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Views and Opinions.

Mr. Bottomley and Immortality.

Soon after the opening of the War, Mr. Bottomley discovered God. How he did it, no one knows; so it is impossible for anyone to reach the same goal by the same path. But he did it. With the utmost solemnity—real or assumed—he announced his belief in Deity; and while the Freethinking world, instead of being riven to its foundations by so notable a conversion, went on its way with a smile, the religious world treated it with the most supreme indifference. Perhaps it was modesty which prevented it blazoning so noteworthy an addition to its ranks. And now, probably as a slight relaxation from his labours of advising—or is it commanding?—the Government, directing the public, and promulgating a new prophecy every month about the War, Mr. Bottomley turns to enlighten the readers of the *Royal Magazine* on the question of a future life. And on that topic we should be the last to deny that Mr. Bottomley is as well informed as any person on the planet. It is a subject on which the fool apes the air of the philosopher, and on which the philosopher only too often plays the part of a fool.

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The Two Bottomleys.

It is, we confess, difficult to take Mr. Bottomley seriously in his ante-War guise as a philosopher; but we will do our best. This difficulty is increased by the fact that there appears to be *two* Mr. Bottomleys in this article of three pages. The old Mr. Bottomley is there at the beginning and the end. But in between, his body appears to have been taken possession of by somebody else, who writes in a quite different style, and with a quite different tone. Spiritualists would explain it as a case of mediumistic "control." Psychologists might say it was a case of disassociation. But whatever it is, everyone with an eye for different styles of writing will see it is there. Mr. Bottomley—the old one—is quite there with a display of questions that are more or less artificial, and of answers that are more or less untrue. The other Mr. Bottomley is chiefly remarkable for an

attempted philosophic or scientific theory of survival that strongly reminds one of the more ignorant type of spiritualistic quack. There is much talk of "Life Force" and "Vital Force" (Oh, ye gods!) and, of course, Karma and "Divine Purpose"; and it all might as fitly serve as a literary advertisement for somebody's pills as for a theory of immortality. The single-personality Mr. Bottomley is amusing enough; he of the dual personality is a constant scream.

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Do People Trouble About Immortality?

But we promised to be serious; and to this end we will deal with Mr. Bottomley as a constant, not as a variable. "The perennial cry of a tortured humanity," says Mr. Bottomley, is, "If a man die, shall he live again?" Now, if Mr. Bottomley means that this has been asked in all ages, he is quite right; so right, if we may use the expression, that it was hardly worth the saying. But if he means that humanity is continuously worrying its head about the question, and bombarding the high heavens with its cries for an answer, then we say quite flatly, it is not true. The vast majority of mankind, even though they profess a formal belief in immortality, never trouble their heads about it. It is a constant complaint of the clergy of all denominations that people will not concern themselves about it; that they live as though there were no after-life, no Judgment Day, no great beyond. And the experience of everyone will bear this out. In ordinary conversation it is a subject seldom mooted. Death is as common as the weather—some sort of weather; and yet, while the one is a regular topic of conversation, the question of whether man survives death is generally ignored. The picture of a world worrying its head about immortality will not do. It is a pulpit-engineered superstition. It is about as near the facts of the case as is the advertising picture of thousands of people struggling to get into a chemist's shop to buy Blank's pills.

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Life as Adjustment.

Life would be intolerable were it otherwise. Conceive a world of human beings obsessed with this question of immortality; you will have a world so weakened, so enervated that it would be useless for lofty deeds or useful purposes. An individual may be obsessed with this belief, a nation may be, but not for long. And in either case utility is weakened and sanity threatened. For a time Europe was smitten with this disease, and the consequence was the Monasticism of the Thebaid. Men and women forsook healthy human responsibilities; they strove to be like the angels, and became worse than the beasts. And the recovery of Europe began when it shook off that nightmare, and allowed the world of light and beauty, of sorrow and wrong, of loving and hating, fighting and striving, flesh-and-blood men and women, to occupy their attention. Mr. Bottomley has much to say of our gallant soldiers who are laying down their lives, etc. Well, look at them. Are they troubling about a future life? Not a bit of it. It is the strong man in the full flush of his manhood who throws away his life without a thought.

It is the weak and helpless old one who is more apt to place an exaggerated value upon his existence. Again the same lesson. Obsession with a future life as the equivalent of enervation. And that is what every evolutionist would expect. Life is developed in relation to the needs of life here, not with regard to some hereafter. Man's real and permanent hopes and fears and aspirations are bounded by the grave, and it is only a false and artificial philosophy that sees their application or realization in a world beyond the tomb.

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Seniimentalism or Sentiment ?

Mr. Bottomley does not, of course, forget the emotional string. His question, "Are our dear war heroes really dead?" is not, he assures us, the barren speculation of theology; it springs from widows in their loneliness, lovers robbed of joy and promise, etc. Really, we have heard all this before, and from the professors of this same "barren theology." And we are not more impressed by it in the pages of the *Royal* than in the thousands of sermons we have glanced through in the course of our life. Again, let us appeal to experience. In how many cases do people who have lost one dear to them—for death, one must remind Mr. Bottomley, is not peculiar to the War—in how many cases do these turn to the belief in immortality for comfort? In how many cases does it give comfort? We do not deny the use of formal phrases, phrases that mean no more than the "Yours obediently" of an angry letter, on such occasions. But look at the cases around us. When the news comes alike to believer and non-believer of a death on the battlefield, can we detect less grief in the one case than in the other? How many people really find consolation in this direction? Do let us quit phrases and come to facts. Sorrow for our dead, its depth and duration, is a question of character, of temperament; it has very little to do with theological speculations.

* * *

An Absurd Theory.

We have but little space in which to deal with Mr. Bottomley's (the other Mr. Bottomley's) amusingly inconsequential theory of immortality. He has long been convinced that the universe is permeated by "an ocean of vital force," ever "flying in and out (at birth or death) of every living being." When a negro child is born, it attracts a little of this vital force, but the negro is "coarse material," and so, when the negro dies, the "vital force" flies back unaltered. But when a white child is born, it takes "a larger quantity of the Vital Fluid," and it is either refined or degraded in consequence. Then when it is elevated enough, "it is of too high a quality to blend with the common ocean, and roams about in search of an Affinity—which it finds in those who were dearest to it in life," and thus, concludes the first Mr. Bottomley, coming into his own at the end of the article, with a deadly raid on capital letters, we shall have, "After Armageddon—Peace. After Sacrifice and Suffering—Exaltation. After Death—for the Ordinary—Oblivion; for the Wicked—Unrest; for the Noble and the Worthy—Life, Glory, and Re-Union everlasting"—and a largely increased weekly sale of *John Bull*. That is Mr. Bottomley's contribution to the theory of immortality. Some of Mr. Bottomley's friends would, he says, like to see him in the Church. Well, we have been fighting the Churches all our life, so we are quite careless what happens to them.

* * *

The Exploitation of Grief.

Although we find it difficult to take Mr. Bottomley seriously, there is a serious side to this exploitation of a widespread sorrow in favour of this or that superstition. Over and over again the press has dwelt upon the way

in which fortunetellers, crystal gazers, and the like are earning money out of the anxieties of credulous men and women anxious for news of those that belong to them. The exploitation of human sorrow in the interests of unfounded belief is, to us, equally detestable. We believe that real sorrow in the presence of death is of too sacred a character to be thus idly played with. Whatever help or sympathy it is within our power to offer—whether of hand or heart, should be given freely and without stint. But to play upon the grief-stricken mind in the way it is played upon is one of the most detestable consequences of the prevalence of superstition. Mr. Bottomley is not alone in this. All the Churches are with him. Nay, without them he would not be possible. It is they who prepared the ground, and sowed the seed, he is only reaping a little of the harvest. And one of the penalties the race must pay for its long servitude to superstition is that of falling an easy prey to such as care to play upon their unthinking susceptibilities.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Christ-Myth.

THE minister-elect of the City Temple, Dr. J. Fort Newton, whose sermons are published weekly in the *Christian Commonwealth*, repeats the old lie that when Christ came "the world was rushing into a dark night," that "humanity was almost hopeless," and that "weariness and lust made life a hell in that hard old Roman world." Dr. Newton cannot be ignorant of the fact that the Augustan Age was one of the purest, healthiest, and happiest ages in the world's history. On the whole, no Christian age is worthy of comparison with it. It is true that "Rome herself was doomed"; but when Christianity arrived it did not avert that doom, but, rather, accelerated its fulfilment. For a thousand years, each Christian century was worse than its predecessor, the tenth being the darkest and most degraded mankind had ever seen. Dr. Newton is discreetly silent on the subject of Christian history, though he has the temerity to assert that we ourselves are the proof of the truth of the Christian faith. He tells us that Paul, "the intrepid old prisoner, looked beyond the valley of the shadow and saw the sunlight shining on the hills," and that "in the swift and gentle years of the life of Jesus he discovered a redeeming force destined to reshape the crumbling world and slowly lift mankind from the animal to the angel shape." That Paul was mistaken was demonstrated by the character of his own converts, of multitudes of whom he was heartily ashamed. The Ages of Faith are known as Dark Ages, and Dr. Newton admits that after nineteen Christian centuries "a new Dark Age seems to be settling down upon us." Yet he assures us that the Christian faith is "equal to a world-tragedy," despite the fact that its history proves the opposite. He thanks God that this mighty faith still lives, "in these strange and troubled times." Does he not realize that his statements are essentially self-contradictory? With the same breath he praises the faith and denounces the times, which the faith has signally failed to redeem. He does, indeed, declare that there are many mysteries still unsolved. "Why all the woes of the world, its filthy lust, its brutal tyranny, its turbid ebb and flow of misery? If God is good, why is man so often vile?" To these and other similar questions he furnishes no answer, but claims that "Love lies at the heart of things, a Love profounder than sin, deeper than death."

Now, what is the use of believing in the existence of a love that is profounder than sin and deeper than death when both sin and death are still triumphant? How

can Christianity be equal to a world-tragedy when that tragedy is still unrelieved? Emotional comfort may be derived from the lines:—

Ah, never sank a sinner so low
But God's paternal hand could deeper go
His perishing child to save;

but anyone who looks the world in the face knows how utterly false they are. Dr. Matheson sang:—

O love that wilt not let me go,

but, as a matter of fact, there is no such love at the heart of things. If there is a God, his love lets millions of people go. It is a notorious fact that unbelievers are never touched by it at all. Neither God's love nor God's wrath troubles them in the least. Though he is their loving Heavenly Father, he leaves them severely alone. Dr. Newton says:—

At least God is no far-off Looker-on, judging men harshly, condemning them arbitrarily, but a mighty presence yearning over them, within them, wounded by their transgressions, bearing their woe.

The reverend gentleman offers no proof of the truth of these words except that which he finds in the life and character of Jesus Christ, or in his spirit, which fills the world.

Deny how you will, doubt this item and that of his story, his spirit is here, and here to stay. He is inevitably present and inevitably influential. "I am the light of the world," he said—and the sun is up. It shines on farm and factory, on palace and hut, on peace and war, slowly changing winter into summer. None can stay it. His spirit is with us, whether we obey it or not.....His life, his character, his vision of God—these are the ultimate, ineffable, unspeakable beauties and the sublimest possessions of humanity.

Of that extract all we can say is that it is not true. There is no such spirit inevitably present and inevitably influential in the world. The only Christian spirit known to us is the spirit that dominates those who profess Christ's name; and it is very seldom that we can accurately define it as pure and beautiful. Indeed, it is often spiteful, jealous, malicious, bitter, and cruel. The Christ of the Churches is a figment of the imagination, and of necessity he can accomplish nothing. Like God, he has no dealings with unbelievers. He is called the Saviour of the world, whose heart is a shoreless ocean of love; but he never even attempts to save unbelievers. They never hear his voice, saying, "Come unto me and rest." He treats them as if he did not exist at all; and they are fully justified in positively denying his existence. His disciples are continually singing:—

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run,

but very few of them verily believe that he shall. Nothing is easier than to say: "He will yet have his way with this hard world to the confounding of all injustice, all unkindness," but the pulpit has been repeating that promise for two thousand years, and it is no nearer fulfilment now than it was at the beginning.

The powerlessness of Christ is demonstrated every day, and were it not for the ministrations of the pulpit his very name would quickly vanish. The supreme business of the clergy is to create faith in him, and, having produced it, to keep it alive. Belief in him does not spring up instinctively, and its constant tendency is to die out, as the preachers very well know. If the Church were annihilated, Christ would inevitably cease to be. The clergy themselves admit that except through his human instruments he can do nothing. "For some mysterious reason," they proudly aver, "he has ordained to do his work only through us. He could easily do without us altogether; but in perfect wisdom he has graciously chosen us as channels through which his

redeeming love performs its saving miracles." The truth is that Christ is a creation of the Church, and that apart from the Church he does not exist. The Church is founded upon a lie, and it is by means of that lie that it thrives. Its proud association with the supernatural is the biggest humbug in the Universe. Falsehood may be written in fiery letters across all its claims. All its so-called treasures are myths, of which the world is at last getting tired. The Christ-myth is losing ground, and, as a result, Man is slowly coming into his kingdom. At last "the lovesong of earth" is already resounding "through the wind of her wings"—

Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things.

J. T. LLOYD

The Poet of Humanity.

Sun-treader, life and light be thine for ever!

—Robert Browning.

The drowning of Shelley on that fatal July day in 1822 was, in all probability, the heaviest loss that English literature has ever sustained.—G. W. Footc.

THOUGH the newspapers be full of tumult, there is always a paragraph or so into which the meditative reader may turn aside, as into a quieter place. In one of these paragraphs there is a somewhat lengthy notice given to a great English poet, who, when alive, would have been astonished at so remarkable a display of publicity. "Hushed is the harp, the minstrel gone," but the spell holds. The name of Percy Bysshe Shelley still carries far. Those Continental critics who keep their fathers' excellent tastes in poetry know it well enough. In the New World it is known as a most famous name. As for English folk, it dwarfs for us most of the nineteenth century writers, although they are some of the most considerable in our literature.

The paragraph states that nineteen Shelley letters, and one hundred and thirty of the poet's cheques have been discovered. The original owner was manager for Brooks' Bank, in Chancery Lane, London, before that bank was taken over by another firm. The letters are business communications to the bank, and, whilst they contain no remarks on life, art, or literature, have an extreme value, for they reveal Shelley's boundless generosity. In one he sends a cheque for £150 to his friend, Leigh Hunt; and among other persons to whom he gave or lent, money were Thomas Love Peacock, Horace Smith, Claire Clairmont, and William Godwin. Indeed, Shelley was always giving, or lending, money, and it is very doubtful if he ever got repaid.

The great poet died so long ago that one would have thought that the facts concerning his life were well known to every lover of literature. Yet Christian writers have ever been loth to admit Shelley's Freethought, and his very virtues have been treated with the scantest courtesy, and his action presented in the worst possible light. Great, noble, and beautiful qualities met in this poet of poets. Splendid as his life-work was, he, the man, was greater and rarer. To the world he presented the spectacle of a man passionate for truth, and unreservedly obedient to the right as he saw it. He might have lived a life of ease and indulgence. The narrow, aristocratic circle into which he was born would have honoured him for it, but he thought continually of other and higher matters. His antagonisms to tyranny, religion, and custom seemed the merest midsummer madness in the son of a wealthy nobleman of many acres. Society denounced him, for it had long agreed that all reform was criminal. In such cases, indeed.—

Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair.

Yet, simply because Shelley was an Atheist, Christians insinuate that the great poet was a bad and vicious man. Thus they cast libellous dust in the eyes of the unthinking public, and incapacitate them from seeing the real facts of the case. Incidentally, they discredit the cause to which Shelley dedicated his life.

That Shelley was a humanitarian is amply proved. To help the needy and to relieve the sick seemed to him a simple duty, which he carried out cheerfully. He inquired personally into the circumstances of his charities, visited the sick in their homes, and kept a list of poor persons whom he assisted. At Marlow he suffered from an acute ophthalmia, contracted whilst visiting the poor, afflicted lace-makers in their cottages. Leigh Hunt has told us that Shelley, finding a woman ill on Hampstead Heath, carried her from door to door in the vain hopes of meeting with a person as charitable as himself, until he had to lodge the poor creature with some personal friends. Shelley's purse was always open to his friends. Peacock received from him an annual allowance of £100, and he discharged debts of Godwin amounting to thousands of pounds. So practical was Shelley in his philanthropy that he even went to the length of attending a London hospital, in order to acquire medical knowledge that should prove of service to the poor he visited. When his friend, Captain Medwin, was ill for six weeks, Shelley was by his bedside the whole time, applying leeches, administering medicines, and tending him like a brother. Without a murmur, without ostentation, this heir to one of the richest noblemen of England illustrated by his own conduct those principles of Freethought and Democracy which formed his ethical and political creed. Byron, who held Charles the Second's cynical view of mankind, acknowledged Shelley to be the best and purest-minded man he had ever met. Captain Trelawny, who knew Shelley very intimately in his later life, admitted that the Atheist poet "loved everything better than himself."

Christians have read the basest and meanest motives into Shelley's relations with his first wife. It does not matter to them that Shelley's relations with Harriet are still a most perplexing problem, or that when they parted she and the children were well provided for. Indeed, Harriet's death, over two years afterwards, had nothing to do with Shelley's so-called "desertion." Shelley was but a boy when he married, and it was the very chivalry of Shelley's nature that led him into so imprudent a step.

Dead at twenty-nine, posterity has but the outcome of Shelley's cruder years; and the assurance of something nobler and wiser was stopped by the tragedy of his untimely end. It is precisely because his heart was aflame with human sympathy that his poems have vital and permanent effect on succeeding generations. Shelley devoted himself to the idea of the perfectibility of human nature, and it is the mainspring of his inspiration and his poetry. In his finest verse its expression glows with the solemn and majestic inspiration of prophecy. He dazzles us with glories beyond our reach, making us yearn for that which seems unattainable, and we are entranced with his dream-pictures of an emancipated humanity. What Shelley might have been we cannot conceive; but, in his short life, he made good the splendid boast of a later poet concerning Liberty:—

I am the trumpet at thy lips, thy clarion,
Full of thy cry, sonorous with thy breath;
The graves of souls born worms and creeds grown carrion,
Thy blast of judgment fills with fires of death.

Thou art the player whose organ-keys are thunders,
And I beneath thy foot the pedal prest;
Thou art the ray whereat the rent night sunders,
And I the cloudlet borne upon thy breast.

I shall burn up before thee, pass and perish,
As haze in sunrise on the red sea-line;
But thou from dawn to sunset shall cherish
The thoughts that led and souls that lighted mine.

MIMNERMUS.

The Suicide of Mr. Hilaire Belloc.

LET me at once say that I would not have the reader imagine that Mr. Belloc has committed suicide in the more obvious sense of the word. Even his enemies—and, like every man who is worth his salt, he has many, and some of them very bitter ones—would be sorry to see him come to any bodily harm, and so deprive them of the malign pleasure of assisting at his intellectual downfall. What I would call attention to by my screaming scare-heading is that he has made another attempt, and this time a more successful one, to commit mental suicide. To be quite frank, I cannot say that I am sorry to see him come to intellectual grief. There is always, as Rochefoucauld says, a bitter-sweet touch of malign pleasure in seeing others suffer; although many of us are inclined to ignore this unpalatable truth, and pride ourselves on the humanity with which we regret the errors of our opponents. Yet I must confess to having much the same kind of mixed admiration for Mr. Belloc as I have for Mr. Chesterton. I am not certain that I should think more of them if they happened to be on my side of the theological fence. A larger dose of Rationalism would, perhaps, make them more intellectually serious; but it is not unlikely that they would show signs of the ponderous dullness, the mental inelasticity, which some of us find inseparable from ethical Rationalism.

Membership of the Catholic Church has, I think, some indubitable advantages. When you can have all your philosophical and moral problems solved for you by the august authority of secular wisdom, you have naturally more time to cultivate the senses and the emotions. I say quite seriously that if the Freethinker had some infallible, or semi-infallible, authority to which he could appeal to settle his metaphysical and ethical difficulties, there might be vital improvement in his literary style, in his artistic sense in general.

However that may be, one of the things I admire most in Mr. Belloc is his courage. Like many men of ability, he thought it would be a fine thing to help in making the country's laws. When he did get into the House, he found that he was expected to form a part of the voting machine. If he had had a larger measure of intellectual docility, or even of political cynicism, he might have been at least a Parliamentary Secretary to one of the big departments; but he chose to throw over politics, and to turn once more to authorship and journalism. He exposed the Party System in terms so round and plain that even the devout believer in political purity became something of a sceptic. He also supported the bid for an absolutely free press made by the *New Age*, by founding the *Eye-Witness* and editing it for a year. Under the title of the *New Witness*, it is now edited by Mr. G. K. Chesterton, and both these papers have this in common with the *Freethinker*—their writers say what they think, not what a proprietor pays them to say.

But if Mr. Belloc is courageous, it has to be admitted that his courage not infrequently shades off into rashness. He is often in so great a hurry to secure a victory that he does not stay to measure his own strength, or to reckon the cost of a possible defeat. It may be remembered how he assailed Professor Bury's excellent and fearless *History of Freedom of Thought*, a little

book which every Freethinker should treasure. He had the good fortune to be able to correct a few dates and statements, which corrections were gratefully accepted by Professor Bury; but as no argument was based on these minor mistakes, there was no warrant for Mr. Belloc's assumption that they pointed to a "fundamental lack of scholarship," and that the historian had written without sufficient preparation or knowledge. The mistakes made by Mr. Belloc in his criticism, I suppose, did not imply anything more serious than ordinary want of care. For the reader of "Catholic Truth Tracts," in which series Mr. Belloc made his indictment, such a stupid controversial method is no doubt quite good enough. But the more intellectual Catholic does not take him so seriously, and does not confine his reading to books that bear the *imprimatur* of the Church. It is fitting that Mr. Belloc should be put in his place by a Catholic scholar, writing in the leading Catholic weekly, the *Tablet*, and it is amusing to see how neatly he is let down.

It will be remembered that Professor Bury, over whose book Mr. Belloc so nearly came to an untimely intellectual end, is the learned and capable editor of Gibbon. Following upon his unwise attempt to discredit the reputation of a great historian, he has made another exhibition of his foolishness by attacking Gibbon himself. In the October number of the *Dublin Review* he seeks to convict Gibbon of incompetence as an historian on the strength of one insignificant incident. With characteristic modesty, he takes a page of Gibbon, and endeavours to translate it into what he calls history. But, curiously enough, he depreciates his own efforts by telling us that the re-writing of the great work is a mere schoolboy's task. "I have often thought," he says,—

that one of the most fruitful labours to which a young man might set himself after a course of historical study would be the publication of an edition of Gibbon corrected with the knowledge of Europe which Catholicism adds to historical scholarship. It would be a lengthy and an arduous task, but it would be final; for the whole great work is vitiated from beginning to end by the faults of which I have spoken; and upon its authority even Catholic writers (when they are of English-speaking culture) still misapprehend their past.

The *Tablet's* comment on this utterance is delightfully sarcastic:—

It may seem an anticipation more sanguine than intelligent to take it for granted that the work of any given young man will necessarily have this "final" character, even though he be aided by "the knowledge of Europe which Catholicism adds to historical scholarship"—a benefit which is apparently denied to Catholics of English-speaking culture. When Mr. Podsnap is telling a Frenchman about the peculiar privileges which Providence has bestowed on the great British people, the Frenchman ventures to make a mild remonstrance. "It was," he urges, "a little particular of Providence." And now, when this new Anglo-French Podsnap comes to us with his dogmatic, *a priori* theories on the making of history, we are tempted to suggest that it was a little particular of Catholicism. Be this as it may, the limitation only makes us more sceptical about the imaginary young man with his definite edition of Gibbon. For as the book itself is written, in spite of Porson, in the English language, it might seem that it would need a Catholic of English-speaking culture to give it this final correction. But perhaps we must look for a young man of French culture who is also a master of the English language. And as another Dickens character was accustomed to speak of "a man," meaning himself, it is possible that Mr. Belloc's frequent thoughts of the young man setting himself to this lengthy historical labour crowned with fruitfulness and finality, may be susceptible of a like subjective interpretation.

At first sight, this suggestion may seem to make the matter more hopeful. For some of us would find it hard to believe that any young man who set himself to the task would be capable of refuting or correcting Gibbon's great work. And when we are told of "the knowledge of Europe which Catholicism adds to historical scholarship," we can only marvel at this curious specimen of loose thinking and looser language. Catholicism, as such, cannot possibly impart this knowledge. Among the poor and simple in many parts of the world there are thousands whose Catholicism is all that could be desired, though they know nothing whatever about European history. But it is another matter if we are merely told that it would be an advantage to have this task of revising and editing Gibbon's history undertaken by some zealous Christian of brilliant natural gifts, such as Mr. Belloc certainly possesses, and an extensive knowledge of European history, both secular and religious. Even with this modification, we should hesitate to anticipate finality. For, even in the hands of the most competent critic, it would be a task of peculiar difficulty and delicacy. There are, happily, several Catholic historical writers who might be expected to do good service in this way. And we daresay that a good many readers, if asked to select a competent Catholic editor and corrector of Gibbon, would have given their votes for Mr. Belloc. But some of them, after reading his treatment of one of the historian's pages in the *Dublin Review*, may be reminded of the words of another great historian—"Omnium consensu capax imperii, nisi imperasset."

Mr. Belloc makes some sweeping assertions with regard to the character of the history. "The great work," he says, without hesitation, "is profoundly un-historical. It presents a thoroughly warped view of the whole vast revolution which turned Pagan into Christian Europe. That Revolution is Gibbon's very subject; and yet his work on it is open, upon almost every page, to strict historical criticism which wrecks its historical authority.....Gibbon's motive was an attack on the Catholic Church," his bias presumably "distorting the values of his narrative." "He thought the Church a moribund vanity." I will let his Catholic critic deal with him; his treatment could not be bettered:—

As it often happens that famous books are known only by name to many readers, and as literary biography, with all its fascinations, is still a special subject of study, it is likely enough that Mr. Belloc's article will be read by a good many who are by no means familiar with the contents of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, or with the life story of its author. And to such readers it may be safely said that the *Dublin* article will give a wholly false idea both of the man and of the book. They will be left with the impression that Gibbon was an Englishman brought up in the narrow Protestant tradition, so that the grand vision of Catholic truth was wholly hidden from his eyes. And they will suppose that the book, like so much Protestant literature, is generally unfair to orthodox Catholics, and glorifies heretics and persecutors at their expense. Such readers will be considerably startled when they learn that Gibbon became a Catholic in his boyhood; that he was forced back to Protestantism by a year's tyrannical persecution and a system of education which, not unnaturally, had a fatal effect on his religious belief. Frankly, we cannot understand how a Catholic critic can write of Gibbon as Mr. Belloc has done, and pass over his conversion and re-conversion in absolute silence.

The irreligion unhappily displayed in many parts of the history is only what might have been expected as a result of the author's treatment in boyhood. But to say that the main object of the great work was an attack on the Catholic Church betrays a complete misconception, both of the book and of its author. The bitterness and hostility was not, like that of Protestants, directed against Rome or orthodoxy. The satire in the account of the Arian controversy affects the disputants on all

sides. And the severest censure on religious persecution in the whole course of the history is found in Gibbon's condemnation of Calvin's cruelty to Servetus. Nay, as the best judges have recognized, the historian, in some important pages, has been more favourable to the orthodox than to their enemies. Thus Moehler, in the preface to his great work on Athanasius, quotes the following words of Gibbon, with well-warranted approval: "The persecution of Athanasius, and of so many respectable bishops, who suffered for the truth of their opinions, or at least for the integrity of their conscience, was a just subject of indignation and discontent of all Christians, except those who were blindly devoted to the Arian faction." And has not Newman remarked that "Athanasius stands out more grandly in Gibbon than in the pages of the orthodox ecclesiastical historians"?

Mr. Belloc's indictment of one of the greatest of our historians is based on one page—that which deals with the death of Priscillian, the Bishop of Avila, in Spain, and the first heretic to suffer capital punishment at the hands of a Christian prince. Now we are told that Gibbon wilfully confused heresy with *magic*, for which crime we are assured by Mr. Belloc, and not heresy, Priscillian was tortured and executed. The same mistake, Mr. Belloc notes, is made by a writer in the *Catholic Encyclopædia*; but he does not stop to draw the obvious conclusion from this fact. When both the Catholic and the Infidel agree, it is not unlikely they are both correct. Both of them knew that *magic* was said to be one of the items in the indictment against the Spanish heretic, but neither of them is less convinced that he died, not for the crime of *maleficium* or sorcery, but for his religious belief. It is sometimes claimed by Protestants that Catholic martyrs under Henry and Elizabeth really suffered for the crime of treason. Certainly that was the distinct charge; and yet an historian is not misinterpreting the temper of an epoch when he refuses to believe that they were not really put to death for their religion. And, after all, Mr. Belloc cannot ignore one fact that upsets his whole case; he cannot disprove that St. Ambrose not only believed, but acted on his belief, that Priscillian died for his opinions; he cannot, moreover, explain away the passage in Sulpicius which tells us how Maximus was preparing to send tribunes into Spain to seek out heretics and to kill them, the soldiers having instructions to discriminate between heretics and Catholics by their *complexion*.

I suppose Mr. Belloc honestly thinks that he has done something to damage the great reputation of Gibbon; but what he has really done is to discredit himself as a critic of historical fact and method. I will leave the judicious and luminous critic I have quoted above to put the finishing touch on this bulwark of the newer Catholicism:—

What Mr. Belloc says of Gibbon really recoils on his own head. He has completely failed to grasp the mind of the early saints about whom he dogmatizes. And he reads back into the past the narrow, intolerant ideas of a later age. When we recall the fact that he is asking us to judge of Gibbon's great work as a whole from this one page, we are irresistibly reminded of the famous encounter between John Wesley and Beau Nash. The autocrat of fashion began to attack the great Methodist, and Wesley asked if Nash had ever heard him preach, or read his writings. When he was answered in the negative, Wesley said: "How, then, are you able to judge me?" Nash answered: "From what I have heard men say of you." "Oh, sir," said Wesley, "I dare not judge *you* by what I hear men say of you." And in like manner we should be exceedingly sorry to judge of Mr. Belloc's historical work as a whole by his suicidal attack on a page of Gibbon.

GEO. UNDERWOOD.

An Old "Christian" Friend.

IT is more years ago than I like to think of when I first got to know this particular friend—a Scotsman, like myself by nationality; a budding solicitor, *then*, by profession; genial, hospitable, entertaining; as straight as a die in all business dealings, an all-round sportsman. When I first knew him he had just embarked upon a professional career for himself, and was on the eve of being married. He was a regular attender at kirk, taught in the Sabbath-school, sang in the choir, and eventually was elected an office-bearer. I, too, followed a similar course as an ardent Presbyterian, and it was in this way we were thrown into contact. As our intimacy ripened, we began to have confidential talks over a pipe.

I shall never forget the shock he gave me one evening when speaking of his business prospects. We were alone. He was remarking upon the social influences that help to bring business to young professional men, which, he indicated, he intended to use to the utmost. "And," he added, eyeing me significantly, "I suppose you realize the meaning of all this bally kirk racket?"

I sat up; I gasped; I was horrified! Did I hear aright? What did my friend mean? Mark you, I was a believer—*then*. "Of course," he proceeded thoughtfully, "a kirk connection is worth a lot if it is properly worked. A nice, diplomatic way with the old wives (male and female) of the congregation, and, by Jove, sir, it may be worth anything from £300 to £500 a year to a tactful young fellow."

I was speechless.

"I am only one of hundreds," he went on. "You must know that the kirk is in very many cases a young solicitor's most promising source of business. Pat the old wives on the back, harangue the kids at the *soirees*, gas at the P.S.A.'s (a wooden, anæmic lot you get *there*), an occasional bit of prayer at the Office-bearers' meeting, and you have the ball rolling fine. "Ay" (with a chuckle), "and the joke is that they believe I believe all their dam nonsense. Religion? Bah! Religion has no meaning to me save as a producer of business, my boy,—*business* with money in it!"

* * * * *

I have again, after a long, long interval, foregathered with my old friend. He is greyer, fatter, wealthier; otherwise unchanged in mind and body. He has, indeed, prospered. He has a comfortable home. He is an elder of the kirk. The religious activities of his younger days are not so *active* as they were; but the offices he holds in connection with the kirk have quadrupled in number. We met at an hotel in the grey metropolis of the north, and he gave me a most cordial greeting. Two interesting hours we spent in his private sitting-room and compared notes, after fighting some of our battles over again.

"It *is* funny," I said, "looking back, when I remember how you shocked me by the announcement that you didn't believe what you professed, and only had a kirk connection for business reasons. Dear me; if I recollect aright, I nearly collapsed! And now to reflect that I am a Freethinker avowedly—and you are too, you know, with your intimates in the smoke-room."

"Ay," he said, with a chuckle, contemplating his fat cigar, "religion's been worth more to me than five hundred a year. I've never regretted it, though I never believed it, and got many a laugh out of it. You ken what I mean, yon oppressive solemnity"—he had dropped into the vernacular—"aye made me put my hand owre ma mouth tae keep me frae lauchin!"

"Well, well," I rejoined; "maybe that sort of thing has been some sort of compensation for the ordeal you

went through. But, in spite of everything, man, I couldn't have done it—I could *not* have done it. You're a lot better off as regards money than I am; but no, man, I *could not positively*—I could *not* have done it!"

"That," said he, jocosely, with a kindly grin and a dig in the ribs, as he handed me his cigar-case, "that is because you are a dam fool!"

IGNOTUS.

Acid Drops.

On February 7 the King and Queen will open Parliament in State. "In State" means, for one thing, that there will be a lavish display of the Army and Navy, and on this occasion there will be a good representation of officers from the Overseas and Indian forces. This is quite in line with previous State functions, and that is all there is to be said in its favour—except that as the Monarchy itself is a mediæval institution, in this country modified in the direction of constitutionalism, one must expect a dose of mediæval accessories. Nevertheless, it is surely time that some drastic modification was made in the "get up" of these State functions. We should, for instance, like to see less of the Army and Navy, and more of the arts, sciences, and industries of the nation. A State function should be a reflection in miniature of the life of the State, and at present whatever else it may be, it is certainly not that.

Parliament is a *civil* institution. We use the word *civil* without reference to its behaviour, but solely with regard to the fact that it does not come under the category of "the armed forces of the Crown." Fundamentally, it represents the civil and peaceful life of the community, while its control of the Army and Navy is an indication that this civil life is supreme, and that the armed forces of the country only justify their being so far as they contribute to that end. This proportion should be observed in all pageants intended to impress, and in that sense educate, the public mind. If we are really in earnest when we rail against "Prussianism," the clank of the sabre, and the menace of the "mailed fist," let us make a start here. First place should be given to the peaceful and *permanent* phases of national life, and secondary place to what we hope are its more transient features. We should then be giving the public a lesson that in the opinion of our rulers it is in virtue of the peaceful arts of life that a nation progresses, and may lay solid claim to be called great. Our present plan is apt to impress the opposite of this, namely, that civilization rests upon brute force, that the uniformed soldier is of greater importance than the thinker or the peaceful artisan.

A pious Streatham lady has made the astounding discovery that the Kaiser William is the "Beast" mentioned in "Revelation." This mythical marvel has already been identified with an enormous number of persons from Nero to Napoleon the Little.

A daily paper has had some outspoken articles on the proceedings of a fashionable London quack who had a business in which he offered to pray for friends in the fighting lines and elsewhere at a sliding scale of fees. One journalist paid nine guineas for the "Absent Treatment" for two fictitious relatives. The dear clergy will smile, for they know that, whilst they are in the same line of business as the quack, few editors have enough courage to expose them.

The newspaper press of London has a peculiar flavour of Catholicism, due, perhaps, to the number of Catholic journalists who write the articles. In a recent review of a book on Giordano Bruno it was stated that Bruno "was especially eager to be restored to the Catholic communion." This might easily mislead an ordinary reader, who might be unaware that Bruno was tried by the Holy Inquisition and afterwards burnt alive.

The Rev. Murdo Smith Maclean, of Malling, Inverness, has been ordered to pay £200 for breach of promise of marriage. It was stated that he married a rich woman in preference to the plaintiff in the action. Evidently, the reverend gentleman was in no haste to appreciate the blessings of poverty.

In a dramatic notice of a recent play in a Sunday paper, it was stated: "The only impression left is that if America is God's own country it must be hell to live there." A fine example of Sunday reading for Christians.

The two strongholds of unreasoning conservatism are the Church and the Law. A good illustration of the latter was given in the discussion in the Inner Temple Hall that took place on Mr. Holford Knight's proposal that the time had arrived when women should be admitted to the Bar. The Attorney-General, Mr. F. E. Smith, occupied the chair, and the result of the discussion was the defeat of the proposal by between 200 and 300 to 22. A more stupid or indefensible vote could hardly have been given. The law is quite a "lady-like" profession, so far as we have been able to observe. It calls for no *very* unusual qualities of mind, and with the example of France, Italy, Russia, and other countries before us, one would have imagined that we might have followed their example in this respect. The incident is a fine commentary upon the genuineness of the "gush" poured out as to woman's work during the war.

The truth is that the legal craft represents a very close and a very narrow trade unionism. And, as with all trades unions, there is a dread of any innovation that threatens to restrict privileges or to diminish gains. And, in the last respect, England is a lawyer's paradise. We doubt if there is any other country in the world in which the gains are as large or in which the layman is so completely at the mercy of the legal practitioner. Some years ago a business friend of ours was involved in a law case in both London and Berlin. It was the same case tried in both capitals. In Berlin the expenses came to just about £40. In London the expenses ran to £200. No wonder the Bar opposes any reform that would tend to disturb its traditions and interfere with its emoluments.

General Sir R. Baden-Powell says that religion in the trenches is comprised in the words "God is love." The believer who realizes that thirty millions of Christians are waiting to murder each other must needs have a very robust faith.

Poor old Providence seems to be more easy-going than the people who believe in him. During the past twenty-nine months 2,821 persons have lost their lives by fire in the United Kingdom. During the same period the loss of lives on the Continent from the same cause has been almost incalculable.

The estate of the late Sir Joseph Beecham, the famous pill manufacturer, amounted to £1,000,000. Mr. Eno, another patent medicine proprietor, left £1,611,000. Evidently Christians put their faith in pills and potions more than in prayer.

In a special article on "Woman's Place in the Church," in the *Daily News*, it is said that Saint Paul's views "cannot be taken as a principle for all time." This is smart—*for* our Nonconformist contemporary; but it plays ducks and drakes with Biblical authority.

The clergy are quaint folk. They will not fight, and their ideas of work of national importance are as ridiculous as the religion they profess. Here is the Bishop of Norwich, whose income is only £90 a week, stating that he has been growing beetroots and carrots in his palace gardens, and geese were strutting about his lawns. Does his lordship not realize that his income would suffice for nearly fifty families of ordinary people?

We are pleased to see *Truth* calling attention to the character of the "Commission" appointed by the self-styled "Council of Public Morals" to inquire into the effects on morals of the cinematograph business. This "Commission" was appointed, it is true, at the request of the people representing the film trade; but it is certain that this was done only because people with an exaggerated capacity for seeing something "nasty" in the most harmless of things were circulating stories as to the immoral consequences of picture shows. As to the character of the "Commission" and the person who appears to be the prime mover in the "National Council of Public Morals"—the very title is offensively redolent of cant and humbug—*Truth* says:—

Why the cinema trade should have thought it desirable to petition the "National Council of Public Morals" for an inquiry, instead of the Home Office or the Education Department, I am quite unable to understand. I am in the same position as to why so many gentlemen of light and leading should have accepted appointments on the "Commission" from the "National Council," for the "Council," in spite of its pretentious title, is a very one-horse, or rather one-man, affair. It owes its existence to a reverend gentleman named James Marchant, whose apostolic career has been exceedingly varied. He appears to have commenced life as a Rationalist, and shortly afterwards to have blossomed out as a lecturer for the Christian Evidence Society. He next joined the Anglo-Benedictine Order, where he was known as Brother James. He was excommunicated by Father Ignatius, whom he thereafter virulently attacked. Later he seems to have been a sort of lay-reader in Presbyterian churches, and, after a brief connection with the Barnardo Homes, he was employed for a while by the National Vigilance Association. He left the association in 1908 to start a similar movement on his own account, called "The National Purity Crusade." A couple of years later the "Crusade" became the National Council of Public Morals.

Where Mr. Marchant got his Holy Orders from is not quite clear. In *Who's Who* for 1913 he described himself as having been "consecrated for the work of public morals" in the Dean's Chapel, Westminster, by the Lord Bishop of Durham and the Rev. F. B. Meyer, but this consecration in later editions is altered to "dedicated to the work of the National Council of Public Morals in the private chapel of the Dean of Westminster Abbey." Whatever this mysterious ceremony was, it does not seem to give him any right to dub himself "Reverend." I have sought in vain also in the literature of the "Council" for particulars of its personnel. It has a distinguished president and a remarkable array of equally distinguished vice-presidents, but of the council itself there is no list. There may be a score of modest gentlemen who prefer to hide their lights under Mr. Marchant's bushel, but this is unfair to the public when they take upon themselves the appointment of public commissions to take evidence on matters of public importance. I suggest, therefore, to the commission that before proceeding further with their investigations they should make some inquiry as to the constitution of the "National Council."

It is the first time we have heard of Mr. Marchant as a "Rationalist." He was, many years ago, a member of the N. S. S. for a few months, and left because he found the Christian Evidence Society more attractive. The reasons for the change are best known to himself. Other people have, of course, their own theories on the matter.

Military officials usually allow the clergy a free hand in proselyting among the troops, but there are exceptions. In the United States, General Funston refused to allow revival meetings in the southern camps on the ground that "whether a man is religious or irreligious no other person has a right to rub his beliefs into his face." Three cheers for the General!

A Sunday paper has the following quaint note on a former "infidel slayer": "The Rev. A. J. Waldron, who, while vicar of Brixton, wrote a very bad play called 'Should a Woman Tell?' in which a parson actually tells his nephew what a woman parishioner has just told him in his capacity as a priest, appears this week as an actor! He is showing at the Victoria Palace in 'Nature's Call,' which is said to discuss 'the problems of the unmarried woman.'" We await the press notices with much interest.

The Kentucky Avenue Presbyterian Church, Kentucky, has decided to purchase a cinematograph machine for use at the Sunday evening services. The pastor of the church says he believes it will fill the place. We have no doubt it will—properly worked. And there are many incidents in both the Old and New Testaments in which Charlie Chaplin would cut a striking figure.

Patrick Kane, Catholic priest, was fined at Sheffield for stealing three bottles of whisky and one bottle of brandy from the railway hotel, Coalville. The defence was that there was no felonious intent, and that Kane was not responsible for his actions. The Catholic Bishop said he would pay the hotel bill if the magistrates would merely bind Kane over. This was refused, and a fine of one guinea and costs were inflicted.

A number of clergymen, claiming to represent the "Christian Community of Swansea," have written the Swansea Allotments Committee, protesting against ploughing on Sunday. Even for the purpose of feeding the people, or of winning the War, these good folk cannot agree to tilling the soil on Sunday. What they ought to protest against is things growing on Sunday. That would be logical, and quite as sensible as the other protest.

As we announced a week or so ago, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners have invested three-and-a-half millions in War Loan. Not to be behind, the Episcopal Church of Ireland has invested £1,400,000. Both bodies will draw their five per cent. with smug satisfaction, and will not feel at all disturbed at making profit from the War. It never struck these pious patriots that the loan might have been made free of interest—or made earlier at a lower rate. As with other "investors," the country's extremity is their opportunity.

CRIMINAL HAPPINESS.

Only the Scot can really observe the Scottish Sunday in all its severity. But occasionally a visitor is taken to task by some more than ordinarily strict Sabbatarian. There was the tourist who was leaving his hotel in Glasgow one fine Sunday morning, and encountered the reproving glare of a police-constable.

"Hey," said the officer, with a warning shake of the head, "ye had better hae a care what ye're dacing."

"Me!" said the astonished tourist. "Why, I didn't know I was doing anything. What's the matter?"

"Ye're maybe no' doin' anything," observed the constable solemnly, "but ye're looking as happy as though it were no' the Sawbath!"

THE GREAT LYING CHURCH.

You have been told by Macaulay and others that the Church in the Dark Ages was the preserver of learning, the patron of science, and the friend of freedom. The preserver of learning in the Dark Ages! It was the Church that made those ages dark. The preserver of learning! Yes; as the worm-eaten oak-chest preserves a manuscript. No more thanks to them than to the rats for not devouring its pages. It was the Republics of Italy and the Saracens of Spain that preserved learning, and it was the Church that trod out the lights of those Italian Republics. The patron of science! What? When they burned Savonarola and Giordano Bruno, imprisoned Galileo, persecuted Columbus, and mutilated Abelard. The friend of freedom! What? When they crushed the Republics of the South, pressed the Netherlands like the vintage in a wine-kelter, girdled Switzerland with a belt of fire and steel, banded the crowned tyrants of Europe against the Reformers of Germany, and launched Claverhouse against the Covenant of Scotland. The friend of freedom! When they hedged kings with a divinity! Their superstitions alone upheld the rotten fabric of oppression. Their superstitions alone turned the indignant freeman into a willing slave, and made men bow to the hell they created here, by a hope of the heaven they could not insure hereafter.—*Ernest Jones.*

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

February 4, Abertillery; February 11, Liverpool; February 25, Clapham; March 11 Birmingham; March 18, Leicester.

To Correspondents.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—February 11, Walsall; March 25, Avondale Hall, Clapham.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges:—Newcastle Branch, 3s.

A. F. (Govan).—Thanks for the newspaper reports of Professor Alexander's lectures. Such things are nearly always useful to us, even when no immediate use is made of them in the *Freethinker*.

MR. A. G. LEWIN writes:—"This is the first time you have heard from me, so perhaps you will be interested to know that up to twelve months ago, I was a communicant of the Church of England, but, owing to the Church's uncertain voice and bellicose attitude, I have been bound to acknowledge its utter helplessness and failure. For the past six months I have been a regular reader of the *Freethinker*, and I must take this opportunity of expressing my appreciation of its high intellectual standard."—We thank this correspondent for the pamphlet he has been good enough to send, which will be of service.

PERPLEXED.—Sorry we cannot offer advice on different lines. We have explained the various courses open to you, with their consequences, so far as we can judge. But we cannot advise anyone what risks they shall take. That each person must decide for himself.

B. F. B.—Received. Will appear next week. Sorry to hear of illness.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—W. L. Rowe (S.A.), 9s. 6d. Per Miss Vance:—Sapper B. G. Brown, 2s.

A. HEWIT.—We are afraid that publication would be so far misused as to furnish a weapon against the whole class. We have been, personally, much interested in your communication, and shall be pleased to hear from you at any time.

W. L. ROWE.—Pleased to receive your good wishes.

L. FRANCIS.—Sorry we have not the space at our disposal to permit a general discussion of the subject. The original point raised was little more than an illustration of the central topic; and as both writers have had their say, we fear we must let the matter rest there.

H. B.—We hope you will recognize the initials. Thanks for reference to article. Your letter has interested us greatly, and one day we may have the good fortune to meet you. At least, we hope so.

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When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, giving as long notice as possible.

Lecture Notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

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

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Sugar Plums.

We are writing this on Tuesday (Jan. 30), and we can only say that the Bowman case has just commenced in the House of Lords. We cannot say how long the hearing will take, but it should not last more than a couple of days, and we shall thus be able to give full particulars next week.

Despite the prevailing Arctic conditions, we are pleased to record that Mr. Cohen's visit to Swansea was a complete success. The hall was quite filled, and both the lecture and

the discussion—a lengthy one—went with a swing. Many expressed a desire to see a Branch of the N. S. S. started at Swansea, and we have every hope that this will be done. To-day (Feb. 4) Mr. Cohen again visits South Wales, lecturing at Abertillery in the New Era Institute at 3 and 6.

Next Sunday (Feb. 11) Mr. Cohen visits Liverpool. The lectures will be delivered in the Alexandra Hall, Islington, and tickets may be obtained in advance of the Secretary, Mr. W. McKelvie, 21 Globe Street, Kirkdale, Liverpool.

A new Branch of the N. S. S. has been started at Falkirk. We hope all Freethinkers in Falkirk and neighbourhood will give their hearty support to the new Branch, and that other parts of Scotland—and England—will follow suit.

We are printing, and hope to have ready soon, a new pamphlet by Mr. Mann on *Christian and Pagan Morality*. This is a subject of considerable interest to both Freethinkers and Christians, and we feel sure it will be found useful. We have also in hand a revised edition of Mr. Foote's *Christianity and Progress*, enlarged by a chapter on Mohammedanism. We also have in course of publication a pamphlet by "Mimmermus," on *Freethought and Literature*. Others will follow so soon as circumstances permit.

Last week we published a letter from the Rev. P. M. Weston, asking for a copy of the *Freethinker* to be sent weekly to a reading-room for soldiers and sailors at Swansea. This was done—in fact, two copies were sent. We have now received the following from the same gentleman:—

Dear Sir,—It is most kind of you to send two copies of the *Freethinker* to me, and to promise to send them. Those connected with the venture (Reading Room) do not think it desirable to continue to take same. I enclose herewith four penny stamps for the two copies sent, and one penny stamp for postage of same. My object was to let everyone see all points, so as to strengthen their Christianity.—Yours, etc.,

P. MOSS WESTON.

We compliment Mr. Weston on his very laudable desire to place all points of view before his readers, but he evidently reckoned without the bigotry of others. Their idea is, clearly, to suppress every point of view but their own. There is no room for men like Mr. Weston in the Christian Church. His proper place is outside.

A correspondent sends us the following:—

I am doubtful about your having space for this short letter; if not, scrap it. A son of mine, returned from France wounded, and now convalescent, tells me how he was converted from Agnostic to Church of England. When he joined up he gave in that he was an Agnostic. First Sunday he was taken and put to about two hours' scrubbing and other dirty work. The Sunday following the same. This against about three-quarters of an hour in church. This, he says, converted him, and he is now Church of England, and goes to church and listens to the rot.

Perhaps when the War is over, and we have finished talking about freedom, some people will set about trying to achieve it. It is little short of a national scandal that men should be ordered to church at any time; but to punish men for not going—and fatigue duty is nothing else—makes the scandal greater.

VIRTUE AND HELL.

It is the blackest sign of putrescence in a national religion, when men speak as if it were the only safeguard of conduct; and assume that, but for the fear of being burned, or for the hope of being rewarded, everybody would pass their lives in lying, stealing, and murdering. I think quite one of the notablest historical events of this century (perhaps the very notablest) was the council of clergymen, horror-struck at the idea of any diminution in our dread of hell, at which the last of English clergymen whom one would have expected to see in such a function, rose as the devil's advocate; to tell us how impossible it was we could get on without him.—John Ruskin, "Ethics of the Dust."

A Sceptical Scientist and Saint.

IV.

(Concluded from p. 53.)

How little publishers, or for that matter theatrical experts, are capable of estimating the merits or probable success of a book or play, is well known to the initiated. It is notorious that no actor-manager would look at "Charley's Aunt," which has proved one of the very greatest monetary successes of the modern stage. In a loftier sphere, both Herbert Spencer and Buckle failed to find publishers, while R. L. Stevenson made no impression when he submitted his now famous writings to those whose favour is essential to the unknown man of letters, who aspires to present his compositions to the notice of the world. And, although already a "selling" author, Lubbock found his publishers somewhat frigid when he suggested a new venture. This volume was to be entitled *The Pleasures of Life*, and the projected work was to consist of various essays. The publishers coldly answered that—

we are inclined to think that such a book, if it does not bear the appearance of a mere reissue of papers which have appeared elsewhere, but is substantially a new book, forming an organic whole, would have a very fair chance of success. Whether it would have a permanent sale, as your scientific books have had, we hardly feel prepared to say.

Not very encouraging, surely. Yet this work proved a tremendous success, and has probably been translated into more languages than any other book of recent times. Walter Pater, Sir George Trevelyan, and Hartpole Lecky all admired it, and the reading community displayed its appreciation by purchasing over half a million copies of its two parts. The volumes were popular in style and treatment, and deliberately so. And the author received letters thanking him for his gift from all quarters of the world. One communication came from a shopman whose leisure hours had been extended by Lubbock's legislation. This correspondent writes:—

I feel under a debt of gratitude to you for having induced me by your *Pleasures of Life* to read your *Beauties of Nature*. This work led me to read Geikie's *Geology*, and a number of the Best Hundred Books, with the result that I now seem to live in a new world, and subjects which before seemed dry, are now intensely interesting.

At the beginning of 1887 Lubbock succeeded in placing two Acts on the Statute Book. One of these related to Public Libraries, and the other widened the facilities for the creation of open spaces in urban areas. Owing to the Home Rule controversy, then in full blast, he greatly concerned himself at this time with the problem of the so-called races of the British Isles. The Home Rulers contended that there already existed four distinct nationalities in the United Kingdom. But Lubbock had no difficulty in proving that although special types are more pronounced in certain areas, the racial stocks of Britain and Ireland are decidedly composite in character. Apart from the very cogent evidence which he himself advances, Lubbock cited that weighty authority, Dr. Beddoe, as saying that:—

With respect to the distribution and commixture of race elements in the British Isles, we may safely assert that not one of them, whether Iberian, Gaelic, Cymric, Saxon, or Scandinavian, is peculiar to, or absent from, or anywhere predominant in any one of the three kingdoms.

At the first London County Council election Lubbock was returned at the top of the poll as a Progressive for the City. Lord Rosebery was first Chairman of the newly created Council, and Lubbock succeeded him

in that office. He also paid considerable attention to the law relating to property at sea in periods of warfare. Lubbock formed the view that the "Declaration of Paris" was unsatisfactory, and he wished to render ships immune to capture or seizure. This opinion he laid before the London Chamber of Commerce, and that body's Council gave him unanimous support. He also approached Lord Salisbury, then Premier, who agreed that his contentions were conclusive, and recommended him to sound Lord Lytton on the subject. Lytton, in a long letter, submitted his reasons for supposing that another Power would not agree. And an epistle from Salisbury provides instructive reading to-day. Writing to Sir John, in 1889, that statesman said:—

I am afraid that in proportion as wars tend, as they are doing now, to be wars for existence, the laws of war will be liable to change in a retrogressive sense. The very acuteness with which each belligerent feels the enormity of the stake he laid down, will dissuade him from sacrificing any sensible advantage in deference to any considerations of a less pressing character.

In an interesting and amusing address dealing with his *Personal and Political Reminiscences*, delivered at the Working Men's College, Lubbock related the following story:—

Many correspondents send letters of reproof and remonstrance, rather in sorrow than in anger; and sometimes under an entire misapprehension. For instance, in my book on *Ants, Bees, and Wasps*, I differ from the well known German naturalist Christ as to the roadways of ants. On this I received a letter from a worthy Scotsman, expressing his surprise and regret that I should venture to differ from the blessed founder of our religion, but saying that he had looked in vain through the New Testament for any description of ant roads, and asked me for chapter and verse.

And this, somewhat suggestive of the phantom Russians and the mythical angels of Mons:—

On one occasion a gentleman in Lincolnshire wrote to say that all the beans in that country were growing that year with the seeds the wrong way up in the pods.....I asked him for some specimens, but heard nothing more for some months, when he wrote again to say that the beans had given him an immense amount of trouble. He had heard the story from a friend, and when he went to him and asked for some of the curious beans, he was referred to someone else, and so on. In fact he had been riding about all over the country from one person to another for weeks, and at last came to the conclusion that it was all a mistake!

Lubbock relished a good story, and records one told him by that genial parson (A. K. H. B.). This anecdote related to—

Dr. Muir, about 1834, praying for the Provost and Bailies of Glasgow, "such as they are, that they may have more wisdom and grace," and when the Provost sent the Marshal to complain, returning his compliments to the Provost with regrets that "his prayer had not been heard."

Always a sincere Pacifist, Lubbock many years ago seconded the late Mr. Cremer's motion in Parliament in favour of arbitration. As usual, Gladstone was supremely eloquent, but nothing came of the resolution, although it was carried unanimously in the Commons. Armaments continued to increase in number and in deadliness in this country, as in others. At a later date, when our relations with our friends, the French, were somewhat strained, Lubbock was asked by M. Michels, London correspondent of the *Gaulois*, to send a message for publication in that journal which would help to remove the suspicions of English antagonism then widely entertained in France. Lubbock, or Lord Avebury, as he had just become, was disagreeably surprised at the information

furnished by his French correspondent. He wrote to say that he regarded even the possibility of conflict with our Gallic neighbours with horror, and proceeded to declare that:—

I am sure that I express the general feeling of my countrymen when I express the hope that the peace which has happily subsisted between us for so many years may long continue, and our friendly feeling grow stronger and stronger.

The Associated Chambers were invited by the Paris Chamber of Commerce to meet in the French capital, but so many misgivings prevailed as to the advisability of acceptance, that Avebury submitted the proposal to Lord Salisbury, who intimated his doubts as to the wisdom of holding the meeting in Paris, while declining to oppose any decision the Chambers might make. As a result, the Chambers gathered in Paris, and many absurd misconceptions were removed. Lord Avebury took a prominent part in the proceedings, which proved a magnificent success. The Minister of Commerce, M. Millerand, heartily welcomed the English visitors to the Exhibition. M. Loubet, the French President, entertained them right royally, and the many other amenities of this historic occasion in reality formed the initial step towards the warm feelings which now obtain between our brave and brilliant allies and ourselves. Prior to the visit of the Chambers, very few Englishmen had attended the Paris Exhibition; but once the ice was broken, "a constant stream of English visitors followed."

Nor was Avebury indifferent to good relations between England and Germany. He presided over the first meeting of an Association, formed in 1905, to promote a closer friendship between the two countries. This body was the Anglo-German Friendship Society. Through its influence, ill-feeling was for a time considerably lessened, but much patient labour, spread over many years, was essential to any permanent success. As Mr. Hutchinson reflects:—

The terrible tragedies enacted on the European stage since Lord Avebury's death afford a curiously sardonic comment on all these and the like well-meant efforts to promote a better understanding and a rational friendship between the two great branches of the Teutonic race.

In 1907, when the Kaiser came to England, the Committee of the Friendship Association appointed Avebury to present him with an olive branch. Avebury was bent upon adding a clause to this friendly address, pointing to the desirability of diminishing, or at least retarding, the perilous expansion of armaments. When approached, however, on this suggested addendum, Count Metternich coldly requested its omission. In reply to this request, Lubbock wrote expressing his colleagues' deep regret that the suggested clause must be left out, and he continued, "They consider that the gigantic armaments of European Countries constitute a great danger to the peace of Europe." But the Count would not budge, and in the course of his rejoinder he said:—

The limitation of armaments being a question of controversy, and in no way connected with the Emperor's visit to England, I could not help saying, on my opinion being asked, that it had better be left out of your address.

Avebury was sufficiently sanguine to suppose "that, at any rate, Germany, France, and England might have come to some understanding as to armaments." How humiliating to realize that he was so sadly doomed to disappointment!

Although not great in the sense in which Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin were great, Lubbock was still a very big man. A noble humanist, as his beneficent activities abundantly prove; favoured by fortune, he was outside the necessity for striving eagerly for bread, and

might have chosen an easier life. But being of splendid nature, he sought and secured happiness in dedicating the larger part of his working hours to the service of the race. And of him more truly than of most men who loom largely on the world's stage it may be written that he strove, and in rich measure succeeded, in conferring benefits on human kind.

T. F. PALMER.

The French Revolution.

II.

(Continued from p. 59.)

THE LIMITED MONARCHY.

JULY 14 is the birthday of modern democracy. For the first time the penniless masses had intervened in a political quarrel with decisive effect. The genteel politicians of the Assembly owed their victory to the people, and could not now ignore them. How did they show their gratitude? They overflowed with congratulatory rhetoric, told the people that they had saved the country, and took care that it should not happen again. They abolished indeed, on the night of August 4, all feudal rights and privileges, and they issued a "Declaration of the Rights of Man," modelled on Rousseau, in which they laid down the principle of political equality as their guide in the framing of the constitution. But they proceeded to elaborate a constitution founded on a strictly limited suffrage, from which the propertiless were excluded, which provided that Parliament should be elected indirectly (the propertied electors choosing an intermediate electoral body, and they in turn choosing the deputies), and which left the king a suspensory veto on all measures passed by the legislature. Even the abolition of feudalism was largely a recognition of the accomplished fact; for indeed, since the fall of the Bastille, and even before it, the peasants in the provinces had taken the law into their own hands, burning the manor-houses of the nobility, and destroying the legal documents which attested their feudal rights. To cope with any further disturbance in Paris, the Assembly authorized the formation of a "National Guard," or citizen force, to which only the well-to-do were admitted, and which was under the control of the municipality.

Nothing, it will be seen, was done for the working-class; and, although it was a period of great economic distress and high prices (cultivation having been nearly ruined by the iniquities and stupidities of the old regime), the Assembly strictly forbade all combinations of workmen, and left the economic problem simply to drift.

Yet the people continued to hope for Parliamentary redress, and to see their enemies only in the refractory nobles, the courtiers, and the Queen, Marie Antoinette. This woman, the daughter of Maria Theresa of Austria, was about the most worthless creature who ever sat on a throne. She was totally indifferent to the sufferings of the people, whether from callousness or from sheer lack of brains we cannot say; and she was the evil genius of her husband, Louis XVI., who, though very stupid, was a good-natured man, and, left to himself, might have made a fair constitutional king, as kings go. The Queen and Court, however, continually egged him on to thwart reforms, plot a counter-Revolution, and seek aid from foreign Powers. In October, 1789, this disastrous couple were planning another *coup d'état*, involving the removal of the court to Metz, the proclamation of the Assembly as rebels, and the suppression of the Revolution by mercenary troops. Once again, they were foiled by the people of Paris, who got

wind of dinner-parties at Versailles at which white cockades (the emblem of absolutism) were handed to the officers of the body-guard and the national colours (the tri-colour) trodden under foot. A mob of women, followed soon after by the National Guard under Lafayette, proceeded to Versailles, and the king was forced to come to Paris and take up his abode there. It was thought that, once at Paris, under the eye of the people, the king would throw off reactionary influences and be reconciled to the Revolution. No one, at this stage, had any intention of deposing Louis or setting up a Republic. On the contrary, he was still a popular monarch; all evil designs were put down to the Queen and Court, and he was regarded as the liberator of France.

With the establishment of the Court and the Assembly at Paris in October, 1789, the first chapter of the Revolution comes to an end. France was now a limited monarchy, and the Assembly was devoting itself to working out a detailed constitution which should put the new regime on a permanent basis, concentrate political power in the hands of the well-to-do classes, and, generally, avoid further trouble. The friends of the new regime formed themselves into a club, which took the name of the "Society of the Friends of the Constitution," but which was commonly called the Jacobins' Club, since it met at the old convent of that name. The leading lights of the constitutionalist party—Mirabeau, Lafayette, Barnave, etc.—belonged to it. Only a tiny minority, taking Rousseau more seriously, advocated universal suffrage, the chief of these being Robespierre, a young barrister from Arras, with sentimental Radical opinions and a total lack of humour, whom his Parliamentary colleagues regarded as a "crank," but who by his sincerity and ready eloquence was gradually winning the admiration of advanced circles in Paris. He belonged to the Jacobins' Club; but other democrats, discontented with its oligarchic atmosphere, founded another society, the "Friends of the Rights of Man," commonly known as the Cordeliers' Club, who represented the advanced Radical position. Their two chief members were Danton, a lawyer of great eloquence and political genius, and Marat, a medical man of poor health and irritable disposition, who edited a very advanced journal, *L'Ami du Peuple*, in which he denounced the constitution-mongers as enemies of the people, and demanded social as well as political reforms. But in 1789 little note was taken either of Danton or Marat. Neither of them had seats in the Assembly, and their public influence was as yet small.

The Revolution might have stopped in 1789, and French democracy have had to wait for generations for a trial, if the country had been solvent financially. To meet the burden of debt left to it from the old regime, the Assembly decided on a measure which eventually was to give a new turn to the Revolution. It decided to seize the lands of the Catholic Church in France and to sell them for the public benefit, substituting a "civil constitution" which would provide for the public payment of a fixed salary to the clergy. It must be understood that there was no intention in all this of attacking religion. Most of the Assembly had, indeed, imbibed the half-baked Deism popularized by Voltaire and Rousseau in the eighteenth century; but they were not hostile to Christianity, and regarded Catholicism as a very suitable religion for the "lower classes." There were a few Atheists, but Atheism was unpopular and viewed with suspicion by the majority. The confiscation of Church property was actually proposed by Talleyrand, the Catholic bishop of Autun, and afterwards the famous minister of Napoleon. Talleyrand was assuredly not a religious man, but he belonged to the "black" fra-

ternity, and would hardly have suggested to his colleagues that they should "fork out," except under the pressure of the direst necessity. Church property was taken over, and the Church reorganized on a basis of popular election-made, in fact, into a department of government.

Here lay the blunder. If the Assembly had restricted itself to taking the property of the Church, the hierarchy might have fumed and fussed, and yet made the best of it in the end. But to alter the constitution of the Church; to make the bishops elective functionaries like members of Parliament; this was reformation with a vengeance, and brought the Revolution at once under the ban of the Pope. It would have been better to have disestablished the Church altogether, as the third French Republic has eventually had to do. But this, probably, would not have been tolerated by French public opinion in 1790. The Pope declared all who accepted the "civil constitution of the clergy" to be schismatics. A great number of priests refused to swear obedience to it, and were deprived of their benefices. Louis XVI. sanctioned the "civil constitution," but, being a pious man, felt immediately very uneasy about his immortal soul, and became, thenceforth, the secret and irreconcilable enemy of the Revolution. From this moment, he lived and hoped for the day when his brother-monarchs of Austria and Prussia should invade France and restore him to full power by force of arms. But he was still unsuspected by the multitude.

In April, 1791, Mirabeau, the one man of genius in the Assembly, died. He had led the opposition to the Court at the outset of the Revolution, and was extremely popular in consequence; but he was fundamentally a Conservative and an opportunist, and would never trifle with democracy. In the later months of his life, desiring to see a strong monarchical government established, he gave secret advice to the king in return for money payment—a proceeding which no amount of special pleading can distinguish from corruption. This was unsuspected by the people, and he died in the full enjoyment of popular esteem and veneration.

Before his death, Mirabeau had advised the king to leave Paris and place himself at the head of an army, to dictate his will to the Revolutionists. In June, 1791, Louis determined to carry out this project. The Royalist general, Bouille, was awaiting him on the Lorraine frontier. Secretly the king, queen, and royal family left Paris to join him. When driving through the small town of St. Meneshould, Louis was recognized by the postmaster, Drouet; and at Varennes, a little further on, his carriage was stopped, and the party were arrested. The veil was torn asunder; Louis, after swearing to support the Constitution, was caught red-handed in an attempt to overthrow it by stratagem. He was brought back to Paris. For the first time in the history of the Revolution the cry was raised for a Republic. The Cordeliers' Club, the centre of advanced Radicalism, voiced the demand. But the Jacobins' Club, the official Liberal "caucus" (to use a modern expression), took fright at the spectre of real democracy. Even Robespierre opposed a Republic. The Assembly passed a resolution exonerating the king, and threatening the agitators with repression. The bulk of the well-to-do classes concurred. The Republicans then drew up a monster petition in favour of the deposition of the king, which was laid for signature on the public platform in the Champ de Mars, known as the "altar of the country." As the crowds came to sign it, two men were discovered hiding under the platform. It was thought that they were attempting to blow it up; and, in a sudden panic, the men were lynched by the bystanders. This gave the Government the excuse for

strong measures. The National Guard, under Lafayette, accompanied by Bailly, Mayor of Paris, arrived on the scene. The Mayor called on the crowd to disperse; and when they did not, the Guard opened fire, hundreds of the petitioners were killed or wounded, and the first Republican movement was crushed in blood (July 17, 1791). Danton, the leader of the Cordeliers' Club, fled to England; Marat went into hiding; the Conservatives were triumphant. A split took place in the Jacobins' Club; and the monarchical and conservative section, seceding, formed a new society, the "Friends of the Monarchical Constitution," popularly known as the Feuillants'. Robespierre and the advocates of universal suffrage alone remained in the Jacobins'. Even they, as we have seen, did not raise the issue of a Republic.

(To be continued.) ROBERT ARCH.

Skeleton Sermons.

Snags of Eden.

"It is not good that man should be alone," and the writer of that statement apparently knew what he was talking about. Undoubtedly, he had lived long enough in the world to find out all its advantages and wealth of meaning in the long run. And it is significant of much that the first thing the first man did after meeting the first woman was to marry her. Possibly he thought that was exactly what the woman was made for. Certainly it was the wisest thing for him to do; for we are all more or less mutually dependent upon each other. Night and day, summer and winter, heat and cold, man and woman represent each the complement of the other, and had the first couple not married, the time would soon have come when scandal would have been talked by the neighbours. Mr. Adam would have had to call on Miss Eve some day to ask if she'd mind sewing a button on his fig-leaf; and some dark, weird night Miss Eve would have been compelled to call on Mr. Adam and ask him if he would please come over to her place and see what was making those strange noises in the cellar, as she feared some ghosts or burglars had got in. Then she would have to hold the candle while Adam poked round with a loaded axe or a waddy; and if the pair had been seen then, the neighbours would have had enough scandal to discuss for a year after. Ergo, it was a happy thought for Adam to marry Eve; and the pity is that all the Adams born ever since have not followed the good example set by the first man who faced the nuptial altar.

Again, women play a large part in the affairs of life. Our civilization to-day is in some respects lopsided because women's mentality has not had fair expression. From the time the first woman stole the first winter fruit to make an apple pie for the old man, right down to the days of Mrs. Pankhurst, she has been making history at the rate of knots. In upbraiding and denouncing Mrs. Adam for the little trouble about the apple, it is only just and courteous to a lady to say a few words in defence.

In the first place, she was only a young married woman, and she had no mother to advise her. If Adam's mother-in-law had been round keeping house and receiving visitors when the Devil called, he would have been glad to leave again and abdicate. But young Mrs. Adam's ma was not at home, or probably Adam himself would not have been out at the club that evening, and the misfortune might never have happened.

Then, again, poor Mrs. A. was just learning to make crust—another probable reason why Adam was away—and the temptation to have a real home-made apple pie

on the table against his return was more than any young married woman could be expected to cope with. Perhaps only that day Adam, manlike, had growled about the prevalence of peach pie on the family dining-table, and poor Eve thought it would be a pleasant surprise to fix up a nice change.

There are scores of other excuses for the woman. It is all very well for the men to say that Adam had just gone round to look after the menagerie. Why didn't he attend to the animals in the morning, instead of spending all his time sitting on the fence smoking his pipe, while his wife, without a rag to her back, had to do all the work of the establishment? She hadn't even a girl to help her with the washing.

No wonder, poor thing, when the other gentleman made himself so agreeable that she listened to him.

THE OWL.

Correspondence.

COMPETITION AND PROGRESS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Kindly grant me space in which to briefly reply to Mr. S. Turner, jun., who is one of the authors of *Eclipse or Empire*. His letter in the *Freethinker* for January 28 suggests that I have possibly misunderstood the meaning of the above work. This may be so. Still, on looking over the book, I cannot get away from the impression it gives, that the authors look upon commercial and industrial empire as the means of the future social salvation of Great Britain and her colonies. In *Eclipse or Empire* we are called upon to work, not for all-round comfort, happiness, and culture, but for Imperialism. "Men and women must put their backs, and not their little fingers, into the development of Great Britain Unlimited" (p. 117). And while they do this, those in high places will strive to keep the toiling masses in subjection. I do not suggest that the authors of *Eclipse or Empire* wish this latter state of things to come about. My desire is to point out that it *will* come about if the ideal of industrial and commercial activity, for the sake of empire, becomes the order of the day. For the simple reason that those who have control of all this activity, and are bent on fighting for supremacy in the trade world, will forget nearly everything else. High profits, high wages, and shorter hours will not solve the difficulty, because this will mean high prices, and, as a rule, overwork during the short hours. In other words the capitalist will have his high profits at all costs, especially if he has to pay high wages for shorter hours. That means exploitation of the workers somehow; either by overwork or high prices, or both—as I above suggest. This, again, is no doubt not the conscious ideals of the authors; but I want them to realize that the exploitation of the majority of workers is involved in their ideal of all-round high profits, even with high wages and shorter hours. What is wanted is the abolition of high profit-making, or the legal taking of the surplus products of other men's labours. As the authors say in *Eclipse or Empire* (p. 117), "The mincing affectations of white-handedness, whether bred in Homes, or Schools, or Universities, or Society, must be seen no more." All who can must work for a living, but not merely for power and empire. We must have time and strength left to wash our hands now and then—that is, if a high state of social development is to be reached. If we are forced to fight for industrial supremacy, then let us not delude ourselves into believing it is the greatest thing in the world.

That strife for industrial and commercial supremacy is almost bound to lead to war, among empires engaged in the strife, seems to me almost an unavoidable conclusion. Why bother about *supremacy*, provided the people of an empire are all well provided for, as they would be only for our false commercial aims?

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.

Ignorance and arrogance are twin sisters with but one soul and one body.—*Giordano Bruno*.

The Right to Affirm.

By the Oaths Amendment Act of 1888 affirmation may take the place of an oath in courts of law and in all other places where the taking of an oath is necessary.

Affirmation may be claimed on one of two grounds. (1) On the ground of having no religious belief, (2) on the ground of an oath being contrary to one's religious belief.

A judge or other official may ask on what ground affirmation is claimed, but no further question is warranted, and all such additional questions should be respectfully and firmly declined.

In all cases where any trouble or difficulty occurs it would be well to inform us of the circumstances at once.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON JANUARY 25.

The President, Mr. C. Cohen, in the chair. Also present: Messrs. Brandes, Leat, Neary, Neate, Quinton, Roger, Silverstein, Wood, Miss Kough, Mrs. Rolf, Miss Stanley, 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 South London Branch and the Parent Society.

Permission was given for the formation of a new Branch at Falkirk.

The President reported that at the last meeting of the Joint Protest Committee, L.C.C., it was apparent that the only Society threatened with prosecution was the N.S.S. The situation was generally discussed, and the meeting adhered firmly to its former resolution.

Suggestions were made as to increased propaganda and the successful activities of the North and South London Branches reported.

The Secretary received instructions to make a similar effort in West London. Mr. Brandes offered his assistance to this end.

The death of Mr. W. P. Ball was reported by the President, who paid a high tribute to his sterling character as a Freethinker, and to his fine literary attainments which he had so generously employed in the cause of Freethought. A vote of condolence with Mr. Ball's relatives was passed unanimously.

Matters of routine business were dealt with.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary.*

N.B.—I have to thank those members of the Parent Society who responded to the intimation that all subscriptions became due on January 1st, but there are still some outstanding subscriptions I should be glad to receive in the course of the next few days.

E. M. V.

We are not allowed to grow up before choosing our religion. We as little choose our religion as we choose to be born. It is done for us without our having part in it.—*Cardinal Newman.*

Obituary.

The death of Mr. Thos. Coles removes from the membership of the New Era Union (Abertillery), one of the oldest Freethinkers in South Wales. Quiet and unostentatious in his manner, deceased met his death as only a convinced Freethinker can. The Secular Service was conducted by Mr. J. H. Edwards, of Cardiff, who delivered a most impressive address at the graveside.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, off Kentish Town Road, N.W.): 7.30, Debate, "Is Mind Evolved from Matter?" Introduced by J. Van Biene.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Avondale Hall, Landor Road, Clapham, S.W.): 7, C. E. Ratcliffe, "Man's Responsibility to Man."

MR. HOWELL SMITH'S DISCUSSION CLASS (N. S. S. Office, 62 Farringdon Street): Thursday, Feb. 8, at 7.30.

OUTDOOR.

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

ABERTILLERY (Tillery Institute): Chapman Cohen, 3, "A World Without God"; 6, "Can Christianity Survive the War?"

LEICESTER (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, W. H. Scott, "Reformers' Knots."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Clarion Cafe, 25 Cable Street): 7, E. Egerton Stafford, "Dreams, in Relation to Religion."

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