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A Secular Charter.

II.

It may be taken as indicative of the growth of public opinion in relation to Freethought that none of the newspapers, religious or secular, that dealt with the case—at least, none that we have seen—found fault with the judgment. It might almost be called a popular verdict, judging from the way it was received. The *Christian World*, which may be said to be as representative as any paper of English Christianity, said that in its opinion the verdict was "just and right." The *Church Times*, in a rather more sorrowful vein admitted that the judges could come to no other conclusion, and rubbed home the moral that by the verdict "England is no longer in law, as it has ceased to be in fact, a Christian country." The *Guardian* makes the best of the situation in the remark that "the religion of the Church can assuredly stand by itself." The *Westminster Gazette* "welcomes" the decision. The *Telegraph*, the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Star*, and numerous other papers published paragraphs or articles pointing out that the verdict was inevitable, and in accord with enlightened opinions. Even the *New Statesman* chaffingly remarked that "the Lord Chancellor has yet to discover that it is not illegal in this country to seek to disprove the tenets of Christian dogma."

This chorus of approval is highly significant. A generation ago one may safely say that the virtual disestablishment of religion in our supreme court of law would have given rise to much controversy, and would have aroused much dissent. That its reception has been otherwise is circumstantial proof that the work of Freethought propaganda has not been in vain. For only in a community saturated with heresy would the daily and weekly press have greeted such a verdict in such a manner.

The judgment, indeed, goes further than many people may, at first glance, perceive. The Secular Society, Limited, is a duly incorporated body, and, as a legal entity, it claimed its legal rights. But a reading of the

judgments will show that much more than this was involved, and more than this was decided. What the House of Lords verdict settled, once for all, was that bequests to a society formed for the purpose of criticising Christianity are perfectly legal whether the society is incorporated or not. Let me make this point quite clear. Admittedly, bequests made to an unincorporated body are perfectly legal, and may be claimed on establishing evidence of identity. Bequests to secular societies have been contested, not really on the ground of the societies being unincorporated, but on the ground that the purposes for which the societies were formed—i.e., an attack on Christian doctrines—were, in themselves, illegal. (We believe, as we said last week that, provided the gift be absolute, a bequest could have been made good, even under the old reading of the law, but for the moment we may let that pass). But now we have one judge after another, in a Criminal Court, in the Court of Chancery, in the Court of Appeal, and in the House of Lords, all agreeing that there is nothing whatever illegal in such a purpose. It is illegal to attack Christianity, only when the attacks are couched in abusive language, or in language likely to lead to a breach of the peace. That much is clear, and it is final.

Clearly, then, it would be impossible to withhold a bequest to, say an unregistered body such as the National Secular Society, on the ground of its being unregistered body. We do not think that position was ever taken up, and we are quite certain it would not now hold if it were. And it is quite impossible to argue that the principles of any secular society are, in themselves, an abusive attack on Christianity. A secular lecturer may use abusive language, but each case would have to be dealt with as it arises. It cannot affect the society, or the combination of individuals who choose to call themselves the society.

An immediate effect of the decision in the Bowman Case is, then, of much wider scope than that of the establishment of the legality of the Secular Society, Limited. It establishes the legality of a bequest to any secular society whether that society be registered or not. That is a consideration of vast importance, and worth bearing in mind. It means, to use the language of the *Church Times*, "the legal establishment of Secularism." A bequest to a Freethought association is now as good at law as a bequest to a tin tabernacle or to an individual. The purpose of a bequest—if the purpose be a legal one, cannot be affected by the consideration that there is a possibility of its being carried into effect in an objectionable manner.

There remains the question of the Blasphemy Laws. And here we need be on our guard against overestimating the extent of our victory. These still remain, and while they cannot well be used against a society, registered or unregistered, they may still be used against individuals. There was unanimity on the part of the judges that a mere attack on Christianity was not illegal. There was also unanimity that if the attack was not expressed in "decent" or "tem-

perate" language it was illegal. It was also said that under Common Law no prosecution for blasphemy had ever taken place without the accompanying feature of ribaldry or scoffing. That is true, and yet we say, without the least hesitation, that no prosecution for blasphemy ever did take place because of the language used, and no jury ever convicted on that account. The language furnished the excuse for the prosecution, the real thing attacked was the opinion expressed. Canon Law, upon which this particular aspect of the Civil Law is based, quite honestly and properly treated blasphemy as a matter of opinion, no matter how expressed. Historical causes led to its being impossible to take over this principle without some modification in form, but the facts of the situation are plain to all who carefully examine them.

What are the "decencies of controversy," to use Lord Coleridge's famous phrase, that we are asked to respect? No one worth bothering about objects to controversy being conducted in a "decent" manner, or wishes to see controversy carried on in any other way. But what are these "decencies"? There seems to be only one sound test, and that is such rules, written or unwritten, as obtain amongst people in connection with non-religious subjects. If a person uses "indecent" language, prosecute him. If he incites to a breach of the peace, prosecute him. But to both these ends the ordinary law amply suffices. The mere fact of Freethinkers being charged with one or the other offence under a special law is proof positive that the blasphemy laws are maintained, not for the prevention of a breach of the peace, or for securing decency in controversy, but entirely for the purpose of inflicting a penalty upon opinion. It is the protection of religion that is aimed at, the punishment of freethinking that is intended. And the existence of such laws places the safety of Freethinkers at the mercy of a Christian judge and a Christian jury, who have to decide whether the Freethinker has attacked their religion in a manner agreeable to *them*. And, of course, the answer always has been, and always will be, that it is not. That is why blasphemy prosecutions never fail.

The Blasphemy Laws were ridiculous before the House of Lords decision. They are still more ridiculous now. Christianity, said Lord Sumner, is no part of the laws of England. The statement is rhetoric, not law. That being granted, one may well ask on what reasonable ground the existence of the Blasphemy Laws, or even the establishment of religion can be any longer maintained? On the one side, the State establishes a form of Christianity as the true religion. On the other side, it declares perfectly legal a society which declares such religion to be false and mischievous. Absurdity could hardly go further than that. In the courts the religious oaths may be dispensed with, thus reducing that formula to the level of a purely personal idiosyncrasy. Jews, Positivists, Atheists, Agnostics, may enter Parliament, occupy all offices in the State, even administer the law itself. The pretence that freethinking opinion endangers the welfare of the State is, in the face of such facts, so ridiculous that no one outside a pulpit or a lunatic asylum would maintain it. And no one ever pretends that religious subjects cannot be discussed without endangering the peace or threatening good manners.

Had the House of Lords decided against the Secular Society, Limited, its decision would have been a threat against every non-Christian body in England. It would, as Lord Buckmaster pointed out, have prevented the enforcement of a contract by way of payment to author, publisher, or bookseller, where any anti-Christian publication was concerned. As it decided in favour of the Society, it has gone a long way towards justifying the demand for the complete disestablishment of religion

in this country. If the Blasphemy Laws are not to be used to protect religion against an attack from opinion, it is ridiculous to preserve them on the pretence that they will protect religion against bad language. Religion has never suffered from the latter, its deepest wounds have been inflicted by the former, and against that there is not, and never has been, a defence strong enough to ultimately defeat attack.

The outcome of the House of Lords' judgment should be, then, the creation of a more insistent attempt to disestablish religion and to wipe out the Blasphemy Laws altogether. So long as these latter remain on the statute books they are a constant menace to real freedom. No one can be sure when they will be put into operation, nor against whom. So soon as religion is recognized as a form of opinion, there is every reason for placing it upon precisely the same level as all other opinions, with no greater safeguards and with no greater disabilities. If the Secular Society, Limited, had lost its case, we should have used our defeat as a reason for renewed endeavours to establish mental freedom. And the Freethought Party will fall short of its duty if it does not utilize this magnificent victory as a stepping-stone to still greater triumphs.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Heretics.

HERESY was for centuries a crime in most Christian countries, punishable by law, and, naturally, heretics were denounced as most disreputable characters, imprisoned, tortured, and often put to death. In 2 Peter ii. 1, we read of "false teachers, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." In Titus iii. 10, the readers are advised to shun an obstinate heretic, on the ground that he is a pervert and a sinner, being self-condemned. Paul could not endure such a character, but without a moment's compunction said of him: "Let him be anathema." The sin of sins was to contradict the Pauline Gospel. Even if an angel from heaven dared to do that he would be accursed. In Acts xiii. 9, 10, a heretic is thus addressed: "O full of all guile and all villainy, thou son of the Devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" As is well known, the Pauline Gospel substantially became the Gospel of the Orthodox Church, carrying with it all the rigors of the bigoted Pauline spirit. The faith of the majority was invariably declared to be the true faith, departures from which were called destructive heresies. Harnack says:—

The sad passion for heresy-hunting, which obtained among Christians as early as the second century, was not only a result of their fanatical devotion to true doctrine, but quite as much an outcome of their rigid organization, and of the exalted predicates of honour which they applied to themselves as "the Church of God." Here the reverse of the medal is to be seen. The community's valuation of itself, its claim to represent the *ecclesia tou theou* ("the Church of God," or "the Catholic Church," in Corinth, Ephesus, etc.) made it evidently unable to recognize or tolerate any Christianity whatsoever outside its own boundaries (*Expansion of Christianity*, vol. ii., p. 62-3).

Celsus, one of the earliest and ablest opponents of Christianity, whose arguments Origin tried to refute, gave the following account of that heresy-hunting mania:—

These people utter all sorts of blasphemy, mentionable and unmentionable, against one another, nor will they give way in the smallest point for the sake of concord, hating each other with a perfect hatred (v. lxiii).

Generally speaking, orthodoxy is the faith of the ruling majority in the Church, and heterodoxy that of a larger or smaller minority. "Ignotus" tells us, in the *Manchester City News* for May 5, that by a heretic he means, "not a scoffer, not a denier, not a foolish man who boasts of ignorance." Of course, no serious-minded person can honestly be dubbed a "scoffer," nor is any genuine Agnostic foolish enough to "boast of ignorance"; but it is equally certain that every heretic is a "denier." It is his denial of some or all of the dogmas held by the orthodox that constitutes him a heretic. Unquestionably Celsus denied the truth of the Christian religion as a new form of supernaturalism. Unitarians deny the doctrine of the Trinity, the proper Deity of Jesus Christ, and the Atonement. Atheists deny and reject all forms of Theism. They deny the existence of every God that has ever been defined; and in their denial many of them employ ridicule as their most effective weapon. And with all due deference, we venture to characterize "Ignotus" himself as a vigorous denier of at least one fundamental tenet of Christianity, namely, that salvation is impossible without faith in the atoning death of Christ. He maintains that unbelievers not only *can* but *do* live righteously, and that the lack of trust in God is no hindrance whatever to the growth and development of the noblest character. The truth of this statement is absolutely incontrovertible; but its truth proves conclusively that the claim so frequently made that a Christless person is hopelessly lost, utterly incapable of devoting himself or herself to the highest human interests, is wholly false and most mischievous in its influence. "Ignotus" lays great stress on this point, and he exhibits exceptional courage in the following passage:—

Before the Christian era the two supreme men, Pagans both, were Plato and Socrates, and it might be doubted whether any form of Divine faith has produced characters more sublime. But I will pass them by, as they cannot possibly enter into the argument. I will not insist either on the example of Marcus Aurelius, of whose fine moral doctrines and elevated conception of life and duty no praise can be too high. But if I were seeking an Ideal Man—a man who wrought great deeds, who was inspired by the loftiest motions, and whose career was marked by singular purity, courage, unselfishness, and integrity—I should in justice have to recognize a man who deliberately abjured Christianity after it had been offered him—Julian the Apostate, the noblest Emperor who sat upon the Roman throne. Are we to assume that because after long meditation he could not accept a creed unconvincing to his reason, his resplendent life of virtue availed nothing? By the same logic we should make an outcast of John Kyrle, the Man of Ross, and forget his philanthropy while scrutinizing his evangelicalism.

There is nothing in his article to indicate whether "Ignotus" is a supernatural believer or not, though one might not unreasonably infer from certain expressions used that he is not; but the main merit of the letter lies in its eloquent insistence upon the principle that supernaturalism plays no indispensable part in the cultivation of moral excellence, and that some of the greatest benefactors of the human race have been unbelievers. Special attention is called to the fact that "the world is divided up among a multitude of rivals and antagonists, each possessed of the 'one True Faith,'" and then comes the exclamation, "What an amazing spectacle it is!" Indeed, the spectacle is at once amazing, amusing, and saddening; but it is a hopeful and cheering sign of the times that the secular press opens its columns to so sane a writer as "Ignotus." Though we cannot agree with all he says, the spirit that pervades his contributions is uniformly admirable. We may not share his

reverence when he asks in regard to theological dogmas, "Cui bono? what does it matter?" but we do fully appreciate his sincerity when he adds:—

Am I a better man for belief in baptism or transubstantiation? Am I a worse citizen, husband, and father because I doubt or disbelieve them? Why should I perish as a Socinian or be saved as a Trinitarian? And who is to decide my fate in advance, and why? If we had toleration there would be mutual helpfulness, but arrogance is the most besetting sin in Religion and inimical to a true understanding.

The only fault we have to find with "Ignotus" is his use or misuse of the term "religion." He says: "Shall I give any one a painful shock by saying that 'theology' and 'religion' may be quite distinct, may even be opposed? Shall I dare to add that theology—found in creeds and forms and dogmas and decrees—cannot be essential to salvation, cannot even be a direct help to good life, and that it is theology, not religion, that creates the heretic?" "Ignotus" does not define the word "religion," but when he tells us that he "should call Abou Ben Adhem a religious man because he loved his fellow-men," he gives us the right to conclude that he does not attach to it the conventional and historical signification. Leigh Hunt's exquisitely lovely poem shows at once the absurdity and the real significance of such ambiguous use of terms:—

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold:—
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said,
"What writest thou?"—The vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord."
"And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheery still; and said, "I pray thee then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow-men."
The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had bless'd,
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

There are myriads of people in the world to-day who deeply love and faithfully serve their fellow-beings without believing in God at all. They are not Christians, even without knowing it, and in the traditional and only recognized sense of the word, they are utterly without religion. To them, as to Plato's Socrates in *Protagoras*, virtue means knowledge, and vice ignorance, and love is the fulfilment of the law of life. They are heretics in the old Athenian sense of having freely chosen their opinions for themselves, and these opinions they find to be helpful to them in the art of living. So far are they from boasting of ignorance that their one aim is to acquire knowledge which they believe is power, and to banish ignorance which they know to be fatal weakness.

J. T. LLOYD.

Watson's Wonderland.

For in life's midmost chamber there still burns
Upon the ancient hearth the ancient fire,
Whence are all flamelike things, the unquenchable muse
Among them, who, though meanly lodged to-day,
In dreariest outlands of the world's regard
Foresees the hour when man shall once more feel
His need of her and call the exile home.

—William Watson.

MR. WILLIAM WATSON is the most austere of contemporary poets. We think of him not as we think of many minstrels, as men singing passionately in the guest-hall, but as a white-robed ministrant at the altar of Liberty,

burning, with a severe grace, the incense and the precious gums.

On matters of high moment, indeed, Mr. Watson always sings with dignity. It is not too much to say that *Wordsworth's Grave*, *The Tomb of Burns*, *In Laleham Churchyard*, and *Shelley's Centenary*, will be linked indissolubly with the memory of those great writers they celebrate, so penetrating is the insight into the genius of each poet. Maybe, Mr. Watson's finest effort in this direction was his *Lachrymæ Musarum*, which made so notable a stir when Tennyson died. It must rank as one of the noblest poems we have had for many years, for Mr. Watson handled that great theme of august death right worthily.

Collected works make or mar men's reputations, for so often they are warehouses rather than treasures. Beside the masterpiece comes the half success; beside the permanent, the temporary, and sometimes the frankly fugitive. But nothing is more gratifying in these days of exaggerated and bubble reputations than to note the steady path along which the fame of Mr. Watson has advanced. He owes his good fortune solely to the sterling merit of his work, for no one has done less to advertise it. Those who look back to the best reviews of the past few years will be surprised to perceive how noiselessly Mr. Watson crept into the hearts of lovers of literature.

No one can read these poems from *The Prince's Quest*, published nearly forty years ago, to the very latest volume, *The Man Who Saw*, issued this week, without being struck with the amount of work of the classical quality, of which there can be no question. To begin with, they are a golden treasury of jewelled aphorisms. Take, for instance, the following felicities of expression:—

The mystery we make darker with a name.
Not in vague dreams of man forgetting men,
Nor in vast morrows losing the to-day.
Now touching goal, now backward hurled,
Toils the indomitable world.
Song is not Truth, not Wisdom, but the rose
Upon Truth's lips, the light in Wisdom's eyes.
And set his heart upon the goal,
Not on the prize.

In nothing, perhaps, is Mr. Watson's genius so bright as in his treatment of Nature. When we remember what Catullus, what Lucretius, what Wordsworth, what Tennyson, what innumerable poets have sung in praise of Nature, we might well despair of hearing a new note. But Mr. Watson has a charm and power of his own. Listen! Here is a couplet in *The First Skylark of Spring*:—

O high above this home of tears
Eternal joy sing on!

He can make a picture of a commonplace scene:—

Where, on the tattered fringes of the land,
The uncouth flowers of the penurious sand
Are pale against the pale lips of the sea.

How unforgettable in its way is the following:—

I beheld the waters in their might
Writhe as a dragon by some great spell curbed
And foiled; and one lone sail; and over me
The everlasting taciturnity;
The august, inhospitable, inhuman night,
Glittering magnificently unperturbed.

Mr. Watson's humanity is beyond question. In *The Purple East* and *A Year of Shame* he impeached Abdul, the Damned. Was ever monarch attacked in such grand and sonorous lines, with such sinewy rhetoric, sounding declamation, pictorial richness, sonnets, written for the purposes of the moment, echoing in the heart, and present in the memory of the men who read them? For Mr. Watson has never lacked courage, witness his Freethought "four square to all the winds that blow."

It is playful in *The Eloping Angels*, a satire in the Byronic vein, and it is serious in *The Unknown God*:—

A god whose ghost in arch and aisle
Yet haunts his temple—and his tomb;
But follows in a little while
Odin and Zeus to equal doom;
A god of kindred seed and line;
Man's giant shadow, hailed divine.

In a fine sonnet, addressed to Aubrey de Vere, the poet, he expressly voices negation:—

Not mine your mystic creed; not mine in prayer
And worship, at the ensanguined Cross to kneel;
But when I mark your path how pure and fair,
How based on love, on passion for man's weal,
My mind, half envying what it cannot share,
Reveres the reverence which it cannot feel.

In his latest volume, *The Man Who Saw, and Other Poems Arising Out of the War*, Mr. Watson writes on the subject of the world-upheaval. He has chosen Mr. Lloyd George as the theme of his principal poem, and cramped his poetic genius within the narrow limits of the conventional. It is a real tribute to Mr. Watson's powers to say he is neither rhetorical nor dull. Compared to the official Laureate's later crudities, Mr. Rudyard Kipling's hysterics, and the tiny outbursts of minor poetasters, the dignified lines of Mr. Watson's are, at least, readable. Few real poets could write about contemporary politicians, and remain poets. Even Swinburne and Tennyson, living in an era of far greater men, did not do this thing with impunity, and their political poems represent but the excrement of their genius.

The trouble is that it is well-nigh impossible at present for a man to write exactly what he thinks, as a man, about men in authority, and yet print what he writes. This makes political poetry possible, but improbable, and gives point to the gibe that there is less freedom in Britain under the Guelphs than in ancient Rome under the Cæsars.

Mr. Watson's portrait of Mr. Lloyd George is painted well, and has some of Dryden's vigour:—

No fabled Merlin, son of mist,
And brother to the twilight, but a man
Who in a time terrifically real
Is real as the time; formed for the time;
Not much beholden to the munificent Past,
In mind or spirit, but frankly of this hour;
No faggot of perfections, angel or saint,
Created faultless and intolerable;
No meeting-place of all the heavenlinesses;
But eminently a man to stir and spur
Men, to afflict them with benign alarm,
Harass their sluggish and uneager blood,
Till, like himself, they are hungry for the goal:
A man with something of the cragginess
Of his own mountains, something of the force
That goads to their loud leap the mountain streams.

This is fine writing, but poets are not always prophets, and it is too soon to say whether Mr. Watson's eulogy is deserved. The verdict of history has yet to be pronounced. The poet is on surer ground in the sonnet in which he salutes America on her entry into the War:—

Thy place is with the great who know not how
To falter, though their night be without star,
And their vast agony without anodyne.

Mr. Watson's poems on Germany are white-hot with a scornful fury, intensified by the skill with which the poet makes every word add its share to the full effect. Yet he can get away from these war-like moods, and return to Nature; as in the beautiful lyric, *The Yellow Pansy*:—

Winter has swooped, a lean and hungry hawk;
It seemed an age since summer was entombed,
Yet in our garden, on its frozen stalk,
A yellow pansy bloomed.

'Twas Nature, saying by trope and metaphor ;
 "Behold, when empire against empire strives,
 Though all else perish ; ground 'neath iron war,
 The golden thought survives."

It will be seen that the awful turmoil of the world-war disconcerts Mr. Watson. In all these poems we see the artist struggling with intractable material, and the agony of his mind is reflected in his verse. We feel convinced that this is but a passing mood. We remember gratefully that Mr. Watson has, in his time, given us of his best, and that is the highest kind of poetry. He is one of the singers of the English race who has held his ear close to the movements of the modern world, and brought away with him some sounding echoes of its music. We expect him to leave fulsome adulation of politicians to other writers. Young University men and the editor of *Punch* can do these little things admirably. We should prefer that a real and unmistakable poet was silent than that he should stammer in such a chorus. We hope that in Mr. Watson's next volume we shall hear again, at its best and freest, that golden voice which has within it the deepest message known to the sons of men. For, in the last analysis, noble thinking means noble writing. All else is as ephemeral as ocean foam.

MIMNERMUS.

Science and Spiritualism.

XII.

(Continued from p. 326.)

PEN PICTURES OF MADAME BLAVATSKY.

Mabel Collins, who for over a year co-edited *Lucifer* with her, said: "She taught me one great lesson: I learned from her how foolish, how 'gullible,' how easily flattered human beings are, taken *en masse*. Her contempt for her kind was on the same gigantic scale as everything else about her, except her marvellously delicate taper fingers. In all else she was a big woman; she had a greater power over the weak and credulous, a greater capacity for making black appear white, a larger waist, a more voracious appetite, a more confirmed passion for tobacco, a more ceaseless and insatiable hatred for those whom she thought to be her enemies, a greater disrespect for *les convenances*, a worse temper, a greater command of bad language, and a greater contempt for the intelligence of her fellow-beings than I had ever supposed possible to be contained in one person.—Cited by J. M. Wheeler, the "*Freethinker*" (Feb. 18, 1912), p. 107.

Her chief strength and the secret of her successes lay in her extraordinary cynicism and contempt for mankind; a cynicism which she used to conceal as a rule with great skill, but which still broke out irresistibly at times. "The simpler and the coarser the phenomena," she subsequently admitted to me, "the more likely it is to succeed. The vast majority of people who are reckoned clever by themselves and others, are hopeless fools.....—V. S. Solovyoff, "*A Modern Priestess of Isis*," pp. 71-72.

MADAME BLAVATSKY, seeking for a habitation for the marvellous Mahatmas she had evolved from her inner consciousness to replace the now discredited mediums, an abode where they would be secure from the madding crowd of unbelievers and sceptics who detected and exposed the best-laid plans for exploiting the multitude, Madame decided that no place could answer better than Thibet. A few travellers had entered the country in disguise, at the risk of their lives, and had brought back accounts of the Grand Lama and the immense monasteries, which had aroused the highest curiosity. Other travellers had been turned back, or, if they had persisted, had been barbarously treated, and barely escaped with their lives. No European had ever, in modern times, penetrated to Lhasa, the capital, which was therefore wrapped in a veil of impenetrable mystery and romance—quite a Rider Haggard flavour about it, in fact. Certainly there must be some very mysterious secret to be guarded so strictly. There was no fear of the Seybert

Commission or the Psychological Research Society sending committees to seek out and interview the new wonder-workers whose agent-general in Europe was Madame Blavatsky.

Thibet is very difficult of access, owing to its situation on a plateau 16,000 feet above the sea level; the highest country in the world, cut off from India by the Himalayas. Our troops encountered the greatest difficulties in reaching the country in 1904—three years after Madame Blavatsky's death—and suffered great hardships for want of roads, the severe climate, and the bleak and desolate country. No European had succeeded in penetrating to Lhasa, the capital, until the military expedition under Colonel Younghusband reached there in 1904.

The two Mahatmas more especially at Madame's disposal were Mahatma Morya and Mahatma Koot Hoomi. At the headquarters at Adyah, says Edmund Garrett,—

in the "Occult Room" adjoining Madame's bed-chamber, hung the famous "Shrine," a sort of cupboard containing a fancy portrait in oils of the condescending Koot. This became associated with as many marvels as the image of a mediæval saint. Suppose you are an intending Theosophist—a hesitating convert, especially a moneyed one, like Mr. Jacob Sassoon. You call at headquarters. You are shown round by Damodar, or by M. or Madame Coulomb, librarian and secretary. With natural curiosity you ask to gaze upon the Master's features. You are told of his indulgent concessions to deserving neophytes seeking for a sign. When the cupboard has been shut again, you are asked if there is anything you particularly desire from the Master. You indicate, not unnaturally, a message. It is about even chances whether the said message—reading generally not unlike Mr. Martin Tupper in his more oracular vein—is discovered in the cupboard immediately on opening the door, or descends from the ceiling on to the top of your head.¹

General Morgan, a member of the Theosophical Society, records a miracle he saw performed at the shrine. He visited the headquarters to see the wonderful picture of Koot Hoomi. Madame Coulomb, who was in charge of the shrine, threw the doors open, and a china tray that was leaning against one of the doors fell and was smashed to pieces on the hard chunan floor. While Madame was bewailing this unfortunate accident to a valuable article of Madame Blavatsky's, her husband was collecting the fragments. The General suggested some china cement to repair the damage. M. Coulomb was despatched for some. The broken pieces were collected, tied in a cloth, placed within the shrine, and the door locked. Mr. Damodar K. Mavalankar, Secretary of the Society, was present, and the General remarked that, if the Mahatmas considered it of sufficient importance, they would easily restore the broken article. About five minutes after this remark Mr. Damodar, who during this time seemed wrapped in a reverie, exclaimed, "I think there is an answer." The doors were opened, and sure enough the china tray was found to be whole and perfect; not a trace of the breakage was to be found on it. The tray was accompanied by a note, which ran: "To the small audience present. Madame Coulomb has occasion to assure herself that the devil is neither so black nor so wicked as he is generally represented; the mischief is easily repaired."² This was a jocular reproof to Madame Coulomb for suggesting that many of the marvels might be due to the Devil.

The General, who came prepared to see marvels, was quite satisfied, and says: "I at once wrote across the note, stating that I was present when the tray was broken

¹ Edmund Garrett, *Isis Very Much Unveiled*, p. 15.

² Podmore, *Studies in Psychological Research*, p. 174.

and immediately restored, dated and signed it, so that there should be no mistake in the matter." What could be more satisfactory proof for a miracle than this? Witnessed, attested, and signed, all within ten minutes, by a gentleman of the highest integrity and honour!

The report of these marvels soon reached England, and created the widest curiosity. The Psychological Research Society formed a committee to investigate the matter, who, after receiving the oral and written statements of several important witnesses of these modern miracles, decided to send one of their members, Mr. R. Hodgson, to investigate on the spot. Briefly, this is what he discovered. The shrine was fastened against the party wall between the "occult" room and Madame Blavatsky's bedroom. At the back of the shrine there was a sliding panel hidden by a mirror; behind this was a hole in the wall, communicating with Madame Blavatsky's bedroom; this hole being hidden on the other side by a sideboard, which also possessed a sliding panel at the back. So that when M. Coulomb was despatched for the china cement to repair the tray, all he had to do was to slip into the adjoining room, remove the broken fragments from the shrine through the hole in the back, substitute the whole one in its place, accompanied by the note, and the trick was done. "It may be added," says Mr. Podmore, "that Mr. Hodgson was permitted to examine the tray in question; that he ascertained that Madame Coulomb had made purchases at a store in Madras on July 3, 1883, and that two articles of the kind had actually been sold on that day at the cost of 2 rupees and 8 annas the pair—a quite considerable outlay, it will be admitted, for a miracle of this magnitude."¹

W. MANN.

(To be continued.)

N. S. S. Conference.

Executive's Annual Report.

BY THE PRESIDENT.

FOR the third consecutive year the Executive issues its annual report under the shadow of a great European War. In such a period merely to live is an achievement, and it would not be cause for surprise had that been the sum of our accomplishments. But even in the midst of war a Society, such as the N. S. S., cannot stand still; it must either advance or recede, and the Executive felt that the wiser plan was to press forward in spite of many discouraging circumstances.

Events have quite justified that policy. In spite of difficulties in the way of propaganda, such as increased cost of railway travelling, very limited financial resources, the taking away of many of the younger and more energetic of our workers for service in the Army or Navy, and the commandeering of public halls by the military, a deal has been done towards reviving the propagandist energy of Freethinkers all over the country. In addition to the old centres of propaganda, such as Liverpool, Birmingham, Glasgow, etc., new ones have been visited, and the ground for future work prepared. Nottingham, where there has been no active work for many years, was visited by both the President and Mr. Lloyd, large and enthusiastic meetings were addressed, and there are hopes that next autumn may see a Branch of the N. S. S. formally established. Swansea, another place unvisited by the Society's lecturers for many years, has also received attention, and a Branch established with a fairly large and, certainly, energetic membership. Walsall is also new ground that was broken by Mr. Lloyd, and by Mr. Willis, of Birmingham. Freethought meetings have also been held at Gainsborough and Barrow-in-Furness—the first for very many years. Northward a new Branch has been opened at Falkirk, which, it is hoped, will be the first of a number of new Branches north of the Tweed. It is also

¹ Podmore, *Studies in Psychological Research*, p. 176.

pleasing to record that a much larger addition to the membership of the Society has been made during the past twelve months than has been the case for some years past.

At Manchester the work had been in abeyance since the opening of the War. Circumstances here made it advisable for the Executive to take the matter in hand, and after some correspondence the Executive requested the President to see what could be done by personal action. After twice meeting Manchester friends in consultation, it was decided that the best plan would be to formally dissolve the old Society and start a new one. This was done, and the new Branch inaugurated its career with two public meetings addressed by the President, which were in every respect satisfactory. A goodly number of members have been enrolled, and it is hoped that the coming autumn will see the work in this important centre in full swing.

Courses of lectures have also been arranged in London at the Queen's Hall, Langham Place, South Place Institute, and Avondale Hall, Clapham. Other courses would have been arranged in the metropolis but for the difficulty in securing suitable halls. After the War this difficulty will not exist—at least in so great a measure.

It should be added that these courses of lectures, as well as the operations in new centres, and the special meetings in the large Birmingham Town Hall, have all been financed from the Special Propaganda Fund raised by the President last year. Direct grants of money from the same quarter to the Executive and to Branches of the N. S. S. have also to be acknowledged.

In London the general propaganda has been well maintained, and during the winter a continuous series of meetings have been held by both the North London and South London Branches. A very promising start has also been made with a discussion class, conducted by Mr. A. D. Howell Smith, B.A., and held weekly at the Society's office. This is an experiment that might be repeated all over the country; its advantages are manifold, and it may well be the means of developing new speakers, in addition to providing opportunities of education in Freethought for new-comers.

Turning to more general affairs, the Executive has first to congratulate the whole of the Freethought Party on the recent victory achieved in the Law Courts in connection with the Bowman litigation. For more than two years the Secular Society, Limited, has been engaged in litigation which would never have existed but for being anti-Christian in its aims. As it happens, however, the litigation has not been without its good purposes. It has established once for all, and beyond the possibility of further question, that henceforward no bequest can be set aside in English Courts because it will be applied to anti-Christian ends. To have established that principle was well worth all the trouble and expense involved. It marks a very real advance in the history of our movement, and lays down a principle in English law that the courts must in future follow. That this decision will provide the condition for furnishing the Freethought movement with the necessary funds to carry on its campaign is clear, but the moral effects of the case will be even more important than the financial ones. The admitted injustice under which Freethinkers have been placed cannot but have the effect of directing attention to the Freethought position in general, and this must result in both a material and moral gain.

It would be improper for the Executive to dismiss this subject without once more placing on record its sense of the great service done the Cause of Freethought by its late President, G. W. Foote. The Secular Society, Limited, was wholly his creation. He had often characterized it as his legacy to Freethought, and, unlike many legacies, it has turned out more valuable on realization than many had dared to hope would be the case. Its conception was marked by daring and simplicity—two characteristics of real genius; and its final establishment by the judgment of the House of Lords may exert no small influence in clearing away that iniquity of the centuries, the Blasphemy Laws. Finally, the Executive cannot resist pointing out that once more the path has been blazed and the victory achieved by the fighting wing of the Freethought Movement.

It is curious to have to point out that, while the supreme court in this country has been placing liberty of thought upon

a firmer foundation, very much smaller courts have been ignoring or setting at defiance laws already in existence which affect Freethinkers. Several cases have occurred during the past two or three years of magistrates and officials insulting or declining to hear witnesses and others who wished to affirm in place of taking the oath, and a particularly flagrant instance occurred in the Clydebank Police Court on March 12 last. A witness—a Mr. Charles Stewart—was not only refused the affirmation, but, after being subjected to quite irrelevant "heckling," was informed that his conduct in refusing to take the oath would be reported to the Procurator Fiscal, with a view to proceedings being taken against him, and, the Executive is informed, was actually charged at the conclusion of the case with contempt of court. The Executive felt that this was a matter requiring prompt attention, and an attempt was made to get the witness's address. The officials, however, refused to give this, not only to private individuals, but to a solicitor who was instructed to inquire into the matter. An interrogation was placed on the question paper of the House of Commons through the friendly offices of Sir George Greenwood, M.P., but was met by the Secretary for Scotland with the reply that the witness had not stated the ground on which he wished to affirm. This was nothing better than an evasion. It was the duty of the magistrate dealing with a witness who may have been aware only of the bare fact that the law gave him the right to affirm, to explain on what ground the affirmation might be made. This was not done, and the threat to report the matter to the Procurator Fiscal must be taken as an act of sheer intimidation. Still, the matter cannot be allowed to rest here if it can by any possibility be carried further. On this point the Executive may be trusted to do all that can be done.

One moral emerges clearly from this incident. Freethinkers should, under all conditions, and at all times, insist absolutely upon making affirmation. Such cases of injustice as the one just mentioned are only possible because in certain courts the request to affirm is not an everyday affair. This may, of course, be taken as an indication of the peaceful proclivities of Freethinkers, and it may be freely granted that Christians will always be in an overwhelming majority in police and other courts. Still, by those Freethinkers who do appear in courts insisting upon their rights, they will render the frustration of the Oaths Act of 1888 more infrequent, if not impossible.

It will be remembered that the last Conference passed a special resolution condemning the action of the London County Council in prohibiting the sale of literature in the public parks, and authorized the Executive to resist such an interference with the right of propaganda to the utmost of its power. The Executive lost no time in putting that resolution into effect. With the co-operation of other London organizations, very soon between thirty and forty different societies were affiliated, including the London Trades Council, with its membership of some 60,000. Of this Protest Committee Mr. Verinder, a gentleman who bears an honoured record as a champion of freedom of thought, is chairman, Miss Vance acts as Secretary, and your President is a member as representing the N.S.S. Perfect unanimity has characterized its proceedings, and we venture to prophesy that this unanimity will continue.

The contest from the date of the last Conference until now may be briefly described. The resolution of the L.C.C. was to take effect from September 30. Despite that prohibition literature was sold in the parks right through October and part of November, until the bitter winter weather forced a desistance, if, for no other reason, because there were no people to whom literature could be sold. Literature has again been sold right through the present month, and although the names and addresses of the sellers have been taken, nothing has been heard from the Council save a letter received some months back by the N.S.S. Secretary from the Council's solicitor pointing out that literature had been sold in November last, and that unless an undertaking was given not to repeat the offence proceedings would be taken. The undertaking was not given, the "offence" has been repeated, and no proceedings have been taken.

The Council was warned from the outset that this resolution

(Continued on p. 346.)

Acid Drops.

Mrs. Humphrey Ward protests against the extension of the suffrage to women on the ground that the real ground of the vote is physical force. But this is sheer nonsense. Physical force never was, and is not now, the ground of the vote. We even venture to say that it has never been secured on that basis. The ground of the vote is the moral—or social—right of people to have a deciding voice in their own destiny. That physical force is more or less present in all human affairs goes without saying, but it is not decisive and ultimate. But one wonders why, if Mrs. Ward believes that the question of the vote for women should be decided on the ground of mere physical strength, why she objects to the doctrine of physical force as applied to the world by certain German writers? If physical force is to settle matters *within* the State, why may it not be permitted to settle matters *between* States? Mrs. Ward's sociology appears to be as unsatisfactory as her theology.

Billy Sunday, the American evangelist, who is out to convert New York, appears to be a great favourite with heaven. The other day he asked the Lord for thirty converts, and at once the Lord gave him forty-eight. Surely, Billy Sunday woefully neglects his duty. While at it, why did he not ask for the whole population of the United States? He would have got Canada and the South American Republics into the bargain. If Sunday and the other revivalists did their work properly, there would not be a Freethinker on the earth.

The *Daily Chronicle's* piety is notorious, but it sometimes takes quaint shapes. Writing of St. Mark's Church, Venice, it adds "which Ruskin's ghost has doubtless protected from destruction from Austrian bombs." Doubtless, Ruskin's "ghost" is as potent as any other Christian bogey.

Many things appear in the press which might have been expressed differently. A Sunday paper, under the headline "Lunatics on the Land," says that patients from the London County Council Asylum at Brunswick House are working on agriculture under the supervision of the chaplain.

The Rev. C. R. Purser, a Rangoon missionary, says Bibles are sold for reasons which were not Christian. A New Testament was sold for a rupee with promises that the possessor would obtain houses, fields, and cattle.

A daily paper remarks on the changed appearance of the frequenters of the May meetings. Instead of the "well-nourished vicar" and "the coloured evangelist," oddly reminiscent of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," we see instead "the Church militant in the person of the khaki-clad Army Chaplain, hardly distinguishable except by his clerical collar." Yet these khaki-clad clergymen do not fight, and they draw pay in pounds instead of shillings.

The newspapers are publishing paragraphs concerning an English lady of title who is working as a saleswoman in a New York millinery shop. There is nothing startling in this, for Christians profess to believe that the "King of Kings" worked at a carpenter's bench.

Dean Inge has the reputation of telling his hearers unpleasant truths. This was his offence at St. Paul's when, preaching on Ascension Day, he said that "all must agree there had been something wrong with the Christianity of Europe, otherwise the present hideous calamity, the War, would not have happened." Unfortunately, all Christians do not agree with him; but he is perfectly right. We are at one with the Dean; but we go further and assert that Christianity in Europe has been not only a gigantic failure but a fundamentally fraudulent system, resulting in scarcely anything but harm to the countries wherein it has borne sway.

Principal Sir George Adam Smith, preaching before the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland, on retiring from the Moderatorship, declared that "the more patiently we regarded the War the more it not only proved to embarrass faith, but to correct the faults of faith, and to supply a fuller and more thorough theology." Then he added: "Never in history had God's way been clearer to the people." The puzzling fact, however, is that never in history has God's way been clearer to the German people. So their professors and pastors have persisted in affirming ever since the War began. Are they, as well as we, not fighting in the name of the Lord, and is not their Emperor constantly thanking Heaven for successes achieved, and passionately praying for the final victory? Of course, clergymen cannot afford to admit that the War is fatal or confusing to faith; but the fact remains that, in spite of all their specious arguments, multitudes of their hearers are losing their faith because of the War.

A touching example of war-time economy is recorded by an evening paper, which mentions that an earl and his countess travelled third-class on the railway recently, and asks indignantly where this sort of thing is to end? We may soon expect to hear that the bishops are discarding their carriages and motors, and are journeying on the lowly animal on which their Master entered Jerusalem.

At the Church of England Zenana Meeting, at Queen's Hall, it was stated that many missionaries were prevented from going out because the Government will not, at present, grant passports. It appears as if religious folk have lost the art of walking on the water, as practised in Biblical days.

Mrs. Flora Anna Steel writes that "we are up against the bread habit of the poor." Unfortunately, the poor cannot emulate King Nebuchadnezzar, the Biblical hero, who ate grass.

In the announcement of a meeting at the Albert Hall to protest against the manufacture of alcohol during the War, the name of Harry Lauder, who was among the speakers, was printed three times as large as the names of the Bishop of London and Dr. Clifford. Doubtless, the organizers of the meeting knew which was the star-turn.

"Pain plus God," says the Rev. Thomas Phillips, of Bloomsbury, "may be understandable because, if we bring in God and the cross of Calvary, pain may be seen to be the cost of progress." But pain is the cost of progress whether we believe in God or not. Dragging God in does not help to an understanding; it only makes the fact morally revolting instead of its being an unpleasant and natural one. If our belief is *minus* God, pain is just one of the facts we have to face as we face other natural facts, and see how we can wrest it to our advantage. If our belief is *plus* God, we have to overcome the healthy repugnance to a Deity who deliberately arranged matters so that the progress of one generation should be purchased at the expense of the suffering of another. Pain without God is a natural fact; pain with God is a moral nightmare. And it is, to the credit of human nature that it has been so largely felt to be such.

The following is from the *Evening News* of May 26:—

Bread and wine being unavailable for a communion service at the Front, Chaplain Major Miles, D.S.O., tells of substitutes in the form of chips of Army biscuits, and some watered apple jam strained off with a little rum added.

We wonder which ingredient was the most attractive in this war-time communion mixture? May we suggest to Chaplain Miles that if he can see his way to add a bottle of Bass's beer to each administration of the sacrament, his congregation is likely to be the largest ever held.

The *Methodist Times* is not pleased with the description of the soldiers' attitude towards religion as described by the Rev. N. S. Talbot. Mr. Talbot says that although the men "do not formulate it to themselves, the glories of human

nature go beyond anything they know of the Divine. For them God is less wonderful than man." Naturally so. And how could it be otherwise? God is always less wonderful than man if for no other reason than because man makes God, and is always capable of more than he puts into that work. And as all the gods of a civilized people are inherited, it follows that they are usually a long way behind their worshippers. Hence the number of people who are always engaged in god-repairing, which is about as wasteful as repairing a worn-out machine. The scrap-heap is the proper place for both.

A Sunday paper has been calling attention to the drones in the West-end of London, and suggests that such people are useless to the nation in the present strenuous time. But what about the 50,000 clergy who are exempted from military service, many of whom only work about one day weekly?

A lady has written a book with the quaint title, *The Swine Gods*. One cannot imagine a rasher inscription.

Canon Carnegie, preaching at St. Margaret's Church, Westminster, called attention to the need of stricter economy in the consumption of bread. He might have suggested the abandonment of the use of bread in Communion services.

Where is the religious revival to be found of which we read and hear so much? It is not in the Wesleyan Methodist Church, for in that communion, according to statistics for the past year, there were notable decreases in both Church membership and Sunday-school scholars. "The principal net decreases are: Membership, 3,870; members 'on trial,' 187; junior members, 4,516; Sunday-school teachers, 730; Sunday-school scholars, 20,396; Wesley Guild, 13,154." Similar losses have taken place in other Free Churches during last year. It is estimated that the Free Church Sunday-schools lost about a hundred thousand scholars. To a writer in the *Christian World*: "The facts are distinctly disturbing," while to us they are not disturbing but distinctly illuminating.

Preaching at St. Peter's Church, Vere Street, London, Dean Inge said "real Christians would always be in a small minority." No wonder pious folk call him "the gloomy dean."

A fortune of £156,354 was left by the late Prebendary Moss, of Shrewsbury. The deceased had small opportunity of estimating the blessings of poverty mentioned in the Gospels.

Speaking at the Albert Hall on the drink question, the Bishop of London said it was solemn hypocrisy to read the King's Proclamation in church if people were not going to live up to it. The Bishop ought to be a good judge of "solemn hypocrisy."

The Turner drawings at the Victoria and Albert Museums are not on view on Sundays, and Mr. Mark H. Judge explains that the donors made it a condition of their gift that they should not be shown on that day. Mr. Judge remarks on this that "so long as we accept gifts thus restricted in their promises, Sunday opening can never point to the complete triumph that it otherwise has won, and the Sabbatarian can boast their victory over the spirit of the times." We would add to this that, in our opinion, it is quite unworthy a modern State to accept gifts bequeathed in so narrow and so *mean* a spirit. A gift to the State should be a gift to the State. For a Government to connive—even unknowingly—at the perpetuation of individual narrowness because it takes the form of a gift is dishonourable to all concerned. It is a striking example of the power of the dead over the living.

Father Bernard Vaughan has fallen foul of Mr. H. G. Wells's theology, and describes the novelist's deity as a "brand-new god." In plain English, the faithful are asked to patronize the old firm.

To Correspondents.

QUERIST (Morton).—Certainly the Church dominates in such matters as Births, Christenings, Marriages, and Deaths, but there is no reason whatever why this should continue so. If we take "passing" as the equivalent of christening, all these functions are essentially of a civic nature, and are, in many cases, celebrated as such. Children may be publicly named, there is the civic ceremony of marriage, and there is the civic, or secular, ceremony over the grave.

L. R.—Pleased to have your appreciation of our notices of new books. We hope to make this a more regular feature, and we have not forgotten our intention to issue a monthly literary supplement—one day.

C. JORTAN.—Order handed to Shop Manager. Thanks for congratulations on our conduct of the *Freethinker*.

STUDENT.—Two very noteworthy recent works on the subject are Durckheim's *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, and Wundt's *Elements of Folk Psychology*, but both are expensive works—15s. each.

A. C. WELLS.—Thanks for *English Mechanic* reference to the Bowman Case. The Editor thinks the Lords "took the right view." So does everyone else.

MISS VANCE, General Secretary of the National Secular Society and Secretary of the Secular Society, Ltd., writes: "Could you find space in your columns to allow me to thank the many friends who continue to send congratulations to both Societies, through me, on the glorious victory achieved in the Bowman case? not the least important of these being a resolution from the Annual Congress of the Union of Ethical Societies and a congratulatory letter from the Directors of the Rationalist Press Association. It is in no small degree a compensation for the long and weary years of waiting to know that our welfare lay so near to the hearts of our friends."

J. ROBINSON.—Thanks for copy of the letter you have written to your representative on the Council concerning the sale of literature in the parks. The letter is an excellent one, and to the point; and we should like to see thousands of our readers equally energetic along the same lines.

R. McLAUGHLIN.—Glad to learn that you secured two new readers this last week. We hope all the rest of our readers will go one better.

G. RULE.—We should have been pleased to have published your notes on the N. S. S. Conference but for the scant space at our disposal this week. We note, however, your appreciation of the Society's work and vitality, also the complimentary references to its officials. As you say, there is plenty of enthusiasm in the Party, and, we believe, plenty of good material, if it can only be developed and utilized.

The Secular Society, Limited, office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

The National Secular Society's office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

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

Lecture Notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4 by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

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

Letters for the Editor of the "Freethinker" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, and not to the Editor.

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

Sugar Plums.

This week's *Freethinker* is largely a society issue. The report of the Bowman Case, the N. S. S. Annual Report, and the report of the demonstration on Sunday last, fill a great deal of our space, and some articles and other matters have had to be set aside. But we think our readers will quite agree that few numbers have been issued of greater general interest than this one. Next week we publish the report of the morning and afternoon sittings of the Conference.

Readers will be able to judge the quality of the speeches at the evening meeting by the summary given elsewhere in this issue. All we feel impelled to say is that from the beginning to the end the meeting never flagged. All the speakers were in fine form, and the audience cheerfully responsive. A very cordial welcome was given to Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, and Mr. A. Howell Smith's maiden conference speech brought to an end a successful, even a remarkable meeting.

We referred last week to the general impression that, as a result of the victory in the Bowman Case, the Secular Society, Limited, would receive a bequest of £10,000. We should have been pleased to say that this was so; but, unfortunately, it is far from the truth. As we said, the gross value of the estate was represented by that figure, but there are considerable deductions to be made, both in the way of charges on the estate and expenses of litigation, in addition to clearing off certain debts incurred by the Society. What remains will represent the sum available for the Society's work. What that will be exactly, it is impossible to say. It is only safe to say that it will be a long way off the original sum.

In the circumstances, the Board of Directors is of opinion, and in this we quite concur, that the clearest and best plan is to outline the general situation. So far as the Board is concerned, what it had to do was to watch the case, and find the necessary funds to carry on the fight. The lines of defence were marked out by Mr. Foote, in consultation with the solicitors, before the first hearing, and these lines have been adhered to throughout. The difficulty was to find the funds. This was done in various ways. In the first place, all the members of the Board did what lay in their power in the shape of advancing loans to the Society. But much more was needed. At the request of the Board, Mr. Cohen undertook to raise £250 by private loans to meet pressing legal charges in connection with the hearing of the case before the Court of Appeal. In response came offers, not of £250, but of nearly £700, while two gentlemen separately offered to find the whole of the £250 if needed. The Society was thus assured that the fight would not languish for want of money. In addition to this, an offer of help came from another quarter. The Rationalist Press Association, recognizing that the case was one which struck at its charter no less than that of the Secular Society, and that our cause was theirs, very kindly offered to assist the Secular Society with a loan to the extent of at least £500. Very properly the Board accepted this offer, and £350 was borrowed to meet legal expenses. We wish to specially acknowledge this loan, as there was a tacit understanding that had the verdict gone against the Society, the money advanced by the Rationalist Press Association would have been as good as lost.

Thus, in addition to the two sums of £250 and £350 respectively, there are legacy duties on the estate, certain other legacies to be paid, two years' very heavy legal expenses to be met (the Society's costs were given in the House of Lords, although how much will be received remains to be seen), and the repayment of loans advanced by the members of the Board. Further, there is a sum of nearly £300 to be paid that was owing to Mr. Foote at the date of his death, which will be paid to Mrs. Foote, and about three years' salary owing to the Secretary, Miss Vance. (It would, perhaps, be more accurate to say that this is owing to those friends from whom Miss Vance has been compelled to borrow the amount due, but that will not affect the Society's indebtedness.) When all these charges are met, what is left will represent the net residue. How much that will be no one can yet say. On a rough guess, we should be inclined to put it at somewhere about a third of the gross value of the estate. We hope we under-estimate the value of the residue.

There is one other matter that should be mentioned. Ostensibly the fight was for a bequest; actually we were fighting for a principle. But it is difficult, apparently, to persuade Christians that there is nothing higher to fight about than money; and on four occasions—once verbally and

thrice by letter—the Board was approached with an offer of compromise. The last offer came only a few hours before the case came on for hearing in the House of Lords. But on each occasion the reply was the same. A compromise would not be accepted on any condition whatever. We would either establish our right to the bequest or lose it altogether. To have acted otherwise would have been to commit a fatal blunder. It would have exposed the Society to blackmail every time a legacy matured, and it would have left the question of our legal position still undecided. Besides, Secularists are not built of the stuff that compromises easily. We are a fighting Party, and when we cease to fight we may as well cease to exist. So the case was fought, and won. If it had taken every penny of the legacy, and more beside, to win that fight, it would have been worth it. It means the opening of a new chapter in the history of Freethought.

Mr. Eden Phillpotts writes:—

Let me be among those who join the chorus of satisfaction at the issue of the Secular Society's two years' struggle. The verdict can never again be challenged and a grievance of long standing is righted. One could almost wish there was another world that G. W. Foote's ghost might learn this great victory!

Newcastle friends are requested to note that the time of meetings have been changed to 6.30. On Sunday, June 3, Mr. J. W. Mee gives his first Freethought address in Newcastle at the Collingwood Hall on "Why I left the Christian Religion."

(Executive's Annual Report—continued from p. 343.)

of theirs would meet with the most determined opposition. A deputation from the Protest Committee placed the position before the Parks Committee, but without effect. Thanks to the activity of Councillor Jesson—to whom we are all indebted for the gallant fight he has made, also to the Rev. Stewart Headlam—the matter has been twice referred back by the General Council to the Parks Committee for reconsideration, but without result. There is, therefore, nothing left but for the Committee to proceed with its resistance, and, if necessary, to carry the matter into the High Courts, where it is to be hoped a keener sense of the sanctity of public right will be shown than has been exhibited by a body of men whom the accident of an election has placed in a position of temporary power.

Of one thing we may all rest assured. It is not merely the sale of literature the Council is aiming at—although that would be serious enough. It is the right of public meeting that is being attacked, and that this move should have been made during the progress of an European War only serves to make the attack more dastardly. Fortunately, public attention was called early to the matter. The article in the *Freethinker* for June 11, 1916, was the first call to the advanced movements of London to defend their threatened right, and there is some reason for believing that had the Council realized how strong the resistance would be, the resolution would not have been passed. Having passed it, the Parks Committee mistaking obstinacy for strength, sees fit to adhere to its resolution. It cannot plead in extenuation public demand, since, on its own admission, no complaints have been made. It cannot urge trouble to park officials, it is confessed that there has not been the least annoyance or friction over the sales. It is nothing but sheer reaction, and to that there can be but one answer—determined resistance against the abrogation of a public privilege that was enjoyed in many places long before the London County Council came into existence.

The Executive regret that during the year it has not found it possible to put into operation the resolution passed at the last Conference concerning the organization of a systematic press propaganda. To be well done, it would require a person specially selected for the work, and during the past year the opportunity of arranging this has not offered itself. Perhaps something in this direction may be attempted in the near future.

The Executive has to report with regret the death of one of its Vice-Presidents, Mrs. M. E. Pegg, of Manchester. Mrs. Pegg had been for over thirty years a devoted worker in the cause of Freethought; although illness during the last three or four years had prevented her being as active in its service as of old, her devotion to the Cause never faltered, and, till the end, her concern for the future of the work in Manchester was as keen as ever. Her death removes a very familiar and respected personality from both the city in which she resided and from these Annual Conferences.

Two other familiar names in the world of Freethought removed by death are those of William Platt Ball and W. J. Ramsey. Both names are well-known to the older generation of Freethinkers. Mr. Ball was always of a quiet and retiring disposition, but his scientific frame of mind and scholarly character made him a valuable asset to the Party in its earlier and more strenuous times. His one ideal was truth, his one aim the benefiting of his fellows. Unselfish in his death as in his life, no cause ever claimed a more worthy or more devoted follower.

Mr. W. J. Ramsey had dropped out of the public view of late years, owing to ill-health having robbed him of his activity. But he was a well-known figure over thirty years ago, both as a worker and a lecturer. He was associated with G. W. Foote in the foundation of the *Freethinker* in 1881, and was one of the indicted persons in the *Freethinker* prosecution in 1883. His sentence was nine months' imprisonment, and he served that term without fear. In his death we salute the passing of one of the many who have suffered through Christian bigotry and malevolence.

Sir Hiram Maxim was a name better known as the inventor of the Maxim gun than that of a Freethinker—Christians being far more appreciative of a weapon that would blast bodies than of a thought that would elevate minds. But his death deserves recording as that of a well-known public man who never hid his heresy, and refused to do even the homage of silence to conventional religion. His funeral, which was a Secular one, attracted wide public attention, although the newspapers, in their biographies, strangely overlooked the existence of his heretical opinions.

Apart from the specific work of the National Secular Society during the year, the Executive feels it advisable to say a word on the general position of Freethought in this country, and also on the immediate outlook. It is now admitted by the Churches that the expected revival of religious belief, consequent on the War, has not transpired. On the contrary, the position of organized religion was never so low and so desperate as it is at the moment. Whether the Churches, by means of combination with other reactionary forces, will retrieve themselves remains to be seen. But, for the moment, the fact is undeniable that the War, by destroying the traditional authority of the Churches, has led thousands of men and women to consider the validity of those beliefs upon which they were based—with consequences disastrous to them.

It would be idle to assume that so soon as the War is concluded, if not before, strenuous efforts will not be made by the Churches to regain their lost prestige. They are, indeed, hard at that work already, and we must never lose sight of the fact of their enormous latent power and of the prestige bestowed upon them by their position and financial resources as well as by the influence of the interests these institutions subserve. Religion, we must remember, is still established in the schools, in the Senate, and in most of our public institutions. It is still to the fore in all Civic and State ceremonials. The Blasphemy Laws, with their potentialities for evil, remain, despite the recent decision in the House of Lords, which may even be used by our enemies as an argument against their abolition. And there is always the vast mass of superstition latent with the general public ready to be quickened into activity when a favourable opportunity offers itself.

Your Executive feels that the present moment is one pregnant with the possibilities of reaction, but it is not less full of the possibilities of advancement. If the Churches are nerving themselves to recover ground lost during the War, it should be our task to see that that effort meets with the failure it deserves. The call of the moment is for concerted effort and effective organization. A serious attempt should

be made to organize the very many thousands of Freethinkers in this country whose opinions are ineffective only through lack of co-operation. There ought not to be a single large centre of population but that should have its Secular Society carrying on a regular and an effective propaganda. In this direction the industrial North, and the large towns and cities of the West of England, offer promising ground. South Wales is also a field ripe for work, and one that would well repay exploitation. Those who share our opinions were never so numerous. The weapons placed in our hands by science, by philosophy, by literature, were never so keen, so finely tempered, as they are to-day. The present is admittedly a time of unsettlement—a moment when old institutions are being subjected to a keen, almost a fierce, scrutiny. And it will be largely the fault of Freethinkers themselves if they allow so favourable a moment to pass without a serious and united endeavour to divert human aspiration and energy into those channels which alone can make for Enlightenment, Freedom, and Progress.

Demonstration at South Place.

NOTABLE SPEECHES BY FREETHOUGHT LEADERS.

DESPITE the shadow of the European War there was a note of quiet jubilation at the public meeting in connection with the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society, held on Whit-Sunday evening at South Place Institute; the President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, being in the Chair. The reason was not far to seek, for the long-contested action concerning the validity of the Bowman legacy to the Secular Society, Limited, had resulted in a splendid and decisive victory for the Freethinkers, and henceforth the worst shackles which have hampered intellectual liberty in this country will be things of the past. Freethought has had very severe trials during the past three years, and has suffered more directly, perhaps, from the consequences of the War than any other advanced organization; but the winning of the Bowman Case will open for it a new epoch of greatness as one of the principal torch-bearers of civilization.

The platform was a representative one, and beside the President, included Messrs. J. T. Lloyd, A. B. Moss, W. Heaford, F. Willis (of Birmingham), A. D. Howell Smith, and Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner.

MR. CHAPMAN COHEN had a most enthusiastic welcome, and his speech was punctuated throughout with applause. He opened by remarking that the fifty-first annual demonstration of the National Secular Society put that organization in some little danger of being counted respectable. In all the previous half century there was never a more important and critical moment than the present. For three years the Christians of Europe have shown the value of Christian love and sentiment. Freethinkers have always had two main charges against the Christian religion; first that it was not true, and second that it was not useful, and we have to thank Christians themselves for showing that the charges were correct by three years' war. Christianity was not even a good policeman. When men's passions rose, religion fanned them; when atrocities were committed, religion sanctioned them. The War had driven home the vital truth that there was not a villainy of which the human mind was capable which religion would not endorse if it suited its purpose. Religion has lost the chance of being regarded as the champion of right, truth, and justice. The War has unsettled men's minds, and thousands were examining the foundations of religion, and turning their backs on it.

For over two years the Secular Society, Limited, had been engaged in litigation, which had resulted in an epoch-making judicial decision. The Churches had, through the law, robbed Freethought of thousands of pounds, and then calmly asked the Freethinkers where was the money stolen from them. Now, however, money left for Freethought was as safe as money left to a tin tabernacle or for the purpose of providing South Sea Islanders with socks. It was a belated recognition that Freethinkers were human beings. The judges were unanimous that religion could be criticized provided that it was done decently. Blasphemy is talking about a man's religion in a way he doesn't like. If Freethinkers were tried

by Mohammedans or Jews, they might get a fair trial, but they were dragged before a Christian jury. The Blasphemy Laws only punish honest people, who tell what they think. Liars and knaves were never in any danger. This explains why outspoken heresy was scarce, for such laws put a tax on honesty and a premium on humbug and hypocrisy. Freethinkers must use victory as a stepping stone to greater things.

Religion was enthroned in our civic life, in Parliament, in law courts, civic ceremonials, and in schools, where minds of little children were poisoned. Fortunately, Freethinkers were in never so fine a position to attack religion. The weapons to-day are so much more powerful and effective. We can deal a thousand blows where our predecessors could only deal one; we can give a deadly wound where our ancestors could only scratch. The present War was really a small matter compared with the battle between Reason and Unreason, which had been going on for three hundred years, and even longer. For the greatest explosive forces in the world are ideas. It was the force of an idea that in 1789 made the downtrodden peasants of France propagandists of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity throughout the world. It was the force of an idea that sent tens of thousands in Russia to dungeons and to exile. It was the force of an idea that shattered the great Catholic Church of the Middle Ages, and made despots and tyrants tremble. Victory was certain. Freethinkers had only to carry on until they planted the flag of freedom on the dismantled fortress of superstition.

The veteran, MR. A. B. MOSS, followed, and said that the National Secular Society had passed through a half century of hard work, and commenced the second half century by a great achievement. The law now recognized the Freethinker as a citizen. This was a great advance on the position years ago when a Freethinker could not even sue for debt. Let us never forget the work of the pioneers. It was the splendid courage of the great Charles Bradlaugh that led to Freethinkers being able to give evidence by affirmation instead of using the barbaric Christian oath, and it was G. W. Foote who devised the instrument which made the Bowman victory possible. Christians are now giving up the fundamentals of their religion. They do not preach of the Fall and of the Atonement, and the parsons only concern now is their deity. They begin to realize that if they no longer foster a belief in a Heavenly Father religion goes. Mr. Wells has found a new god—an invisible king. If invisible how does he know that he is a king? Even, then, kings are at a discount, and gods will soon be so. A deity who meant well and cannot accomplish his purpose is useless to mankind. Hence Christians find it so difficult to explain what God is doing in the present War. What they want is a wonder-worker. Not all the troublous tribe of priests can perform one little miracle to mitigate the horrors of this War. What treasures in blood and money had been squandered on War. What could not have been accomplished if the money and energy had been devoted to the welfare of the rising generation.

MR. J. T. LLOYD was eloquent and forceful. He said he was proud of the title of Freethinker, a name at which our opponents made merry. They taunted us with the name of loose thinkers, whereas the fact remained that we were the most careful, precise, and logical thinkers in the world. We were free in the sense that we were unbound, untied, unshackled, loosened from the bonds of superstition and the terrors of tyrannical authority. We think for ourselves, and our thoughts were unrestricted by dogmas. In the service of Freethought such men as Bruno and Servetus were burnt alive. Richard Carlile spent over nine years in gaols. He was proud to be a humble servant in so great a cause. Our crime was attacking religion, a crime of which the early Christians were themselves guilty. Why do we assail it? We do not force ourselves into private houses, or button-hole strangers in the street. We address ourselves to those who choose to come and hear us. Our open-air speakers are often targets for insults. We attack Christianity because it is false and a source of harm to mankind. Its miracles are untrue; its foundations are false, yet multitudes have been put to death for denying their truth. No religion has had such a triumphant career, because she ruthlessly suppressed her opponents. In the fourth century Christians destroyed

the magnificent library of Alexandria. In a nutshell that is the historical attitude of the Christian Church towards heresy. It was simply a triumph of brute force. She won Europe, not by loving her enemies, but by crushing them. In the awful massacres of the Albigenses and Huguenots over a million persons were murdered. The Protestant reformers were also persecutors; and the Christian superstition has ever relied on coercion. Religion still stands in the way of progress, but doomsday is coming. The Bowman case judgment has proved it, and a leading church paper sorrowfully admits that the result of the litigation is that "England is no longer in law, as it has long ceased to be in fact, a Christian country." Freethinkers appeal to humanity, and, in the end, will come out more than conquerors.

MRS. BRADLAUGH BONNER made a telling speech, and said that our opponents, in the conduct of the Bowman case, hoped to injure us and to enrich themselves. Fortunately, the law acted like a boomerang, and the action resulted in their being impoverished. The result was that in these black days of national suffering new gleams of hope had appeared for Freethought. It was remarkable that in days when national liberties were being sacrificed, that Freethinkers should secure liberty denied to them for five centuries. During the whole of its history Christianity had never replied to argument by argument, but always relied on the stake and the prison. But things are changing. A great judge has declared that the boast that Christianity is part and parcel of the law of England is "mere rhetoric." The result is due to the growth of Humanism. The Blasphemy Laws still disgrace the Statute Book, and there is always a danger that they may be used. We have to set to work to get these laws repealed, and strike off the last of the fetters on intellectual liberty. The Churches have captured the schools, and Freethinkers must see that they fight for the children no less than for adults. Fifty years ago the National Secular Society held its first Conference, and the pioneers who bore the heat and burden of the day handed to us a precious inheritance. Let us see that we, in our turn, hand it on unimpaired to our children.

Another veteran, MR. W. HEAFORD, followed with a lively speech. He expressed the hope that he would be preserved to attend the next fifty one Conferences, to give full expression to his irrepressible juvenility. His youthfulness was due to the fact that he had ever sought inspiration from Freethought. Over forty years ago he frequented the London Hall of Science, and listened to the great men of the past. It was good to know that their devoted labours had not been in vain. If Bradlaugh and Holyoake were alive to-day, they would rejoice at our great victory, which promises a richer legacy of liberty to our children. It was significant that the republics were all fighting on one side in the present War, and that the reactionary nations were all on the other side. A new era in European politics had been opened by the revolution in Russia, and he saluted the new era of Liberty which sheds its rays of hope on 170,000,000 people, and that so great a nation had been gained for the cause of Freedom. We are the heirs of Liberty, and we must see to it that priests no longer trample on the happiness and liberties of mankind.

MR. F. WILLIS, of Birmingham, had a most cordial reception. He said that at the recent Holyoake Centenary celebrations the press had slurred over or ignored the great reformer's association with Freethought. This was part of a press campaign against liberty. Secularism had been declared to be dead again and again, but he had never seen such a lively corpse. Freethought leaders were always credited with absurd and ridiculous actions, and all of them had been declared to have taken out a watch and asked an offended deity to strike them dead. It was the clerical method of avoiding dangerous argument. The clergy, however, were compelled to change their position. The hell of Spurgeon was now handed over to the care of the Salvation Army orators. Priests were now getting ashamed of their deity, who was resolved into a Divine Immanence. If Freethinkers were bolder Freethought would grow ten times more rapidly. The clergy were the veriest weathercocks. In times of quiet the Prince of Peace was pushed into the foreground, but in War time he was superseded by the God of Battles. If men would see what religion does for civiliza-

tion they had only to look at the Catholic countries of Europe. The Freethinker had no hell to be afraid of, and no heaven to be bribed with. He warmed both hands before the fire of life, and when it sank was ready to depart.

MR. HOWELL SMITH made an excellent impression in a maiden speech. He said he was proud to stand in a building around which clustered so many memories of great men as South Place Institute. When Bradlaugh died he was himself a boy of eleven, and had been brought up in a very religious household. He was told a great infidel had passed away, and heard the hope expressed that God had spoken to his soul. Now Christians express the hope that Bradlaugh had gone to heaven—not that the great Freethinker would be happy in such a place. Few people take their religion seriously to-day. Like Mrs. Gamp with her gin, they say "Put it on the mantelpiece until I am so disposed." The clergy welcome any help, and annex extraordinary allies. They claim Eucken, Bergson, and others as Christians when they know these men have little regard for God and immortality. The clergy will stick to Christianity so long as there is money and power left in it, and to-day it was simply an organized hypocrisy. Let the Churches keep their God they took from a printed book while they can. Their doom was nearer than they thought, for Freethinkers could say with the old Protestant martyr: "Play the man, Master Ridley, and we shall light such a candle in England as shall never be put out."

C. E. S.

Bowman and Others

V.

Secular Society, Limited.

(LORD PARKER OF WADDINGTON—continued from p. 334.)

THE Secular Society, Limited, was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Acts 1862 to 1893, and a company so incorporated is by Section 17 of the Act of 1862 capable of exercising all the functions of an incorporated company. *Prima facie*, therefore, the Society is a corporate body created by virtue of a Statute of the Realm, with statutory power to acquire property by gift, whether *inter vivos* or by will. The Appellants endeavour to displace this *prima facie* effect of the Companies Acts in the following manner. If, they say, you look at the objects for which the Society was incorporated, as expressed in its Memorandum of Association, you will find that they are either actually illegal or, at any rate, in conflict with the policy of the law. This being so, the Society was not an association capable of incorporation under the Acts. It was and is an illegal association, and as such incapable of acquiring property by gift. I do not think this argument is open to the Appellants even if their major premise be correct. By the 1st Section of the Companies Act 1900, the Society's certificate of registration is made conclusive evidence that the Society was an association authorized to be registered—that is, an association of not less than seven persons associated together for a lawful purpose. The section does not mean that all or any of the objects specified in the Memorandum, if otherwise illegal, would be rendered legal by the certificate. On the contrary, if the Directors of the Society applied its funds for an illegal object, they would be guilty of misfeasance and liable to replace the money, even if the object for which the money had been applied were expressly authorized by the Memorandum. In like manner a contract entered into by the Company for an unlawful object, whether authorized by the Memorandum or otherwise, could not be enforced either in law or in equity. The section does, however, preclude all His Majesty's lieges from going behind the certificate or from alleging that the Society is not a corporate body with the status and capacity conferred by the Acts. Even if all the objects specified in the Memorandum were illegal, it does not follow that the Company cannot on that account apply its funds or enter into a contract for a lawful purpose. Every company has power to wind up voluntarily, and moneys paid or contracts entered into with that object are in every respect lawfully paid or entered into. Further, the disposition provided by the Company's Memorandum for

its surplus assets in case of a winding up may be lawful, though all the objects as a going concern are unlawful. If there be no lawful manner of applying such surplus assets, they would on the dissolution of the company belong to the Crown *bona vacantia* (Cunnack v. Edwards, 1896, 2h ch. 679).

My Lords, it follows from what I have already said that the capacity of the Secular Society, Limited, to acquire property by gift must be taken as established, and all the conditions essential to the validity of the gift being thus fulfilled, the donee is entitled to receive and dispose of the subject-matter thereof, unless either (1) the gift was obtained by duress or undue influence, or (2) there is something which in a Court of Equity imposes on the donee the character of a trustee. Admittedly there is no question of duress or undue influence, and in my opinion it is impossible to hold that the donee was intended to take or, in fact, takes the subject-matter as trustee, or in any other character than that of absolute owner. It should be observed that the testator says nothing as to how he desires his residuary estate to be applied in the hands of the Society, nor is there any evidence that he made any communication to anyone on behalf of the Society with regard to such application. The only possible argument in favour of the testator's intention to create a trust rests upon this: The Society is a body corporate to which the principle of your Lordships' decision in *Rich v. Ashbury, etc. Company, Limited* (7 H.L. 653), is applicable. Its funds can only be applied for purposes contemplated by the Memorandum and Articles, as originally framed or altered under its statutory powers. A gift to it must, it may be said, be considered as a gift for those purposes of the subject-matter of the gift. This argument is, in my opinion, quite fallacious. The fact that a donor has certain objects in view in making a gift does not, whether he gives them expression or otherwise, make the donee a trustee for those objects.

My Lords, I will next proceed to consider whether a trust for the first object specified in the Memorandum would be a valid trust. The Society's first object is "to promote the principle that human conduct shall be based upon natural knowledge and not upon supernatural belief, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end of all thought and action." A trust to promote or advocate this principle would certainly not be a trust for the benefit of individuals. But could it be established as a charitable trust? It is certainly not within the preamble of the Statute 43 Eliz. c. 5. This is not conclusive, though the Courts have taken such preamble as their guide in determining what is or is not charitable. It is not a religious trust, for it relegates religion to a region in which it is to have no influence on human conduct. The principle may have its attractions for certain types of mind, but on analysis it appears to be extremely vague and ambiguous. The first branch does not prescribe the end to which human conduct is to be directed. It merely says that whatever aim a man has in view, he is to base his conduct on natural knowledge rather than on supernatural belief. This may merely mean that if, for example, we desire to defeat our enemies, we should avail ourselves of all known scientific means, and not rest idle in the belief that there is a special providence looking after our interests. The meaning intended must necessarily be obscure until the terms "natural knowledge" and "supernatural belief" are more narrowly defined. Passing to the second branch of the principle, it is, I think, equally obscure. It lays down dogmatically what ought to be the end of all human thought and action, "so think and act as to secure human welfare in this world." No hint is given as to what constitutes human welfare—a point on which there is the widest difference of opinion, or as to why anyone should act on the precept unless it be assumed that altruism is merely enlightened egoism. It would in my opinion be quite impossible to hold that a trust to promote a principle so vague and indefinite was a good charitable trust. Even if the principle to be promoted were as definite as Kant's Categorical imperative, I doubt whether a trust for its promotion would be charitable.

My Lords, it remains to consider the question (which formed the chief topic of argument at your Lordships' Bar), whether the promotion of the principle specified as the Society's first object is either illegal or against the policy of the law. A trust for the promotion of the principle being

unenforceable on other grounds, this question could only arise on a criminal prosecution for blasphemy, or in an action to enforce a contract entered into for the purpose of promoting the principle. In discussing it I shall assume that the principle involves a denial of, or an attack upon, some of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion.

My Lords, on the subject of blasphemy, I have had the advantage of reading, and I entirely agree with the conclusions arrived at by my noble and learned friends, the Lord Chancellor and Lord Buckmaster. In my opinion to constitute blasphemy at common law there must be such an element of vilification, ridicule, or irreverence, as would be likely to exasperate the feelings of others, and so lead to a breach of the peace. I cannot find that the common law has ever concerned itself with the opinion as such, or with expression of opinion, so far as such expression is compatible with the maintenance of public order. Indeed, there is express authority that heresy as such is outside the cognizance of a criminal court, unless the heretic by setting up conventicles or otherwise endangers the peace (see *Hawkins's Pleas of the Crown*, vol. i., p. 354). The contrary view appears to be based on various dicta (I do not think they are more than dicta), to the effect that Christianity is part of the law of the land, the suggested inference being that to attack or deny any of its fundamental doctrines must, therefore, be unlawful. The inference, of course, depends on some implied major premise. If the implied major premise be that it is an offence to speak with contumely, or even to express disapproval of existing law, it is clearly erroneous. If, on the other hand, the implied major premise is that it is an offence to induce people to disobey the law, the premise may be accepted, but to avoid a *non-sequitur* it would be necessary to modify the minor premise by asserting that it is part of the law of the land that all must believe in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and this, again, is inadmissible. Christianity is clearly not part of the law of the land in the sense that every offence against Christianity is cognizable in the courts.

A good deal of stress was laid in this connection upon the Blasphemy Act (9 and 10 Will. III. c. 32), and its provisions, undoubtedly, give rise to certain difficulties. I think, however, for reasons which will appear later, that this Act should be construed as imposing in the case of persons educated in or who have at any time professed the Christian religion, certain additional penalties for the common law offence rather than as creating a new statutory offence. The fact that there has, so far as can be discovered never been a prosecution for an offence under the Act points to this view having been generally accepted.

My Lords, on the question whether the promotion of the principle in question is against public policy as opposed to being illegal in the criminal sense the Appellants relied principally on two authorities, namely, *Cowan v. Milbourn* (L. R. 2 Exch. 230) and *Briggs v. Hartley* (L. J. N. S. Chanc. 416). In the former case the Court consisting of Chief Baron Kelly, Baron Martin, and Baron Bramwell, refused to enforce a contract for the hire of rooms, the purpose of the hirer being to use the rooms for certain lectures, one of which, as advertised, was to be on "The Character and Teaching of Christ; the Former Defective, the Latter Misleading," and another on "The Bible Shown to be no More Inspired than any other Book." Chief Baron Kelly was of opinion that the first of these lectures could not be delivered without blasphemy. He referred especially to the fact that Christianity was part of the law of the land. Baron Martin agreed. Baron Bramwell quoted the Blasphemy Act, and said that the rooms were clearly intended to be used for a purpose declared by the Statute to be unlawful. It appears, therefore, that all three Judges considered that the purpose was unlawful in the strict sense, though Baron Bramwell referred to the distinction between things actually unlawful in the sense of being punishable and things unlawful in the sense of being contrary to the policy of the law. This, however, appears to have been unnecessary for the decision. The Court refused to enforce the contract. In the case of *Briggs v. Hartley*, the testator had created a trust to provide a prize for the best essay on natural theology, treated as a science, and sufficient when so treated to constitute a true, perfect, and philosophical system of universal religion. Vice-

Chancellor Shadwell held the trust void as inconsistent with Christianity. In my opinion the first of these cases might possibly be supported on the footing that the lectures intended to be given would involve vilification, ridicule, or irreverence, likely to lead to a breach of the peace. In so far as it decided that any denial of or attack upon the fundamental doctrines of Christianity was in itself blasphemous either at common law or under the Statute, I think it was wrong. The second case, however, appears to be a direct authority on the point at issue, for the trust was clearly a good charity unless it could be held contrary to the policy of the law.

The Revolution of 1688 was followed by the Toleration Act of that year, which exempted Protestant Dissenters from the penalties imposed by the earlier Acts, but provided that nothing therein contained should afford any protection to Roman Catholics or persons denying the Trinity. From the date of this Act all trusts for the religious purposes of any Nonconformist body entitled to the benefit of its provisions have been held good charitable trusts, and inasmuch as the provisions of the Act do not deal with the validity of trusts, but merely give exemptions from penalties, I think we are safe in assuming that in the equitable rule as to trusts for the purposes of religion being charitable, religion includes all forms of religion which accept, as the exempted Nonconformists may be said to have done, the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

But subsequent decisions enable us to go a step further. The Unitarian Relief Act, 1812, repeals so much of the Toleration Act, 1688, as enacts that nothing therein contained should extend to give any case or benefit to persons denying the Trinity and also so much of the Blasphemy Act as relates to persons denying the Trinity. As from the passing of this Act trusts for the religious purposes of Unitarians have always been held good charitable trusts. The repeal of the Blasphemy Act, which did not itself affect the common law, could not alter the common law. These decisions proceed therefore on the footing that a mere denial of the Trinity is not criminal. The Unitarian Relief Act containing no provisions as to trusts, they also proceed on the footing that but for the statutory penalties to which, prior to the Act, persons who denied the Trinity had been subject to a trust for a religion which rejects the doctrine of the Trinity would have been a good charitable trust. A denial of or attack on the doctrine of the Trinity can never therefore have been either actually illegal or contrary to the policy of the law.

Further, whatever may have been the case with the Unitarians of 1812, it is quite certain that in more recent years many Unitarians have not only denied the Trinity, but have disputed the "Divine authority" of the Old and New Testament in the sense in which that expression is ordinarily used by persons professing the Christian Faith. If there is any doctrine vital to Protestant Christianity, it would appear to be that of the divine authority of the Scriptures, and yet in the case of trusts for the religion of Unitarians no distinction has been drawn between those who do and who do not hold this doctrine. It would seem to follow that a trust for the purpose of any kind of Monotheistic Theism would be a good charitable trust, and that it is not illegal or contrary to public policy to deny the authority of the Old or New Testament.

(To be continued.)

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

While visiting the Zoo in Washington, a little girl saw a great white bird in a cage standing on one leg. She threw in a piece of candy; the bird gobbled it up eagerly, and thrust its head through the wire for more.

Presently the child's mother came along.

"Mother," cried the youngster; "see here! What kind of a bird is this?"

The mother pointed to the sign on the cage, which read, "The Stork."

"The Stork!" cried the child enthusiastically. "Oh! mother, do you know, he actually recognized me?"—*Harper's Magazine*, February, 1917.

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.

MR. A. D. HOWELL SMITH'S DISCUSSION CLASS (N. S. S. Office, 62 Farringdon Street): Thursday, June 7, at 7.30.

OUTDOOR.

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

FINSBURY PARK N. S. S.: 11.15, Miss Kough, a Lecture.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (corner of Ridley Road): 7, J. W. Marshall, "The Truth Shall Make You Free."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill): 3.15, H. J. Stenning, a Lecture.

REGENT'S PARK N. S. S.: 3.15, R. Miller, 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. Shaller, a Lecture.

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