wanted to know if picture palaces were fit places for servants. Hence the Bishop's resolve to inspect and report. We are afraid that his report may be adverse. We have ourselves seen films on which were displayed servants kissing each other, and even kissing their masters. And one can easily conceive how demoralising this must be to the ordinary "domestic." We are inclined to favor the idea of servants being let out in couples during daylight, marched to a girls' club or a mission service, and solemnly escorted home—not later than 6.30—by one of the curates. We had almost forgotten to say that servants were not invited to the Conference.

Rev. Dr. Robinson delivered the annual address to the Christian Evidence Society, and we fancy that its lecturers must have wished that someone else had been selected. He told his hearers that evidential books were full of smart debating points, but they did not leave the impression that here was a man really anxious to get at the facts. "Too often the Christian apologist traded upon the ignorance of his audience." Dr. Robinson also dwelt upon the ineffectiveness of the work. He said they were too much occupied in knocking down their opponents instead of declaring the truth. We would suggest to Dr. Robinson that he spends a few Sundays in visiting some of the Christian Evidence meetings if he wishes to properly appreciate the character of both the lecturers and the lectures. Nothing more hopelessly vulgar, stupid, and untruthful than the present generation of Christian Evidence speakers has ever existed. They are the Rudyard Kiplings of religion—minus his ability and education.

A testimonial to the good done by a South American Missionary Society, written by the manager of an American company, is published in one of the religious weeklies. The manager writes in praise of the Society's work in Paraguay, and thinks his company fortunate in securing land under the influence of the Mission, where it can obtain Indian labor, which is "a very valuable asset to us." If only the introduction of alcohol can be prevented, the manager dwells upon the possibilities before them "owing to the extreme cheapness of labor." We can quite believe in the manager's gratitude. If the Mission can "tame" the natives, and keep the American company supplied with an abundance of cheap labor, it does well to feel grateful. Only we fail to see in this a clear proof of the value of the Mission—to the Indian. It is all right for the preacher and for the trader. The latter makes the money, and hands over a percentage of the profit to the preacher. But does the native benefit? May it not be better for him to go cheerfully to hell after his own fashion than to reach heaven after being sweated to death in the joint interests of English missions and American shareholders?

There is an old proverb about the futility of giving a pail of milk and then kicking it over. We are often reminded of this saying by Mr. R. J. Campbell's sermons. In a recent

sermon he pointed out the fallacy of assuming design from an examination of the cosmic order. That, he rightly said, "does not prove anything as to an intelligent directing purpose at the back of it." And he went on to point out:—

"As far as one can see, in the very nature of things an order of some kind always results from the interplay of forces, physical or psychical.....Forces which cannot destroy each other must get along together somehow; they will check and modify each other, and then settle down into a system of relations which will continue until some new factor disturbs the balance. This would happen of necessity without anyone arranging it.....Every natural phenomenon within our range of acquaintance can be thus accounted for."

This is well said, although it is possible that Mr. Campbell does not see its full implications.

Of course, Mr. Campbell has to find room for God somewhere—that is his business; and having given his pail of milk, he proceeds to kick it over the roadway. Purpose is to be found, not in the universe, but in ourselves. "We should have no notion of purpose if we were not conscious of it in ourselves." Therefore, "Can we do otherwise than attribute the same kind of spiritual faculty, though immeasurably greater, to the mysterious power of which we are ourselves the outcome, and whose works we behold in the myriad worlds around us?" Now, this is really the ground on which purpose in the universe is inferred, but there is no evidence whatever offered that would lead one to assume the inference to be correct. Man assumes purpose in the universe because he himself plans. But to make the analogy complete, or even to establish an analogy at all, one would have to show that the universe resembles man as one man resembles another. I may assume that another person acts from the same motives as myself because he resembles me in all other points. But does the universe resemble me? Clearly, it does not, and consequently the whole analogy breaks down. The uncivilised mind infers purpose in the universe because it places a personal intelligence at the back of phenomena. Design in nature is not something we discover, it is something we create for ourselves. Mr. Campbell really gives the cause of a fallacy, and imagines he is establishing a scientific analogy.

It is rather a curious thing, but since the appearance of the article "The Savage in Our Midst" in our issue for May 24, we have received about half-a-dozen articles from various papers on the subject of Mascots and the use of charms generally. We hardly like to suggest that the articles in question were inspired by those who find the *Freethinker* very good to steal from, but we may take it as a proof that the *Freethinker* is more widely and more closely read than most people imagine.

The thirtieth annual report of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children states that the Society had in hand last year 54,772 cases. These were accounted for as starvation and neglect, 47,960; ill-treatment and assault, 3,991; exposure and begging, 903; and other minor offences. The Society has a deficit of £6,550. Here is a ghastly illustration of what Christianity does *not* do.

Dr. Drummond, of Edinburgh, says that the best thing that can be done for children is to see that they have "decent Christian homes." Let them have decent homes, by all means. We need not bother about their being *Christian*. Decency and Christianity are not by any means synonymous.

The General Assembly of the United Free Church (Scotland) discussed the other day the question of housing in Dundee. It appears that there are 15,000 people living in homes of one room, and 85,000 in homes of two rooms. Eventually, the Assembly decided it could do nothing. Then it proceeded to discuss the question of a stained glass window, containing a figure of Christ, in one of the Arran churches, and ordered its removal.

The Bishop of Colchester has been lamenting the want of cash in the English Church. Many, said the Bishop, who have been preferred to "livings" find themselves in possession of "starvings." We have heard this familiar tune before, but expressed in better language. Many working people would find themselves passing rich on the stipends of "clerical poverty."

The Pope has created thirteen new cardinals, including the English Benedictine, Abbot Aidan Gasquet, and Mgr. Begin, the Archbishop of Quebec. Presumably, the remainder are Italian gentlemen, as usual.

To Correspondents.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1914.—Previously acknowledged, £158 3s. Received since:—D. Wright, 5s.; "Ernest," 5s.; Mr. and Mrs. Harden, £2 2s.

MR. AND MRS. HARDEN.—Your letter has reached us. Thanks for your very good wishes as well as for the enclosure.

T. CLINTON.—Sorry there has been a delay in your newsagent delivering your paper. The mistake is not, of course, due to us, as the *Freethinker* is published on the same day and, as near as possible, at the same hour each week. Our shop manager will, however, look into the matter and write you.

H. THOMSON.—We regret to hear of the death of Mr. Drummond. He lived and died as a brave man should. Mr. Foote is not back "in the editorial chair" yet, in the full sense of the expression, but we hope to see him there very shortly. He will appreciate your good wishes for his return to complete health.

NON COM.—David Watt is an old correspondent of ours. We much regret to hear that he is lying so weak from such a painful illness. Pray let us hear when you can report his recovery.

E. HALL (Melbourne).—We are afraid there is no likelihood of Mr. Foote visiting Australia on a lecturing tour. We can quite believe that there is room in Melbourne, Sydney, and Perth for "a live and really educated lecturer"; but Mr. Foote's hands are sufficiently full of work in this country, and there would be small wisdom in neglecting work at home to undertake other work at the Antipodes. We hope that some native Australian may be found able and willing for the work. Thanks for cuttings. We shall be happy to comply with the request in your letter.

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 Shop Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.

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

Sugar Plums.

The full report of the proceedings at the National Secular Society's Conference on Sunday last is held over until our next issue. Mr. Foote was, of course, re-elected President, and all those present were delighted to see him back again after his rather severe illness. Several figures familiar at these gatherings were absent, mostly on account of ill-health or age. On the other hand, we were glad to observe a number of younger men who seem to take a keen interest in the promotion of Freethought ideas. And it is, after all, to the younger ones of a party to whom one must look for the carrying on of the fight. And the number of young men and young women who are at present avowing themselves as Freethinkers is one of the most pleasing and inspiring features of the situation.

The evening public meeting at Queen's (Minor) Hall was a pronounced success. The Hall was well filled, and, judging from the applause, the speeches were greatly enjoyed. As we publish in another part of this paper a full report of the evening meeting, our readers will be able to judge the quality of the speeches for themselves. We need only say that the listeners seemed as fresh and as interested at the end as they were at the beginning; and that, at the expiration of two hours' speaking, is no small tribute to the speakers themselves. We are also glad to record that a quite satisfactory "offertory" was taken up towards the expense of the evening.

Considerable interest was taken in the statement of the President concerning the reorganisation of Secularism, and the party may expect to hear more on this subject in the near future. Conditions are not what they were when the National Secular Society was established, and the time appears to have arrived for a careful consideration of the whole position in the light of existing circumstances. It

should be quite possible to conserve all that is really valuable in the present constitution of the N. S. S., including its record as the foremost militant Freethought Society in Great Britain, and at the same time make it a still more effective weapon in the war against superstition. When the scheme of reorganisation is complete, it will be placed before the party, and members will then be in a position to express their opinions on the matter.

There was no excursion arranged for Whit-Monday for Conference delegates and visitors. London is such a huge place, and with so many attractions, that it was thought wisest to leave those who attended the Conference to indulge their own inclinations. In the evening, however, a number of delegates and other friends foregathered at the Bay Malton Hotel, and an enjoyable time was spent in listening to songs, recitations, and music. This was kept up until such time as some delegates had to leave in order to catch their trains.

There is one point for congratulation in the tragic story of the sinking of the *Empress of Ireland*. Less religious humbug has been imported into the newspaper narratives. A band was on board the liner, but it didn't play "Nearer my God to thee." The Salvation Army musicians seem to have been as busy in saving themselves as any of the other passengers. On the other hand, it is not pretended that "Providence" paid them any special attention. There is the usual account of some selfish idiot, who was going to travel by the fated boat but changed his mind at the last minute, and imagines himself therefore to have been "divinely preserved." But it is also confessed that Mr. Laurence Irving, the famous actor, changed his mind the other way; travelling with his wife by the *Empress of Ireland* and leaving the bulk of his company to come on from New York; and nobody suggests that he was "divinely lost." On the whole it seems that the prayers of some survivors for their own safety—which is what it comes to—are looked upon as rather a human weakness. What a change from what we should have read in the newspapers twenty years ago!

FLASHES FROM EMERSON.

As men's prayers are a disease of the will, so are their creeds a disease of the intellect.

A foolish consistency is the hob-goblin of little minds adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines.

Whenever a true theory appears, it will be its own evidence. Its test is, that it will explain all phenomena.

We say the old forms of religion decay, and that a scepticism devastates the community. I do not think it can be cured or stayed by any modifications of theologic creeds, much less by theologic discipline. The cure for false theology is mother-wit.

There is no virtue which is final; all are initial. The virtues of society are the vices of a saint. The terror of reform is the discovery that we must cast away our virtues, or what we have always esteemed such, into the same pit that has consumed our grosser vices.

Blame is safer than praise. I hate to be defended in a newspaper. As long as all that is said, is said against me, I feel a certain assurance of success. But as soon as honeyed words of praise are spoken for me, I feel as one that lies unprotected before his enemies.

There is always room for a man of force, and he makes room for many. Society is a troop of thinkers, and the best heads among them take the best places. A feeble man can see the farms that are fenced and tilled, the houses that are built. The strong man sees the possible houses and farms. His eye makes estates as fast as the sun breeds clouds.

This view of the world, the real idea of Christianity, spread with great rapidity over the whole Roman realm like an infectious disease, and the whole Middle Age endured its agonies, sometimes in the delirium of fever, and anon in death-like exhaustion, and we moderns still feel its cramps and debilities in our limbs. Even if one of us be in health he cannot escape the general lazar-house atmosphere, and he feels miserable as the only sound man among utter invalids. When it shall come to pass that mankind shall regain their perfect health, when peace shall be restored between body and soul, and they blend again in their original harmony, then we shall hardly understand the artificial, unnatural strife which Christianity caused between them.—Heine, "Germany."

National Secular Society's Annual Conference.

EXECUTIVE'S REPORT.—BY THE PRESIDENT.

THE past year has been a very uneventful one for the National Secular Society, as well as for other advanced organisations. Preoccupation of the public mind with political questions, rivalries, and disputes, always causes a diminution of interest in other questions which are only indirectly of material importance. The thought of to-day determines the action of to-morrow, but that is only seen when to-morrow itself belongs to the past.

Unfortunately, too, the N. S. S. has received very slender financial assistance from the Secular Society, Ltd., which is unable at present to act with its customary generosity. The N. S. S. Balance Sheet should be read in the light of these facts.

One great fact in the credit side of the account is apt to be forgotten. The President of the N. S. S. is the Editor of the *Freethinker*. It is difficult to separate the two functions even in fancy. And the *Freethinker*, which is the only Freethought weekly journal in England, still maintains its circulation, and occasionally adds to it in favorable circumstances.

One new Branch has been formed at St. Helens, and arrangements have been made by the Executive, in the absence of local Branches, for carrying on outdoor propaganda in Regent's Park and Finsbury Park. Two half-yearly special meetings of the London members have been held, according to Conference resolutions, and reports of same have appeared in the *Freethinker*. The Annual Dinner—this year at Frascati's Restaurant, was the usual success; a special feature being a humorous Freethought speech by Sir Hiram Maxim.

Your Executive was unable to carry out the resolution of the last Conference,—that the N. S. S. should be represented at the Lisbon International Congress by at least three delegates. It was found that each delegate would cost £20 at the lowest, and that each would have to devote three weeks at the lowest to the delegation. It was impossible to find even one who could give so much time to travelling and attendance at the Congress. Of necessity, therefore, the project fell through. It is to be hoped the Society may be luckier on the next occasion. Not much practical good results from these International Congresses, but they serve to show that Reason as well as Faith is of a universal character.

One unpleasant incident in the past year's history might well be forgotten, if it were not necessary to be referred to, for the sake of future peace and quiet, as a warning to those who, having little respect for themselves, pay (if possible) as little or less to others. Mr. J. W. Gott, in spite of official prohibition, insisted on using the name of the N. S. S. to cover propagandist work under his own personal control, for which he was soliciting funds from the Freethought party. Refusing to desist from this abuse of the Society's name, he had to be declared as out of connection with the N. S. S. Responsibility for any of his proceedings was repudiated, and it was resolved that his membership would not be renewed on the expiration of the current year.

Some persons who object to all discipline, who imagine that individuals acting "on their own" are the only ones who have any rights at all, and that even a voluntary Society ought not to protect itself against insult and defiance, called this an act of tyranny on the part of the N. S. S. Executive. Mr. Gott himself posed as a painfully persecuted martyr. He was left to maintain that position as he could,—with what success is seen.

A prosecution for the sale of Freethought literature without police permission resulted in a fine of five shillings at Bolton. A similar prosecution at Leeds, more recently, resulted in the case being dismissed. The views of policemen and magistrates as to their right of interference in matters where the "interests of religion" are supposed to be involved are of a most chaotic character. It is to be hoped that the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws will put an end to all future possibility of such a state of things.

Mr. W. T. Stewart has been prosecuted again for "blasphemy"—to say nothing of other "offences" with which the N. S. S. has no special concern. He is not a careful speaker, but none of the language quoted against him would have been considered indictable if employed in political or social discussion. It was really, therefore, talking too freely on religion for which he was sentenced to three months' imprisonment. A great opportunity presented itself for another clear and authoritative statement on the Common Law of Blasphemy. Your President, on behalf of the Society, immediately offered to carry the case to the Court of Appeal—which did not exist in criminal cases in 1883. Unfortunately Mr. Stewart left his interests in hands as incapable as his own—and the great opportunity was lost.

What was done by others afterwards, in the way of petition for the prisoner's release or better treatment, was good in its way. But it could not possibly lead to any fresh step in the direction of the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws; although, of course, it served as a public advertisement of their origin and character. The same may be said of the deputation to Mr. Asquith, satisfactory as his own declaration was from a personal point of view. All the really effective fighting against the Blasphemy Laws—apart from the courageous agitation against them, in which the N. S. S. has always more than taken its share—has been done in the Law Courts. It was there that Lord Chief Justice Coleridge's epoch-marking judgment was elicited in 1883. It is there that a fresh, and perhaps final, judgment may be elicited, to crown and complete Lord Coleridge's work; unless a Repeal Act be carried through Parliament in the immediate future, which is possible but hardly probable.

The effective fighting, it may be repeated, has been waged in the Law Courts. That is why the N. S. S. deserves commendation for taking up the Boulter case in 1908. The Boulter case was a turning point. The argument at issue was legal. The bulk of critics did not agree with your President that Lord Coleridge's judgment in 1853 stood practically unchallenged and unchallengeable as the Common Law of Blasphemy in England. The policy pursued by the N. S. S., at great expense, in the Boulter case, compelled the judges (Phillimore and Darling) to endorse Lord Coleridge's statement of the law. That endorsement has been repeated by other judges since. Nobody now thinks of suggesting otherwise. What remains to be argued is something historical and critical. Has not other legislation virtually repealed everything substantive in the Blasphemy Laws? Do the "decencies of controversy" in debates on religion differ in any respect from the "decencies of controversy" on any other subject? If they do not—if the criterion in the one case is deduced from the common principles in the other cases—then the definition of "Blasphemy" sinks down to the simple formula of "annoying Christians," which would reduce the law to a disgusting and disgraceful farce, incapable of being presented again in the light of day.

A curious case of religious bigotry, no doubt expressing the same spirit as the Blasphemy Laws, but even more insolent in outward form, occurred at Morpeth. A witness called Snowball, who claimed to affirm instead of swearing, which he had a perfect right to do, was browbeaten by a Captain Mitford, one of the magistrates, who actually refused to take the witness's evidence, on the ground that nobody could believe the word of a man who did not believe in God. Fortunately, the newspapers read this bigot a lesson, both in law and in good manners; and the culprit seems to have got out of the trouble with a minimum of publicity. The N. S. S. communicated with the solicitor conducting the case in question, and offered to contribute towards the cost of a "mandamus" to compel the offending magistrate to act legally; but his own prompt surrender made such action unnecessary.

It is gratifying to record that the London County Council arrived at a satisfactory settlement of the question of collections at public meetings in parks and other open spaces under the Council's control. The deputation—consisting of representatives of the N. S. S., the London Trades Council, and other Labor organisations—that waited upon a general meeting of the Council, was able to show that the new order prohibiting collections without a special permit was both unwise and unjust. There appears to have been some misunderstanding on the part of certain members of the Council, under the influence of a handful of bigots. The deputation was treated in a very friendly way, not an unpleasant word occurred in the speeches or the discussion, and the Council seemed to feel that their visitors represented men who wanted nothing of a revolutionary character, but just the time-honored rights of citizenship. Eventually it was decided that at all meetings of *bonâ-fide* societies, holding "permits" as such, collections should be made for such societies' general funds, but not outside the limits of such meetings. Thus the matter ends with a substantial victory for the principles of freedom and fair-play.

The part played by the N. S. S. in this matter is one of which it may well be proud. It bore the brunt of the actual fighting. It defended Miss Vance before the Marylebone Police-court, paid all the legal expenses that were incurred in relation to a large number of other summonses that were "hung up," and undertook the arrangements for testing the law by moving for a *mandamus* against the London County Council in the High Court of Justice, if a settlement could not be reached in any other way. Your President, as editor of the *Freethinker*, raised the sum of £77 18s. 3d. by a preliminary appeal. That sum was eventually handed over by him, without any deduction for expenses, to the N. S. S. treasury; so that the Society gained (even financially) instead of losing over the transaction. Speaking from a

higher point of view, the raising of that subscription must have convinced the hostile portion of the County Council that there was reality in the intention of appealing to the law of England against the arbitrary action of a single municipal authority.

The Education Question is likely to come to the front before long, as the Nonconformists are beginning to cry more lustily for their pound of flesh. It seems hardly possible, however, that a new Bill can be more successful than its unhappy predecessors. Church and Chapel want the same joint, and are too hungry to be persuaded that they both have it. Their mutual hostility is, indeed, the Secular Educationists' strongest guarantee of his own ultimate victory. Fortunately there exists an instrument which represents the Secular Educationists of all schools in the Secular Education League. Mr. Foote and Mr. Cohen are members of the League's executive committee, and this should satisfy Secularists that they may safely join the League and give it their best support. All sections of the executive committee work together in perfect harmony. They are united in promoting one, and only one, object; namely that the education of children in elementary State-supported or State-subsidised schools shall be confined to subjects which the Education Code calls "secular." The League's office is at 19 Buckingham-street, Strand, London, W.C., and the secretary, Mr. Harry Snell, will be glad to send prospectuses and other printed matter to all applicants, and to answer all questions that may be asked of him regarding the League's affairs.

A veteran Freethinker, associated with the Secular movement in the Bradlaugh days at the Hall of Science, who suffered imprisonment for "blasphemy" in connection with the *Freethinker* case in 1883, having fallen on evil days through age and a painful malady, a few of his friends (political as well as theological) have formed a committee to raise a fund that may make his last days somewhat easier. The N. S. S. is not acting officially in this matter, Mr. W. J. Ramsey not being one of its members; but the first list of subscriptions, to be published after the Whitsun holidays, will show that a good many members of the N. S. S. have already contributed. No doubt others will follow suit in the near future. The General Treasurer is Mr. B. T. Hall, Club and Institute Buildings, Clerkenwell-road, London, E.C., whose lists of acknowledgments will be printed in the *Freethinker*.

This Annual Report may close with the usual glance abroad. There is much unorganised Freethought activity in America. Mr. M. M. Mangasarian still carries on his eloquent and fruitful propaganda in Chicago. Mr. Percy Ward appears to have settled down in the same city, lecturing with great acceptance to good audiences. At New York we find Mr. George Macdonald still conducting with the old verve the weekly *Truthseeker*; and it is to be hoped with more than the old success. It is regrettable that Mr. W. W. Collins—one of the N. S. S. vice-presidents at Christchurch, New Zealand—has broken down in health, at least temporarily. His friends hope for his speedy recovery, and are meantime glad that his journal, the *Examiner*, is being carried on by his colleagues. There are many Freethinkers in South Africa, but very little organisation—as might indeed be expected. To describe the progress of Freethought in Europe would require volumes. Suffice it to say that the general prospect was never brighter, and that France still leads the great procession of Reason and Humanity.

EVENING PUBLIC MEETING.

A goodly audience assembled at the Queen's (Minor) Hall, London, W., to hear Mr. G. W. Foote, the leader of English Freethought, and his colleagues, at the public meeting in connection with the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society on Whit-Sunday.

It was Mr. Foote's first public appearance since his recent illness, and when he took the chair he had a most flattering and enthusiastic reception.

Mr. Foote's was the first speech, quite in his best vein, and full of wit and wisdom. It was punctuated throughout with laughter and applause, and he had a perfect ovation at the finish. He said that intellectual honesty was the nearest honesty on this planet. Few men would stand to the colors of unpopular ideas, and face a world which hated them because they were dangerous to every sinister interest. The only irreconcilable was the Freethinker. When political canvassers call on such a man, they say "He thinks for himself; we'll go next door." Voting was only of value when it was done by men who thought freely. So many persons go through life thinking as their parents and teachers did before them. Ignorance was very prevalent. When a little daughter of his was withdrawn from religious instruction at school, she was asked if her father was a Jew. She said he was a gentleman. Other children regarded the

situation as uncanny. Yet if all people who were inclined to Freethought put aside fear, and spoke out the actual truth concerning their opinions, it would frighten the Churches more than the sinking of any number of Atlantic liners.

Freethinkers were feared. Even Socialists were regarded as clever fellows; but let a Freethinker stand up and avow his principles, and he will be certain to be at the bottom of the poll. As intellectuals, they were content to be at the bottom of such a poll. They would rather be true to the highest and most durable interests of mankind than take part in mere party triumphs.

No one who espoused Freethought must expect public applause. Opponents say that Freethinkers set themselves up as being better than other men. They do not; but if they did, it would not be a tremendous effort of vanity. One half of the world lived by deluding the other half. The clergy know that the Bible is not the Word of God, yet they allow it to be placed in the schools, and martyrise the children who are withdrawn from its influence. There are purple passages which no clergyman would dare to read to a congregation, unless he wanted to have all the bonnets leave the church, and all who did not wear bonnets wait for him at the door.

Look at the clergy! £200 a year is considered bad pay. Jesus Christ had not where to lay his head, and modern bishops have scores of bedrooms in their palaces. Why doesn't the Rev. R. J. Campbell, when he gets a new motor-car, offer the old one to me. Christianity is the falsest religion in the world. It has made its way by lies and impostures, filled the world with blood and tears, and made artificial barriers between men who had no other quarrel. Its influence is felt in the political world, for all the present trouble is caused by the hatred between Catholics and Protestants. Let Christianity give place to Humanity, and let faith give way to reason. What happened when the great liner sank? Who saved those who were saved? Science, in the shape of wireless telegraphy, brought help and saved hundreds, whilst God did—nothing.

Miss Kough followed with a bright speech full of charm. The air, she said, was full of talk about the revolt against reason, but there was nothing to be terrified at. A speaker at a recent Church Congress said that once scientists used to believe in the operation of natural law, but since the discovery of radium, which was so erratic, one might believe in the miracle of the Gadarene swine. Reason could never have been established in that person. A highly cultivated lady told a story of two friends, fishing by night, who had caught a member of a house-party who had turned into a pike. Opponents often magnify Freethought efforts to suit their own ends. One had stated that there were seven Atheistic Societies, all publishing their own papers, and sending out their own lecturers. There was, however, a real and growing danger in the growth of the Roman Catholic Church among certain sections of the population.

Mr. C. Cohen, who was in excellent form and warmly welcomed by the whole audience, pointed out that the world had been terrified throughout its history by a religious goblin, but it was a goblin whose head was empty. He had a contempt for the whole thing, and had never thought it worth hating. If Christianity improved, he might hate it. Christian scholars discussed whether the Virgin Birth was a fact. Such a subject was unworthy of discussion by a civilised people. People who were in such a state of mental confusion were only savages, even if they wore hobble skirts or frock-coats, and were as uncivilised as the denizens of Central Africa. A change was coming over the scene. People no longer questioned as to whether the Bible was the Word of God, but how did people get to believe in the idea of Deity? At a recent debate on Miracles, which was conducted by popular dramatists and apparently cultured men, none of the speakers got mentally within 150 years of the twentieth century. Children grow out of their beliefs in fairies and goblins, but grown-up people are afraid to grow out of their beliefs. At the last French census 7,000,000 declared themselves as Atheists, and there were enough English Freethinkers to form seventy societies, but for the lack of moral courage. This want of courage was the bad heritage of the Church, which had bred from the worst material for centuries. The reason why the average Jew was sharper than the average Christian was that the Church made it impossible for any Jew to live unless he was sharp. The Church killed all the brave men and preserved the cowards. For 200 years Mohammedan Spain led the world in arts and sciences; but Christian Spain for 200 years killed thousands of the best men every year, and no nation could stand such treatment with impunity. It was astonishing that religion had not bred universal idiocy. The objection that Freethinkers had nothing to put in the place of religion was absurd, for religion was not worth having. The clergy pretend to be afraid of immorality, and run fearful

risks to be conversant with the subject. Recently the Bishop of Chichester, speaking of safeguarding the interests of servant girls, said he intended to visit a picture palace. Imagine the reckless daring of a disguised Bishop planking down his sixpence to see the awful screen, and then—imagine his disappointment! Clean-living men were not always thinking of immorality.

Men cowered before witches and goblins until knowledge wiped them out of existence. We want religion out of the way and the nightmare of the gods removed, so that man can face the world with conquest in his eyes, and leave it without a lie in his mouth or a mask on his face.

A rousing reception was given to Mr. J. T. Lloyd, who was the next speaker; who spoke of the unscrupulousness of the Christian opposition to Freethought. Sometimes the Freethought movement was described as being rich, issuing many newspapers, paying large numbers of lecturers, and organising a powerful campaign throughout the country against religion. At other times, and for other purposes, the same Freethought movement was called poor, moribund, and its leaders representatives of a dead cause. At one time the Freethought speakers were characterised as clever and eloquent, and at others as obscene and blasphemous. No abuse was neglected by the defenders of universal love. We ought not to underestimate the strength of the enemy, for, although Christianity was dying, it was yet capable of inflicting terrific blows. Christian apologists propped up their position by absolute misstatements, but, fortunately, the Church was not impregnable, for critics within the Church and Freethinkers without would hasten the day when the yoke of superstition will be broken. Christian critics were helping the Freethinkers to tear the Bible to tatters, and to unsettle the faith of the people.

The veteran Mr. Arthur B. Moss wound up the evening with an eloquent appeal to Freethought tradition. He said the great work accomplished by the pioneers of Freethought had practically destroyed Christianity. Forty years of Freethought advocacy had taught him what a persecuting religion Christianity was. When he was young a Freethinker could not get employment, and Freethinkers were not invited to Christians' houses. The work done by Holyoake, Bradlaugh, and Foote, who fought with all their great powers against intolerance, had changed the position, and to-day it was the orthodox religion that was in the melting-pot; but the change was entirely due to the fighting of the Freethinkers. If we wanted to rout the enemy, the fight must go on. Lukewarm Rationalists ask, Why continue to fight? for science and ordered knowledge will achieve the object. But science and knowledge are helpless, unaided, against an organised superstition with millions of money behind it. Fighting alone trampled out the fires of hell, and will in time get rid of the fantastic heaven which a Christian dean says many Christians regard as a fairy tale. Freethinkers said the same thing long years before. Superstition and credulity never assisted mankind in the past, and men in ever-increasing numbers were turning to Secularism as a philosophy which is of vital importance. Freethinkers will not be content till they have wrested from Nature all her secrets and used them for the benefit of mankind, and made this world a nobler one than ever our fathers knew.

So ended a memorable meeting, the outstanding feature of which was the high level of oratory displayed. Organised Freethought has always had the best speakers since the days of Holyoake and Southwell, down through the stormy Bradlaugh era to the present day, and the present speakers easily maintain the proud reputation of their honored predecessors. It is one of the chief of the fighting weapons of a great party, which has done more for intellectual emancipation than any other organisation in the English-speaking world, and it is one that will ultimately lead to the emancipation of the nation from the "lie at the lips of the priest." It is a noble dream, and the National Secular Society has brought it within the grasp of the realities of the future.

C. E. S.

Gradually there came gasping towards them a pale Jew, dripping with blood, a crown of thorns on his head, bearing a great cross of wood on his shoulder, and he cast the cross on the high table of the gods, so that the golden goblets trembled and fell, and the gods grew dumb and pale, and even paler, till they melted in utter mist. Then there were dreary days, and the world became grey and gloomy. There were no more happy immortals, and Olympus became a hospital, where flayed, roasted, and spitted gods went wearily, wandering round, binding their wounds, and singing sorrowful songs. Religion no longer offered joy, but consolation; it was a woeful, bleeding religion of transgressors.—Heine, "Pictures of Travel."

Artists and Freethought.—II.

(Continued from p. 349.)

TINTORET (1518-94) is one of Ruskin's "five supreme painters." His bold realism is patent in all his works. Sacred and profane subjects were all the same to him in this respect. Hence we find the former condemned for their "coarse realism," and being "entirely opposed to the feeling and dignity of religious art." Vasari says that, notwithstanding the power displayed in his *Last Judgment*, "it had all the appearance of being painted in jest." Heaton says of the *Last Supper* that the artist "degraded" it into "a scene of a vulgar carousal."

In Paola Veronese (1528-58) we have the very opposite extreme of an artist in relation to sacred subjects. Where Tintoret brought "realism" to bear against the accepted devotional treatment of sacred art, Veronese sought the utmost "romanticism." All his Madonnas and Saints are clothed in the finest Venetian raiment. In his *Marriage at Cana* he has introduced Christ, in company with the Sultan of Turkey, "Bloody Mary" of England, the King of France, and artist friends, at a sumptuous Venetian banquet. In his *Supper at Emmaus*, in the Louvre, he brings himself and his family into the solemn episode, his two little children playing with a dog at the very feet of Christ, in innocent indifference to the presence of the Son of God. This "romanticism" seems even more irreverent than the "realism" of Tintoret, and I can quite understand one commentator saying that "there is no hint in any of his works of a belief in any higher life than that of the beautiful city in which he dwelt."

We now come to two undoubted heretics and rebels, Caravaggio and Salvador Rosa, practically the last two great names in Italian art. Caravaggio (1569-1604) was the leader of the so-called *naturalisti*. His works are marked by a very forcible "realism," and especially his religious subjects, notably the *Supper at Emmaus*, in the National Gallery, in which the meal (a fowl) seems to be the essential feature. One of his altar-pieces, the *Calling of St. Matthew*, was rejected "as too vulgar for a religious edifice."

Salvador Rosa (1615-73), the greatest painter of the Neapolitan school, was clearly a Freethinker and anti-clerical.* He not only consorted with the Freethinkers of his day, and wrote his thoughts as freely as they did, but he painted his heresy in such works as *L'Umanana Fragilita* and *La Fortuna*, and had to fly from the Inquisition in consequence. Rosa, with Falcone and other artists, joined in the Naples revolution under Masaniello. He was the first in Italy to write in the cause of Freedom. His landscapes in the National Gallery, and at Edinburgh and Glasgow, reveal his highly wrought spirit.

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) was nominally a Roman Catholic; but how much of his mind, if any, the Church owned is doubtful. We know that the artist was in full sympathy with the Protestant Reformation, and Kugler claims his *Four Apostles* as "the first complete work of art produced by Protestantism." But, as Heaton points out, "it is not Protestantism or Catholicism that they express, but the artist's own individual thought on the subject, unbound by any creed, and free from the dogmas of any Church." This remark may fittingly cover the whole art work of Dürer; for, indeed, those weird fantasies, *The Apocalypse*, *The Knight*, *Death and the Devil*, and *Melancholia*, seem altogether incompatible with orthodoxy. At any rate, I fail to see much "faith" in any man who could depict the Blessed Virgin sitting very unbecomingly on the floor, whilst Joseph, dead drunk, is seated at the table with the guilty tankard as a support.

With Rubens (1577-1640) came to Flemish art the light of the renaissance. The religious spirit which had dominated the national art fell with Rubens to

* In an article in the *Freethinker*, September 21, 1913, I have dealt at length with Rosa's art and religion.

rise no more. Rubens' art is thoroughly pagan, and the works we have in England, such as the *Judgment of Paris*, at the National Gallery, and *Nature Adorned by the Graces*, at Glasgow, certainly reveal how "gloriously pagan" (as Wedmore puts it) it really is. In dealing with religious subjects, as Coleridge has pointed out, there is nothing of the "spiritual" in Rubens. His mind, says Heaton, "was never troubled by the mystery of life," and "he had no sympathy with the spiritual aspirations of humanity." Ruskin, too, found Rubens "a healthy animal, without any dearly perceptible traces of a soul." Let anyone look at the *Descent from the Cross* and the *Crucifixion* and this is immediately evident. These works simply depict the execution of a malefactor—no more and no less. There was no room for "spirituality" in such a realist as Rubens.

Teniers the Younger (1610-90), unlike his predecessors, was much affected by genre subjects. The merry-makings of the people—at the tavern, the fair, or the market were his special delight. His "religious" pictures, which gave great offence to the pious folk, are conceived in his ordinary genre style. *Christ Buffeted* and *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, have been described as "vulgar and almost repulsive scenes of low life," the artist being "totally wanting in that elevation of feeling that marks all the great Italian masters." We know little of the private life of Teniers, but it certainly seems that he had no "elevation of feeling" for sacred themes. His best known work, the *Temptation of St. Anthony*, leads us to this view. This subject, which had always been treated with the utmost propriety, if not reverence, by earlier masters, is to Teniers a huge joke. The original is in the Louvre, but there are several good copies, one being at Glasgow.

Jan Steen (1626-79) has been called "the one original Dutch genre painter." He, like Teniers, introduced the fun and frolic of the people into his art. Busken Huet considered him an anti-clerical, and he certainly has every reason for it in regard to his art, for as Heine says, after you have seen his pictures you "know the whole life of the man." His *Marriage at Cana* shows Christ blessing a Dutch wedding party. But he is a "nobody" in the scene. The essential features are in the foreground—a fiddler and a boy being handed drink, and an apparently tipsy woman. Again, in the *Disciples at Emmaus*, Christ is not the personality. As a matter of fact, he is right at the back. His disciples and a maid are in the front, and they are gazing very disconsolately at the repast; for although the table is broad, there is a solitary lemon upon it. The *Expelling of Hagar* gives the merry Jan a chance for fun despite the "Blessed Book." Sarah is seen sitting "examining" little Isaac's head. There are a couple of spaniels in the picture, and seemingly are taking a tip from their mistress, since they also are engaged in what Mark Twain calls a "hunting expedition."

Hogarth (1697-1764), the founder of English painting, was most certainly a Freethinker, for no Christian could have handled brush and graver for such blasphemies as his. The parsons were a fund of amusement to him in their absurdities, and in their follies he caught them in biting satire. Sala calls Hogarth "a decorous man in theology." Fancy a "decorous man" treating the Bible (whose cover is used to sole boots) as he does in the first scene of the *Rake's Progress*. The *Sleeping Congregation* is scarcely a "decorous" work, and neither is the marriage scene in the *Rake's Progress*. But for downright blasphemy that powerful print, entitled *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism*, stands an "easy first." Churchmen pretend that the satire was directed against Wesley and Whitefield, the revivalists, but it is clear that Hogarth was dispensing it against the entire superstition of Christianity.*

Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), a painter little heard of nowadays, was, despite all adverse criticism, an artist of genius. It was no ordinary man that undertook

such a theme as the *Bridging of Chaos* from Milton. His *Titania and Bottom*, in the National Gallery, and *Edipus and His Daughters*, at Liverpool, ought to be a sufficient answer to the host of his detractors. Fuseli mixed with all the prominent Freethinkers and political rebels of his day, and appears to have been at one with them in their opinions.

One of the closest of Fuseli's artistic *confrères* was William Blake (1757-1827). He, too, consorted with rebels, and was hailed before the "authorities" for treason! Blake was certainly much in sympathy with the French Revolution, and both his art and poetry reveal its influence. None but the closest students of his life and work can arrive at a clear grasp of the psychology of Blake. Swinburne calls him a "heretic and mystic." He had a most wonderful sense of phantasy and symbolism, and this, under the promptings of a deep spiritual nature, led him to the creation of those remarkable religious visions in his art. He ought, perhaps, to be classed as a Pantheist; yet, withal, he was an enemy of religion, the Church, and the priests—a Freethinker to the core.

J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851) was one of the greatest of English landscapists. "None before Turner," wrote Ruskin, "had lifted the veil from the face of Nature." Never before, indeed, had Nature been clothed in such glorious harmonies. His tones of coloring strike the senses like beautiful chords. The *Fighting Temeraire*, *Dido Building Carthage*, the *Bridge of Sighs*, etc., are among our great national treasures. Ruskin sought to associate Turner's art with a certain ethical and religious feeling, a thing from which (as Benn points out in his *Modern England*) Turner stood aloof. As a matter of fact, Turner was, according to Hamerton, the art critic, a complete sceptic in religion.

H. GEORGE FARMER.

(To be concluded.)

The Ramsey Testimonial.

Subscriptions acknowledged to May 26 by Mr. B. T. Hall (General Treasurer), Club Union Buildings, Clerkenwell-road, London, E.C.:—Victor Jackson, 10s. 6d.; C. Smallman, 5s.; E. Garrity, £1 1s.; B. T. Hall, £1 1s.; J. J. Dent, £1; H. Burrows, £1; J. Sumner, 10s. 6d.; C. Banks, 2s. 6d.; I. Jackson, £1; Dr. Nichols, 10s.; J. Barry, 10s.; F. Wood, 5s.; H. Reeve, £1; R. Jacobs, 10s. 6d.; Kingsland Branch Members N. S. S. (per W. Davey), £2; W. Allen (or Adams), 2s.; J. Ansell, 5s.; M. B. Sax, 2s.; W. H. Hicks, £1 1s.; H. L. Breaksat, 10s.; J. G. Dunville, 2s. 6d.; J. Clifford, 1s.; V. H. Abbott, 1s.; J. Sumner, £1 1s.; J. Argyle, £1; W. G. Stroud, 10s. 6d.; M. Weatherburn, 2s. 6d.; N. Camberwell Radical Club, £2 2s.; G. W. Foote, £1 11s. 6d.

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Obituary.

At Paisley, in the Royal Alexandria Infirmary, on May 24, Andrew Drummond, aged 35 years. Mr. Drummond was well known in Paisley and Renfrew as a militant Freethought propagandist. His was the moving spirit which brought into being the Renfrew Secular Society. He had not the natural equipment of a public speaker; still, his wide reading and his zeal for the cause made him a ready and trenchant penman. When he realised the serious nature of his illness, he expressed the wish to be buried without religious ceremony. His Christian relations respected that wish, and Mr. Robertson, of the Renfrew Secular Society, made arrangements for a Secular funeral, which took place on May 27 at Hawkhead Cemetery.—H. THOMSON.

* In the *Freethinker*, June 11, 1911, I have dealt fully with Hogarth's heresy.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

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