

The FREETHINKER

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Of religion I know nothing, at least in its favour. We have fools in all sects, and impostors in most; why should I believe mysteries no one understands, because written by men who chose to mistake madness for inspiration, and style themselves evangelicals?

LORD BYRON
(Letter to Ensign Long, April 16, 1807).

Views and Opinions.

Sociology and Atheism.

In another part of this paper there appears a letter from a correspondent which raises anew a very old issue. That issue is the relation borne by Atheism or Secularism to definite social theories. The question is often argued, although mostly in terms of personal temperamental inclination. Some persons seem as convinced that Atheism should lead direct to advocacy of a socialistic system, as others are that it can only logically encourage an undiluted individualism. Such conclusions are, of course, valueless, since so far as they indicate purely personal feelings. There are others who occupy what is at least a superficially stronger position, and who urge that a Freethought movement should take up a definite and declared attitude towards social questions. This, I think, really lies at the root of all the conclusions reached. Having shaken off theological beliefs, and developed definite opinions as a consequence of this, some persons cannot see why others should not arrive at the same conclusions. The conclusion is natural, but a little faulty.

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What is Atheism?

Let us begin at the beginning. What is Atheism? Our correspondent says that "All Atheists *per se* confine their teachings to pure speculations." I do not quite follow this. Atheism, *per se*, is really a protest against certain speculative teachings on the specific ground that they are unprovable and unreasonable. Its teachings are not confined to pure speculations, although it may be said that Atheism is concerned with a pure speculation—*i.e.*, the belief in God. The Atheist is simply one who is without belief in a deity, and putting on one side that very infantile stage of mind—racial and individual—in which the idea of God has not yet developed, we may say that Atheism consists in a reasoned rejection of the belief in deity. I say "reasoned rejection" in order that it may be seen to what extent Atheism is concerned with pure speculations. And the practical issue arising from this is the attitude involved, or implied, towards life as a whole.

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Rival Points of View.

Now it is quite evident that in a community such as ours, the acceptance or rejection of the belief in God must exert a profound influence on the view of life taken by all earnest thinking men and women. I have in view

only those with whom the belief in God is real and operative; those with whom it is a mere formula may be set on one side. Where the ultimate test of conduct is earthly welfare, and rules of conduct are admittedly derived from human experience, the angle of vision must be somewhat different from those cases where the assumed commands of Deity, or the effect of conduct on an after existence are the governing considerations. The end of action is so far concrete and definable in the case of the Atheist; it is indefinable and abstract on the part of the Theist. In the one case one's energies may be entirely absorbed by religious considerations, as in the case of the ascetics of the early Church, or the quietists of more modern times; in the other case, the limitation of one's view of life this side of the grave of necessity circumscribes the area of one's thoughts.

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The Purpose of Atheism.

So far, I quite agree that merely "to be saved from religious superstition is not the final virtue of Atheism." Militant Atheism would have little justification for its activities, and it would certainly not attract many if that were its final virtue. The ultimate justification for a propaganda such as is represented by this journal, is that if successful, and so far as it is successful, it represents the liberation of an enormous mass of energy, at present squandered on religion, but which may be, and which ought to be, spent on purely social concerns. In other words, we attack religion because religion blocks the way to a better social life, to a saner social synthesis. Whichever way we turn we see examples of the extent to which religious belief leads to social injustice, and prevents many needed reforms. Men and institutions are outlawed, equal rights of citizenship are refused, education is hampered, evil passions excited, privileges safeguarded, millions of money wasted, and oceans of energy dissipated in the name of religion. And the final virtue of Atheism is that in cleansing the mind of superstition it leaves the way open to a more profitable expenditure of human energy, and a more rational ordering of life. The Atheism that does not emerge in this is indeed sterile. It has failed to achieve social justification.

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Has Atheism Failed?

But I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that, tried by this test, Atheism receives the fullest justification. It is admitted on all sides that the past century has witnessed an enormous development of interest in social problems. This interest has grown rapidly and consciously. Quite deliberately, a growing number of people have proclaimed "social salvation" as the primary purpose of human endeavour. The growth in this direction has been so great, its influence so powerful, that even the Churches have given way. What has been called "social Christianity" is a quite peculiar feature of modern times, while many preachers of eminence have declared the social gospel of Christianity to be its essential feature. Freethinkers are, of course, not misled by this. They know that it is in no sense

due to a truer understanding of Christianity, but only to the desire of wide-awake persons to meet and control a growing tendency. The significant thing is, that this development of interest in social affairs has been coincident with a marked decline of belief in religious teachings. The one is the counterpart of the other. The social consequence of critical unbelief has been to create a deeper and healthier interest in questions of social growth and betterment.

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From Theism to Humanism.

If any one doubts this, let him think over the names of the master-minds in social reform, from Robert Owen, who declared that "all the religions of the world were so many forms of geographical insanity," onward. In the main, this has been a movement of heresy; while the activities of Christians have been expended in the direction of a palliative, but radically ineffective, philanthropy. And as with the leaders, so with the rank of the file. Take away from the movements for social reform all those who have alienated themselves from religion, and they become emasculated and powerless. I have no hesitation in saying that these movements have owed their virility to the Freethinkers in them. And these became social reformers because they had emancipated their minds from the narcotizing influences of theology. I quite agree, therefore, that emancipation from religion should lead to the work of salvation from the wrongs of secular life. And I say, moreover, that in the main this has been the case. The many thousands who have become earnest workers in social reform after being "saved" from theology are proofs of this. That they have not worked as avowed Atheists, and have even remained silent concerning their unbelief, is no disproof of this. This is a simple consequence of their having to work in a community in which the majority are still religious, and in which bigotry and intolerance still exert so great an influence.

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The Great Liberator.

But I fancy—although in this I may be mistaken—that what the writer of the letter, which formed my text, had in mind, was the notion that a militant Freethought party ought to proclaim some definite policy on social questions. And with that I do not agree. To be effective as an organization, our platform must be wide, and in the social arena there is abundant room for differences of opinion on both principles and methods. The task before us is not to harmonize these differences. That will be done by other agencies—and there is no lack of them in the field. Our work is of a different kind. Our task is to capture those whose minds are in thrall to superstitions, liberate them, and thus set them free to expend their efforts in social channels. Every man we take from the Churches thus becomes—potentially, at least—an instrument of genuine social betterment. We do not, or should not, aim at establishing a new Church, differing only from other Churches in the absence of a God. I know that has been the aim of some Freethinkers. It has never been mine. To me, Freethought is before all, and above all, a great liberative force. Our best work is seen neither in the number of buildings we own, nor the strength of our organizations. It is seen in our influence on life, in the gradual weakening of theology before our repeated assaults, in the modification of Christian doctrines, in the growing insistence that "the supreme test of conduct and of teaching is their influence on human life here." Freethought is the great liberator. And to the emancipated intelligence all things are possible.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Immorality of the Cross.

THE apostle Paul frankly admitted that the Christian Gospel was indeed mere folly to unbelievers everywhere, and that the Greeks in particular, lovers of wisdom though they were, looked down upon it with withering contempt. He went so far as to declare that God himself could only make it acceptable by destroying human wisdom and rejecting human prudence. "The foolishness of God," he said, "is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." The idea that a whole world of lost men could be saved by the sacrifice of a Divine Being was so irrational that the descendants of Aristotle could not tolerate it for a moment. Consequently, the great Apostle continued, "not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise, and God chose what the world counts weak to put its strong things to shame, and God chose what the world counts poor and insignificant—things that to it are unreal—to bring its realities to nothing, so that in his presence no human being should boast" (1 Cor. i. 26-29). It is perfectly true that the overwhelming majority of the early Christians were poor, ignorant, and insignificant people, whom both Greeks and Romans heartily despised; but to imagine that God chose them in order to put the strong and wise to shame was indeed the very height of human folly. As a matter of fact, Paul was right when he spoke of the Gospel as unacceptable to the thinking classes, both among the Jews and the Gentiles. The world, through its wisdom, knew neither God nor his Christ, because both are objects of faith only, and not at all of knowledge. That Paul understood this is evident from the fact that the chief emphasis of all his epistles is upon the duty of believing the Gospel, salvation being possible only through faith. What is the Gospel? A way of escape from the wrath of God, which, by nature, abides upon the whole human race. Christ came into the world and died to propitiate and placate this angry Deity, who accepted his atoning death as a substitute for the eternal punishment of fallen mankind; but, strangely enough, this way of escape becomes effectual only for those who pin their faith in it. In spite of the statement that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, God's wrath still abides upon all unbelievers (John iii. 36), and is destined to abide upon them for ever.

Now, what we contend is that the New Testament Gospel is utterly false, and that the Greek attitude to it was entirely justifiable. Humanity does not lie under the wrath of an angry God, and no loving Son of God ever came down from heaven to make deliverance from that wrath possible by dying. And yet such an irrational and immoral Gospel is being assiduously preached and devoutly believed in even to-day. The leading article in the *British Weekly* for March 30 is a fervent proclamation of it in all its pristine preposterousness. According to Sir William Robertson Nicoll, for the article is presumably from his pen, "the sacrifice of Jesus no doubt annuls much for the believer; there is no condemnation to them that are in him." It is true that the article does not dwell at any length on this aspect of the atonement, but this is what underlies it from beginning to end. In the death of Christ there was present "the power that should reconcile the world to God." St. Peter says, "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God"; while St. Paul uses a stronger expression still, declaring not only that he suffered for sin, but that he who knew no sin was made to be

sin on our behalf. This is how Sir William states the doctrine:—

The apostles did not imagine the atoning power of the death of Jesus, it is too great for imagination. They did not invent it to cloak the offence of the Cross, it is too great to be a theological contrivance. No; but a new truth rose on their horizon as they looked on the perfect sacrifice of Jesus—the truth of truths, beyond all hope of telling, wonderful—that sin-bearing love is the supreme and final reality in the universe, and that here it is incarnate once for all. From Christ on his Cross a goodness put forth its hand and touched them, which outweighed all the sin of the world and made it impotent.

We maintain, on the contrary, that the apostles *did* imagine the atoning power of the death of Jesus, or that the doctrine of the Cross is merely a theological contrivance, and a fundamentally immoral contrivance at that. The Gospel Jesus did not seem to think that his death was to be an atonement. He never said that there was to be any connection between his crucifixion and the sweeping aside of the wrath of God. He died when and as he did simply because his fellow-countrymen wanted to get rid of him, and he shrank from the very thought of being put to death. He even offered up “prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death”; and while hanging on the Cross he “cried with a loud voice, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” He never said a word about dying to restore sinful humanity to God’s favour, or to save the elect from the wrath to come. All theological references to his death contained in the Gospels were never made by him, but rather by the writers who were under the influence of the men who were creating Christ and Christianity. The Fourth Gospel is more of a theological treatise than a biography. But it is not until we come to the Pauline epistles that we find the complete doctrine of the atonement. It is essentially a Pauline invention, undreamed of by the Gospel Jesus. There is no trace of it in the Epistle of James.

The editor of the *British Weekly* declares that it is too great a doctrine for imagination, or to be a theological contrivance; but wherein does its greatness consist? God is supposed to have so loved the world that he killed his only begotten Son to show how deep and strong his love was; yet while he so loved it, the world was lying under his wrath, doomed to perish everlastingly, if it did not believe and put its trust in that awful sacrifice. Yes; this Gospel depicts our loving Heavenly Father as the most cruel and immoral being ever heard of, and brought into existence the most cruel and immoral institution the world has ever seen, with the result that Christendom has been through all the ages, and still is, the bloodiest and most savage battlefield on earth. But the Gospel is false as well as immoral. It is a lying Gospel, and it is its lying character that accounts for its dismal failure. As a purely human organization the Church was for centuries a tremendous success, dominating practically all departments of life; but as a society Divinely instituted for the redemption of the world, it has been the most gigantic fiasco in all history. The world has not been redeemed, or made one whit better by the Church or its false Gospel.

Sir William admits that even the Church has drifted away from the Biblical doctrine of the Cross, but is of opinion that “there is reason to hope that the War will bring us back” to it. Then he says:—

For the one great lesson of the War is the reality and the worth of sacrifice. Men are dying daily, and dying for us. We live because they die; we are redeemed by their precious blood. That is how the Bible speaks of Christ.

But that is not true. We do not live because our soldiers

die, nor do they die for us. They die in the attempt to prevent our beloved country from becoming a German possession and ourselves German subjects. They die for the preservation of the British Empire; and, as Sir William tells us, people are asking whether the British Empire is worth the sacrifice. In any case, the sacrifice of life on the battlefield is not in the same category as the sacrifice which the theologians aver Christ became on the Cross. He died to soften God’s heart and to open heaven’s door beyond the tomb. Paul informs us that he is our peace, that he shed his blood in order “to reconcile us unto God through the Cross, having slain the enmity thereby.” There was enmity between the Creator and his human creature, and Christ died to destroy it. But reconciliation has never been effected. Humanity has not been brought to God through the Cross. It is quite true that of late the Church has greatly lost its hold of the nation, but not because it has failed too much to illustrate the demands of the Cross, but because the people are beginning to realize that both the Church and its Gospel are equally lying; or, in other words, because they are learning to walk by knowledge rather than by faith.

J. T. LLOYD.

Dante the Dreamer.

King who hast reigned six hundred years.—*Tennyson.*

Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea.

—*Wordsworth.*

By the general suffrage of the literary world Dante’s place has been assigned among the three greatest masters of his art. Yet comparatively few people know intimately the writings of the greatest Italian poet. Over seven thousand books on Dante and *The Divine Comedy* have increased to such a point the difficulty of studying his works that, to the bewildered reader, tossed on the perilous waters of contradictory commentary and subjective criticism, nothing is left but to take shelter in the safe haven of conventional admiration.

What wonderful changes have taken place in Europe since Dante’s time. Poets have rushed, comet-like, across the literary horizon, illumined the darkness for a moment, then as rapidly departed. We have forgotten their songs, their message, even their names. Dramatists have provided fun for the crowds, and tragedy for those rarer folk to whom poetry is the elixir of life. Most of their names are lost to memory, and even their plays have ceased to attract. Time is merciless, and strews the poppy of oblivion over all but the worthiest. But Dante has had but one superior during the centuries since his death, and that is William Shakespeare, the greatest name in all literature.

Of Dante’s life but little is known. Even before his death he had come to be the subject of many flourishing legends. It is well nigh impossible to make out exactly what he did. So deep in this obscurity, that his stature gains from the uncertainty a fabulous proportion, like a giant’s in the mist. Dante Alighieri, “the voice of ten silent centuries,” was born in Florence in the thirteenth century. He was of noble birth, and had a passion for learning. He learned all that the schools and universities of his time could teach him “better than most,” fought as a soldier, did service as a citizen, and became chief magistrate at Florence.

While but a boy he met Beatrice Portinari. She made a great figure in his life, and a greater in his immortal poem. He married another, “not happily.” In some Guelph-Ghibelline strife he was expelled the city, and had to eat the bitter bread of banishment.

Without a home, he turned to the world of imagination, and wrote *The Divine Comedy*, one of the most remarkable of all books, and died, not old, at the age of fifty-six.

Dante's masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*, consisting of the three parts—"Hell," "Purgatory," and "Paradise," forms an epitome of the Christianity of the Middle Ages. It was written in an age of Faith, and Dante was a firm believer. His uncompromising realism brings vividly before us the full extent of the credulity of those far-off days in which Paganism still mingled with Christianity. However strange, however grotesque, may be the appearance which Dante undertakes to describe, he never shrinks from describing it. His similes appear the illustrations of a traveller. Dante even introduces the illustrious Virgil as his guide to the infernal regions. He compares the precipice which led from the sixth to the seventh circle of Hell to the rock which fell into the Adige on the south of Trent. The place where the heretics were confined in burning tombs resembled the cemetery of Arles. He puts Francesca of Rimini, whom he had nursed on his knee as a child, among the damned, "imprisoned in the viewless winds, and blown about the pendant world." Count Ugolini is introduced among other sinners. His own loved Beatrice, the star of his shadowed life, continuously appears and reappears throughout the poem. Dante was all imagination; but unlike modern theologians he wrote like Euclid. The power of Dante's genius carries everything before it. Such transcendent originality of conception is alone paralleled by old Homer and divine Shakespeare. For his having adopted the popular superstition in all its extravagances we have no more right to blame Dante than we have to criticize Homer because he uses the Pagan gods and goddesses; but *The Divine Comedy* is none the less a reliable mirror in which we may view mediæval Christianity. There is an air of infinite grief and the sound of lamentation all over this lurid conception of life. A veritable devil sits in the seat of deity and rules a terror-stricken world. Dante shows us hell after hell, each more abominable than the last, round every species of petty offenders. He pictures in unforgettable language the torments of the lascivious, the unbaptized, the gluttons, the avaricious. Some are tossed about in furious winds, some are lying in filth under a continuous hailstorm, others are punished in burning tombs, whilst numbers are tormented in a river of blood. Except in the writings of the Fathers of the Church and Christian theologians, nobody had such ideas of filth and corruption. The human emotions of the man are strangled by this hideous theology. The gloom of the Infernal Regions tinges even the flowers of Paradise and the glories of Heaven.

The Christian superstition, of which Dante sings with such power, is now in the melting-pot; but it matters little to *The Divine Comedy*. The daring imagination, the delicacy of verbal vesture of the great genius of Italian literature can never stale, for there are few lines of the great poem without those superb felicities of utterance which seem to tingle the very blood.

The essence of Dante's greatness lies as much in the splendour of his language as in the grandeur of his imagination, and intellectual greatness is the highest and the most lasting. Empires, kingdoms, and commonwealths pass. Nations degenerate, cities become desolate. Great soldiers and statesmen become mere names, but the supreme beauty of a great intellect survives the centuries, and clothes an illustrious name with immortal glory, which grows in lustre with the overlapping ages. Transcendent genius has rendered the name of Dante ever illustrious, and his greatness is secured for all time.

MIMNERMUS.

The Soul of a Soldier.

A FEW weeks ago the Rev. Father Vaughan wrote an article for *Reynolds*, in which he narrated how a young soldier had written to ask him to write to his mother to say that he was quite prepared to die for his country now that he had found Christ. Father Vaughan and the Rev. R. J. Campbell, I find, are quite in agreement that, however much the body might be shattered in warfare, no shot or shell can harm the soul; and that the souls of the hundreds of thousands of brave men who have been killed in this terrible War, come out of the bodies scathless and exist somewhere in the infinite universe, throughout eternity, in everlasting happiness or misery. When theologians talk of the soul in this loose and careless fashion it is necessary to ask, What is meant by the term? Personally, I have never been able to find any theologian who could give an intelligent or satisfactory definition of the word. Not only are theologians unable to tell us what the soul is, but they are equally doubtful as to where it is located. At one time most Christians believed that the soul was the "breath of life," at another, that it was a kind of entity that could exist apart from the body.

Some years ago, when I was quite a young man, I remember reading about two men who met at a public-house in the little parish of Horselydown, only a few hundred yards from London Bridge. They talked pleasantly on a variety of subjects, and at length the problem of the existence of an immortal essence in man was brought on the *tapis*. One of them declared his belief that the soul of man was to be found in his head—in fact, he was not quite sure that the intelligence of man was not, in reality, his soul. The other said he was convinced that the soul was located somewhere in the stomach; and so the discussion proceeded. But it had not gone far when one of the disputants, who had warmed himself to the subject by a plentiful dose of alcoholic drink, took up the pewter pot out of which he had been drinking and struck his antagonist a heavy blow on the head with it, felling him to the ground. It was a terrible blow, splitting the poor fellow's head in two; the blood flowed freely, and in a few moments the man was dead. But the questions as to what the soul is? and where is it located? I need scarcely say, were not finally settled by this brutal experiment.

And so it is necessary for us to inquire once again, What is the Soul? Is it a spirit? If so, what is that? With sublime ingenuousness, a theologian answered, some time ago, that spirit is an "*unknown substance*." But if it is an "*unknown substance*," how are we to know that it is a substance at all? And if spirit is a substance, whether known or unknown, is it in the possession of every child born into the world at the time of birth, or at what period of the development in the fœtus does it make its first appearance? Or are there innumerable souls in the universe waiting to enter the body of each child born into the world? These are questions which theologians never attempt to answer. To-day, however, most Christians are of opinion that the soul is in some way connected with the brain. That the brain is the organ of thought no one would be prepared to dispute at this time of day, in point of fact, the word *mind* is but a term by which we express the totality of mental phenomena. Without brain there can be no thought, no intelligence, no mind.

If the characteristics of the brain, taken collectively, are the soul, the question naturally arises, Have idiots souls? And, if they have, will they live again? And if they live again, will they be the same persons as they were in this world? If so, they will be idiots; and if

they are not idiots, they will not be the same persons; and if they are not the same persons, it will not be they who are living again, but somebody else; and they might just as well not live again.

But it may be said a soldier does not lose his identity when he loses a leg or an arm, or even if he loses both legs and both arms; but suppose he loses his head, literally, surely he has lost his identity then? And I should be prepared to maintain that he has lost part of his identity when he has lost an arm or a leg, or any other portion of his anatomy. Assuming that the mind of man is the soul, there is absolutely no evidence whatever to lead us to the opinion that it is immortal, except in the sense that, as matter and force are alike imperishable, the elements of which the brain is composed exist through all eternity, in some form or other, in the universe.

Taking the facts as they stand, we find that the brain of a child is altogether inferior in vigour to that of the man, and that with the growth of the body we have a corresponding growth of the brain. Not only so, but it is also true that in the brain substance of a child there is more water and less cerebral fat than in that of the adult. It follows, therefore, that if the soul be identified with the phenomena of mind, it is subject to change; that it grows with the growth of the material organization; that it becomes strong and active as the individual advances towards maturity, and suffers a gradual diminution of power in old age. Between the ages of twenty-five and fifty, the brain reaches its maximum weight and power, afterwards slowly diminishing, until we find the individual has lapsed into a second childhood, "sans eyes, sans teeth, sans everything," as the melancholy Jacques says in *As You Like It*.

But these are considerations that never disturb the minds of priests and parsons like Father Vaughan or the Rev. R. J. Campbell. It is enough for them that the young soldier believes that he has found Christ, and that he has obtained salvation for his precious soul by his belief in the Christian faith. Many Christians seem to think that because they crave for personal immortality, therefore they will get it; but this is only what James Thomson (B.V.), the Freethought poet, called:—

The childish lollipop attraction of religion, so absurd as to be really beneath the contempt of full-grown men and women. Just as young ones look forward to having the free range as long as they liked of shops full of sweeties, so those big babies, our dear, simple, Christian brethren, look forward to their lubberland of eternal bliss, in singing Glory! Glory! Glory! Their claim to it is purely the infant's—because they would like it. "Oh, we shall be so ap-ap-appy! Canaan is a happy place; we'll go to the land of Canaan."

It always reminds me of dear old Dr. Pangloss, LL.D. A.S.S., he was always exclaiming:—

I often wish that I had clear,
For life, six hundred pounds a year.

But he never got it. And I am very much afraid that, after death, Christian desires will meet a similar fate.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Talks With Young Listeners.

VI.—The Father of the Hebrews.

GOATS and sheep, asses, cattle and camels were many in the pastures of the valley, and goat's-hair tents sheltered masters and slaves, women and children from the sun; and grey stony hills rose on all sides. Two chiefs, clad in white cloaks with hoods over heads, stood on a high rock, whence they could see the River Jordan winding

over a green plain. The place was Bethel, in the land of Canaan.

Canaan was a strip of hilly country, about as large as our Wales, washed by the blue sea on the west, and lying on the road between the land of the Nile and the Pyramids (Egypt) and the Empire of the Hittites—the people who wore pointed hats, and hunted lions, and bore warlike rule over the region of Asia Minor.

The elder of the two chiefs was Abraham, a pilgrim from some wilderness of the east or south.¹ Many were his flocks and slaves, but he had no child; and yet the voice of Yahweh had said to him, "Your children will be a great nation, and to this Chosen People will I give the land of Canaan."

The cattle, asses, goats, and the rest, were too numerous for the valleys of Bethel, and Abraham advised his nephew, Lot, to choose a better pasture. That is why they had climbed the peak, and were scanning the landscape.

Lot raised his hand towards the plain, where the white houses of Sodom and Gomorrha shone in the sun.

"That is my choice," he said.

Loud was the clatter of tent-packing, and collecting the flocks, and the bidding of farewells, and then Lot's caravan passed eastwards out of sight. At night, Abraham looked up at the lustrous stars, and Yahweh said to him:—

"As the stars, so shall be the host of your children."

One day, as he reclined under a shady tree near his camp, he saw three travellers approach on foot. Good sheikh, or campmaster that he was, Abraham courteously bade them sit in the cool, while he laid before them a meal of hot bread and minced veal, and he stood waiting on his guests.

His guests were three angels; and one, indeed, was Yahweh himself, the same Yahweh who had planted trees in Eden, opened the sky windows at the Flood, and stopped the building of Babel. He had two strange pieces of news for the sheikh.

One was: "You shall have a son." And at this word, Abraham's wife, Sarah, listening behind the tent-door, laughed. Hence, when the boy was born, he was named Laughter, or Isaac.

The other was that Sodom, where Lot dwelt, should be set afire by fire from heaven, because the folk of the city and the plain were vile. In vain did Abraham nobly cry for mercy on the wretched sinners. In vain did he plead that the place should be spared if fifty good people could be found in it. Not fifty, not even ten were good, said the stern Yahweh; and the three angels walked eastwards in the twilight towards the doomed city. Abraham got up early the next morning, and beheld vast columns of black smoke rising from the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrha, and the plain that once was green. Flocks and herds and goods all lost, Lot escaped with his two daughters; and his wife who looked back, though forbidden by Yahweh to do so, at the blazing towns and villages, was changed into a pillar of salt. The plain also was changed, and where once the pasture was green, a sullen grey lake rippled gloomily under the smoky sky, and men named it the Dead Sea. In years to come, the story would be told that beautiful looking apples grew on trees on the shore of this ghostly lake, and whoever bit the fruit found it turned to ashes.

Abraham had a slave-wife named Hagar, and her son Ishmael, a brawny, tan-coloured lad, mocked at the little Laughter boy. His mother had herself suffered

¹ The late Prof. T. K. Cheyne, in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, traces the Hebrew origins mainly to Negeb, or South Land, round about Kadesh; and he also regards the journey of Israelites from Egypt as mythical.

trouble through scorning Sarah years before; and Sarah, flushed and enraged, so worried and tormented Hagar that the unhappy slave-wife fled from the camp, and ran and ran till she fell swooning by a lonely spring in the wilderness. There Yahweh's angel found her, and telling her she should be the mother of a valiant son of the desert and of war, he bade her return. And now again she must go, for Sarah's wrath overflowed. One sorrowful dawn, she and Ishmael stole from the camp, carrying a goatskin of water and a loaf which Abraham had given them, and so they fared forth for days into a wild place of bare rocks, and sand, where no man dwelt, and where no water was. Again Yahweh came to the rescue by showing Hagar a fountain of sweet water, and Ishmael, who was faint and near death, drank and got strong. He was an archer and hunter, married an Egyptian girl, and was father of a tribe of swarthy warriors, manly but fierce, and dreaded by all who passed near their Arabian haunts. Where the sandy storm of the simoom blew, and where the black tents were pegged beneath the palms, there were the Ishmaelites and their spears.

As Yahweh chose Abraham, and gave him much favour, so, in turn, Abraham was like a slave to God. Right loyally he showed his obedience when Yahweh said to him:—

“Take now your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and get you into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burned offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you of.”

He did as he was bid. He was ready to devote his dearest and his best to the service of Yahweh. A party of four set out for Moriah—Abraham, Isaac, and two slaves. Leaving the two slaves at the bottom of a hill, the old man climbed the slope with his son, and they two built an altar, and the father tied the youth upon the pile of wood laid and prepared for the fire, and he held up the knife to slay his son; and then Yahweh's voice was heard crying:—

“Abraham! slay not your son, for well I know you fear me and obey.”

A wild ram was caught in a thicket by his horns, and Abraham disentangled the creature from the bushes, and slew it instead of the human sacrifice. In a rocky glen, where olive trees grew, was the village of Hebron, and a hole in the ground led by a passage to the cave of Machpelah. This cave Abraham bought from some Hittite folk, weighing out four hundred shekels of silver as purchase money; and in this cave he buried his aged wife Sarah; and here, when years had passed, he was himself laid to rest by his sons, Isaac the herdsman, and Ishmael, the dark-skinned spearman of the desert; for, at the father's burial, the brothers came together in peace and in sorrow.

Isaac's son was Jacob, or Israel, and Jacob was the father of twelve sons, who were fathers of the twelve tribes of the Jews. A wonderful race were the Israelites, and to-day, some twelve millions of the sons and daughters of Abraham are to be found scattered over the Five Continents.

* * * *

Well, the Jews are real enough; but whether such a man as Abraham really lived is in doubt; just as we may doubt if Romulus, the supposed founder of the city of Rome, ever really lived. And this is what learned men mean when they say that the beginnings of the history of a nation are often shrouded in myth, or legend. But it is likely enough that the early Hebrews were herdsmen and tent-dwellers, and buried their dead in caves, and weighed silver for money, and killed children as gifts to the God Yahweh. In course of time, softer feelings stirred their hearts, and they offered rams and

goats in place of human flesh and blood.

So also in other nations. The Druids of Britain burned prisoners of war in wicker cages as offerings to the gods. In Ancient Mexico thousands of human beings were slain every year in order to please the God of War. When, at Midsummer, peasants in the North of Europe jump over bonfires, they remind us of an old-time custom when men were actually burned in the fire itself in homage to the gods. Indeed, one might fill many a sad page with such accounts from various quarters of the world.

The Greeks related that when the fleet of war-vessels was about to sail from Greece to the siege of Troy City, the captain of the host killed a stag which was sacred to the Goddess Artemis. The goddess caused the wind to cease, and no sailing-ship could move, and the fleet was helpless. Nothing would appease the anger of Artemis but a human sacrifice, and the captain's daughter, Iphigenia (pronounced *Iphi-ge-ny-a*), must be the victim. The girl was bound upon an altar, and a priest lifted a knife to slay her, when suddenly the girl was snatched away in a cloud, and a deer was seen on the altar; and this animal being killed, all was well; the wind blew and the fleet sailed. Iphigenia was afterwards found living in the temple of Artemis as a priestess in the service of the Goddess. This legend also points to the change from human sacrifice to animal sacrifice. Thus mankind progresses from the worse to the better.

“And yet it moves!”

F. J. GOULD.

March, 1916.

Of these am I, Coila my name.—Burns, “*The Vision.*”

LET us take another step, those of us who still keep pace with Time, the great surviving shattered remnant of humanity, remembering as we pass the innumerable dead, especially those recently and untimely fallen on the fatal plain, swallowed on the senseless seas; surviving; shouldering our loads, grown heavy almost beyond endurance; the sane man's burden! How soundly the dead sleep—we had almost said how snugly and comfortably—beneath the quiet soil, under the sobbing seas, while the living wait and wonder, hope and fear! January and February are gone with yesterday's ten thousand years; their storms are hushed in the echoless caverns of the never more. March fills the ditches with proverbial rain or snow, mingled in places with a richer stain, a “ghastlier dew.” But, enough; we regret, deplore, this cruel, wasteful, wicked War; the war of elements we can meet and master, even at times enjoy as natural and necessary, at least inevitable, but this far-flung fratricidal War can only fill us with dumbness and despair. Alike for victor and vanquished, this War especially is hopeless, heartless, stupid, brutal, and insane. Hope lies elsewhere.

Pondering these things, dismissing for a space the ruthless reality, once more we seek the illusion and seclusion of the wild; we choose Karl Marks' “semi-imbecility of the country”—just as Robert Burns chose it—for the total madness of courts and camps. It was Sunday, and we trod “the paths of righteousness,” we had escaped, rejoicing, into the wilderness,—

The roadway wound before us calling
Follow, follow, follow;
With joyful tread we onward sped
Adown its happy hollow.

We knew such roads in the long ago,
We were happy then;
The joy returns retracing these, and
We are happy now.

The naked, dark, picturesque trees lined and spanned

Ed arched the rustic track. The wind was in their tops, and the viewless organist made sombre but satisfying sound, humming or thundering in the enraptured ear. At a turning in the road, abrupt and bare, the wind swoops upon the withered leaves that scurry round the bend as though in mock alarm at our approach, and further on they rest again and whisper as we pass, and overtake us no more. Poor old dry bones of the dead, they make way for the green children about to return. Burns pictures such a scene in his inimitable *Doric*:—

When lyart¹ leaves bestrew the yird,
Or wavering like the baukie² bird,
Bedim cauld Boreas' blast.

The sky is gloomy, with shining places here and there. We leave the roadway and walk in ecstasy the woodland's tangled sere, and by the stream whose diamonds leap and scatter in the filtered sun. The poets are with us, and the scroll of memory and old association unfolds at many a magic line. We are the exiled Duke—exiled? No; we also “find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything.” The wind-music above mingles with the babble of the stream below in a confused medley of contenting sound; the road is regained, and more remote and rustic still; the idyll grows like a great painting, satisfying all the senses; the whin, or furze, is green among the whitened grasses at the hedge-root, and here and there is *profitably* gay with yellow bloom. Anon we reach the sanctuary of our Sunday walk and worship—the deeper, scarred, and broken ravine; resounding with the noise of winds and waters; with much recumbent timber; with islands in the stream, and natural bridges, and fantastic dugouts roofed with grey roots and red and crumbling soil.

Wrapt in remembrance and anticipation of creeping plant and flower and fern in such an arbourage, we were just complacently straddling over a fallen trunk when—straight—the sky grew black and frowning, and a mighty wind with hail and snow went charging down the glade. The trees groaned—the stream seemed to rave louder in sympathy—the winter had returned. An epic for an idyll—the furies for the fairies—but then it was March. Beyond the woods we had visions of the Firth in its misty wrath and the island Alps of Arran clad in complete snow. The sun shone again, brokenly, as we walked homeward by the ploughed land—already edged with vivid green. Still in the religious mood, we thought of Ingersoll, and said, “To plough is to pray, to plant is to prophesy, and the harvest answers and fulfils.”

What has all this got to do with Freethought? Everything. We had lived one hour of one day in the week and breathed the very spirit of liberty and truth—and beauty. We returned with mind exalted and brow serene. We had lived. We had understood. We must enjoy, improve, employ the present. Verily, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation, now or never! Let the dead past bury its dead. Let the thoughtful rational present ensure the happier future for the race. I find I am preaching; but, then, it is Sunday. Adieu! In the march of events we may meet again.

COILA.

The clergy are fond of cheap victories over antagonists. At Westcliff-on-Sea the Rev. J. A. Bell advertises his “After Sermon Debates”; but these “debates” are limited to mere questions and answers, and have a decided “adult Bible class” flavour about them. As the prize-fighter said when attacked by his family, “It pleases them, and it doesn't hurt me.”

¹ Lyart, of a mixed colour.

² The bat.

Acid Drops.

There are certain anti-Catholic laws still in existence in this country, and which, so long as they remain, are standing proofs of the charity of Protestants or the dangers of Roman Catholicism, whichever way one likes to take it. In either case they are, to the Freethinker, evidence of the delightful nature of Christianity as a whole. Mr. Birrell has promised to bring a Bill before the House of Commons dealing with the removal of at least one of these disabilities—that which prevents a Catholic religious order pleading at Common Law. We hardly need say that we are without sympathy for a law which aims at penalizing any form of opinion, whether religious or non-religious. However wrong an opinion may be, attempted suppression only serves to enhance its value in the minds of those who hold it, and so serves to prevent that impartial consideration which affords the most potent means of its destruction.

We agree with the *Church Times* when it talks of such laws as a “standing disgrace” to the nation, and one purpose of our noticing it here is to offer the suggestion that when Mr. Birrell brings in his Bill—which he hopes will prove non-contentious—someone in the House of Commons might propose that a Bill abolishing *all* religious disabilities should be introduced as speedily as possible. For it is not alone the laws against the Catholic orders that are a “standing disgrace” to a people claiming to be civilized. The Blasphemy Laws are equally so, although we doubt whether the *Church Times* would extend its disapproval to them. But to all unprejudiced persons the rule is clear. It is not the duty of a civilized government to “take sides” against any opinion. Its duty is simply to “hold the ring,” to see that all forms of opinion have opportunities of expression, and equal protection in the exercise of that right. A people can never be truly free while anyone is exposed to punishment or branded as an outlaw for no other offence than the expression of opinion.

The *Guardian* has been doing a bit of statistical work for the benefit of Free Churchmen. From the *Free Church Year Book* it finds that fifteen denominations provide 8,106,381 sittings for a membership of 2,136,782, which means that three out of four chapels are superfluous. This method of reckoning applied to the Church of England's places of worship would be an eye-opener, especially in the City of London.

A letter written by Robert Burns was sold recently at Sotheby's Sale Rooms for £225, and at Christie's the same day four necklaces of pearls and diamonds realized £10,000. Some Christians do not seem to appreciate the blessings of poverty.

At the Rochford (Essex) Military Tribunal a healthy young Christian protested that heaven was his home, and that he had no concern with the world. “Just so!” said the military representative, “but you draw your wages here.” He might have added that they could give him a rare chance of getting home quickly.

The *Daily Mirror* suggests that Spurgeon's notes on the Bible have been used by conscientious objectors in order to confound the Tribunals. We have our doubts. Although Baptists believe in immersion, the old preacher's theology would hardly damp the ardour of a Tribunal.

The *Daily Mail* makes a speciality of quoting the maxims of Napoleon, and the *Daily Express*, not to be outdone, retorts by quoting passages from Nelson's despatches. None of the papers so far have made a speciality of the maxims of the “Prince of Peace.”

The Home Secretary of the London Missionary Society says that the only way to end the War is to Christianize the whole world. Bearing in mind that the activities of the London Missionary Society are confined mainly to what are called “Heathen” countries, the counsel has a curious

sound. For it is none of these people that have disturbed the peace of the world, and judging from those who have, the conversion of the "heathen" will not affect the question for good. Nor are the Hindoos and other non-Christian people, who have taken part in the War, likely to form a more favourable estimate of Christianity from what they have seen. On the whole, we are inclined to think that the point of the London Missionary Society Secretary's statement lies in the fact that his Society is appealing for an extra £20,000.

A German newspaper, the *Vossische Zeitung*, reports a food experiment in which two Teutonic doctors breakfasted on maggots. It must have been as festive as dining with the prophet Ezekiel.

Facts are stubborn things, and the clerical statement that the Germans are "Atheists" is constantly being disproved. In the Prussian Parliament recently, Herr Hoffmann, a Socialist, told the members that the present European War was "a mockery of Christianity and of God." The taunt would be meaningless if addressed to Freethinkers.

A London newspaper recently contained an article suggesting that the combatant soldier ought to be distinguished from the man in the office and other soft jobs. This should interest the Bishop of London and the Army chaplains, who are "sunshine soldiers."

The Rev. E. Raymond, of Prittlewell, Essex, who is serving as an Army chaplain in Egypt, nearly lost his life by being upset in a boat whilst carrying the Communion Service materials by water. If the reverend gentleman had been drowned, would he have been regarded as a Christian martyr?

Rev. J. D. Jones thinks he would rather have this country unready and undisciplined than be scientific and efficient like Germany, with its catalogue of crimes. It is unfortunate that the feeling against Germany should be used as a means of belittling efficiency and education. Whatever be the offences of Germany, they are certainly not the product of education. The fallacy lies in regarding education in itself as being of necessity either good or evil. It is neither. The value of education depends upon its direction. In the hands of a rogue, education may become the servant of crime, as it may the means of good in the hands of a decent citizen. And the fault of Germany is not that it is educated—or, as some have said, over-educated—the world runs no danger from that; its fault is in having a governing class that has used the educational efficiency of the country in an evil manner. And the unfortunate thing with us is that we have a number of lukewarm friends of education, or of actual enemies, who are only too ready to use Germany's educational proficiency as a reason why we should neglect education in order to avoid the risk of imitating her in other directions.

Father Bernard Vaughan is frank—for a clergyman. He says he is "a member of the oldest advertising firm in religion on this planet." We do not question the commercial nature of his religion; but he had better settle the question of priority with the Buddhist priests.

One of the clergymen at Southend-on-Sea gave up smoking during Lent as an act of self-denial. We wonder if he denied himself the pleasure of telling his opponents that they would "smoke" in the next world.

Professor H. E. Armstrong, speaking of the national inferiority in scientific matters, says, "Our failure was traceable to Oxford and Cambridge Universities and to the public schools." These are largely under clerical domination.

At the funerals of the five little victims of the Ramsgate air-raid, children from the various Sunday-schools attended. We wonder how many of them believed the words of the hymn, "There's a Friend of little children up above the bright blue sky."

When Hobbes said that superstition was religion not allowed, while religion was superstition allowed, he gave a definition that accurately described the facts. And proofs of this are always to hand. One religious weekly, quite ready to publish stories of the miraculous preservation of crosses and images amid the rain of German shells, laments the growth of "the heathenish practice of carrying mascots." It also notes that the "weakened hold of religion" always results in "a corresponding growth of superstition." Why the wearing of a mascot should be a superstition, and the carrying of a cross as something sacred, a religious practice, is only discoverable on Hobbes' definition. It is superstitious because it is not allowed. If all the mascots worn were issued by a religious organization, their being worn would be a sign of piety.

What heroes the ecclesiastics are! The Bishop of Rochester recently confirmed a number of wounded soldiers and sailors at Rochester Cathedral.

Dr. William Barry, the well-known theologian and novelist, says, "Comfort is the religion of John Bull." Not a bad religion either, and John does not want the services of 50,000 clergymen to tell him how to obtain it.

Dr. J. E. C. Welldon, Dean of Manchester, says that "persons of high authority who have preached economy have not sufficiently practised it." This is a hard saying for the archbishops and bishops of the Established Church, 39 of whom share £180,700 annually.

The Vicar: "These Salonikans, Mrs. Stubbs, are, of course the Thessalonians to whom St. Paul wrote his celebrated letters."

Mrs. Stubbs: "Well, I 'ope 'e'd better luck with 'is than I 'ave. I sent my boy out there three letters and two parcels, and I ain't got no answer to 'em yet."—*Punch*

The newspapers have been making headlines about a church at Southsea, which was originally a stable. The journalists appear to have forgotten that the Christian religion started in a stable.

The Chief Constable of Edinburgh, in his annual report calls attention to the increase of drinking among soldiers' wives. He suggests as a means of checking this that the allowances be paid through some association, and "in kind, according to their needs." We hope that nothing so stupid or so fundamentally vicious will be attempted. Nor do we see any reason for singling out soldiers' wives in this manner, and holding them up for reprobation. Their allowances are as much their own money as what was earned by their husbands while in civil employment. And, really, a soldier's wife has as much right to get drunk as anyone else's wife. There is no special evil in a soldier's wife getting drunk; the evil lies in anyone's wife getting drunk. And nothing is more detestable than this plan of holding up soldiers' wives to rebuke, as though they were worse than others. Those who profess to think so much of the soldier's profession, and hold up our "gallant lads" to public admiration, might at least cultivate the habit of treating those belonging to them as though they were normal members of the human family.

We confess to a certain pleasure in seeing the bigots hoist with their own petard. The International Church and Educational Cinematograph Institute applied to the Middlesex County Council for permission to use picture-palaces on Sundays in connection with religious services. The application was refused.

Jane Larsen, aged 15, was charged at Glasgow with having murdered her mistress with an axe. On the Sunday she attended church, and afterwards the Y.W.C.A., at which place she was arrested. The girl is apparently of weak intellect, but the combination of religion and moral degeneration is quite common.

Special.

IN spite of the hard times, and the many calls upon the purses of all with the slightest disposition to give, the G. W. Foote Memorial Fund has reached a figure which bears testimony to the regard in which our late Leader was held. The £500 that it was suggested the Fund should realize, has been subscribed with 14s. 9d. to the good. I know from the many letters received that had times been other than they are, the response would have been much more generous. As it is, I feel that all have done their best, and more no one should expect.

From Mrs. Foote herself I have received a personally flattering letter—which I do not care to print, and also a request to convey to all the “good friends” who have contributed to the Fund, as well as others who have been prevented from doing so by unfavourable circumstances, her very warmest thanks. For what all have done, she says, “I am deeply grateful.” In saying that all is said. For my own part, I can only add my appreciation of what has been done during a peculiarly trying time.

The sum actually received and placed to the credit of the G. W. Foote Memorial Fund up to March 31—the date given for the closing of the Fund—was £482 os. 9d. From this must be deducted the sum of £1 1s. 6d. for charges. The whole of these, together with all subscriptions received after the Fund was officially closed are acknowledged in another column. I promised subscribers that the accounts would be duly audited by an accountant, and this has been done. I append his certificate as to the amount actually in the Bank to the credit of the Memorial Fund on March 31:—

37 Essex Street Strand, London, W.C.
April 3, 1916.

THE G. W. FOOTE MEMORIAL FUND.

I certify that the subscriptions to this Fund, as acknowledged in the *Freethinker* up to and including the issue dated April 2, 1916, amounted to £482 os. 9d., that the expenses for postage, etc., amounted to £1 1s. 6d., leaving a net amount of £480 19s. 3d. (four hundred and eighty pounds, nineteen shillings, and threepence) to the credit of the Fund.

I further certify that on March 31, 1916 this sum of £480 19s. 3d. was standing in the name of Chapman Cohen, Esq., at the London City and Midland Bank, Limited.

HY. THEOBALD (Incorporated Accountant),
Hon. Auditor.

Subscriptions received since will be banked in due course.

As to the disposition of the Fund. Taking all the circumstances into consideration, it has been decided, with Mrs. Foote's full assent, that the money should remain at the Bank—the bulk of it on deposit—and an agreed sum to be paid monthly to Mrs. Foote. Owing to banking technicalities, the Fund had to stand in the name of one person; but the account will now be transferred in the names of two persons, of whom Mrs. Foote will be one. In this way there is effected a guarantee both as to the duration and disposition of the Fund, which takes the nature of a trust. I hope that this will be approved by all subscribers as the wisest disposition of the money. My aim has been to consult the welfare of Mrs. Foote for so long a period as possible, and thus carry out what, I believe, would be the general desire of her many friends and well-wishers.

Now that the Memorial Fund is disposed of, I may as well deal with the question of the *Freethinker*. Some months ago, I said that while Mrs. Foote would

remain the owner of the paper, steps were being taken to relieve her of all legal and financial responsibilities. By that was meant she would not be liable to a prosecution for blasphemy—always a possibility so long as the Blasphemy Laws exist—and that no demands should be made upon her private purse to meet any monetary shortcomings. So long as I am responsible for the conduct of the paper I should not like to feel that any action on my part would expose her to either of these contingencies, while their prevention would mean greater ease of mind—and ease of mind begets confidence in action. I think I may say that I do not fear the consequences of anything I see fit to do; but it is a different thing if others are involved.

After consultation with Mrs. Foote's legal adviser, it was decided that the best way of achieving this end was to convert the Pioneer Press into a small, private Company. This has now been done under the title of “G. W. Foote & Co., Ltd.” The capital is a nominal one, and is represented by the stock, type, and office fixtures. The whole of the shares, with the exception of a qualifying number for two directors, are held by Mrs. Foote. By this means she still remains the real owner of the *Freethinker*, although she can neither be served with a summons for blasphemy, nor can she be made personally responsible for any financial liabilities that may be incurred. In the event of profit being made it would go to Mrs. Foote—as the holder of practically all the shares—but that probability, at present, is not great.

I hope the above explanation will make the position quite clear. The task of running the paper, of making ends meet, and facing all the consequences of editorship, remains mine. The ownership of the paper rests with the G. W. Foote Co., Ltd.—really Mrs. Foote. This, in the circumstances, is the best plan that I and her legal adviser could devise; and in this matter, as in that of the Memorial Fund, I have tried to carry out the promise I made Mr. Foote—to safeguard his wife's interests and make the continuance of the *Freethinker* certain. The paper now, as hitherto, remaining at the service of the Freethought movement.

Let me also take this opportunity of once more thanking those friends who, all over the country, have worked so well to help the *Freethinker* during one of the most trying times experienced by journals of every kind. Papers are dying weekly (no pun is intended), and others are being kept alive by lavish subsidies. Up to the present, we have actually advanced on our pre-War circulation, but with paper at double the price—and scarce at that—and other expenses increased, the struggle is a severe one. There is, therefore, every need for our friends continuing their efforts, and when the War is over they will, I hope, reap the full reward of their work. It must be borne in mind, too, that the Honorarium Fund, which was really a *Freethinker* Sustainment Fund, has been dropped; and one's task is not made the lighter by that.

There is another matter that I may as well mention while I am writing, and which affects the movement generally. Quite recently, an unsolicited, but substantial, offer of a sum of money was made me, to be expended under certain conditions, in the interests of Freethought propaganda. I am not at liberty to say more at present, but as soon as possible—in the course of two or three weeks—full details will be given. This offer, when it materializes, should provide the means for a vigorous propaganda for three or four years. Tentative offers have reached me from other directions, and however much the War may have helped religion, there is no doubt that it has had the effect of arousing amongst Freethinkers a good deal of the old fighting spirit. And,

for my part, I believe there will be need of it. The end of the War will bring us face to face with many a grave problem, and there will be a golden opportunity for Freethought to make its influence felt during a critical period in the world's affairs.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Mr. C. Cohen's Engagements.

April 16, Abertillery.

To Correspondents.

G. W. FOOTE MEMORIAL FUND.—Mr. and Mrs. A. Hartley, £1; S. M. Brown (Troy), 12s. 6d.; G. R. Baulkes, 5s.; A. Younger, 5s.; E. A. H., 10s.; D. Smith, 2s. 6d.; W. Thompson, 2s. 6d.; A. Thompson, 2s.; J. Thompson, 3s.; Mr. and Mrs. J. Shaw, £1; T. Wood, 5s.; Percy Freer, 2s. 6d.; A. W. Freer, 2s. 6d.; L. A. S., 1s.; Mr. and Mrs. S. G. Hinley, 3s.; T. Evans, 2s. 6d.; W. Judd, 2s. 6d.; J. Lousman, 6d.; T. W. Houghton, £1; From a few admirers at G.P.O. Parcels' Office, W.C. (per H. V. D. Clark), 8s. 6d.; Well Wisher, 4s.; W. Pitt, 10s. 6d.; G. E. F. Dixon (Accra), £5; E. O. (Coventry), 2s. 6d.; J. McMullan, 5s.; J. T. Entwistle, 2s. 6d.; J. Kenworthy (N. Z.), 10s.; E. Simpson, 2s. 6d.; S. H. Baron, 5s.; W. Spinks (Leeds), 5s.; F. and L. Smith, 5s.; Spr. H. Johnston, £1.
Per Miss Vance.—Mrs. Whatcott, 2s.; J. Trevelion, 10s.; T. Chalmers (Frazerburgh), 5s.; T. Bradshaw, 5s.; T. F. G., 2s.
Per L. H. W. Mann (Barbados).—J. Greaves, 10s.; R. F. Licorish, 6s.; L. H. W. Mann, 6s.; Two Spmpathizers, 7s.; H. C. King, 5s.; W. G. Carbin, 4s.; J. H. Roger, 3s.; E. Delaney, 2s. 6d.; A. D. Faid, 2s.; I. Wilson, 1s.; J. Poyer, 1s.—Total, £500 14s. 9d.

This Fund is now closed.

- R. G. LICORISH (Barbados).—We did publish your reply to Mr. Mann's remarks *re* Lamarck, and Mr. Mann, as the writer of the article, had a clear right of reply. There we regarded the subject as settled. It is rather too far back to reopen the matter as a personal controversy; but if you care to submit an article of, say, a couple of columns' length, stating your own views, we shall have much pleasure in publishing it.
- J. W. K. LEIPER.—We intend getting ahead with some leaflets and other things as soon as conditions are a little more prosperous than at present. But the outrageous price of paper prohibits at present all printing that can be dispensed with.
- T. STRINGER.—We did not quite succeed, as you will have seen. We hope that there will be no need for the cutting from the *Freethinker*—which you say you carry in your "will book," with instructions to be read over your grave, should a German bullet pick you out from your comrades.
- J. KING.—"Heretic" is rather an elastic word, and must always be taken with regard to chronology. Dickens may not have been a heretic in the sense in which contributors to the *Freethinker* are heretics, but in relation to Mid-Victorian theology it would not be difficult to make out a case.
- M. HILL.—Pleased to hear from you, and to read what you say about the late Councillor Blanch Bland, J.P. Your opinion of him was doubtless well deserved, but we do not see anything in the cuttings you send on which to base a paragraph, beyond regretting the decease of an ordinary worthy man.
- T. W. HOUGHTON.—We wish we could agree with you that no one in this country needs convincing of the evils of militarism. Naturally, all are convinced of the evils of *German* militarism, but you have forgotten that we have a militarist party here, as every other country has. Military drill, under military instructors, is now being established in secondary schools, and this, obviously, cannot be intended to aid the conduct of the present War. And "to deal (only) with things as they are, and not as they ought to be," is to keep them as they are.
- W. JUDD.—It is the spirit of such things that matter, and we should indeed be hard to please if we failed to appreciate that shown in your letter.
- W. E. WALTON (Melbourne).—Thanks for paper, which will prove useful. Never hesitate. Criticism, when well meant or soundly based, is always acceptable. And there are no infallible men on the *Freethinker* staff.
- T. EVANS.—Sorry to hear of your ill-health. Your good opinion of the *Freethinker* is encouraging.
- A. J. MARRIOTT.—We read your comments with a considerable amount of sympathy, but they are hardly in our line, however justifiable.

W. COLLINS.—If a hall can be obtained at Winchester, yes, certainly. Even the Cathedral would do, if available.

A. YOUNGER.—Thanks for your appreciation of what you call "the fine work you are doing for 'the best of causes.'"

A. HARTLEY.—We can quite understand your missing the writings of G. W. Foote from these pages. It would be strange were it otherwise. What you suggest is part of our programme in the immediate future.

F. LONSDALE.—Your Lecture Notice did not reach this office until Wednesday, and we go to press on Tuesday. The delay was probably due to the storm and the dislocation of traffic.

T. S. MATTHEWS.—Remittance received, which will be applied as has been indicated.

T. M.—Yes, we *have* considered the question of advertising, and are doing as much as our means permit in this direction. We are also advertising, in likely papers, the Shakespeare Number announcement in this issue.

W. PITT.—It is not the *size* of the contribution, but the spirit, that counts. Thanks, we are quite well. Congenial work is a good tonic. It is wry that injures, not work.

Letters for the Editor of the "Freethinker" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

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Sugar Plums.

The *Freethinker* for April 23 will be a special Shakespeare Number. Articles on various phases of Shakespeare will appear from the pens of Messrs. Lloyd, Cohen, "Mimmermus," Underwood, Gould, Moss, Palmer, Ingersoll, and G. W. Foote. There is bound to be plenty of *Christian* "gush" in connection with the tercentenary, and it is as well to have the Freethought view to the fore. The nature of this issue will make it an excellent one to introduce to new readers. Many of our old readers may desire extra copies for that purpose. In that case, we should be obliged if they will place their orders early, as with paper at its present price and scarcity, we do not desire to print more than is necessary. Neither do we wish anyone who requires a copy to go without one.

In the *Freethinker* for March 12 we replied to an inquiry as to whether Charles Bradlaugh had ever withdrawn from a debate by saying that we did not know the particulars, but if it occurred we were content that Bradlaugh would have had sufficient reason for doing so. A correspondent, Mr. J. Hibbert, now writes saying that he was one of the officials—on the Christian side—connected with the debate, and that the circumstances were quite of the nature we anticipated. The debate was one held at Bury in 1870 with a Mr. King. Of this discussion, his daughter says no accurate report exists. Mr. Hibbert says the debate was for five nights. The first two nights' business passed off in the usual manner, but on the third night it was seen that Mr. Bradlaugh was suffering from a severe cold, and became so hoarse that he was obliged to discontinue, but offered to resume the discussion at the earliest possible moment. This appears to have been the extent of the withdrawal. And Mr. Hibbert's report of the consequence of the debate is that it converted him, and others, to Freethought. We do not suppose any Freethinkers were converted.

There are a number of towns within a few miles' radius of Birmingham which should be likely centres for Freethought propaganda. With a view to opening up work in these places, the Birmingham Branch of the N. S. S. is willing to undertake the arrangements for meetings whenever one or two friends are willing to look after the local fixtures. We hope that full advantage will be taken of this offer, and that other centres will be encouraged to follow suit. Applications should be addressed to the Secretary of the Birmingham Branch, Mr. J. Partridge, 245 Shenstone Road, Rotton Park, Birmingham.

In the *Sunday Chronicle* recently Mr. A. M. Thompson tells the story of one, Camille Eugene Jacques, sentenced to death by the Germans at Lille for sheltering an English aviator. For fifteen days Jacques had kept the English aviator concealed, and in the end succeeded in getting him over the Dutch frontier. Ordered to be shot for the offence, Jacques wrote a letter to his wife, from which the following is taken:—

It is the luck of our family never to go beyond fifty.....Be brave, my beloved wife. Forgive them that harm me as I forgive them. At the moment of departure my last wish is for you.....We shall die with heads erect, hands free, eyes unbandaged. We shall shout "Vive la Republique! Vive la France!" and shall say nothing to the executioners, who already appear prostrate. We have seen soldiers weep. I die as a convinced Atheist. Farewell, my beloved Jeanne, farewell.

We raise our hat to the memory of a brave man.

From a paragraph in the *Weekly Dispatch*, we see that Mr. Mangasarian's daughter is shortly to appear in London in *Mr. Manhattan*. If the lady is as talented on the stage as her father is on the platform, she will deserve success, whether she meets it or not. At any rate, we offer her our heartiest good wishes.

After a not very lengthy career *New Days* has been obliged to cease publication owing to the difficulties of maintaining a weekly journal during war-time. In a way, we regret its disappearance; we would have preferred it to meet a natural death under normal conditions. But it was a very pretentious magazine, and appeared to aim at running a species of Christian Socialism, and, we imagine, suffered from being too advanced for timid religionists, and too backward for genuine thinkers. Its tribute to the learning and courtesy of the Christian Evidence Society lecturers was one of its most amusing perpetrations.

Job as a Freethinker.

THE Christian method of dealing with the Bible is designedly, or by accident, that best calculated to prevent an intelligent apprehension of the nature of its contents. The books of the Old and New Testament are read out, in the church or in the home, in arbitrary dribbles called "lessons" or "chapters," and without any regard to the context in which a particular "lesson" or "chapter" is placed. When to this is added the paralyzing habit of "reverential" reading—*i.e.*, of droning passages out in a monotone, so as effectually to drown the sense and put the intelligence to sleep—we cannot wonder that Christians are, on the whole, the people least able to give an intelligible account of any book in the Bible.

Perhaps those responsible for this are wise in their generation. If it became the practice to read books of Scripture like any other books—*i.e.*, at a stretch, at one's convenience, regardless of chapters, verses, and such-like arbitrary breaks—the unsophisticated reader would perceive some things which would seriously affect his attitude to the whole Christian "revelation." In the case, for example, of the Book of Job, he would see that, thanks to the (for once) beneficent obtuseness of Jewish Rabbis and Christian Fathers, there has been preserved to us, thinly disguised as edifying "Scripture," a genuine specimen of old-world Freethought. Another example of this, and one more generally recognized as such, is *Ecclesiastes*, but the case of Job is perhaps the more striking of the two.

We do not know the date of the Book of Job. It must have been written some time after the fall of the old Jewish kingdom (586 B.C.), and before the time of the Maccabees (170 B.C.); but any time between these dates would suit the book about equally well. The work is not, and does not pretend to be, a history, but is an imaginative drama or dialogue, and the theme of

it is the compatibility, or incompatibility, of injustice and unmerited suffering with the existence of a benevolent and omnipotent God. We shall see that the author, while pretending (no doubt for reasons of prudence) to offer a reply to the questioner, carefully makes his reply so palpably absurd that it is impossible to regard it as seriously meant. In other words, he is a Freethinker, who uses the weapon of irony, probably because to use any other would have been unsafe for him. A parallel case is that of the Greek dramatist Euripides, who (in plays written for performance at the Athenian religious festival of Dionysus) introduced the gods and goddesses in odious lights, intentionally designed to undermine belief in them. A favourite device of Euripides—which is also resorted to by the author of Job—is to introduce a deity at the end of the drama, to provide a manifestly unreal solution of the tragically real *impasse* that has arisen. We shall see that the oration of Yahweh from the whirlwind (Job, chapters xxxviii. to xlii.) is a typical example of the use of a *deus ex machina*, or "god out of a machine," as the Euripidean device is called.

The first two chapters of Job are simply a prologue. An argument arises in heaven between Yahweh and Satan, the angel whose business it is to find fault with men and bring harm upon them. (The conception of Satan as a rebel against God is a later one, and entirely alien to the writer of Job.) Yahweh points to Job as an example of piety and justice. Satan observes that, with all his wealth and property, Job has every reason to be thankful to God; he predicts that, if deprived of these, he will throw God over. Yahweh, with an incredible mixture of levity and injustice, gives Satan free leave to destroy Job's property and his family. In one day his flocks and herds are carried off by Bedouin, or struck by lightning, and his sons and daughters crushed by a falling house. Job, however, submits to this without complaint. Yahweh claims that he has won the argument. Satan asks leave to torment Job personally, and is given it. Job is struck down by a hideous disease, but still submits to the will of God. His three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, come to visit him. At this point the dialogue opens.

Job begins by cursing the day that he was born; why should he have been brought into the world to suffer all this? His friends, one by one, try to argue with him. They say that his sufferings are a punishment for sin. God must know better than man what is right, etc. Job had better repent of whatever he has done, and he will be restored to health and prosperity. Job will have none of this. He asks only to be told what crime he has committed. His complaints, he says, should not be met with reproof. A man driven to desperation cannot be expected to be temperate in his language (chapter vi. 24-30). Man's life is short at the best; why should he not be allowed happiness while it lasts? What has he done to God, anyhow, that God should treat him like this? (chapter vii. 17-21).

There is no answer to this; and Job's friends can offer none, except to reiterate their old assertion that Job—or if not he, his children—must have done something wrong, or this would not have happened. In chapter ix., Job's argument develops in boldness. Whether he has sinned or not, he urges, it is most unfair that God should punish him. He argues that God has the forces of nature at his disposal; he can do what he pleases; there is no getting at him (chapter ix. 1-12). He further observes that God does not, as a matter of fact, punish the wicked to the exclusion of the good, but destroys "the perfect and the wicked" alike; nay, the wicked often even prosper while the innocent suffer. This is God's doing, for "if it be not he, who then is

it?" (verse 24). Again, Job points out that if his sufferings are to be regarded as a punishment, God has condemned him arbitrarily and unheard. God is his accuser, judge, and executioner in one.

For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him,
That we should come together in judgment.
There is no umpire between us,
That might lay his hand upon us both.
Let him take his rod away from me,
And let not his terror make me afraid:
Then would I speak, and not fear him;
For I am not so in myself.

I will say unto God, Do not condemn me;
Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.
Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress,
That thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands
And shine upon the counsel of the wicked?

Thine hands have framed me and fashioned me
Together round about; yet thou dost destroy me.
Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast fashioned me
as clay;
And wilt thou bring me into dust again?

(Chapters ix. 32 to x. 9.)

One is irresistibly reminded by this passage of Omar Khayyam's eloquent protest against the claim of the tyrant creator to judge his creatures. In this and other passages the Freethought of the writer of Job shines out like a lamp.

Job's friends grow excited and acrimonious; they wish God were there to talk to him in person, and assure him that he is really getting less than he deserves. He sticks to his point, however. He does not question the power of God; what he wants to know is what justification he has for tormenting him. He claims, as a rational and moral being, to argue with God on equal terms, without terrorism.

Only do not two things unto me,
Then will I not hide myself from thy face:
Withdraw thine hand far from me;
And let not thy terror make me afraid,
Then call thou, and I will answer;
Or let me speak, and answer thou me.
How many are mine iniquities and sins?
Make me to know my transgression and my sin.
Wherefore hidest thou thy face,
And holdest me for thine enemy?
Wilt thou harass a driven leaf?
And wilt thou pursue the dry stubble?

(Chapter xiii. 20-25.)

He repeats his contention that as man's life is short and full of trouble, it is positively mean of the Almighty to scrutinize his conduct closely, even when it shows shortcomings (chapter xiv.). Meanwhile, he is conscious of innocence; moreover, God, who knows everything, must know perfectly well, too, that he is innocent. Nor is he speaking unadvisedly; he wishes his words could be taken down and recorded. One day, sooner or later, his innocence will be vindicated; even now, eaten up with disease as he is, he is confident that he will be able to have it out with God, and come to an understanding. So he refuses to surrender a jot of his case.

This last passage (chapter xix. 23-27) has been disgracefully garbled by the incompetence or dishonesty of translators. In the Revised Version, which restores the meaning in the main, the verses run as follows:—

Oh that my words were now written!
Oh that they were inscribed in a book!
That with an iron pen and lead
They were graven in the rock for ever!
But [or "for"] I know that my redeemer [or "vindicator"] liveth,
And that he shall stand up at last upon the earth [or "dust"]:
And after my skin hath been thus destroyed,
Yet from my flesh shall I see God:
Whom I shall see for myself [or "on my side"],
And mine eyes shall behold, and not another.

The bracketed words are the marginal renderings in the Revised Version. By spelling "redeemer" with a capital R, and introducing wholly unauthorized "worms" into verse 26, the Authorized Version succeeds in converting this passage into a colourable prophecy of Jesus and the resurrection. If there is one thing more certain than another, it is that Job is not depicted as believing in a resurrection, or in immortality at all. Over and over again in the book, he is made to refer to death as an eternal sleep, practically equivalent to non-existence (chapters iii. 13-19; vii. 6-10, 21; x. 18-22; xiv. 10-12; xvii. 13-16). Clearly, then, he cannot be interpreted as taking a contrary view in the present passage. This rules out the marginal reading, "without my flesh shall I see God," in chapter xix. 26. The whole passage plainly refers to a vindication which Job hoped for in his lifetime.

Nothing is more noticeable in Job's position than his constant claim to be allowed to *argue* with God and criticize his treatment of him. He does not in the least accept that grovelling conception of the deity as "inscrutable" and "moving in a mysterious way," which has been the mainstay of religious moralists from Paul o Wesley. Job demands that his God shall be amenable to reason and to the moral law. In this, the author of the poem stands head and shoulders above the ruck of Jewish and Christian prophets, apostles, and theologians.

Job's arguments conclude with a weighty protestation of his innocence of any crime, occupying chapter xxxi. The next six chapters, containing a harangue from a hitherto unmentioned disputant, "Elihu," are now generally recognized as an interpolation. Elihu's remarks come as an anti-climax; they add nothing to the stock of ideas accumulated in the preceding discussion, and merely reassert the position of the three friends, while pretending to improve on it.

In chapter xxxviii., Yahweh answers Job "out of the whirlwind." Job has demanded argument with God; he has looked forward to seeing him "for himself, and not another." Now God appears; and what happens?

I should be inclined to describe the Yahweh of this theophany as an Old Bailey bully, were it not that any bullying advocate in a court of law would be pulled up by the bench for a tithe of the irrelevancies in which he indulges. The preceding dialogue has led us to expect, above all, a grand *moral* vindication of God's dealings with Job. Instead of that, Yahweh is made by the author to propound a succession of formidable, but quite irrelevant, conundrums about the physical universe. The expectant Job is asked to state where he was at the time of the earth's formation; how the earth and sea were made; how morning comes; what is at the bottom of the sea; what happens after death; what is the breadth of the earth; etc., etc.? and because he is unable to answer, his right to ask for a plain answer to a plain question of morals is denied. As this extraordinary harangue goes on, its interest centres more and more on the brute creation. Job is invited by God to contemplate the peculiarities of various animals, and to explain them if he can. After passing allusions to the lion and raven, several lines each are devoted to the habits of the wild goat, the wild ass, the wild ox, and the ostrich; the horse has a rollicking passage all to himself; the hawk and the eagle come in for due attention. But the *piece de resistance* of Yahweh's zoological lecture, the climax of this triumphant vindication, as it should have been, of divine justice, consists in a whole chapter and a half devoted to minute descriptions of—the hippopotamus and the crocodile! The English translators have done their best to preserve these chapters from bathos by refusing to translate the names of these two species, and calling the hippopotamus "behemoth" and the crocodile

"leviathan," which gives a certain air of mystery and portentousness to the language; but this is a very thin expedient. God says to Job, "True, I have committed arson and murder somewhat extensively in order to win my bet with Satan; I have ruined your home, your happiness, and your health without an atom of provocation; I have behaved like a cad, and if I were a mere man, I should deserve destruction and ignominy; but consider it—I am a God, and above mere morality; only think of it, I made the horse; nay, and the hippopotamus: above all, the beautiful, wonderful, and noble *crocodile!*"

Those who will may believe, if they can, that the author of Job—who was no fool—meant this oration of Yahweh, with the consequent climb down of Job, and the latter's rehabilitation (a conventional happy ending of the most unreal sort) to be taken seriously. I cannot bring myself so to insult the intelligence of readers. The scheme of the work is analogous to that of Euripides' plays; that is, the existence of God is assumed, and shown to result in a moral impossibility, to which the author adds, for form's sake, a conventional and unconvincing solution of the anomaly. The pretended solution was a practical necessity, whether at Athens or in Judæa; for in both communities a conviction for impiety or blasphemy meant death to the offender.

This also explains why someone thought fit to interpolate the speech of "Elihu." As it stood, the book betrayed too palpably, perhaps, its sceptical tendency. Some scribe, wishing to render the book more edifying, and dissatisfied with the obvious failure of Job's friends to answer him, thought he would try his hand at supplying an answer, and created "Elihu." "Elihu" is a failure, as he was indeed bound to be. But he is certainly not more of a failure than Yahweh in the whirlwind. The figure cut by the latter, when we contrast it with the real intellectual honesty and moral elevation of the main body of the book, can, I submit, only be accounted for as a deliberate burlesque on the part of the author.

ROBERT ARCH.

Correspondence.

CAN SECULARISM ASSUME DEFINITE FORM?

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—All Atheists *per se* confine their teachings to pure speculations. The Christian contention that Atheism is immoral or non-moral is in both cases begging the question. No one in his senses would dream of referring to the speculations of astronomy as "immoral"; neither should anyone allow "morality" to impose itself in a discussion upon the "existence" of "God."

Atheism, among other definitions, may be said to be the emancipation of minds from the hindrance and canker of supernaturalism, and the consequent preparation of those minds for the true study of Naturalism (Secularism). It further follows that it leads to the correct conception (the origin and nature) of supernaturalism.

Atheism does not bind itself down to any particular concrete form of Secularism. It merely leads up to that abstract principle that human conduct is based on natural knowledge, for the end that all thought and action makes for human welfare.

Where Atheism leaves off, Secularism begins. The latter, in its scientific conception, is not possible without the former. To be "saved" from religious superstition is not the *final* virtue of Atheism. To rest content with that is proof that Atheism has found no rich fields for its culminating harvests.

Just as the methods and tools of Atheism produce emancipation from the error of religion, so they ought to carry on the work of "salvation" from the error of secular life. The same methods and tools used by Atheism should be likewise

transferred in the work of building human welfare. What are those methods and tools, and what is human welfare?

As to methods and tools. The first essential is an *open mind*. That should have been provided by Atheism. The next is the study of the origin and nature of our social being—say a study of the works of Spencer, Green, Ruskin, Rogers, Loiré Morgan, Mill, Hobson, etc.

Next comes the impartial observation of, and reflection upon, the experiences of our own social life, with an ever-recurring mental comparison of those experiences with what we learn in our other studies.

Using the scientific method, we should be careful of our own conclusions upon them, requiring ample verification, careful acceptance of *facts*, and discardance of fancies; making proper association of facts and ideas that are susceptible of proof. We should also be warned against preconceived ideas. Atheism should easily provide this.

Being Atheists, we should naturally love justice and liberty. These being moral principles, *conclusions* and incitements drawn from studies and experiences, their meaning and practice constitute the great field of contention in the polemics of agitation, and extra care is required in their construction and operation.

We therefore (having been greatly assisted by Atheism) identify facts, study impartially, reason logically, and attempt no other conclusions than are substantiated by these facts—such study and logic springing from our innate love of justice and liberty.

What is human welfare? The branches of this study are, economic, political, ethical (including art), and physical (health education, etc.), and their whole aim is encompassed within the one term, *happiness*.

In the economic and political we shall find ourself seeking justice and liberty; in the ethical, purity and humanity; and in the physical, longevity and culture. Here we are in the great field of Secularism—this worldism, definite and concrete. If we are true to our Atheism, here is where our work lies, and always with a vigilant eye on religious interference. Every activity in this direction requires that we never lose sight of this definite, concrete goal, and that we loosen ourselves from any other activities, or else refuse them, that are well-known to ignore liberty and justice, purity and humanity, longevity and culture.

TOM RENNOLLS.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON MARCH 30.

Mr. R. H. Rosetti in the chair. Also present: Messrs. Baker, Cohen, Cunningham, Davidson, Gorniot, Lazarnick, Leat, Neary, Neate, Nichols, Quinton, Roger, Rolf, Samuels, Thurlow, F. Wood, G. Wood, Miss Kough, Miss Stanley, Miss Pankhurst, Mrs. Rolf, and the Secretary.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed.

The monthly cash statement was presented and adopted.

New members were admitted for the Parent Society, and an application for the formation of a new Liverpool Branch was received. The necessary requirements having been completed with, permission was granted.

The town in which the Annual Conference, on Whit Sunday, should be held was then discussed; Birmingham and London being proposed. After a general survey of the many and unprecedented difficulties the Executive would have to contend with, it was finally resolved that it be held in London.

The financial position in which the Society is placed, owing to the general upheaval of the country in consequence of the War, was discussed, and a sub-committee, consisting of Messrs. Davidson, Quinton, and Roger, was appointed to consider and report on ways and means of placing the Society in funds to carry on its general work.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary*.

N.B.—Secretaries of Branches are requested to kindly note that the books of the Society close for the year 1915-16 on April 29, by which date all collections and Branch subscriptions should reach me. The latest date upon which notices of motion for the Conference Agenda can be received is Thursday, April 27.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.LONDON.
OUTDOOR.

HYDE PARK: 11.30, Messrs. Saphin and Shaller; 3.15, Messrs. Dales and Kells, "Prayer"; 6.30, Messrs. Hyatt, Saphin, Kells, and Shaller.

COUNTRY.
INDOOR.LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Clarion Cafe, Cable Street entrance): 7, Ernest Ilsley, "The Outcome of Philosophy."
SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. 34 James Mather Terrace, off Ocean Road; 6.30, Business Meeting.

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Secretary—Miss E. M. VANCE.

This Society was formed in 1898 to afford legal security to the acquisition and application of funds for Secular purposes.

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

The liability of members is limited to £1, in case the Society should ever be wound up and the assets were insufficient to cover liabilities—a most unlikely contingency.

Members pay an entrance fee of ten shillings, and a subsequent yearly subscription of five shillings.

The Society has a considerable number of members, but a much larger number is desirable, and it is hoped that some will be gained amongst those who read this announcement. All who join to participate in the control of its business and the trusteeship of its resources. It is expressly provided in the Articles of Association that no member, as such, shall derive any sort of profit from the Society, either by way of dividend, bonus, or interest, or in any way whatever.

The Society's affairs are managed by an elected Board of Directors, consisting of not less than five and not more than twelve members, one-third of whom retire (by ballot) each year,

but are capable of re-election. An Annual General Meeting of members must be held in London, to receive the Report, elect new Directors, and transact any other business that may arise.

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