

The

FREETHINKER

FOUNDED · 1881

EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN ■ ■ EDITOR · 1881-1915 · G · W · FOOTE

VOL. XXXVII.—No. 19

SUNDAY MAY 13, 1917

PRICE TWOPENCE

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Views and Opinions.

Why were the Clergy Exempt?

Many people have wondered why on earth the clergy were exempted from the operation of the Military Service Act. On every earthly ground they seemed the most suitable class to which it could be applied. They are, or ought to be, more certain about a future life than others; they are, or ought to be, ready to quit this life with less reluctance than others. No religious compunction should have stood in the way of their killing the Germans since Archdeacon Wilberforce said: "The killing of Germans is a divine service in the fullest sense of the word," the Bishop of Ripon that "Our cause is identical with God's cause," and the Bishop of London that "This is the greatest fight ever made for the Christian religion." In such a holy war the clergy ought to have been the first to rush to the Colours. Moreover, the clergy were unanimous in urging everybody to enlist. Why, then, did the clergy claim and receive exemption? * * *

The Secret Out.

Some light was cast on the subject by a recent remark from the Archbishop of Canterbury before the House of Convocation. Addressing that august assembly he said, the clergy—

had been exempted from combatant service by the nation's representatives in Parliament without so far as he was aware, a dissentient voice, simply because to them had been assigned a great responsibility in the nation's life at all times, and never more so than at such a time as this.

Now we know all about it, or rather we are told all about it. Of course, the Archbishop is not accurate when he says there was not a single voice raised against clerical exemption, but one does not look for accuracy in a clergyman. Some voices were raised against it in Parliament and outside Parliament, the Trades' Union Congress voted against it. But the fact remains that Parliament did exempt the clergy. It put into actual practice Sydney

Smith's famous division of the nation into men, women, and clergymen, by conscripting men, calling out the women, and placing the clergy in a category by themselves. And, presumably, on the principle that a live jackass is better than a dead lion the clergy are content—even jubilant. * * *

More Light.

Still we are puzzled. *What* is the part played by the clergy that endows them with so "great a responsibility in the nation's life"? Parliament didn't say, the Archbishop is diplomatically vague, and so we are left to surmise. The production of good crops is a very old standing function of the priesthood, and a great many religious observances have clustered round that. But Parliament couldn't have exempted the clergy on that ground or it would have issued an appeal for their assistance. Nay, it very curtly declined to sanction a general day of prayer at which all the clergy would have paraded and gone through their magical hocus-pocus with all the solemnity of painted medicine men dancing round a wooden idol. Many thousands of allotments have been laid down, but I haven't heard of a single clergyman being called in to bless one of them. All the clergy appear to have done here is to start a row among themselves as to whether God will blast the ground because people have taken to digging on Sunday. They cannot have been exempted to look after the weather—until quite recently that was vile. They cannot have been preserved to arrest the submarine danger, that has grown. It was suggested that German prisoners should be placed on board hospital and passenger ships, but no one suggested parsons on board as a means of protection. They were not exempt in order to protect the people against "profiteering," that has gone on in all directions—and the clergy have maintained absolute silence. Nor could it have been to guard the morality of the nation. For that, if we are to judge by reports of alarmist committees, has deteriorated since the opening of the War. What was the "great responsibility" laid upon the clergy by Parliament?

* * *

The Spirit of Sacrifice.

An idea strikes us. Perhaps they were exempt in order to encourage the spirit of sacrifice. If so, one is compelled to admit that they have met with a measure of success. For people have been exhorted and encouraged to make sacrifices. The shopkeeper has called upon his customers to sacrifice. The mineowner has called on the consumer to sacrifice. The shipowner has asked the merchant to sacrifice. The merchant has passed on the inspiring message to the dealer. There never was such a demand for sacrifice; and the clergy have sacrificed their desire to bear their share of the fighting; they have sacrificed the honours and distinction they might have won at the "divine service" of killing Germans, by remaining at home and keeping their establishments open and ready for business "when the boys come home."

A Parasitic Order.

Seriously, what is one to make of a public that can be fooled by such empty talk as that of the Archbishop's? Can anyone seriously contend that there is a single function discharged by the clergy that cannot be, and is not discharged, by the layman? Have the clergy, as clergy, really contributed anything to the successful pursuit of the War? Have they done a single thing that has not been done by men and women who are not connected with the priesthood? The parson, as a man, may be a quite admirable person; as a priest, he is an anachronism in a civilized age. For all the real use that the Christian Church has been to the nation, it might as well have been closed in August, 1914. And yet the clergy are exempt from military service. That is the significant fact. Thousands of businesses have been closed in the interests of the War, but the business premises of the clergy are in full swing. Economy has been urged upon the people, but funds for foreign missions and similar fantastical absurdities are still forthcoming. It was not essential that the widow's son should remain at home, but the parson might. The head of a family, upon whose welfare depended the future of his children, must go; the person of the celibate priest remains inviolate. Take the citizen, but leave the priest. That is the attitude of an order which has been a burden upon the shoulders of mankind from the very dawn of history. It is the attitude of a priesthood careful only of its own interests and of the interests it finds to its own benefit to defend.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Roots of the Christian Tree.

.VI.

CONCERNING Christianity two facts are now indisputably established and candidly recognized as such by all scholars, namely, the first, that it is an eclectic religion, containing not a single element of which it can honestly say: "This is my own, my very own," and the second, that it did not differ in any essential sense from any of the great religions from which it borrowed, and which were its rivals during the second, third, and fourth centuries. Particularly in the third century all the influential religions were, in essence, very much alike. Harnack calls our attention to "the rise of new ideas and emotions which meet us on the soil of Hellenism—that Hellenism which, with its philosophy and its development of the ancient mysteries, coalesced with Orientalism." What those new ideas and emotions were we learn from this learned critic:—

*The soul, God, knowledge, expiation, asceticism, redemption, eternal life, with individualism and with humanity substituted for nationality—these were the sublime thoughts which were living and operative, partly as the precipitate of deep inward and outward movements, partly as the outcome of great souls and their toil, partly as the result of the sublimation of all cults which took place during the imperial age. Wherever vital religion existed, it was in this circle of thought and experience that it drew breath.....Whenever Christianity came to formulate ideas of God, Jesus, sin, redemption, and life, it drew upon the materials acquired in the general process of religious evolution, availing itself of all the forms which these had taken (*Expansion of Christianity*, vol. i., pp. 33-39).*

We may not agree with every statement in that extract, but its author does not hesitate to recognize the principle that Christianity, in its completed form, "fails to be considered as syncretistic religion in the fullest sense"; that it "may be just as truly called a Hellenic religion as an Oriental, a native religion as well as a foreign";

and that though from the very outset it had been syncretistic upon Pagan soil, yet it was not till the middle of the third century that it was first seen "in full bloom as the syncretistic religion *par excellence*, and yet, for all that, as an exclusive religion." The following is Harnack's description of the syncretistic religions, each of which aimed at complete sovereignty:—

Three great religious systems confronted each other in Western Asia and Southern Europe from the close of the third century: *Neoplatonism*, *Catholicism*, and *Manichæism*. All three may be characterized as the final results of a history which had lasted for over a thousand years, the history of the religious development of the civilized nations from Persia to Italy. In all three the old national and particular character of religion was laid aside; they were *world-religions* of the most universal tendency, with demands whose consequences transformed the whole life of man, both public and private.....Formally, therefore, all these religions were alike, and they were also similar in this respect, that each had appropriated the elements of different older religions. Further, they showed their similarity in bringing to the front the ideas of *revelation*, *redemption*, *ascetic virtue*, and *immortality* (*Ibid*, vol. i., p. 393).

Now, with those facts in mind, we are face to face with the problem of how to account for the triumphant survival of Christianity and the somewhat sudden and complete disappearance of its powerful rivals. Harnack declares that both Christianity and Manichæism were superior to Neoplatonism, for the very reason that the latter ad no *founder*; and yet on Harnack's own showing Christianity itself could boast of no founder except in name. He assures us that Jesus Christ did not belong to the circle of ideas which, by the end of the third century, constituted the Christian religion, but that it was his disciples who were responsible for its primitive shaping. It is doubtless true that the fact that Christianity had a nominal founder was a factor of considerable influence in its expansion; but in this respect it enjoyed no advantage over Manichæism which ceased to be in the Western world. The divines aver that Christianity conquered Europe because of its divine origin and nature, but a mere glance at the history of the fourth century shows the utter absurdity of such a claim. The conversion of Constantine is a question upon which there has never been unanimity of opinion. Some critics have always regarded it as having been occasioned by political rather than purely religious considerations. Many different accounts of it were written by Eusebius, the Christian Lactantius, the Pagan Nazarius, and the Arian Philostorgius; but whatever version of it may be accepted as being in the main accurate, the fact remains that Constantine was actuated in all he did subsequent to it by political motives, in which ethical principles had scarcely any place at all, as is abundantly proved by the many dark deeds for which he was directly responsible. What moved him to befriend the Christian Church, to adopt the Cross as the symbol of victory in war, and to exalt Christianity into the position of State religion? We will answer this question in the words of a Christian theologian, Adolf Harnack:—

In the bishop or priest, or even in the ecclesiastical fabric and the cultus, the masses had a direct sense of something holy and authoritative to which they yielded submission, and this state of matters had prevailed for a couple of generations by the time that Constantine granted recognition and privileges to Christianity. This was the Church on which he conferred privileges, this Church with its enormous authority over the masses! These were the Christians whom he defined as the support of the throne, people who clung to the bishops with submissive faith and who would not resist their Divinely appointed authority! The Christianity that triumphed was the Christianity of blind faith, which Celsus has

depicted. When would a State ever have shown any practical interest in any other kind of religion? (*Ibid*, vol. i., p. 280).

At the close of the third century both Armenia Major and Armenia Minor were converted to Christianity by Gregory the Illuminator, who had been persecuted and driven from his native land by the Persians. When the Armenians succeeded in releasing themselves from the Persian rule, Gregory gave his support to the Armenian monarch, who became a Christian, and adopted Christianity as the State religion in his country, because he believed that "as an exclusive religion it was far better adapted than the cults of Hellenism and the native Armenian faith to safeguard the Armenians against the Persians." Thus the Armenian king embraced Christianity for himself and his kingdom simply because he was convinced that the action would prove of the highest political advantage. Now, listen to Harnack:—

When Constantine recognized and granted privileges to Christianity, he was only following in the footsteps of the Armenian king (*Ibid*, vol. ii., pp. 345-6).

This is a Christian theologian's explanation of the triumph of Christianity over all rival cults in the Roman Empire. Its survival was due, not to any supernatural intervention, not to the belief that it alone was true, but to the fact that the Emperor looked upon it as the only faith that engendered the spirit of unquestioning loyalty to authority in those who professed it. The bishop was supreme, because he claimed to be God's vicegerent, and surely a Christian emperor would occupy the same position in his administration of State affairs. The truth is that the rival faiths did not die a natural death, but were destroyed by force. As Mr. F. Legge well says:—

Constantine's accession proved to be, like the coming of Alexander, a turning-point in the history of the world. His so-called conversion put into the hands of the Catholic Church a weapon for the suppression of all rivalry, of which she was not slow to make use. Already in his reign many of the Heathen temples were torn down, and under the rule of his morose and gloomy successor, Constantius, the work of demolition went on apace.....The end came under Gratian, when the temple estates were confiscated, the priests and vestals deprived of the stipends which they had hitherto received from the public treasury, and the Heathen confraternities or colleges were declared incapable of receiving legacies. Only a few rich men like the Vettius Agorius Prætextatus, whom we have seen among the worshippers of Mithras, or the Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, whose learned and patriotic life has been so well described by Sir Samuel Dill, could henceforth venture to practise, even with maimed rites, the faiths condemned by the Court and the Church (*Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity*, vol. ii., pp. 358-9).

Prior to the conversion of Constantine, Christianity had to struggle against all her rivals "in a contest where the victory was not always on her side"; but no sooner did she become the religion of the State than her supremacy was an absolute certainty. As Mr. Legge suggests, there was "no need of the miraculous powers which were once assigned as the reason for her gradual and steady advance to all but universal dominion." She was only one among many until Constantine discovered that she was the best adapted of them all to help him in securing the blind submission of the people to his imperial will. She became the whole-hearted servant of the State in order that by the co-operation of the State she might carry out her own ambitious and well-considered designs. Enough has been said to prove that neither her origin nor her triumphant advance to pomp and power indicated any supernatural interference.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Fear of Death.

Death, and his brother Sleep. —Shelley.

Death, not armed with any dart,

But crowned with poppies. —Julian Fane.

SHAKESPEARE, the supreme genius of literature, has told us that "our little life is rounded with a sleep." The materialistic similitude of death to sleep is a thought which has possessed a peculiar fascination for great writers, ancient and modern, but more particularly for Shakespeare, whom it always prompts to utterances of universal sublimity. With this lofty thought is mingled a touch of simple pathos that strikes home to every heart, as, for example, in the saying, "Tired we sleep, and life's poor play is o'er."

Sleep! All that the human fancy can conceive of refreshing and delightful things are compressed in that gentle word. Poets in all ages and in all countries have sung its praises; but of all tributes uttered on this subject, the most striking, probably, is that which Cervantes puts in the mouth of Sancho Panza: "Sleep! It covers a man all over, thoughts and all, like a cloak. It is meat for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, heat for the cold, and cold for the hot."

Priests, on the other hand, have ever sought advantage from the fact that man is mortal. They have taught men that death is the most dreadful evil. All the terrors that theology could gather from savage nations were added to increase the horrors, and they invariably tried to paralyse reason with the clutch of fear.

The advent of Christianity deepened this terror. Never has death been the cause of such craven timidity as in the Christian world. To visionaries like Catherine of Siena, or Emanuel Swedenborg, it may have been different, but to the uncultured masses death has been, and is, the King of Terrors, from whose approach they cower in an agony which Marcus Aurelius and Socrates would have scorned. These great Pagans invested death with dignity, but Christians fear death as children fear the dark. In Bacon's famous essay on death all the instances he gives of its being borne with equanimity are taken from Pagans. For Christianity added a new terror to death in the thought of being cut off in sin "unhouselled, unaleled." The Church of England has a prayer against sudden death, which Pagans regarded as best. This idea is strikingly illustrated in *Hamlet*, where the Prince refrains from killing the King whilst at prayer, because—

To take him in the purging of his soul

When he is fit and seasoned for his passage

is to send his father's murderer to heaven.

Religion has found it advantageous to invest death with all that is hideous. "Prepare for death, flee from the wrath to come," have been its cries. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," shout the evangelists. By such appeals to fear and imagination it has made a terror of that which should be accepted with serenity. Charles Spurgeon, the most popular preacher of his generation, whose works are so admired by Sir W. Robertson Nicoll, preached and wrote that the majority of the human race was destined to everlasting torture in full view of the Deity:—

In fire, exactly like that which we have on earth to-day, will lie, asbestos-like, for ever unconsumed—every nerve a string on which the Devil shall for ever play his diabolical tune of hell's unutterable lament.

Yet to the Materialist, who deems death "the popped sleep, the end of all," dissolution can have no terror, whilst Christians might ponder the wise words of Marcus Aurelius:—

What is it to die? If we view it by itself, and stripped of those imaginary terrors in which our fears have dressed

it, we shall find it to be nothing more than the mere work of Nature; but it is a childish folly to be afraid of what is natural. Nay! It is not only the work of Nature, but is conducive to the good of the universe, which subsists by change.

Lucretius, the noblest of the Roman poets, writing, be it remembered, twenty centuries ago, tells us that death is dreamless rest:—

Thou not again shall see thy dear home's door,
Nor thy sweet wife and children come to throw
Their arms round thee, and ask for kisses more,
And through thy heart make quiet comfort go.
Out of thy hands hath slipped the precious store.
Thou hoardest for thine own, men say, and lo!
All thou desired is gone. But never say
All the desire as well hath passed away.

Omar Khayyam, the most splendid poet whose lyre sounded under the Mohammedan crescent, was as emphatic:—

Oh, threats of hell and hopes of paradise!
One thing at least is certain—this life flies;
One thing is certain, and the rest is lies,
The flower that once has blown for ever dies.

Many men dread dying rather than death, and here science comes to the rescue of mankind with its anodynes and anæsthetics. The clergy, who opposed the introduction of chloroform because they said it interfered with God's primal curse upon woman, are fond of pointing the feeble finger of scorn at scientists. Did the whole of the clergy of Europe ever do so much for humanity as Lister and Simpson? The doctors fought all their lives against the horrid shapes that follow the rider on the pale horse. The clergy made death more awful and gruesome, but Lister and Simpson and the rest of their glorious company robbed death of half its terrors. As a result of their discoveries, death comes as a tender nurse to patients who had otherwise died in cruel suffering. They saved more lives than the wars of the century had wasted, and they took away a black fear out of life.

Despite clerical nonsense, most people die as unconsciously as they are born. Physicians notice that fear of death departs with the dying. The nearer the end, the less the apprehension. Dr. William Hunter, the famous anatomist, when dying, said: "If I had strength enough to hold a pen, I would write how easy and delightful it is to die." That gay, old sinner, Louis XIV., of France, said: "I thought that dying had been more difficult." Wise old Michel de Montaigne, having met with an accident which was thought to be fatal, said on restoration: "I had sincere pleasure in the thought that I was passing away." Walter Savage Landor, in extreme age, wrote:—

Death stands above me whispering low,
I know not what into my ear:
Of his strange language all I know
Is, there is not a word of fear.

In the Highlands of Scotland people have a time-old proverb, "There is always peace before death." Christians claim that the King of Terrors can only be encountered by aid of their faith. Yet modern Japanese have as great a contempt of life as the old Greeks and Romans. In truth, Christianity has, for its own ends, harped on the terrors of death.

"Rounded with a sleep!" "These words created whole volumes in me," said Jean Paul Richter, acknowledging the power of the master-mind of Shakespeare. Is it not a superb tribute, remembering that so many of the highest minds have ever been fortified by the same thought? Freethought everywhere destroys the terrors of death. The Atheistic poet, Shelley, in the opening lines of his *Queen Mab*, sings of death and sleep being brothers. Walt Whitman, "the tan-faced poet of the West," chants a hymn of welcome to death. The dead

are made one with Nature, and death is presented as a friend, is "lovely and soothing," is always "gliding near with soft feet," and the body, weary with life, turns, like a tired child, and nestles close in the bosom of the eternal mother. Our own George Meredith asks with a fine touch of stoicism:—

Into the breast that gives the rose
Shall I with shuddering fall?

For thousands of years priests have chanted the old, sad, disheartening refrain of death as an enemy, but the Free-thinker listens to far other and better strains. The contemplation of death as a deliverer, dis severed from the terrors of the imagination, comforts him. Living without hypocrisy, he dies without fear.

Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

MIMNERMUS.

Science and Spiritualism.

IX.

(Continued from p. 278.)

Turning, now, for the moment, to the historical side of this question, we find that there is scarcely a medium producing physical phenomena who has not, at one time or another, been exposed in the grossest kind of fraud, and that the whole history of the subject—so far as the physical phenomena are concerned—is battered with evidences of fraud and the worst "moral mud" and intellectual mire imaginable! It presents an almost unbroken chain of evidence, showing that fraud and nothing but fraud has been practised throughout, by mediums; and presenting scarcely any evidence whatever that they are ever genuine, or did really happen as stated.—*Hereward Carrington, "The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism,"* p. 6.

When engaged in the investigation of table-turning, I constructed a very simple apparatus, serving as an index to show the unconscious motions of the hands upon the table. The results were that the index moved before the table, or that neither index nor table moved; and in numerous cases all moving power was annihilated. A universal objection was made to it by the table-turners. It was said to paralyze the powers of the mind;—but the experimenters need not see the index; they may leave their friends to watch that, and their minds may revel in any power that their expectation or their imagination can confer. So restrained, a dislike to the trial arises; but what is that except a proof that whilst they trust themselves they doubt themselves, and are not willing to proceed to the decision, lest the trust which they like should fail them, and the doubt which they dislike rise to the authority of truth?—*Faraday, "Observations on Mental Education,"* A Lecture, reprinted in "Science and Education," edited by Sir Ray Lankester (1917), p. 51.

It may be as well to deal here with the phenomena of table-turning and rapping. No doubt most people have met with persons who have taken part in table-turning, and who assure you that the table really did move without any pressure being exerted through the hands resting on the table.

The phenomena of table-turning became quite an epidemic in England in 1853, being introduced from the Continent, where it had broken out in 1852. The usual method followed was for the party to seat themselves at a round table, upon the edge of which they rested their fingers, spread out, and the last finger touching the last finger of his, or her, neighbour. The table-turning mania reached such dimensions that several scientific men turned their attention to it. A committee of four medical men made an investigation, says Mr. Podmore. "Briefly they found, as the result of several trials, that when no expectations were formed of any probable result, and the attention of those sitting round the table was diverted by conversation or otherwise, the table did not move at all. Again, no results followed when half the sitters expected the rotation to take place in one direction and half in another. But when expectation was allowed

free play, and especially if the direction of the probable movement was indicated beforehand, the table began to rotate after a few minutes, although no one of the sitters was conscious of exercising any effort at all. The conclusion formed was that the motion was due to muscular action, mostly exercised unconsciously."¹ Dr. Braid, who also investigated the subject, declared that at "all the experiments at which he had assisted someone had always announced beforehand the direction in which the table might be expected to move, and had thus helped to bring the unconscious expectations of the sitters into unison."

But this was too simple an explanation of the mystery to commend itself to the multitude, who revel in the mysterious and unexplainable. The spiritualistic interpretation found its strongest advocates among the clergy, who found that the tables were tilted by diabolical agency.

The Rev. N. S. Godfrey, a Church of England clergyman, of Leeds, with his wife and his curate, held a meeting for table turning in the presence of the National schoolmaster and others. After various unsuccessful attempts to induce the table to confess that it was moved by diabolic agency, Mr. Godfrey continues:—

I was now prepared for a further experiment of a far more solemn character. I whispered to the Schoolmaster to bring a small Bible, and to lay it on the table when I should tell him. I then caused the table to revolve rapidly, and gave the signal. *The Bible* was laid on the table, and it instantly stopped! We were horror-struck.

"After supper, the experiment was resumed, and the following test was tried: 'If there be not a devil, knock twice; to our horror the leg slowly rose and knocked twice.' It need hardly be said that these appalling disclosures were made public without delay."²

Later, at another seance, the "table admitted, in answer to leading questions, that it was moved by the spirit of a dead man, a lost soul, sent from hell by the devil, for the express purpose of deceiving the circle there assembled, and doomed to return to hell when the nightly task was accomplished." Later still, the spirit of a deceased parishioner appeared on the scene. "This spirit confessed that he had only once before been in the schoolroom (where the seance was held), and then not to attend Sunday-school, but for the carnal delights of a tea-meeting. In earth life he had generally attended the Wesleyan chapel, but now deeply regretted he had not paid more heed to Mr. Godfrey's counsel."³

"The inconceivable Godfrey," as Mr. Podmore calls him, published alarming revelations under the titles *Table-Moving Tested, and Proved to be the Result of Satanic Agency* (1853), and *Table-Turning the Devil's Masterpiece*; also *The Devil's Modern Masterpiece*.

Later in the year, the Rev. E. Gillson, of Bath, after one sitting, published his experiences under the title *Table-Talking: Disclosures of Satanic Wonders and Prophetic Signs*. Mr. Gillson, at this sitting, got into communication with a departed spirit "who expected in the course of ten years to be bound with Satan and all his crew, and cast into the abyss." Another clergyman, the Rev. R. W. Dibdin, in a lecture delivered in the same year (1853), and afterwards printed, contended that the spirits at work were not those of departed men and women, but those of devils. "But whether spirits of men or devils," says Podmore, "all these clergymen were agreed that the motive power and the aim were alike diabolic."⁴

It was Faraday who gave the death-blow to this rank growth of superstition by the method of scientific experiment, and we cannot do better than give Mr. Podmore's account of it:—

Faraday, like other thoughtful men, was aghast at the hold which the table-turning mania had gained on all classes of society, and at the loose thinking and presumptuous ignorance which the popular explanations revealed. Amongst the various theories commonly offered to account for the movements of the table he mentions spirits, electricity, magnetism, "attraction" of some kind, and the rotation of the earth! By the use of some apparatus Faraday showed conclusively that the movements were due to muscular action, and to that alone, exercised in most cases without the consciousness or volition of the sitters. Perhaps the most effective of his test apparatus was the following. He prepared two small flat boards a few inches square, placed several glass rollers about the thickness of an ordinary pencil between them, and fastened the whole together with a couple of indiarubber bands in such a manner that the upper board would slide under lateral pressure to a limited extent over the lower one. A light index, consisting of a haystalk or a piece of paper, was fastened to the apparatus so as to betray the least movement of the upper board to the lower one. It was found that, in all cases, the upper board moved before the lower board, which rested on the table, showing that the fingers of the operator moved the table, and not—as the sitters themselves supposed—the table the fingers. But the most striking proof that the movement was due to a muscular effort of which the performer was quite unconscious is that when the sitters learned the meaning of the index and kept their attention fixed upon it, no movement followed; "when the parties saw the index, it remained very steady; when it was hidden from them, or they looked away from it, it wavered about, though they believed that they always pressed directly downward."¹

Thus did science give the death-blow to this peurile superstition. The public excitement on the subject quickly died down, and henceforth the practice was confined solely to spiritualistic circles, where it still continues a languid existence. It would be utterly incredible that a man of such scientific eminence as Sir Oliver Lodge is a believer in this superstition, and practises it to get into communication with the spirits of the dead, if we did not have his own word for it. In his lately published book, *Raymond*, Sir Oliver gives pages and pages of communications from spirits obtained by this means. Chapter viii. is entirely taken up with them; and there are many others!

Dr. Ivor Tuckett, who has himself experimented in the subject, says that the conditions for success in table-turning are chiefly three: (a) that there should be no one taking part who is profoundly sceptical; (b) that someone should be a convinced believer in the "spiritual explanation" of table-turning, usually of a neurotic temperament; (c) that the performance should be carried out in a dim light. These are just the conditions for inducing a state of auto-suggestion or hypnotism. Dr. Tuckett also gives the rational explanation of the phenomena, as follows: "After a few or many minutes of sitting with outstretched fingers, one or more of the sitters will become the subject of fatigue of the neuromuscular system, encouraged by the expectancy of phenomena and by the concentration of attention not to miss the moment the table begins to move. This fatigue leads to a certain degree of tremor in the hands, and probably evinces itself first in those who are the most intense believers, especially if they are of a neurotic temperament—that is, have a nervous system easily excited and depressed. As the finger-tips are fixed by

¹ Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii., p. 8.

² Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii., p. 13.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 13.

⁴ Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii., p. 14.

¹ *Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 9.

contact with the table, the tremor gives the feeling that the table is vibrating, and in the belief that it is about to move, the enthusiasts quite subconsciously push the table. The moment the table moves ever so little, the whole company, including the least enthusiastic, become the subjects of a process of auto-suggestion, and aid the deception quite unconsciously by pushing. If, however, a profound sceptic is present, he will not be the victim of this auto-hypnotic process, and by not doing his share of the pushing, or by withstanding the tendency of the table to move, which is very slight at first, he will defeat the action of the others."¹

It is easy from this to understand why mediums always object to sceptics joining their circles.

W. MANN.

(To be continued.)

A Puritan on Paine.

A FEW days ago I came across a new book of essays by Mr. Augustine Birrell. I must confess to no very violent interest in matters political, but I have a sort of vague recollection that Mr. Birrell was Irish Secretary under the late-lamented Liberal Government. It would seem that he is one of those much praised writers who have brought to perfection the art of saying nothing in particular in an airy and charming way. This is, no doubt, as good a reason as any other for co-opting him into a job which is handsomely paid by a long-suffering nation. An elegant taste in letters and a witty style are by no means the invariable intellectual characteristics of your professional politician, who, for the most part, is a dreadfully dull and heavy-handed man. It is, therefore, pleasing to know that Mr. Birrell succeeded in "pulling off" one of the big prizes. Be this as it may, what I am now concerned with is not Mr. Birrell as politician, but as critic. The book I mentioned above is called *Self-Selected Essays* (Nelson & Co.; 1s. 3d. net). The essays appear to have been selected by Mr. Birrell himself, and not, as was the case with a former book, by one of his admirers. They have, however, on the whole, so little coherence that they might very well have selected themselves. A few of them not even the most out-and-out admirers would ever have dreamed of admitting. In their place in the columns of literary and other journals they were, no doubt, promptly read and praised, and then as promptly forgotten. To give them a permanent form, especially at a time when paper is scarce, is simply to invite the jibes of the unfriendly critic. After all, we hardly expect a man who has been extolled for his exquisite humour and sense of proportion to exhibit a foolishly lavish affection for his literary offspring.

The essay that has a particular interest for the Free-thinker is one on Thomas Paine, written in 1900, as a review of Mr. Moncure Conway's *Life*. It is a short article of nine pages or so; and, in order to bring out the contrast of method and temper, it should be closely compared with another essay, a long one on Burke, originally a lecture delivered at Edinburgh. It is difficult for Mr. Birrell to be reasonably fair to Paine; it is equally difficult for him to be anything but generous to Burke. Yet both the writers have equal strength and sincerity; one being plain, logical, and controlled; the other, rhetorical, emotional, and potent. What, then, is the reason for this uncritical preference? I cannot imagine that Paine's plebeian origin could have much influence, although it is noticeable that the average middle-class critic is often disposed to handle tenderly a commonplace book by an aristocrat. How often have we seen them

tumble over themselves in their hurry to acclaim an insignificant piece of history or sociology by Lord Rosebery or Lord Cromer! It is impossible not to find a suspicion of snobbishness in Mr. Birrell's irritating prejudice against Paine, although it is the critic's narrow and orthodox Christianity that accounts for much of the animus.

Let us now see what he thinks of Paine, noting at the same time how Burke strikes him. We are first told, with emphasis, that Paine was a "rank failure" up to the age of thirty-seven. This is an unpleasant way of saying that Paine had not done anything of note up to that age. "Rank," like the more modern "rotten," is one of those meaningless adjectives by which a writer expresses his unintelligent contempt. With his natural advantages of social position, education, and money, Burke was quite as much, or even more, of a failure at the same age. He had done nothing more than amuse himself with parodying Bolingbroke's reasoning on religion, and making the subject of the "sublime and beautiful" even more attractive and difficult than it was. But Mr. Birrell does not mention failure in connection with Burke, and "rank" is an epithet you keep for plebeian democrats. However, he does admit that Paine was a success from the moment he landed in America. This is quite a generous admission for Mr. Birrell, who also credits Paine with being a born journalist, and tells us that, having found the right groove, he never left it, but went on "*scribbling* his advice, and *obtruding* his counsel on men and nations." Surely this is the height of Puritan insolence! But when he proceeds to tell us that Paine "hated British institutions with the hatred of a civil servant who has had the 'sack,'" he simply shows that malevolence will make a clever man talk foolishly. In no one more than in Paine was personal feeling so completely, so admirably, under control. The closely woven logical fabric of his thought is evidence of a fundamental sincerity, which is by no means the quality we found below the gorgeous eloquence and uncontrolled vehemence of Burke. Again, Mr. Birrell is pleased to tell us that Paine was "a bad gauger for King George, but an admirable scribe for a revolution conducted on constitutional principles." My answer is that if Paine did once neglect his duty as an exciseman, he admitted his fault and took his punishment in a manly way, while a politician like Dundas used public money for private purposes and played the injured innocent when he was impeached.

Another of Mr. Birrell's Puritan objections to Paine is that he was not a teetotaler, and that he was inclined to redness. I don't know if Paine's favourite stimulant was gin and-water. If not, it was no doubt something equally vulgar, something far removed from the old and aristocratic port which seems to have been the tippie of Burke and his friends. As Mr. Birrell knows, it was an age of hard drinking. Many of the greatest statesmen of the time cultivated convivial habits, and some of them made a point of never going to bed sober. "The lampoons and cartoons of the day," says Mr. Lovatt-Fraser, "frequently dwell on the bibulous tendencies of Pitt and Lord Melville," who, it is said, were able to finish seven bottles of wine between them and yet take their seats next day in the House with steady nerves and clear brains. A hundred years ago men had stronger stomachs and harder heads. Drinking was one of the signs of a vigorous and expansive temperament. It set up no more deterioration in Thomas Paine or Charles Lamb or Pitt than did the deplorable opium-habit in Coleridge, for whose moral shortcomings Mr. Birrell would be the first to find excuses.

¹ Dr. Ivor Tuckett, *The Evidence for the Supernatural* (1911), p. 82.

But what concerns us most as Freethinkers is Mr. Birrell's attitude to the *Age of Reason*. He knows—Mr. Conway's *Life* has made it quite clear—that Paine was a sincere Deist, and not an Atheist, as is ignorantly and commonly supposed. Yet on other points he shows lamentable ignorance. "Nobody now," he assures us, "is ever likely to read the *Age of Reason* for instruction or amusement." Now, I hardly think I am far wrong when I say that the R.P.A. sells a dozen copies of Paine's work for one of Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*. This surely proves that some people do not share Mr. Birrell's tastes; and I am able to assure him that I, for one, have found it both instructive, amusing, and attractive. If we read a little further on, we are able to see why Mr. Birrell has gone astray. He is content to repeat the stupidities of the average orthodox critic. "Paine," he tells us, "is a coarse writer, without refinement of nature, and he uses brutal expressions, and hurls his vulgar words about in a manner certain to displease." Certainly it must come as a crude shock to the Christian to find that there are undeveloped humorous possibilities in the *Pentateuch*, and many absurdities even in his cherished *New Testament*. It was Paine's business, as he conceived it, to put these absurdities and contradictions plainly, with the intention of forcing the believer to examine for himself. To have handled the subject more delicately would have been to miss his opportunity, as the orthodox are notoriously thick-skinned. But to say that Paine is naturally coarse is to show yourself both ignorant and foolish. When he attacked people whose principles he hated, he never let himself loose like the immaculate Burke, who was naturally coarse-grained. You need only scratch the aristocratic statesman to find the hackney cab-driver. There is nothing in Paine to put against the outrageous coarseness of Burke's abuse of Warren Hastings and of the principal actors in the French Revolution. Mr. Birrell, no doubt, could put his finger on the passages I am hinting at; but he prefers the more congenial task of discrediting Thomas Paine.

GEO. UNDERWOOD.

Acid Drops.

Speaking in the Upper House of Convocation on May 1, the Bishop of London said he was not happy at the little response made by the nation to the appeal for half a million men for the Army. "He was most anxious that the Church, which had been at the bottom of all the nation's struggles for freedom in all its history, should call the nation's attention to that appeal." Exactly, the Church has always been at the bottom in all the nation's struggles for liberty. At the bottom, or behind, anywhere but on top or in the front. If anyone doubts that the Church has been at the bottom, let him look up the votes of the Bishops in the House of Lords.

The Bishop added that "Many of the agents of the Devil are perfectly prepared to go and work in factories at 30s. a week side by side with the girls and use their influence to lead them astray." We have heard this kind of thing before—from the Bishop, and from agents of the Salvation Army—but we should like to see something like facts produced in support. Until they are forthcoming we are inclined to put them along with the romantic stories of the Bishop's encounters with Atheists in the East End. We do not say that men do not lead girls astray, and sometimes girls lead men astray. Both things are possible in this Christian country with its moral sense heightened and purified by this Christian War.

The death of Sir Francis Burnand, a famous editor of *Punch*, reminds us of his ready wit. At a Foreign Office reception, a guest in brilliant uniform came up to Burnand

and shook hands with great cordiality. Burnand looked embarrassed, so the guest said, "I see you don't know me from Adam." "My dear sir," replied Sir Francis, "I didn't know Adam."

At the funeral of Sir Francis Burnand, Father Fox said that Sir Francis was "famous before God and the saints in heaven." We had no idea they took such an interest in *Punch*. But we daresay the poor things were glad of anything to enliven the deadly monotony of their existence. And one can imagine the angels crowding round Sir Francis, the moment he arrives, begging for the last good story.

The side-tracking of education by the clergy is continuing, and a large number of Welsh Nonconformist ministers have become elementary day-school teachers. This will mean a very big Bible in the schools.

A London magistrate says that beggars exhibit much better manners than formerly. Nowadays, when they were refused, they went off saying, "God bless you," or something of that sort. Perhaps the dear clergy will claim this as proof of the belated revival of religion.

The Archbishop of Canterbury issued a special prayer asking God to "protect our merchant ships and those of our Allies, and of the neutral nations against the attack of our enemies." Now the Government says that the submarine menace is growing, and the number of ships sunk increasing. What will the Archbishop do about it? Will he conclude that God doesn't want to help the Allies, that he can't help the Allies, or that he is helping the Germans? Or will he move a vote of censure on the Lord for his inactivity? Clearly something ought to be done.

Owing to the paper shortage, the Plymouth Education Committee has cancelled an order for the supply of 20,000 hymn-books. So war does bring some benefits in its train, after all!

The intrusion of the clergy into the teaching profession reminds us that over 10,000 members of the Church Lads' Brigade are with the Colours. The parsons evidently like their fighting done by proxy.

Vegetables are being grown in the old burial-ground of the Chapel of the Ascension, Marble Arch, London. As the ground has been consecrated, the vegetables ought to be "very fine and large."

A suggestion was made before the Cinema Commission that many empty churches might be filled if they were equipped with a cinema-screen to illustrate the sermons. If the sermons were on Jonah and the Whale or Noah's Ark, the pictures should be as funny as a Charlie Chaplin film.

Some German editors object to English parsons styling them Atheists, and one points out that Bismarck stated in the Reichstag that he was a Christian, and that the Hohenzollerns have been very pious.

In an article on the late Dr. Zanenhof, the inventor of Esperanto, the *Daily Telegraph* says that the famous linguist tried "to undo the effects of the Tower of Babel." Babble on Babel is more suitable to the pages of a parish magazine than the columns of a newspaper.

Following upon an argument concerning the War, the Rev. Robert Barry, a Congregationalist minister at Bronville, U.S.A., murdered his wife and mother-in-law, and committed suicide. The restraining power of religion is not very evident in this.

Lord Devonport has issued an order that anyone found wasting food will be punished. But what will he do with one who prevents the growing of food? We ask this because the Secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society writes in the *Times* that, as a punishment for our desecration of the Sabbath, "God, by his weather, prevented ploughing on

several of the proposed seven Sundays." Now, that is clear and definite. God is aiding the enemy by preventing the growth of foodstuffs. And we seriously ask, What is Lord Devonport going to do about it?

Billy Sunday, the Yankee revivalist, it is said, is working under his own name, but his name has been too much for its owner. So long as he was a baseballer, he thought of the other six days; but when he took up preaching, the one day won. Before he got on the religious war-path he was William A. Sundry.

Scratch a Christian and you find a barbarian. Even the clergy find this out sometimes. At a Plymouth meeting, protesting against lenient treatment of conscientious objectors at Princetown Prison, a Nonconformist minister wished to move an amendment, but was howled down, and had to seek police protection.

The Revs. W. B. Selbie, F. B. Meyer, and J. Scott Lidgett have sent a letter of protest to Mr. Lloyd George concerning the policy of reprisals, in which they contend that by so doing we have become partners in the enemy's evil deeds. So far, about a dozen out of 50,000 clergymen have protested.

The Rev. George Davies, a Baptist minister, fell dead in the street whilst visiting London for the May Meetings. There is no moral.

The Rev. R. J. Campbell says that children must be taught the culture of the soul. In order, presumably, that the clergy may reap the harvest.

The clerical boast that the War is doing good to religion does not often square with the facts. Owing to paper shortage, Plymouth Education Committee has cancelled an order for the supply of 20,000 hymn books.

On Shakespeare's birthday the poet's monuments in Westminster Abbey, Southwark Cathedral, and other churches, were decorated. The author of *Hamlet* did not often trouble the pew-openers during his lifetime.

The Loretto Heights, near Arras, which has been the scene of a great battle, is a reminder of the Italian town Loretto, which Catholics believe contains a house in which the Virgin Mary formerly lodged. The story tells how, in the thirteenth century, it was brought from Galilee by angels. This story is as true as the Gospels.

The *Daily Chronicle* reminds its readers that George Jacob Holyoake invented the word "jingo" to describe fire-eating militarists. Our contemporary refers to Holyoake as "the Social reformer," but omits all reference to his Secularism.

There are 227 petitions for divorce to be tried during the coming law term. This discounts the clerical boast that those whom God has joined, no man shall put asunder.

One of the "Reporters" of the Imperial War Conference remarks: "A simple calculation shows that, had the annual wastage of infant life during the last fifty years been no greater than it is at present, at least 500,000 men would have been available for the defence of the country to-day." What a glorious thought! And what a commentary upon the benefits of Christian dominancy. The crowning argument for looking after our babies is that it will provide us with more men for "cannon fodder." Who says that Christianity does not protect the home?

Truly the clergy learn nothing and forget nothing. It is at a time like the present when thrones are toppling that the House of Convocation, at the instance of the Dean of Canterbury, pass a resolution in favour of the reinsertion of the name of Charles I. in the Calendar as a saint and martyr. To call him a martyr is absurd. We do not say it is absurd to call him a saint because most saints are absurd. But what a topic to engage the thoughts of men

in the midst of a world War. And when all is said and done the only claim of Charles I. to distinction is that he was beheaded. That is a distinction other monarchs have earned, but have not always received it.

Rev. Dr. Eyre has complained to the East Sussex Education Committee that facilities for religious instruction have been infringed by the instruction given at cookery centres. Shocking! And yet we fancy that most sensible people would rather see girls grow up capable cooks than good theologians.

Sir Robert Borden told the British and Foreign Bible Society that democracy must be guided by the Bible. We suggest the following as the guides that would suit: "The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." That is the kind of text which we should imagine would commend itself to such leaders of the democracy as the late Czar, the Kaiser, or Lord Milner. And we are overwhelmed by the democratic enthusiasm burning in such a text as, "Servants (slaves) be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart as unto Christ"! Could anything be more democratic?

A Sunday paper complains that we wear too many clothes, and calls for a sumptuary controller. We hope this does not mean a return to the very primitive fashions worn in the Garden of Eden.

In a religious periodical appeared the following piece of beautiful sentimentousness: "To-day is the to-morrow you were worrying about yesterday." It sounds like an attempt to parody the Athanasian Creed.

Now we know why the clergy were exempted from the operations of the Military Service Act. Last week the Archbishop of Canterbury told the House of Convocation that the clergy had been exempted from military service by the nation's representatives in Parliament "without a dissentient voice," and this was because "to them had been assigned a great responsibility in the nation's life at all times." So we know all about it. But one still wonders what is the great responsibility assigned to the clergy. The Archbishop doesn't enlighten us. Perhaps he was initiating a guessing competition.

The death of Canon McFadden, parish priest of Glenties, County Donegal, recalls the time when the priest was arrested, in full vestments on a Sunday morning, for the part he took in the Irish Plan of Campaign. The police inspector who carried out the order was killed by the peasantry. Religion and politics make a highly explosive mixture.

A Salvation Army advertisement states that its workers "have been engaged in the collecting and sorting of waste-paper for over a quarter of a century." This is a frank admission of the business side of salvation.

The late Rev. W. F. Hale, of Reigate, left estate to the value of nearly £50,000. That should be quite sufficient to keep him out of heaven.

"Some" Ghost.

I BELIEVE in the Holy Ghost,
Believe that he is ever most,
That we can expect from the Host,—
That is Religion's chiefest boast;
Believe he's nothing but a Ghost;
He won't make material roast;
He's neither here nor at his post;
He's naught, in fact; so no fine toast
Can we propose to such a Ghost. C. B. W.

To Correspondents.

- J. CRASSIE.—Your letter received. If it did you any good to write it, the benefit is all on one side.
- R. C. YOUNG.—Now that Mr. Rosetti is in France, we will see that you get your *Freethinker* until he returns.
- J. HARDING.—We quite appreciate your solicitude. But we do not think we are overworking, only working hard; and it is not hard work that hurts, but worry and anxiety. We could do with less of the latter, but must make the best of it.
- ASHTON RIDLEY.—Have placed your name in newsagents' list. We are not surprised to learn that the War has scattered many of your old customers for the *Freethinker*. That has been one of the difficulties we have had to face during the course of the War.
- MR. G. K. HARPER writes that *La Revolution*, by L. Madelin (Huhatte, Paris), is one of the best works on the French Revolution, and was awarded a prize by the *Institut*. The book is available in an English translation.
- S. THOMPSON.—Pleased to know that you are now a regular reader of the *Freethinker*. We don't think "God" does occupy the whole of our space. On the contrary, the weekly fare provided is a very varied one. Our policy is to treat all things from a Freethought point of view, and for that purpose the paper exists. Other suggestion noted.
- "FATHER" RUDDY.—Not at all offended—on the contrary, rather interested.
- C. HARPUR.—Sorry we have not the space at our disposal to publish your letter. Communications must be brief, if they are to be inserted. But if you insist in preferring a personal conviction against all evidence, is controversy worth while?
- W. RAWETT.—If you are convinced, as a Spiritualist, that Mr. Mann's articles can only aid your cause, and as we have a quite opposite opinion, controversy seems quite needless. We are both in agreement as to the value of the articles.
- W. KENSELT.—We were under the impression that the feeding of inmates of prisons had been improved of late years. If things are as you say, there is evidently room for improvement. As you say, prisoners are not sentenced to semi-starvation.
- H. C. HEBBES.—You appear to have overlooked the sarcasm in the review of Mr. Angell's book by "Criticus."
- L. JENNINGS (Bristol).—Thanks for new subscriber. We are quite certain that if our readers were to put their backs into it, a thousand new subscribers might be secured in the next three months.

Sugar Plums.

We are not at all surprised to hear that Mr. Lloyd's address on "Humanism *versus* Christianity" was greatly appreciated by the South Place audience on Sunday last. We should have been surprised had it been otherwise. "After the War," perhaps, something may be done. Meanwhile, we draw the special attention of Freethinkers to the fact that the lecturer to-day is Mr. Harry Snell. His subject is "The Imposture of Faith Healing." We trust that our friends will see to it that the hall is crowded—as it should be.

Every little helps. Added to the exceptional and excessive high cost of paper, a rise in the wages of compositors has just been arranged between the masters and men, which puts between £30 and £40 per year on our printing. We quite sympathise with the men in getting this advance, but that does not help us much. So, as we said, every little helps—to make the burden heavier.

Capt. W. H. Rushbrooke, of Cosford, Milford, Surrey, writes that someone sent a copy of our "garbage entitled the *Freethinker*" to his address, and that he put the paper in the fire, "the fittest place for it." We hope the gallant captain feels better after informing us that we are living under the frown of his displeasure. But we can assure Captain Rushbrooke that if he thinks of setting up a claim for originality on the score of what he has done, he is quite unwarranted in doing so. Bless the man's innocent Christian soul, the *Freethinker* has been put in the fire by just such cultured and courteous gentlemen many a time. It is an old practice. We are very downcast, but are bearing up, and in time hope to forget this blow to our feelings.

But although cast down by Captain Rushbrooke's dis-

pleasure, we are cheered by the following from a Manchester correspondent:—

I hope your readers will ponder the advice given in your "About Ourselves." The marvel to me is that a paper of such sustained excellence as the *Freethinker* does not have a very large circulation.....(Compliments deleted by office censor.) But if Freethinkers put their backs into it, the circulation ought to be very soon doubled. I am doing my bit, inasmuch as I have gained one new reader this, and I hope to get another one within the next week. If 25 per cent. of your readers (your own figure, Mr. Editor) did the same, your anxiety would be lessened and the *Freethinker's* usefulness increased.

Our correspondent will be pleased to learn that other of our readers are working hard in the matter, and, we trust, will meet with the success they deserve.

Miss Vance reports that our outdoor propaganda commenced last Sunday under favourable conditions both as regards weather and audiences, although the latter were somewhat interfered with by the May Day Labour demonstrations. These also engaged the attention of many of those who would have offered to sell the *Freethinker*, but all who had sold last season repeated their evil doings aided by recruits, and are now cheerfully awaiting the Council's promised attentions. The paper was eagerly bought, showing that the ban placed upon it by the Council had, naturally, served to increase the demand. Curiously enough, the impression that the Council had caved in at the end of last season had to be corrected in several instances, and, when this was understood, a resolution condemning the action of this reactionary body was put and carried unanimously. Miss Vance concludes with the request that additional volunteers to sell the paper may reach her in good time for Sunday next.

We have just published a new pamphlet, *Freethought and Literature* (price one penny, by post three halfpence), by "Minnermus." Curiously, although "Minnermus" has been writing in the *Freethinker* and elsewhere for many years, he has never yet put anything into permanent form. We feel sure that our readers will welcome his new departure with as much pleasure as they read his weekly contribution to our columns. His review of some of the world's great writers in their relation to Freethought will be helpful to Freethinkers and illuminating to Christians. We have no doubt but that the pamphlet will have the wide circulation it deserves.

A great many of our readers will be interested in the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, and these will be pleased to hear that a meeting demanding its withdrawal, "and the postponement of such legislation until women have political responsibility," is to be held at the British Schools, Kentish Town Road, on Friday, May 11, at 8 o'clock. As the present issue of the *Freethinker* is in the hands of most London readers before Friday, this notice may be of use. There will be various speakers, and admission is free.

Owing to pressure on our space, we are obliged to hold over the concluding portion of Miss Frances Ivor's "Woman and Christianity." For the same reason we are compelled to hold over the report of the N. S. S. monthly Executive meeting. Both will appear in our next issue.

Presidential Notes.

In another part of this issue there will be found the Agenda of the National Secular Society's Annual Conference. The Conference will be held in the South Place Institute which is, perhaps, one of the most centrally situated halls in London. The Agenda, it will be noted, affords ground for profitable discussion, particularly those resolutions having a vital relation to the position of Freethinkers and Freethought in public

life. It is just possible that events will occur between now and the Conference that may call for notice, but the Agenda has to be prepared some time beforehand, and it can only deal with affairs as they stand at the time of going to press.

Two things may offer serious developments at any moment. One is the trouble with the L.C.C., about which I wrote last week. The other is the Clydebank case in connection with the Oath's Amendment Act. It will be remembered that a witness was refused the right to affirm in defiance of a clear statutory right. On behalf of the executive, Miss Vance was instructed to write the Secretary for Scotland calling his attention to the matter. But these letters brought no more than an official acknowledgment of their receipt. A letter to the editor of the paper, in which the case was reported, did, however, bring the startling information that the witness had actually been threatened with contempt of court for refusing to take the oath. This made the case still more serious, and on mentioning the matter to Sir George Greenwood, M.P., he very kindly volunteered to place an interrogation on the question paper of the House of Commons if I desired it. I was, naturally, pleased that this should be done, and the question was accordingly asked the Secretary for Scotland. The following is his reply:—

My attention has been drawn to this case, and I have caused enquiries to be made. The information before me is that the witness, although given the opportunity of doing so, did not avail himself of either of the statutory grounds provided by the Oaths Act, 1888, on which he might have been entitled to give his evidence on affirmation. These grounds are (1) that the witness has no religious belief, and (2) that to take the oath is contrary to his religious belief. The court accordingly refused to take his evidence, and at the close of the proceedings intimation was made to him that the incident would be reported to the Burgh Prosecutor, in terms of the section of the Summary Jurisdiction Act, 1908.

All I have to say now upon this answer is that it is quite at variance with the published newspaper report of the case, and is little better than an evasion of the question at issue. It was clearly the magistrate's duty to explain to the witness the grounds upon which an affirmation might be made, and there is no indication that this was done. On the contrary, there is evidence that the witness was actually pressed to take the oath. He was asked such irrelevant questions as "Do you attend church?" In short, there is a very ugly look about the whole of the proceedings.

But the matter cannot be allowed to rest here. The important thing is to find out the address of the witness, Charles Stewart. The gentleman who first drew my attention to the case applied to the court for this, and was refused. I then wrote to my friend, Mr. T. Robertson, of Glasgow, asking him to instruct a solicitor on behalf of the N.S.S. to probe the matter to the bottom. Acting on instructions, the solicitor also applied to the police for the witnesses address. It was refused, but he was referred to the "Assessor." On applying to this official there was another refusal. It is, therefore, quite evident that the officials feel they have done wrong and are trying to hush the matter up. Further pressure will, however, be applied, and we must await the result. The important thing is to find the address of Mr. Charles Stewart, who was a witness at Clydebank Police Court on March 12. Surely some one must know him, and I beg Freethinkers on the spot to do what they can to find out where this gentleman resides. It will be a monstrous thing if officials, whose

duty it is to see that the law is carried out, can act in the manner indicated without there being some means of calling them to account.

One way and another, the immediate future of Free-thought in this country is not likely to lack interest, even if it fails to provide excitement. It is certain that the Churches will strive their hardest to repair their shattered prestige when the War is over, and we shall need to be well on our guard if we are to counteract their efforts. So far we have no cause for complaint, although one would like to have seen greater activity in some quarters. The past year has been one of exceptional difficulty; but, on the whole, the most has been made of opportunities that occurred for work. The lecture propaganda has been revived and carried into new fields with success. New Branches of the Society have been opened, and the ground prepared for others. There has been a larger number of members join the Society than has been the case for many years past, and I can at least close my first year of office with the feeling that I have not spared myself. Continuous lecturing up and down the country, attending to a hundred and one odd matters that crop up, in addition to running a weekly paper single-handed, and under more trying conditions than has ever before been experienced, quite ensures one against rusting out. I console myself with the reflection that I am fairly tough and not likely to *wear* out in a hurry. And I know that I have done what I promised to do—my best.

This year, the increased cost and difficulty of railway travelling may have the effect of diminishing the number of delegates who will attend the Annual Conference; but I hope that all Branches will make an effort to send a delegate, nevertheless. After all, the Conference only occurs once a year, and all should make a very special effort to rise to the occasion. It is in times of stress that co-operation is most needed and most appreciated. There is a great work to be done yet by the N.S.S. if it only rises to the occasion. That work may involve a good deal of reconstruction of the internal mechanism of the Society, the precise nature of which cannot at the moment be indicated. Much will depend upon events that are now in the shaping. Much will, of course, depend upon the whole-hearted energy which each one puts into the common cause. And that cause is great enough to act as an inspiration to all who value freedom, enlightenment, and progress.

CHAPMAN COHEN (*President, N.S.S.*)

National Secular Society.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

SOUTH PLACE INSTITUTE, SOUTH PLACE, MOORGATE STREET,
London, E.C.

WHIT-SUNDAY, MAY 27, 1917.

Agenda.

1. Minutes of last Conference.
2. Executive's Annual Report.
3. Reception of Report.
4. Financial Report.
5. Election of President.
 - (a) Motion by West Ham, Bethnal Green, and Birmingham Branches:—
"That Mr. Chapman Cohen be re-elected President."
6. Election of Vice-Presidents.
 - (a) The following are nominated by the Executive for re-election: Bailey, W.; Baker, W. H.; Bartram, J. G.; Bowman, E.; Chapman, R.; Charbonnel, Victor; Collins,

- W. W.; Cowell, H.; Davidson, W.; Dobson, J. G.; Dodd, W.; Elstob, T. H.; Fathers, R. G.; Gorniot, T.; Grange, John; Hammond, J.; Heaford, W.; Hins, Eugene; Hurd, S. L.; Kough, Miss Kathleen B.; Leat, W.; Lloyd, J. T.; McCluskey, G. B. H.; McGlashan, James; Moss, A. B.; Neate, J.; Nelson, Wallace; Nichols, R. T.; Partridge, J.; Peacock, S. M.; Pegg, C.; Pitt, W. T.; Quinton, C. G.; Robertson, Thomas; Roger, Victor; Rolf, G.; Rolf, Mrs.; Rosetti, R. H.; Ross, J. T.; Ross, Miss Mary; Samuels, S.; Shore, T.; Silverstein, H.; Stanley, Miss Alma; Terry, J.; Thurlow, T. J.; Turnbull, John H.; Vance, Miss E. M.; White, G.; Whitwell, C. J.; Williams, E. Clifford; Willis, F. E.; Wood, Frederick.
7. Election of Auditors.
8. Adoption of Revised Rules.
9. Motion by Mr. Cowell:—
“That in order to place the Society on a more democratic basis the office of President be abolished, and in place thereof a committee of three be appointed by the Executive to act in emergencies and report.”
10. Motion by Birmingham Branch:—
“That in the opinion of this Conference the earliest opportunity should be taken of publishing the judgment of the House of Lords in respect to the Bowman case.”
11. Motion by Mr. A. D. Howell Smith, R.A.:—
“That, having in view the elaborate preparations being made by all sections of the Christian Church to meet post-War conditions, and the possibility of reaction resulting from such activities, this Conference urges Freethinkers throughout the country to counteract the tactics of the Churches by effective organization on their part, and suggests the formation of Branches of the N. S. S. wherever possible.”
12. Motion by North London Branch:—
(a) “That future Conferences of the Society be held twice yearly, at Whitsuntide and in the autumn; the annual election of officers to be made at Whitsuntide, and the balance-sheet to cover the same period as at present.”
(b) “That this Conference, realizing the profound importance of the *Freethinker* to the Secular Movement, and being anxious to induce all Branches at their indoor and outdoor meetings to push the circulation of the paper, favours the weekly insertion of brief reports of meetings in that organ, feeling that these notices are calculated to promote and sustain a keener interest in the Freethought Movement.”
13. Motion by Mr. Lloyd:—
“That this Conference regrets the absence of all mention of the religious question in State schools from the educational scheme outlined by the Minister for Education in his recent speech before the House of Commons, and is of opinion that no assured progress is possible so long as the schools are permitted to be the arena in which religious bodies fight for a sectarian advantage, and calls upon the Government to restrict the State schools to subjects defined as ‘secular’ in its own code, and thus end a state of affairs which hinders the progress of education and inflicts an injustice upon a large body of citizens.”
14. Motion by Mr. Louis Brandes:—
“That the same person shall not hold the office of President for more than two consecutive years, and shall not be eligible for nomination for two years after the expiration of his last term of office.”
15. Motion by Mr. A. B. Moss:—
“That this Conference protests in the strongest terms against the repeated flouting of the provisions of the Oaths Act of 1888 in the public courts; it draws special attention to the case in the Clydebank Police Court in March last, when a witness was not only refused the right to affirm, but was subsequently charged with contempt of court; and calls upon the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland to see that the administration of the law is no longer obstructed by ignorant or bigoted officials.”

16. Motion by Mr. C. Cohen:—

“This Conference, noting the fact that our great Ally, France, is, without injury to the conduct of the War, able to grant her soldiers and sailors complete freedom with regard to attendance at religious worship, regrets that such attendance should still be compulsory in both branches of the Service under the British Government, and regrets that in a War in which ‘Freedom’ and ‘Justice’ play so large a part, Freethinkers serving with the Forces should be compelled to participate in a religious service in which they have no faith, and should be denied that freedom of choice in matters of belief which is now generally regarded as the condition of a progressive social life.”

17. Motion by Executive:—

“That, having in view the ambition of the Vatican to regain some portion of its lost temporal power, bearing in mind also the danger to European liberty of permitting the presence of representatives of the Papacy at the Peace Congress that will be called at some future date, this Conference welcomes the agitation now being carried on in continental Freethinking and Liberal circles against the international recognition at a Peace Conference of a Church which has always distinguished itself as an enemy of enlightenment and Freedom.”

18. Motion by Executive:—

“That this Conference protests against the policy of allowing trained teachers in State schools to be replaced by ministers of religion, who are fitted neither by training nor tradition for so technical and responsible a task as the education of the nation's children.”

This Conference will sit in the South Place Institute, South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. Morning session, 10.30 to 12.30; afternoon session, 2.30 to 4.30. Both are purely business meetings. Only members of the N. S. S. can speak and vote. A public meeting will be held in the evening at 7 o'clock.

By order of the Executive

C. COHEN, *President*,
E. M. VANCE, *Secretary*.

The Monarch of Cereals.

VII.

(Concluded from p. 285.)

As an article of food, wheat has always been used in various ways. In remote ages, the unground cereal was soaked in water and then dried into cakes in the sun. Frumenty or furmity was for centuries a favourite dish in England. This food was prepared by soaking the grain, boiling it with milk, and then adding some sweetening substance. Macaroni and several other edible commodities are made from wheat, but bread is the oldest and most valuable of its products. Charred fragments of bread have been discovered in the Lake remains of the Neolithic Age. The loaves of these far-off days were prepared from crushed wheat. Many were the varieties of cakes and bread consumed by the classic Greeks. As many as eighty-one loaves of bread, quite modern in texture, were recovered from an ancient Roman oven in the overwhelmed city of Pompeii, while the old Egyptians were long acquainted with leavened bread.

The modern loaf is leavened by the action of yeast, and unless the dough rises, the bread is certain to be sad and heavy. After the dough has been kneaded and shaped into loaves, a temperature of from 70 to 75 degrees F. is regarded as best for obtaining light and palatable bread. Yeast, or “barm,” is a fungous plant which, when introduced into the dough, nourishes itself chiefly on the sugar contained in it. As the yeast spreads, it exhales alcohol and carbon dioxide gas. This gas and “the generated steam expand with heat, force their way through the dough, and thus lighten it.” The changes set up by the fermentation initiated by the yeast result

in an average loss of 2 per cent. of the flour content. It is officially stated that "in exceptional cases, as in prolonged fermentation,.....the losses may amount to 8 per cent. or more."

This serious leakage led to the substitution of chemical preparations for ordinary yeast. But these substitutes have failed so far to secure the benefits required. The best bread baked from German yeast lacks taste, and has other blemishes. There is some talk now of the possibility of preparing yeastless bread, in which the waste due to fermentation will be avoided, but it remains to be seen whether this unfermented loaf has yet passed beyond the stage of experiment.

The "Ready-to-Eat Wheat" industry has developed considerably in America since 1895. Shredded wheat biscuit is said to contain every part of the grain. Wheat straw finds innumerable uses on all farms. In mediæval England this straw formed the house thatch, and in some Old World lands wheats of certain kinds are expressly cultivated for the straw used in making hats and baskets. Although bread is a staple in most countries, the use of rye and other cereals lessens the consumption of the wheaten loaf. The chief European consumers of wheat are France, England, Belgium, Spain, and Switzerland. Elsewhere wheaten bread is greatest in request in Canada, Australia, and the States.

In area the wheat fields of Russia are the largest in Europe, and the land of the recent revolution may yet become the granary of the Old World. The potentialities of the Russian soil are beyond all reasonable calculation once a rational system of government permits the progress of the agrarian population. The renowned black soil of European Russia consists of an arable plain situated in the south-east of the country. It is of vast extent, and the earth is remarkably fertile. Nor need this occasion surprise, for the dark soil results from many centuries' constant decomposition of the plant life of the region. The eighteen provinces of European Russia which mainly possess this rich soil raise two-thirds of the wheat of the country. Of Russia's 328,000,000 acres of plough land, nearly 60 per cent. is situated in the area of black soil. The remaining arable domain of Russia lies towards the north-west, and is greatly inferior to the sable soil. This poorer land is devoted chiefly to the raising of rye. Mainly owing to the shameful secular misgovernment of the country and the sinister influences of the Sacerdotalists the Russian peasant is still steeped in ignorance, superstition, poverty, and squalor. Despite the miserable standard of living and the wretchedly recompensed toil of the labourer, the effete methods of farming, and the antiquated system of land tenure, have made Russian wheat a high-priced grain, considering its inferior quality. During recent years, however, a spirit of progress has appeared. Machinery is being set to agricultural service, and the rotation of crops is being practised. In Western Russia, from 1870 to 1904, the production of wheat increased 122 per cent., and a far greater area was employed in its cultivation.

Asiatic Russia has also moved forward. The building of the Great Siberian Railway has necessitated many changes of a progressive character. Siberia, which remained until recently to the world in general as a synonym for all the horrors which attend autocracy, suddenly stood revealed as our planet's future granary. This magnificent vision has thus far failed to materialize, but the promised fruitfulness of this immense territory when controlled by capable and conscientious administrators is indeed vast. Siberia is twenty-four times the extent of Germany, and nearly double the area of the United States. Intensely cold is the climate, and much of the country is unfit for human habitation. Yet there remains a huge region for cultivation, and especially for

the cultivation of wheat, which is already Siberia's leading crop. After recent happenings, we may safely regard Russia as a great permanent contributor to the world's wheat supply.

India became an important wheat exporting centre with the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869, and with the development of internal railways at a later date. India is a peninsula so large, and agricultural and climatal conditions are so various in the country, and as the weather fluctuates considerably from season to season, the annual output of wheat is subject to marked variations. In consequence of this, Indian wheat is always an extremely uncertain factor in the world's markets. Were it possible to predict the approximate yield of the export crop for a series of years, Indian grain would materially affect the world's wheat prices. In British India there are about 30,000,000 acres under wheat, and the cereal is harvested in the European spring.

Although the average agriculturist in Argentina is decidedly unenterprising, and despite the fact that cattle breeding has long eclipsed all other aspects of husbandry, the Republic has made remarkable progress recently in wheat production. Some thirty years since, not sufficient wheat was raised for domestic demands, but the cereal has now become the staple crop. The annual export exceeds 50,000,000 bushels, and it is thought that at least 60,000,000 acres will, at no distant time, be devoted to the growth of wheat.

It is, however, to Canada that we must look as the coming wheat-field of the world. Every facility is afforded in the great Dominion for immediate and unexampled development. Not alone are soil and climate almost ideal for wheat culture, but the Canadian farmer is usually industrious, intelligent, and up-to-date. Canada possesses an area in which wheat can be conveniently and profitably cultivated, which has about three times the acreage of the wheat region of the United States. Truly a tiny percentage of this immense territory is at present under cultivation, but this small area yielded more than 100,000,000 bushels of wheat ten years ago. An American authority admits that "the hard wheat of the Canadian North-West ranks with the world's best wheat, and the Toronto papers quote it at a price about 15 cents above that of Ontario wheat."

Intensive agriculture, combined with suitable soil, produce more bountiful returns in Canada than in the American wheat lands. As a permanent source of European supply, Australia is less reliable, as in that Southern land wheat proves unremunerative in comparison with other crops, and the cereal is severely handicapped by the recurrent droughts.

About 95 per cent. of the world's total wheat crop is produced in the Northern Hemisphere. And not only does this hemisphere consume all that it raises, but it absorbs a considerable percentage of that grown in the Southern Hemisphere as well. More than half the entire wheat crop is cultivated in Europe, but owing to the density of that continent's population, Europe absorbs the world's surplus in addition to her own yield. No marvel then that in our war-stained countries the cry increases that flesh and blood seem cheap, while the indispensable loaf becomes steadily scarce and dear.

T. F. PALMER.

Book Chat.

As an earnest of a serious attempt to rouse the British public to a due sense of the value of Pure Science, *Science and the Nation* (Cambridge University Press, 5s.) deserves a warm welcome. The volume is well planned, and the thirteen scientific authorities, who between them

range over the larger part of the scientific world, deal with their subjects in a way which, while bringing out the importance of scientific research to the commercial and economic life of the nation, duly emphasizes the fact that genuine scientific progress is only possible to those who are animated with a love of knowledge for its own sake. And there is need for this lesson. As Lord Moulton, who contributes a preface to the work, points out, there is a real danger that the widespread determination to remedy our national neglect of industrial science may defeat itself by leading to as great a neglect of Pure Science after the War as existed before that catastrophe broke upon Europe. The volume before us is designed to avert that danger, and it deserves success. Each of the thirteen essays is fascinating in its account of the marvels already worked, and not less so in the worlds of speculative possibilities indicated. We cannot think of a better volume to place in the hands of those who think science a "dry" and uninteresting subject. The sciences of Chemistry, Physics, Metallurgy, Botany, Geology, Forestry, Medicine, Ethnology, etc., are passed in review, and fairyland is made contemptibly matter of fact and commonplace by the tale of wonder unfolded. Lord Moulton may well say that these essays "offer an unchallengeable argument in favour of Pure Science," or, as I should prefer to call it, Experimental Science motivated purely by the desire to increase knowledge.

And that is the only spirit in which really important scientific work is ever accomplished. You cannot set down a first-rate scientific worker to discover something useful or commercially profitable; you must leave him free to discover something that is true. Its commercial exploitation will be pretty sure to come later. It is to our national discredit that hitherto we have thought much of the latter and little of the former. This is due, says the Cambridge Professor of Chemistry, to the fact that "during the past fifty years hardly any English public man of affairs possessing any knowledge of scientific principles has arisen, and no Government department having the faintest interest in scientific industry has existed."

How much better we shall be after the War remains to be seen. But it is certain that we shall not be better off unless by some means a public interest in the right direction is created. It is as a step in that direction that *Science and the Nation* is to be welcomed. It is both informing and inspiring, and the man or woman who can read it through, from the opening essay to the fascinating ethnological chapter, by H. R. Rivers, without being fired by the spirit of adventure, must indeed be of "coarse clay and common mould."

The famous Swedish author, Helen Key, has a large and international, if somewhat peculiar public, and in *War, Peace, and the Future* (Putman's Sons, 6s. net) she deals with the question asked her at the opening of the War, "In what way can humanity prevent war?" Her answer to that query is, "by making humanity really human," and her work is an examination of the causes that produce war, with an indication of the means that may prevent its recurrence. The causes of war—the jealousies of nations, the persistence of false ideas of greatness, the piling up of armaments, the fact of the desire for peace not being so powerful as the desire on the part of each nation not to declare war, have been so frequently stated as not to need dwelling on at any length here. And the folly and inutility of the policies dominating the nations of Europe should by now be plain to all. If proof be needed, the War itself surely furnishes all that is required.

A sub-title to the volume is "A Consideration of Nationalism and Internationalism and of the Relation

of Women to the War." But, on the author's own admission, women stand in no special relation to this War, if they ever do at any war. Women have supported war in general, quite as much as have men, and have as often as not urged men to war. One ought not to forget, in this connection, those impertinent and vulgar-fashionable women who, in the early months of the War, made it a rule to hand a white feather to any young man they saw in civilian dress. If it be said that in this respect women have accepted the ideals that men have placed before them, and they will know better as their social education becomes perfected, we agree; but man himself, we hope, will learn better with the growing of the years. We have, indeed, a strong dislike to all attempts to consider this or that social question from "the woman's point of view." It is a heritage, by reaction, from the practice of considering social questions from the man's point of view. Social questions are neither women's questions nor men's questions. They are just social questions, and concern men and women alike. And men and women need to be trained in the light of that conception. We agree, however, with Helen Key, that a general influence from the War will be an increase of woman's self-esteem. Her share in the activities of the War will have made her realize her place as a social unit, and it will lie ill on the lips of those who have utilized woman's labour for every purpose save that of actual fighting, and have only refrained from using it there because of lack of sheer brute strength, that she must not "interfere with things she does not understand."

We agree, also, with this:—

The first condition of woman's peace movement is, that all talk of the necessity of war, the ennobling influence, the beauty, and the eternity of war, should be silenced on the lips of women; that their lips should never be opened except to proclaim that war belongs to those phases of life that must be conquered if humanity is to be humanized.

Only it seems to us that "men" would read as well as "women" in this paragraph, and "human beings" better than either.

CRITICUS.

Correspondence.

PSYCHISM AND THE SUPERNATURAL.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—As a careful inquirer into the many forms of so-called spirit phenomena, I should like to thank you for the very able and careful articles on this subject which have appeared from the pen of Mr. Walter Mann. I have interviewed, personally, several "mediums," and have been present at the seances in which these folk have acted in the capacity of percipient. I myself have, at telepathic seances, acted both as percipient and as agent. Mr. Mann gives us many examples of fraud and deception, but omits from his essays any reference to cases which have been most carefully inquired into by the Society of Psychological Research, where there is no reason to suppose that any fraud existed. I am as firm a disbeliever in "spirits" as Mr. Mann, but in my own experience have met with certain cases where there can be no doubt that no form of fraud was employed. Mr. Mann may be doing the Rationalist cause a great deal of harm by implying that all forms of psychic phenomena are fraudulent. It is unquestionably established that certain persons are born with a highly developed "percipient" sense in being able to record thought transference. The pity is that such persons at once believe that their powers are supernatural instead of natural, and begin to demonstrate their faculty in public and for money. Directly they become servants of the public they are obliged to take precautions that they will not fail, and here is where fraud creeps in. Fraud

is easy to expose where scientific tests are used, but the genuine cases are very difficult to account for unless we are fully prepared to accept the now proven theories of telepathy and thought-transference. The numerous cases of psychic phenomena which came under the observation of Mr. Podmore, Professor Richet, and others, and even under my own observation on a more limited scale, cannot be accounted for by fraud, and we are doing the scientific cause a great disservice if we claim that they are. Most public "mediums" have been exposed for the reason above mentioned, although this cannot, I think, be said of Mrs. Piper, with whose case Mr. Mann is no doubt familiar. The full account will be found in the Proceedings of the S.P.R. (vol. vi., pp. 436-660), and also in Mr. Podmore's *Apparitions and Thought Transference* (pp. 326-338). Surely it is better to look for scientific explanations than to attribute phenomena to fraud? I hope Mr. Mann will make his views on this most important scientific problem clear.

EDWIN GREENWOOD.

FREETHINKERS AND ADULT SCHOOLS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—If you consider the subject a suitable one, I should like to raise the question as to the desirability or otherwise of Freethinkers attending such institutions as Adult Schools. My experience may be of interest to some of your readers.

I joined the local Adult School some five years ago, it being the only gathering in the village where full and free discussion are allowed. I have never disguised my views as an Agnostic, and have been instrumental in getting the following subjects discussed (amongst others of same type): "Christianity or Secularism: Which is the Better?" "Pagan and Christian Morality" (based on W. Mann's articles); "Civilization and War" (based on Chapman Cohen's pamphlet).

I have always expressed the Freethought point of view without restraint, and am accorded a respectful hearing; and it seems to me that it is better to do this than to hold aloof from such gatherings. What say you?

FRED HOBDAV.

ATHEISM IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—To deal fully with Mr. Farmer's last letter, it would be necessary to enter on an æsthetic discussion on the use of expletives in literature, legitimate and otherwise, which I have no intention of doing, especially as I no longer have Aulard before me, and cannot reproduce the quotations from Hebert which, in my opinion, justified my description of him and his journal as of the "gutter" variety. Even if I could, I should have to use dashes and asterisks to a degree sufficient to deprive the quotations of any value. I must simply, then, so far as the quality of Hebert's journalism is concerned, state my opinion that, while a writer may be "broad" and even "purple," and yet justify himself by his abundance of wit, humour, and sympathetic insight into life, there are limits to the permissible use of low expressions, which one need not be a Puritan to appreciate, especially when used simply to sell a paper.

But in answering my contentions, Mr. Farmer has inadvertently done me an injustice. In my eighth article, which appeared in your issue of April 1, I summed up my opinion of Hebert and his associates, and made it plain that my adverse judgment on this group, including their leader, was based much more on their inordinate bloodthirstiness than on the eccentricities of *Pere Duchesne*. When, therefore, in restating the case against Hebert in reply to Mr. Farmer, I gave proof of his sanguinary incitements by quotations from Kropotkin, I was not introducing a fresh charge, but sustaining my original indictment. Mr. Farmer declines a brief for Hebert on this count. I am disappointed; for I had hoped that this, my one and only encounter with a live Hebertist, might disclose a real case for the editor of *Pere Duchesne*, and add materially to my historical information. It has not done so.

May I add that, so far from being influenced by M. Aulard's "unscrupulous" translator, I entirely forget what that gentleman said on the subject, and should certainly not have treated him as an authority.

ROBERT ARCH.

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.

SOUTH PLACE INSTITUTE (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.): 7, Harry Snell, "The Faith-Healing Imposture."

MR. A. D. HOWELL SMITH'S DISCUSSION CLASS (N. S. S. Office, 62 Farringdon Street): Thursday, May 17, at 7.30.

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 6.15, E. C. Saphin, a Lecture.

FINSBURY PARK N. S. S.: 11.15, R. Miller, a Lecture.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (corner of Ridley Road): 7, R. Miller, a Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill): 3.15, Percy S. Wilde, a Lecture.

REGENT'S PARK N. S. S.: 3.15, George Rule, a Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15, P. S. Wilde, a Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (outside Maryland Point Station): 7, Mr. Burke, a Lecture.

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (Good Templars' Hall, 122 Ingram Street): 12 noon, Annual Meeting.

NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE (Collingwood Hall, Clayton Street): 3, L. J. Watson, "Omar Khayyam."

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