

The FREETHINKER

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

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Views and Opinions.

Religion in the Army.

Ever since the War opened we have had very strongly in mind the question of religion in the Army. We have written many scores of letters and penned numerous paragraphs concerning the position of Freethinkers, first under the Derby scheme, and then under the Military Service Act—both, when first entering the Army and when serving in the ranks. On the question of taking the oath, and the statement of the recruits' religious opinions, the position was soon made clear. We do not know how far a couple of letters sent by us to the Minister of War during 1914 and 1915 contributed to the result, but in January, 1916, the following instruction was issued by the Army Council, which we published soon after it was issued, although it may serve a useful purpose in again printing it:—

ARMY COUNCIL INSTRUCTION.

No. 179 of January, 1916.

War Office, 21st January, 1916.

179. Religious denomination of a Recruit on attestation.

It has recently come to the knowledge of the Army Council that in certain cases Recruiting Officers and others when filling up the attestation papers of recruits enlisting in the Regular Army on a Duration of the War engagement, or in the Territorial Force, are in the habit of asking them to state their religious denominations. It is therefore necessary to point out that on the attestation papers referred to there is no printed question as to religion, and no question on the subject should be addressed to a recruit at the time of his attestation.

In this connection attention is drawn to W. O. letters 27/Gen. No./2514 (Chaplains), of 23rd Nov., 1914, and 27/Gen. No./4279 (Chaplains), of 30th June, 1915, and all Officers and N.C.Os are reminded that whenever it may be necessary to obtain information as to a soldier's religion, as for instance for the completion of his identity disc., etc., his own statement on that point should be taken without any attempt to influence him, and should be acted on without question.

27/Gen. No./5063 (A.G. 21).

By Command of the Army Council.

This was quite satisfactory, and any difficulty experienced was due to the want of acquaintance of the officials with the regulations. An officer is bound to take the answer as given to the question: "What Religion?" He is not warranted in using any kind of pressure, or in entering upon any inquisition. He must take down the reply, and any soldier has the right to enter himself as of no religion, or as Freethinker, Agnostic, or Atheist. He is also, of course, absolved from taking any religious oath. These rights are secured to him by law, and by the Army regulations. Any officer who traverses these regulations is exceeding his duty.

* * *

Church Parade.

Up to this point no soldier has any ground for complaint. The pity is that the same wise liberality is not continued through the whole of a soldier's career. Once in the Army, there is "Church Parade," which may be either compulsory or voluntary. It is quite impossible to say how many soldiers *like* this Church Parade, but it is quite certain that the majority very heartily dislike it. Indeed, it is not too much to say that, were Church Parades really and wholly voluntary, the practice would soon die out altogether. It is not the men who want these Church Parades; nor, we believe, do the majority of officers. It is the Chaplains attached to the Army who ask for them. Their interest in the matter is, obviously, almost aggressively professional. And it is certainly anomalous that, after allowing a man on joining the Army to dispense with all religious formulæ, after even writing him down as Freethinker or Atheist, he should be *ordered* to attend a church service in which he has recorded his convinced disbelief! It is really taking away with the one hand what is given with the other. The liberty of conscience permitted on entering the Army is virtually denied afterwards. We suggest, therefore, that on this matter soldiers should be permitted the same liberty as civilians. If they wish to attend a church service, they should be permitted to do so. If they wish to stop away, that also should be permitted. And we are quite sure that no one would be a worse man, or a less efficient soldier, because his opinions on religion were treated with consideration and respect.

* * *

A Ridiculous Situation.

As is usual with religion in a civilized country, there is something laughably foolish in the retention of compulsory religious attendance in the Army. If religious observance be essential to the maintenance of discipline, or efficiency, or of good behaviour, two things should follow. First, Freethinkers should not be enrolled at all, for it is clearly useless to make a man go through a performance which he tells you plainly beforehand he does not believe in. And if only believers were admitted, compulsion would be a mere form; all its awkward features would disappear. Second, if religion is necessary for the purposes above stated, it is the duty of the Army authorities, or the Government, to say what

religion is to be followed. For the soldier, it will be observed, is—quite properly—not permitted a choice in other directions. He is not allowed to choose his uniform, or his weapons, or his drill, or where he shall go or what he shall do. All these things are properly settled for him, and the reason is that their settlement makes for efficiency. But in the matter of religion a very wide choice is given. A man may choose from quite a number of religions—Mohammedanism, Brahmanism, Roman Catholicism, Methodism, Presbyterianism, and other religious odds and ends. Men from the same regiment will be selected, and each lot ordered to go away and follow the observances of a religion the non-observance of which they believe will damn the rest. A sense of humour would make a camp resound with laughter before and after, if not during, a Church Parade. And when these variegated religious services are over, the men will return to their ordinary life with all the religious distinctions obliterated—except on their identification discs. One simply cannot escape the conclusion that, so far as discipline, efficiency, and behaviour are concerned, religion doesn't matter—to anyone except the chaplains.

* * *

A Move by the War Office.

But we are naturally concerned with the compulsory Church attendance, so far as it affects Freethinkers. And here it is pleasing to note that the number of compulsory Church Parades are on the decline—while the voluntary ones are so much a farce that they, too, are getting fewer. Mr. R. H. Rosetti—whose letter appears in another column—states that in his battalion compulsory Church Parade is abandoned. That is good news, and it is only what one would expect. The vast majority of British officers are gentlemen—in other than the cant sense of the word—and it must be irksome to them to order men to go through so solemn a farce as a Church Parade, which they know the men regard as a folly and not necessary to their duties as soldiers, and in which the officer himself often does not believe. From certain sources, the nature of which we are not at liberty to disclose, we learn that the War Office is becoming more alive to the existence of this easily removable hardship, and we are informed by a trusted correspondent that the Authorities are inquiring for particulars of men who have “been the victims of persecution.” We do not think “persecution,” as ordinarily understood, is the right word to use. The grievance is that when a Church Parade is ordered, men can only be excused on the ground of illness or other duties. And the officers have, we understand, no power to excuse men from attendance, save on those grounds. The result is that men who ask for exemption are, when the exemption is granted, confined to barracks during the time the rest of the regiment is at church, or else told off to perform some kind of “fatigue duty,” more or less disagreeable. Naturally, this is looked upon as being a kind of punishment, and thousands who would gladly stay away from church regard attendance as the less disagreeable of the alternatives offered. If the War Office were to conduct an inquiry on these lines, we feel sure it would discover that the abolition of compulsory Church Parade in the Army would be regarded as a real boon by the men, and it would relieve the officers of what is often a disagreeable duty.

* * *

The Modern Trend.

Against any possible plea of necessity for compulsory religious service there are two outstanding facts. In the French Army, the praise of which we have been singing for nearly four years, compulsory, even official religious service does not exist. The French soldier can play his part as a man without being marched off to Church at

the command of his superiors. In the American Army, the praise of which we are beginning to sing, there is an official religious service, but attendance is voluntary. What reason is there for maintaining as necessary in the British Army a practice that is not found necessary with the two greatest of our Allies? Is the British Army dependent upon what both the French and American Armies can do without? All the retention of this practice means is, that England is behind other countries in this respect. The whole trend of modern life is to divorce the secular State from religious control. We see that taking place in the general affairs of the State, where the holding of office is becoming independent of religious opinion, and in the growing agitation for exclusively Secular Education in State schools. In France, the complete example has been set. There is no religion in the official life of the State—there is none in the schools; there is none in the Army. The ideal of duty, of love of one's fellows, of a sense of oneness with the rest of the community, is enough. This position has yet to be realized here, but it is coming. At any rate, we have decided that in civilian life what religion a man follows, or whether he follows any at all, is his own private concern; it has nothing to do with the State. All that we are asking is that the same principle shall apply to the Army. There is no reason why a man should be called upon to sacrifice his sense of personal dignity, or to take part in what, to him, may be a meaningless, absurd, or harmful religious service, because he has donned a military uniform. Soldiers will not be worse soldiers because they become better men. And in a War that is claimed to be a war for the freedom of the world, it is something of a stroke of satire to insist that those who are fighting it shall be compelled to participate in a religion in which they do not believe, which adds nothing to their efficiency as soldiers, and that repeats formulæ and expresses beliefs of which the more intelligent part of the world is growing ashamed.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Newest Apologetic.

III.

THE arguments against the truth of Christianity are both numerous and cogent, and no attempts to refute them have ever been successful. In his *Achievements of Christianity*, Mr. Mozley undertakes to deal with four of them, the first of which being “that Christianity, when it had the power to do so, discouraged free inquiry, and accordingly impeded the course of learning and knowledge.” This is a serious charge, and deserves to be seriously treated; but Mr. Mozley fails to bring forward any facts in disproof of it. We frankly admit that “the intellectual activity of the Middle Ages is a patent fact.” The schoolmen did a good deal of hard thinking, even if it resulted in no practical benefit to the world. Thomas Aquinas was an intellectual giant, and the Church can legitimately boast of many such both in ancient and modern times; but this fact does not show that the Church favoured free inquiry. Indeed, Mr. Mozley himself admits that she did not, and endeavours to justify her conduct. “For the men of the Middle Ages,” he says, “Christian doctrines were bedrock realities; they naturally disapproved of whatever seemed inconsistent therewith.” We do not blame the Church for her protection of what she regarded as sound teaching, or for her efforts to stamp out whatever seemed to her inimical thereto. We also recognize the fact that “very wide latitude was allowed to thinkers like Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, though their metaphysics must

have seemed almost subversive of first principles." We go a step further and agree that "it is impossible to imagine the later Middle Ages as a time when learning was at a discount"; but it was Christian learning that flourished then. Learning, as such, has always been looked upon by the Church as an enemy of the faith. Mr. Mozley declares that many of the greatest scientists, such as Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo, "have either been orthodox Christians, or have at least stood on the Christian side," but he forgets that the Copernican system lay under the condemnation of the Church for many years. Copernicus himself and several of his disciples were authoritatively denounced, in 1616, for teaching that the earth moved. Lecky says:—

It is, indeed, marvellous that science should ever have revived amid the fearful obstacles theologians cast in her way. Together with a system of Biblical interpretation so stringent, and at the same time so capricious, that it infallibly came into collision with every discovery that was not in accordance with the unaided judgments of the senses, and therefore with the familiar expressions of the Jewish writers, everything was done to cultivate a habit of thought the direct opposite of the habits of science. The constant exaltation of blind faith, the countless miracles, the childish legends, all produced a condition of besotted ignorance, of grovelling and trembling credulity that can scarcely be paralleled except among the most degraded barbarians. Innovation of every kind was regarded as a crime; superior knowledge excited only terror and suspicion (*The Rise of Influence of Rationalism in Europe*, vol. i., pp. 274-5).

Mr. Mozley maintains that the condemnation of Galileo "is quite irrelevant to the main question"; but we fail to see how the irrelevancy is made out. Galileo was by no means an exemplary character; but it was his teaching, not his character, that the Inquisition pronounced pernicious. His offence was the declaration that the earth moved, which was in direct contradiction of the generally accepted statement that the "sun runneth about from one end of heaven to the other," while "the foundations of the earth are so firmly fixed that they cannot be moved." Science was frowned upon merely because it could not be harmonized with Scripture. What does Mr. Mozley think of the Church's treatment of Roger Bacon? Why was that great scientist flung into prison, where he remained for fourteen years? Was it for some irregularities in his moral character, or for the expression of opinions antagonistic to orthodox theology? The truth is that Roger Bacon was punished because he pursued his studies in a spirit of free inquiry, which the Papacy could not tolerate. Mr. Mozley refers to the number of European universities which were founded between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries, but he omits to tell us that science, as such, was not allowed to be taught in them. Chemistry, geology, and astronomy, in particular, were directly subversive of the Christian Creed, and the Church was determined to prevent them from being taught. Scientific experiments were prohibited because the discoveries made by means of them undermined the Bible. Roger Bacon was a professor for several years in the University of Paris towards the close of the thirteenth century, and he had the audacity to make a violent attack upon the ignorance and vices of the clergy, as well as upon the false system of education in schools and colleges. The immoralities of which the clergy were guilty went unpunished, though perfectly well known to the ecclesiastical authorities; but the introduction of scientific discoveries that threw discredit upon Scripture was a crime that could not be tolerated for a moment, and so pioneers like Bacon, Bruno, and many others, were imprisoned, tortured, and, in numerous instances, put to death.

Our contention is that the Church has never encouraged free inquiry, or been the friend of learning and knowledge. Indeed, ever since her advent to power, under Constantine, her conduct of affairs has been open to grave suspicion. This is what Mr. Mozley says in his book:—

At the accession of Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, to complete dominion in 321, the heathen population of the Empire may still have been nineteen-twentieth of the whole; it was certainly in an overwhelming preponderance (p. 32).

This is a point of enormous importance. As is well known, Gibbon estimates the number of Christians, at Constantine's accession, as only one in twenty of the entire population of the empire. That estimate was accepted as essentially accurate by the late Bishop Lightfoot, and Bishop Boyd-Carpenter is not able successfully to challenge it. Now, though the Pagans were overwhelmingly in the majority, the Christian religion was adopted as the only religion for the Empire, while all the Pagan cults were proscribed and finally extirpated. Under Constantine, laws against Paganism were passed, but not systematically executed. The prohibited worship was permitted to continue. The imperial delays greatly annoyed the clergy, but they did not openly rebel. The first full-blooded persecutor of Paganism was Theodosius the Great, who was in a state of cowardly subserviency to one of the most notorious bigots that ever lived, Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, under whom Augustine was converted. That eloquent prelate was a man who did not hesitate to sink every principle of honesty, truth, and justice when the interests of his creed were at stake; and Theodosius was little more than his willing tool. Acting under the spell of the Ambrosian and Augustinian bigotry, he rallied all available resources in a gigantic attempt to put a complete end to Paganism. He fought with might and main for the full establishment of the Catholic faith. In thirty years the Pagan religions were finally extinguished throughout the Roman Empire. By the beginning of the fifth century Christianity had succeeded, mainly either through the fear, or by actual use, of the sword, in supplanting all rivals for the suffrage of the people. Of course, all Pagan schools were closed, and, in consequence, ignorance and superstition grew apace. Secular knowledge was despised and suppressed. Whewell says that "during a considerable period of the history of the Christian Church, and by many of its principal authorities, the study of natural philosophy was not only disregarded but discommended." In the middle of the eighth century an Irish saint, named St. Virgilius, both loved and cultivated scientific knowledge, and when in Bavaria he expressed his belief in the existence of the Antipodes, with the result that the whole religious world was beside itself with wrath against him. Mr. Mozley thinks most highly of the fourteenth century, ignoring the fact that it was in this age of universities the astronomer Cecco d'Ascoli was burnt. Copernicus was condemned by Catholics and Protestants alike. Of him Luther said:—

This fool wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy; but sacred Scripture tells us that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and not the earth.

The universities of the Middle Ages, of which Mr. Mozley is so proud, are thus seen to have been compelled to teach the Ptolemaic System of the World when it was known to be false.

Geology fared even worse, because it discredited the Mosaic cosmogony and disproved the Pauline belief as to the origin of death. The theologians were determined to crush the new science out of existence. The conflict continued till within living memory. But the Church

was violently opposed not only to the sciences, but also to Greek and Roman literature; the only literature worthy of study being that contained in the Bible. "After Jesus Christ," said Tertullian, "all curiosity, after the Gospel, all inquiry, are unnecessary." In classical education that Father could see "only a robbery of God." Writing an angry letter to a bishop, Gregory the Great said: "I hear that you have committed the unspeakable crime of teaching profane letters." One of the chief faults of Pope Leo X. was that he devoted himself to the curiosities of profane studies, and called to the sanctuary of religion men who were better acquainted with Greek fables than with the history of the Church and the doctrines of the Fathers. Indeed, there were men in Holy Orders who prided themselves upon their dense ignorance. Gregory of Tours, a Frankish historian, said, "Why should I blush for my rusticity, since the Lord, our Redeemer and God, chose for the destruction of the vanity of worldly wisdom, not orators, but fishermen; not philosophers, but rustics. As Compayre well says:—

If the early doctors of the Church occasionally expressed some sympathy for profane letters, it is because in their youth, before having received baptism, they had themselves attended the pagan schools. But these once closed, Christianity did not open others, and after the fourth century, a profound night enveloped humanity. The labour of the Greeks and Romans was as though it had never been.

Baronius, the famous annalist of the Catholic Church, delivers this significant judgment:—

The tenth century was an *iron* age, barren of all goodness; a *lead* age, abounding in all wickedness; and a *dark* age, remarkable above all others for the scarcity of writers and men of learning.

With all these incontrovertible facts in mind we deliberately repeat the charge that "Christianity, when it had the power to do so, discouraged free inquiry and, accordingly, impeded the course of learning and knowledge," and declare that Mr. Mozley's answer to it "obviously will not do at all." He ignores the facts that count, and cites only wholly irrelevant ones.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Great Saint Bernard.

Bernard Shaw, the Man and His Work, by Herbert Skimpole. Allen & Unwin; 1918.

George Bernard Shaw: His Life and Works, by Professor Henderson.

Bernard Shaw, by A. Hamon.

THE whirligig of time brings strange revenges. Much that the Philistine disclaimed some years ago, the middle-class man adores to-day. But nowhere has the reversal of positions been so rapid or so absolute as in literature. The Socialist writers ran a great risk, for they were odious, unpopular, and were supposed to exhibit the worst features of petty political propaganda. William Morris is now a classic; Edward Carpenter addresses a large and ever-increasing audience; and Bernard Shaw is one of the foremost literary figures in the public mind. And Shaw possesses an effrontery like Casanova, a readiness and an irreverence equal to that of Panurge, and a brain as brilliant as Machiavelli. "It is roses, roses all the way."

After these happenings, it is not so astonishing that Mr. Shaw's biography should be written by a university professor, who hails from the land of "tall statements and tall buildings." Even his latest critic is a full-blooded American citizen, who throws bouquets at Mr. Shaw from across the Atlantic. To Mr. Skimpole, Shaw appears as a serious rival to Shakespeare and Sheridan, whilst Professor Henderson likens him to "a genial

Celtic Mephistopheles"; and both insist on his seriousness as a writer. A continental critic, Mons. Hamon, declares Shaw to be "the English Moliere," which is a graceful compliment to the most brilliant living English man of letters. This wide concensus of opinion is remarkable, for the purely parochial success of an ordinary writer sinks into insignificance beside a reputation of this kind.

The underlying seriousness of Bernard Shaw's work cannot be ignored. For Shaw, despite his chameleon-like changes, always maintains stoutly the rottenness of the prevailing ideals. He criticizes these ideals in his novels, his dramas, his musical, sociological, and theatrical reviews. He sets up these ideals, strips them, and puts them to the test, and the ordeal is the cleansing fire of truth and the scalding water of satire. So thorough is the process that few impostures may walk and live. He is so much more than a merely brilliant author. Underlying all his wit and irony, you find a sanity, a balanced good sense, which mere smartness lacks. Occasionally, of course, as an Irishman, he justifies his reputation as a "Celtic Mephistopheles," and grins under his cock's feathers, as in his attacks on Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, and his attitude on religion. But the total impression left by his work is of a man grappling earnestly and seriously with social and theological problems, not of a clown grinning through a horse-collar. And that impression is very welcome, for, as Heine says finely, "unless wit is based on seriousness it is only a sneeze of the reason."

Shaw has not the temperament which suffers fools gladly, and when he is annoyed he is merciless. He sees all round a subject. Is he writing to Benjamin Tucker, the apostle of Individualism, he will tell him that true Individualism can only be reached through Socialism. When addressing Socialists, he will warn them of the dangers of Socialism to individual liberty. He will jibe at religious people for their barbarism, and scoff at Freethinkers for their devotion to science. When he belonged to the Shelley Society, he told the members bluntly that he expected all the members were Atheists, Republicans, and Vegetarians, and nearly broke up the Society on the spot. Sometimes the victims get angry, but the ready Irish wit comes to the rescue, and the jester is again forgiven for his audacity.

After all, Shaw's plays contain his most valuable work. He has been at great pains to emphasize his technique and his philosophy, and to explain that his technique is old and his philosophy is new. Frankly, neither is originally Shavian. The one is seen clearly in Henrik Ibsen, and the other plainly conveyed from Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. But Shaw's comedy is interesting and valuable. He has re-introduced high comedy on the English stage. So far as England is concerned, the comic spirit, as George Meredith so admirably calls it, has had few chances between Bernard Shaw and the Restoration dramatists. And, remember, the main secret of Congreve and Wycherley's interplay of character is not mere depravity. It is the absolute equality of equipment with which men and women pitch their battles of wit.

There is no question of Shaw's genius. The impress of his unique personality is on all his work. Even his newspaper articles retain their freshness and survive the test of republication triumphantly. They are the work of a brilliant, clever, and witty man. With a strong, haughty, careless nonchalance he has expressed himself very freely. He once asked: "Who is Hall Caine?" and people have not done laughing yet. His phrases hit. "Sardoodledom" is not a compliment to the popular author of *La Tosca*. "Bardolatry" is applied to the worship of Shakespeare. His famous retort, "Sir

Edward Grey is himself a Junker," was merciless. And so was his advice to the Free Churches that, if they were wise, they would place busts of Voltaire in their buildings. Shaw is too much in earnest to be impartial. "I have never claimed for myself the divine attribute of justice," he says blandly. His life's work is a siege laid to the social and religious abuses of his time by an author who had to cut his way into them at the point of his sword, and throw some of the defenders into the moat.

Mons. Hamon is right in pointing out Shaw's affinity to Moliere, for he has the same indomitable commonsense, his capacity for crusading, and the acidity of his sarcasm. Listen!—

A theatre to me is a place where two or three are gathered together. The apostolic succession from Æschylus to myself is as serious and as continuously inspired as that younger institution, the apostolic succession of the Christian Church. Unfortunately, this Christian Church, founded gaily with a pun, has been so largely corrupted by rank Satanism that it has become the Church where you must not laugh, and so it is giving way to that older and greater Church to which I belong—the Church where the oftener you laugh the better, because by laughter only can you destroy evil without malice, and affirm good fellowship without mawkishness.

There is a strain of Puritanism in Shaw's attitude towards art:—

I am as fond of fine music and handsome buildings as Milton was, or Cromwell, or Bunyan; but if I found that they were becoming the instruments of a systematic idolatry of sensuousness, I would hold it good statesmanship to blow every cathedral in the world to pieces with dynamite, organ and all, without the least heed to the screams of the art critics and cultured voluptuaries.

Shaw's emendation of the "Golden Rule" is often quoted: "Do not do unto others as you would they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same."

Bernard Shaw is, indisputably, the most brilliant living English dramatist. His plays have crossed all frontiers, and have been played in all the chief cities of the civilized world. The nimble lightning of his wit rouses men everywhere. He is, in fact, the only man-of-letters of world-wide reputation that we have. It is well, for he has done more for Progress than any other writer of his generation.

MIMNERMUS.

John Smith in Khaki.

II.

(Continued from p. 93.)

I HAVE suggested that language is of no very great consequence in placing a man ethically. I remember hearing a famous Puritan (W. T. Stead) quote a bishop, with approval, as discounting the seriousness of swearing as a sin. "Bad" language may be either strong, indelicate, or foul. Strong language, *i.e.*, the use of oaths, is hardly worth considering as a vice; indeed, one feels very sorry for the poor devil who has nothing stronger than "Oh, blow!" wherewith to relieve his feelings. Imagine the poor milk-and-water Methodist side-slipping into a ditch with "dear, dear!" There are some who tremble at a damn and faint at a (well—ask Mr. Shaw for the word). I have no patience with these "unco guid." They are, more often than not, of the class that, having no positive virtues worth mentioning, imagine themselves vastly superior to the common crowd by reason of this and similar puerilities. Of course, oaths, like spirits, should only be taken in moderation. Continual swearing soon wears all the

edge off your best oaths, until it comes to pass that, when an emergency arises, calling for an extra super one, words fail you. You haven't a decent cuss-word in reserve, so your passion has to find vent in some other and generally more dangerous way. That is how it works out in the Army. The recruit finds so much to swear at (for it is absolutely the only relief open to him) that he soon wears out his harmless A.B.C.'s and the D. E. F.'s, which at first shocked him, soon become as familiar to his ears as Sunlight Soap and Prussian Militarism.

But however deplorable the habit of tainted speech may be, it would be unjust and short-sighted to attach a great deal of importance to something which is, after all, little more than a reflection of one's surroundings. Anyone who happens to overhear a soldier "letting off" should remember that the grosser images made use of really have nothing to do with their primary meanings, being just expletives and nothing more. Before dropping the subject of the psychology of cussing, I *could* say something about the language of women-soldiers, but chivalry forbids.

After making every allowance for the natural coarsening of language which comes of barrack life—or any similar life—one is, as I have said, bound to admit that the very heart and soul of Mr. Smith are tainted. Not rotten, mark you, but tainted. Military life has much to answer for, but we cannot justly arraign it here. The people who are responsible for it are the priest and schoolmaster. It all comes of the folly of lying about Nature. It is largely contributed to by the absence of real culture in the scheme of elementary education, an omission which is, I hope and believe, gradually being made good. The exploitation of remunerative rubbish by music hall and newspaper magnates, by which they fill their pockets at the expense of the public taste, is another factor to be reckoned with, but the germ of all that is rotten in us is the fact that we try to keep children ignorant of their nature. A child picks up its first knowledge of sexual physiology from furtive and guilty questionings. Very rarely does the veil of silence cover up the facts—even from the child of tender years. This silence, with the positive lying which is necessary to keep it up, acts rather like a distorting mirror than a veil. The whole truth no child or adolescent can ever know without sympathetic and tactful help from those of maturer years, but long before he or she is supposed to know anything about the subject, enough distorted knowledge is acquired to make a joke of what is really one of the most serious things in life. It is bad enough to make a joke of sex. I have, unfortunately, seen evidence lately of a distinct tendency to make a joke of maternity. This is not so much a matter for anger as for sorrow. If ever a loud laugh spoke a vacant mind, it does when maternity is the subject of humour. But it is no use railing at the rising generation. The tittering that runs round a picture hall, for instance, whenever an allusion to motherhood is made, must be understood as a sign of ignorance rather than depravity. It is not the rising generation who should be condemned, but the risen generation. The moral sores are a result of the rotten moral food supplied by bilious prudes and sanctimonious humbugs. If the cause of the disease is understood, the remedy is obvious. Let a child be taught to distinguish between the ethics of local convention and those fundamental principles of right conduct that are not right here and wrong there, but are necessary for the preservation of true manhood and womanhood in all countries and at all times. Moralizing *as* moralizing is out of date. The best sermon is not a series of exhortations cemented by threats and bribes, but a plain statement of the truth.

I mean the whole truth—not selected bits of the truth. For the art of selecting some important facts and omitting others is only another form of lying. Even in the case of the hideous evil of prostitution the preacher rarely rises above a denunciation of it because it is "sinful." You are not to do it because it is a sin, and it is a sin because it is prohibited in some mysterious "moral code"—that dear old hardy annual so much beloved of the Christian Evidence lecturer and others of the Pecksniff clan.

A gallant attempt was made by the Bishop of London who, gloriously arrayed in the uniform of the warrior, favoured the gallant regiment of which I am an insignificant member with a discourse on the subject some months back. But with all his descent to the vernacular, and evident sincerity of purpose (which latter is, I think, his redeeming feature) the sermon utterly failed to grip. I know that by the subsequent allusions to it among the men. He certainly showed some appreciation of the scientific side of the subject, apart from the goody-goody clap-trap that formed his dominant theme, but the former was all about venereal disease. According to what one could gather from the good Bishop's address, prostitution is bad, (1) because it is naughty; (2) because it leads to disease. He ornamented his sermon by a rather childish insistence upon his personal performance as a life-long total abstainer. (I believed him, but I regret to say there was much mirth among the ungodly about it.)

Of the above two reasons, it may be said that the first is idiotic, and the second insufficient. If the horrors of venereal disease could be wiped out of existence, and all the moral codes of the world were to be discredited, the great objection to the practice would still stand. The thing is evil because it is an insult to nature. It is the attempt to cramp and confine nature that is principally responsible for it, and anyone wishing to combat this evil must not be content with planting the "fear of God" into the hearts of young men and women. There are two potent forces at work to counteract this and other debasing practices. The first is the ennobling influence of love, and the second is the effect of a development of good taste. Love is more uplifting than anything else in the world, and the true artist can do more to purify morals than all the Comstocks and Torreys and Ingrams ever heard of. Perhaps if factories were not quite so hideous, and the dwellings of the poor were not quite so ugly, the lure of the siren of sin would lose much of its force over the weaker portion of womenkind, and if boys were made to understand the beauty of Nature, they would be the better armed against temptation to insult her.

HERBERT W. THURLOW.

(To be concluded.)

A Tribute.

BRAVE-HEARTED toiler, toiler of the sea!
Can we repay thee—for to thee we owe
The greatest debt that human heart can know,
Dear life itself, and all that life may be.
We, and our England, from thy hands we take
Warmth, shelter, safety—all of these from thee;
Because of thy strength is it we are free?
Thy sleepless watch for sleeping brothers' sake.
Ah, Gods of men! Men cry to you in vain.
Then cease your prayers, ye people of the shore,
Look toward the sea, where thunder evermore
Breakers that rise and swell, and break again.
There man, your fellow, fights and dies for you;
To him your prayers, your praise, your thanks
are due.

A. C. APTED.

Acid Drops.

"Boldness, again boldness, always boldness," said Danton, at a time when the French Revolution was fighting for its existence. The Russian Bolshevik leaders are acting on the same principle. Undeterred by their trouble with Germany—although one fancies the German Government are more afraid of Trotsky than of the Armies of the Allies—the Bolsheviks have now entered into conflict with the Church. The Soviet Government has declared complete liberty of conscience, and wiped away all privileges on account of religious belief. The State is completely secularized, as in France, but all religious ceremonies are permitted so long as they do not interfere with public order. The religious oath is abolished in law courts, and religious instruction in State schools, but private teaching of religion is permitted. No Church or religious society can possess property, and all churches, etc., are declared to be national property; but buildings and instruments for religious service are assigned by the authorities for the free use of religious societies.

Naturally, all this has stirred up the opposition of the Church in Russia, and pietists in this country are doing their best to misrepresent the situation. Thus, most of the papers report curtly the "outrage" of the Government in seizing the Alexander Nevsky Monastery. Mr. Arthur Ransome, in the *Daily News* of February 6, gives a truer version of the affair. The monastery is very rich, covers a large area, and is practically a town in itself. And this monastic town was "commandeered" on the ground of its being needed for the use of invalided soldiers. On the face of it, what is being done may be quite justifiable from several points of view; and our good people at home forget the treatment of Roman Catholics by that Defender of the Faith, Henry the Eighth.

In order to excite public sympathy, the monastery organized a public procession, and this terrible Government not only permitted the procession, but issued a proclamation that anyone who interfered with it would be arrested. The procession was a large one, with rich banners and many ikons. In spite of the proclamation ordering people not to interfere with the procession, agents of the Church went amongst those who could not read—a very large proportion in Russia—telling them that the Bolsheviks were putting down all such ceremonies. Mr. Ransome says:—

All along the route were groups with agitators trying to work on the ignorance of the people. But the day passed quietly.....The Bolsheviks wisely avoided trouble by removing the Red Guards from the streets. The procession, which took half an hour to pass, would have been impressive had it not been so obvious that it had a secondary non-religious object. That object was not attained. The political opponents of the Bolsheviks wanted martyrs. They got no martyrs, and from their point of view the procession was a failure.

Now the monks of the Alexander Nevsky Monastery have proclaimed a Holy War, and the Patriarch has excommunicated the Government. Other things might have been overlooked, but seizing Church property was the last straw.

Meanwhile, we invite Freethinkers to read with caution the stories that are being made current in the ordinary press about Russia. They should remember the systematic slanders on the Portuguese revolution because it struck at the Throne and the Church, and also the misrepresentation in this country of France when it disestablished the Church a few years ago. Church interests are well served in this country, and lies in defence of piety find a ready market. Above all, we advise all to study the French Revolution. The analogy between that and the Russian Revolution is wonderfully close, and very instructive.

The *Daily News* concluded its account of the consecration of the new Bishop of Hereford with the words, "the ceremony passed off without incident." Was a free-fight expected?

Some of the new models for spring headwear are of the poke-bonnet type. For once in a way the Salvation Army girls will find themselves in the fashion.

A plan is being discussed for reinforcing the religious life of America and this country by exchanging ministers for periods up to twelve months, says the *Daily News*. The Americans are very welcome to our Bishop of London, but we hope that they will keep Billy Sunday on their side of the Atlantic.

Speaking at the Colston Hall, Bristol, the Rev. D. J. Hiley said:—

No hymn in any hymn book he had ever seen had done him so much good as "What's the use of worrying?" sung by brave men, who lived up to that sentiment. "What about the religion of the boys?" they might ask. His experience was that war must brutalize men—there was no escape from that. Those who expected a wave of religious enthusiasm after the War would be bitterly disappointed. The religious service at the base was not the most popular event of the week. Swearing was probably "only from the teeth," and he did not attach too much importance to this weakness, but he always regretted that this had seemed to become part of the soldier's ordinary vocabulary. Referring to the morals of the troops, the speaker complained bitterly of the "conspiracy of silence" on the great evil which threatened the British race even more than did the Huns. To Churchmen—the whole Catholic Church—he said, "We have lost touch with democracy."

What will trouble the Churches most is that they will probably lose touch with a deal of their income.

My Tuesdays are meatless,
My Wednesdays are wheatless,
I am getting more eatless each day;
My home it is heatless,
My bed it is sheetless—
They're all sent to the Y.M.C.A.
My club it is breadless,
My coffee is sweetless,
Each day I get poorer and wiser;
My stockings are feetless,
My trousers are seatless.
My God! But I do hate the Kaiser.

—*Daily News*.

Sir Arthur Yapp's task at the Food Ministry has come to an end, and he has retired, to resume his work of talking for the Young Men's Christian Association. Talking was his job for the Food Ministry, and, as a daily paper points out, "he has probably talked more words in four months than the glibbest street-corner medicine-vendor." Anyhow, Sir Arthur ought to be satisfied, for he yapped himself into the honours list.

Billy Sunday, the popular American revivalist, is engaged in an eight-weeks' campaign against sin, and, according to the *New York Herald*, Billy never misses an opportunity of attacking "Kaiser Bill and his bunch," whom he describes as "a God-forsaken, weasel-eyed, hog-jowled, beetle-browed crew." It would be interesting to hear "Kaiser Bill's" comments on these compliments from a fellow-Christian. Probably they would be couched in the same exquisite language.

One of the alterations made by the House of Lords in the Franchise Bill was a suggestion to exhibit in public places a "black list" of Conscientious Objectors. This was rejected by the House of Commons. What an ironical suggestion that men with "consciences" should be "black-listed" in a Christian country!

Oh, those newspapers! The *Daily News* is again assuring its readers that "the German power is a pagan power, just as their ideal is a pagan ideal." Has the editor ever heard of German priests and Lutheran parsons?

The glorious free press of England has been expressing its astonishment in headlines at the news that the ex Czar

of Russia has been sawing wood. Yet Christians profess to believe that the King of Kings wielded the jack-plane.

The *Evening Standard* declares that "it is the English habit to shrink from the analysis of ideas." Even Tory journalists find out things in time.

The secularization of Christianity is still going on. At an Eastcheap church the Sunday programme comprised "Songs, orchestra, and cinema," and the sermon was devoted to "Food hoarding." At an East-end tabernacle the chief attraction was a "free tea for 700."

The new Education Bill, soon to be brought before Parliament, provides for the maintenance of school camps for physical training. Quite a good clause—so long as it is properly carried out. But the County of Leicester Education Committee has issued a handbook, called *Elements of Military Education*, from which it may be gathered that those responsible for its issue are only jealous of Prussia, not antagonistic to its spirit.

Thus, "Special Military Practice" is to have a definite place in the cadet curriculum. There is to be bayonet practice, with or without bayonet; trench practice, in which a sack is to be placed to represent a man. The boy is to go through certain manœuvres, and finally "seize bayonet to stick into the throat at close quarters." Quite a pretty, humanizing exercise for young boys. The rulers of Germany have brought their country to its present pass by a systematic militarizing of the rising generation. The County of Leicester Education Office is evidently jealous of German efficiency in this direction, and wishes to try the same process here. We can only hope that parents will see that this kind of thing is killed before it acquires strength. Physical drill for boys, as much as is possible. Bayonet exercise, involving the simulated running of a bayonet through the throat of a prostrate enemy, a thousand times no! Let us leave that kind of systematic brutalization to Prussia.

The Bishop of Oxford says "there is a lamentably low tone in many country places as well as in the towns. I feel bowed down with humiliation and misery, yet I do not know what to do." Perhaps the Bishop may reflect that this "low tone" is some sort of a comment on the boasted purifying effects of Christianity. That kind of confession stamps Christianity as a decided failure. It is the Churches who have claimed moral control, it is the Churches who have told us of the marvels accomplished, and if the Bishop's lament is justified by facts the sooner the clergy give up the job the better.

In the House of Convocation the Bishop of Lichfield protested strongly against the "smallness of the outfit allowance and daily pay" of chaplains in the Army compared with that of combatant officers. Well, but they do get officer's pay, and many will be receiving, as Army chaplains, more than they were getting as curates. And is there any reason why a chaplain should get officers' pay at all? Why should he be paid more than an ordinary soldier? Why should not even the Church to which the chaplain belongs pay him? He is there to represent it. The protest strikes us as just "cheek."

There is a fool or a liar involved in the following item of news. On January 29, at the Cambridge Borough Tribunal, a bookseller running a one-man business, married, and a specialist in scientific publications, applied for exemption. He was refused, the Military Representative stating that *the Minister of National Service regarded books as luxuries*. Comment is quite needless.

On the window of the Reading Room of the Y.M.C.A. at Ayr, appears a notice intimating that for some time past the management has been troubled through magazines having been stolen from the premises, and a request that visitors should abstain from the practice. Is this a sign of the glowing return to religion among our young men?

It is a pity that Mr. George Bernard Shaw does not pay more careful regard to fact when dealing with certain subjects. Thus, in the *Nation* for February 1, he says in the course of a review of a recent book by Mr. Belloc:—

The late editor of the *Freethinker* was not the same man in his private correspondence with Meredith as in his editorial columns. He knew quite well that the sort of Atheist who called the Bethlehem stable the Pig and Whistle, not merely to change the atmosphere of the discussion, but with the quaintly snobbish notion that nothing miraculous could happen in a vulgar public house was a danger to Secularism; yet he was not free to say so; too many of his subscribers would have suspected him of superstition, if not of downright Christianity and abandoned him.

Those who knew G. W. Foote will smile at the suggestion of his refraining from saying things for fear of losing subscribers. That consideration has never been of weight in the editorial policy of the *Freethinker*, and, we hope, never will be. And we are pleased to say that the relations between this paper and its readers are such that no one feels at all upset when something is published with which many may disagree. Clear thinking and honest speaking is all that our readers ask for, and so far as is possible they get it. Both the late and the present editor have had disagreements with some readers, but we do not think any have been lost on that account. And, quite frankly, we should not greatly value the support of anyone if his or her support was conditional on complete agreement upon every subject and all the time.

The suggestion that G. W. Foote was one man in the *Freethinker* and another man in his private correspondence, is simply ridiculous. It was the G. W. Foote of the 'eighties who won the respect of Meredith, and it was won on the strength of his writings in the *Freethinker*. And that respect was retained to the end. Of course, G. W. Foote didn't write "Acid Drops" when corresponding with Meredith; there was no necessity for his doing. Nor was there any need to "depolarize" words by calling the Bethlehem Inn the "Pig and Whistle," or changing the atmosphere of the discussion in other ways. Between two such men these things were quite unnecessary. But that is a different thing to the suggestion conveyed in the passage cited. Nor do we imagine that G. B. S. writes or talks to his friends in the same way that he does in his articles or plays. If he did they would think of him as a deuce of a bore. For with those who can read, lessons in the alphabet are quite unnecessary.

A bold advertisement in the press states that the Rev. J. T. Davis, the minister of the Theistic Church, will deal with "mental doubts" on the subject of religion. The subject should keep his congregation awake.

The *Strassburg Post* suggests that the Kaiser is in dire need of the prayers of his people. This does not tally with the clerical statement that the Germans are "Atheists."

At a special service at St. Paul's Cathedral the music included selections from Mendelssohn's *Saint Paul*. A striking instance of German "Atheism."

In these days of the enforced simple life it is refreshing to notice an advertisement in the Catholic *Universe* announcing that "bees-wax vegetable votive candles" can be supplied promptly at reasonable prices.

Well done, Inverness! A deputation of "laymen and ministers" waited on the magistrates to protest against their action in permitting Sunday concerts. One of the ministers told the magistrates that if Germany had observed the Sabbath better, she would not be "going through such a period of debasement." The magistrates were unrepentant. Indeed, Bailie Maclean said that if the ministers would do more to show the people how to live they would have plenty to do. Other magistrates informed the deputation that they represented a community not a section. This was a good and

deserved snub. So we again say: "Bravo, Inverness." And we hope the authorities elsewhere will follow suit.

The Archbishop of Canterbury thinks there is likely to be a shortage of parsons after the War unless a great number of young men now in the Army are ready to offer themselves for ordination. We should say a deal will depend upon the state of the labour market. If there are no openings elsewhere some may "offer themselves." If other openings present themselves, then we fancy the War will not lead to a great rush in the direction of the Church. There is one thing, however, of which we may be quite sure, whatever may be the shortage of parsons, there is not likely to be a queue formed waiting for their ministrations. So far as this commodity is concerned, the public will submit cheerfully to the most drastic rationing.

The *Church Times* is alarmed at Mr. Justice Atkins refusing to send to prison a soldier charged with killing his wife for infidelity. It fears that such a judgment may lead to the taking of human life being regarded less seriously than hitherto. But what can one expect? If millions of men spend four years on end killing each other, how is it possible for them to regard human life as of great value? We said when the War broke out that it meant a progressive brutalization of character, and we are now witnessing some of the consequences.

A Wesleyan minister in the Isle of Man has received three months' imprisonment for saying that many soldiers were "drunken, immoral, and profane scoundrels," and that "to talk of such men going straight to heaven because they had died for their country was sheer heathenism." We are no authority as to *who* will go to heaven, or what are the conditions of entry, and we cannot see why the question of militarism cannot be discussed without painting an Army as worse than the rest of the population. We should be surprised to find that our Army is either much better or much worse than the rest of the people from whom the Army is made up. As it is, we have one class painting soldiers as all saints, and another class depicting them as all sinners. A little common sense would dispense with both extremes.

The *Star* notes that a further distribution of the profits on the late Canon Fleming's sermon, *Recognition in Futurity*, has just been made by Queen Alexandra. The *Star* also reminds its readers that this sermon, although preached by Canon Fleming, really belonged to Talmage. What Fleming did was merely to alter the names of places. An impudent trick, but it went down.

The *Sketch* will be getting into trouble. In a recent issue it printed a picture of a "Calvary" showing the figure of Christ broken into pieces by a shell. It ought to have shown everything else broken and the figure untouched. The *Daily Mail* knows how to "arrange" these things better.

"Will the Archbishop act?" asked a religious periodical at the height of the hubbub over Bishop Henson's appointment to Hereford. An unkind critic might have retorted that His Grace had never done anything else.

The Bishop of London seems anxious to impress people with the idea that the clergy are taking their proper share of work in the national crisis. Speaking at Covent Garden, he said that, he had "combed-out" forty parsons to go to the Front. He did not explain that they were going as non-combatants, and that they would receive officers' pay.

A would-be humourist in a Sunday paper declares that he knew a man whose idea of heaven was to sit in a hot bath reading Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. The funny thing about this remark is that many pious folk believe honestly that persons who read "Kant" will have a hot time—in the next world.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

February 17, Leicester; March 3, Sheffield; March 17, Southampton; March 24, Manchester; May 5, Abertillery.

To Correspondents.

- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—February 24, Manchester; March 17, Abertillery; March 24, Leicester; April 28, Nuneaton.
- "FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—E. B. Side, 5s.; H. W. Side, 5s.; J. D. Maysmoor (Sierra Leone), 14s. 6d.; East African Soldier (per E. Murson), £1.
- J. C. HARDING.—Thanks for address, which is now included in list.
- J. BARTRAM.—Sorry no hall can be obtained at present for meetings in Newcastle. Hope things will soon improve.
- J. LIGHT.—You will see what you require in this issue.
- S. THOMPSON.—We suppose that alcohol is the "gift of God" if he created everything. There is nothing wrong with the argument from a religious point of view. Its only fault is that, like nearly all religious arguments, it is supremely silly.
- P. TE. STARMER.—Pleased you found our "splendidly selected parcel of literature" so interesting and useful. We have no doubt its distribution will do good.
- E. STARLING.—Paper is being sent. Have not seen the book you name.
- P. MAIR.—Will send on specimen copies.
- A. C. APTE.—Shall appear. We quite appreciate your story of the clergyman who, after acting as recruiting agent, moved "heaven and earth" to get exemption for his own son when he was called up for service.
- M. BIRKENHEAD.—Unless material is used in the sense of "existence" the answer you quote is absurd.
- C. F. BENNION.—The publishing offices of the New York *Truthseeker* is 62 Vesey Street, New York, U.S.A.
- G. WEBB.—We quite agree that it would be well for people to discuss the Population Question without dragging in so many side issues. But our experience is that very few people are able to discuss any question and keep to the essential issues. We may act upon your suggestion when a suitable occasion presents.
- A. F. THORN.—Received. As early as possible.
- "ICONOCLAST."—Thanks for verses, but regret they are not up to our standard.
- W. SMALBRIDGE.—Cathedral towns usually are sleepy places, and one may trust the clergy to keep them so. Thanks for cuttings.
- W. GREGORY.—Paper is being sent.
- H. L. LAWS.—Sorry, but as you will have seen, the discussion is closed.
- MRS. BRIDGES ADAMS.—Will see if it is possible to do anything in the direction you indicate.
- M. L.—Quite correct; but Darwin and Wallace stated that the idea of Natural Selection came to them from reading Malthus on Population.
- A. JOHNSON.—We are pleased to learn that Mr. Clifford Williams had a successful meeting at Nuneaton on Sunday last; also that a debate is likely to be arranged as an outcome of the discussion.
- "FREETHINKER" (Glasgow).—Next week.
- 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.*
- 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.*
- Letters for the Editor of the "Freethinker" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.*
- Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.*
- 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.

To-day (February 17) Mr. Cohen lectures in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. The lecture commences at 6.30, and the subject, "The Savage in Our Midst," should bring a good attendance.

Mr. T. F. Palmer lectures this afternoon (Feb. 17) at the West Central Hall, Store Street, Tottenham Court Road. The lectures commence at 3.15, and those of our London readers who are already familiar with Mr. Palmer's writings will no doubt avail themselves of this opportunity of making his acquaintance as a lecturer. In the evening, Mr. Palmer is holding a debate with Mr. P. Muir, a Christian Evidence lecturer, at the St. Pancras Reform Club, Kentish Town Road. The debate commences at 7.30.

Mr. R. H. Rosetti, who has returned to the fighting zone, writes:—

Freethinkers in general, and the *Freethinker* in particular, have striven against the tyranny of religion in the Army with much success. On enlisting now, the *Freethinker's* chief difficulty is enlightening Army officials, and acquainting them with the new procedure in relation to the "What religion?" question.

Freethinkers will also, I believe, be pleased to hear of a further success. In my own company, church parades were occasionally ordered, but at the foot of the announcement was a note stating that the parades were voluntary. I cannot say if it is the same in other companies or battalions; but the point is, that voluntary church parades are in operation in one company at least, and that is a beginning; and I think much of the credit for it is due to the *Freethinker* and its energetic editor, who has lost no opportunity of bringing to the notice of the military authorities the tyranny and impudence of the old method.

Thus, just as the late Charles Bradlaugh, by continually pegging away, eventually defeated the legal necessity of Freethinkers becoming hypocrites in courts of justice, and the late G. W. Foote by the same process checked the mean but Christian policy of robbing Freethought Societies, so in the same manner has the present President of the N. S. S. and editor of the *Freethinker* led the way in winning another right for Freethinkers—the right of openly professing non-religious opinion, and the acceptance, without question, by officials in a hitherto compulsory religious branch of national service, and the beginning of voluntary attendance at church parades.

Thus the evidence for the strengthening of religion during the War accumulates. If Christians are satisfied with that kind of evidence, we certainly are.

Therefore I hope every Freethinker will keep on pegging away to relieve injustices to Freethinkers wherever they exist, in the full knowledge that they are, by so doing, helping to win the fight against the enemy to human progress; for Christianity can never be strong where Freethought has equal rights.

Mr. A. D. Howell Smith pays his first visit to Birmingham to-day (February 17). His address will be on "The Influence of the Church on Marriage and Divorce," and we hope Birmingham friends will see that the Repertory Theatre is well filled.

While we are on the point, we should like to draw the special attention of local friends to these meetings. The meetings at the Repertory Theatre are successful and impressive, but the local Society is in need of better financial support. There must be many Freethinkers round and about Birmingham who can help in this direction, and probably they have not done, because they are not aware of the need. We can assure them the work is worthy of their help.

Mr. John Breese writes:—

One man's bit. I am taking six copies of the *Freethinker* weekly. My newsvendor is going to display them prominently on the counter. All not sold, I purchase, and shall distribute to likely converts. I am telling you this because I am

seriously out for helping you to realize that splendid object—1,000 increased weekly sales of the *Freethinker*. Surely there are a thousand purchasers who would take *one* copy more each week, say, for six months, and give that extra copy away, or do a little propaganda work by leaving it on tram-seat or in the train. There is not the least doubt in my mind about you moving that additional thousand copies. Anyway, I am going to have a cut at it.

Nothing gives us so much encouragement as the knowledge—which comes to hand by almost every post—of the warm support given, and which continues to be given, by our readers.

We are asked to state that lectures are held every Sunday in Jail Square, Glasgow, by the Herald League, at which the *Freethinker* and other heretical literature is offered for sale.

We were very pleased to see the following in the *North Mail*:—

The Newcastle No. 3 Branch of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners has passed the following resolution:—

That we strongly protest against any further combing-out of the working classes for the Army whilst the clergy and ministers of various sects remain exempt as a privileged class, seeing that many vigorous, eligible ministers have no objection to the War, whilst physically unfit conscientious objectors have died in prison, despite the Exemption Act.

We therefore urge the Government to take immediate steps to revoke this glaring injustice, as we refuse to continue to quietly submit to having our sons and brothers made the scapegoats of any privileged class, whose services are of no national importance.

Copies of the resolution are to be sent to the Premier and Sir Auckland Geddes, and members of Parliament.

The Southampton Branch of the N. S. S. is holding a meeting this evening (Feb. 17) in the Waverley Hall, St. Mary's Road. Mr. Rayner is the speaker, and his subject is "The Life and Work of Charles Darwin." We hope that all local Freethinkers will make a special effort to be present.

It will not be very long before a new Education Bill will be before Parliament; and although Mr. Fisher shows every desire to avoid discussing the religious question, it is improbable that he will be able to do this. The question is almost certain to be raised in some form or other. We again, therefore, ask Freethinkers all over the country to get busy. Those who belong to Trade Unions should seek to get a resolution passed asking for a policy of Secular Education in State schools. Those who belong to organizations other than Trade Unions should act in the same way. It is not at all difficult to get such a resolution passed, since the justice of our case is obvious; it is becoming plainer than ever that Secular Education is the only way to end the "religious difficulty." We have urged this advice several times, and have been pleased to note that it has been acted on in several cases. We have reported some of these instances; but we should like to see the policy followed more generally. The more resolutions received by the Minister for Education, the better. Therefore, we repeat, let Freethinkers all over the country get busy.

Another subject on which Freethinkers might bestir themselves is that of compulsory church attendance in the Army. We deal elsewhere in this issue with this topic; and we should like to see constituents writing their parliamentary representatives on behalf of this act of justice to the soldiers. If this does nothing else, it will ventilate a real grievance. And, perhaps, when our legislators realize that Freethinkers are not an altogether negligible quantity, their legitimate claims will receive more serious attention.

The simple diminution of the freedom of the press is enough to diminish the stature of a people.—*Victor Hugo*.

Writers and Readers.

THE greater part of the prose writings of Coleridge are not what would be described as easy reading. At their worst, they are grey, dull, devitalized stuff—the outcome of a brain befogged with opium and the more moonshiny variety of German metaphysics. *Aids to Reflection* used to be, and I am told is even now, the favourite reading of the more thoughtful Unitarians. It is no doubt largely responsible for the absence of colour and vibration from Theistic thought. A sort of philosophical wet blanket, it is a hindrance rather than a help to mental movement. *The Friend* and the other political and moral dissertations are equally without form and void. Even the *Biographia Literaria* is vital only in parts; the mere materials, often excellent in themselves, out of which a fine book might have been made. Coleridge was a sympathetic, and at times an acute and subtle, critic of literature; but, like many men of genius, he was too easy-going a critic of his own works—he could never bring himself to reject the irrelevant. He was so much in love with his own amazing faculty of discursive expression that he never troubled to think of his readers. All really effective writing is a sort of collaboration between the writer and the reader, who are both willing to make sympathetic adjustments. Coleridge was not the garrulous lunatic of Peacock's silly caricature—he is labelled as Dr. Flosky in *Nightmare Abbey*—but certainly for those who had not come under the spell of his magical eloquence, that is; for most of his readers, he has never had the attraction of a sequacious thinker.

In conversation, too—or, to speak more correctly, in monologue, for Coleridge would talk for hours at a time—he was often content to throw away the riches of his reflective wisdom. He tells us somewhere that he was once at dinner in company with an intelligent-looking man, who listened and said nothing for a long while; Coleridge, no doubt, expatiating with melodious eloquence on some favourite topic—the idealism of Berkeley, or Kant's wire-drawn distinction between the reason and the understanding. The gentleman nodded his head in polite and apparently intelligent agreement. At the end of the dinner, when a streaming dish of apple dumplings was brought in, he broke silence with—"Them's the jockies for me!" I am half inclined to think that the silent gentleman was pulling Coleridge's leg, our metaphysician being too self-conscious to see the joke. Still, there is no question but that Coleridge was in the habit of scattering his seminal ideas with no regard to the nature of the ground. Some of his friends benefited by his undeveloped sense of personal property in ideas, and it would not be difficult to find traces of them in Wordsworth, Lamb, and Hazlitt. They, no doubt, felt they were justified in helping themselves from so rich a store. Emerson, it may be remembered, did the same with his friend Alcot. But Alcot, although a generous talker, was not silly. One fine morning he paid an early visit to Emerson's kitchen-garden, and helped himself to a wheelbarrow of vegetables. We are told that Emerson could not see that Alcot had as much right to his vegetables than he had to his friend's original ideas. It is an instructive comment on transcendental logic.

It is not my intention here to discuss the merits of Coleridge as a thinker in politics, religion, or æsthetics; the curious reader will find all he wants in Pater's essay, reprinted in a handy form in *English Critical Essays* (The World's Classics), and in Mr. J. M. Robertson's illuminating study (*New Essays Towards a Critical Method*).

What I want to do is to recommend anyone who knows little of Coleridge to make his acquaintance through the *Table Talk* which the Oxford University Press has just published at half-a-crown. There you get the best of Coleridge in a form easy to digest. Nothing short of a phonograph could have reproduced exactly the continuous stream of vocal sound, and one might be thankful, perhaps, that the talking-machine was not thought of a hundred years ago. His sympathetic and intelligent admirers reported the more striking passages, which are not usually epigrammatic, Coleridge having but little taste for the condensed phrase that puts a criticism with dogmatic and vigorous clearness. Yet there are quotable passages that seem to contradict this view. For instance:—

In Æschylus religion appears terrible, malignant, and persecuting: Sophocles is the mildest of the three tragedians, but the persecuting aspect is still maintained: Euripides is like a modern Frenchman, never so happy as when giving a slap at the gods altogether.

The poor-rates are the consideration paid by, or on behalf of, capitalists for having labour at demand. It is the price and nothing else.

You may depend upon it, the more oath-taking, the more lying, generally among people.

Party men always hate a slightly differing friend more than a downright enemy. I quite calculate on my being one day or other holden in worse repute by many Christians than the Unitarians and open infidels. It must be undergone by everyone who loves truth for its own sake beyond all other things.

The morality of Rabelais' work is of the most refined and exalted kind; as for the manners, to be sure, I cannot say as much. Swift was *anima Rabelaisii habitans in sicco*—the soul of Rabelais dwelling in a dry place. Yet Swift was rare. Can anything beat his remark on King William's motto,—*Recipit, non rapuit*,—"that the receiver was as bad as the thief?"

A rogue is a roundabout fool; a fool *in circumbendibus*.

There are not many of these "short, sharp things" in Coleridge; the sort of thing which Johnson was celebrated for, and which are much easier to report than continuous discourse. It was not the style of talk that best expressed the wide-ranging genius of Coleridge, who tells us with amusing simplicity that all men of genius who love to talk at all are very discursive and continuous. Yet it would have been impossible for Dr. Johnson to say a shorter and sharper thing than this on Burke:—"Until he could associate his general principles (of history) with some sordid interest, panic of property, Jacobinism, etc., *he was a mere dinner bell.*" The remark above about Swift is witty enough, although at bottom it is only a little less inapposite than Pope's line about laughing and shaking in Rabelais' easy chair. Now, is it difficult to think of Swift as even smiling sardonically at the gross stupidity, the banality average human nature. To paraphrase his latest apologist, Mr. Whibley: A fierce hatred of injustice and oppression is the master passion of Swift. He has no illusions, and would tear away the illusions which mask the faces of men. We marvel at the genius of Swift; we do not laugh at it. The reader who is critical enough not to be impressed or oppressed by the mere *obiter dicta* of a great man is sure to come across many passages with which he will not agree, but they will, or should, help to clarify his ideas. He will note how far astray is Coleridge in his judgment of Gibbon. The historian's style is pronounced detestable, which is, perhaps, no more than we might expect of the recoil from the periodic prose-style of the eighteenth century. But the style is not the worst thing. Gibbon has no ideas, no philosophy; he is ignorant of the true cause of the decline and fall of the

Roman Empire. Coleridge, like Mr. Belloc, in our time, knew all about it, no doubt, by a sort of historical intuition. The one historian of the eighteenth whom modern research has not set aside nor threatened to set aside; the writer of the broadest sociological survey ever attempted is ignorant of the philosophy of his subject. The truth is that both Mr. Belloc and Coleridge have ignored the immense value of Gibbon through sheer antipathy to the Voltairean scepticism of two chapters out of a total of seventy-one. And yet Newman had splendid praise for the historian's great portrait of Athanasius; and Freeman, who knew the ground well, could bring himself to speak of Gibbon's work as the encyclopædic history of 1,300 years; the grandest of historical designs carried out with wonderful power and wonderful accuracy. "Whatever is read," he avers, "Gibbon must be read too."

These are precisely the kind of misjudgments every one is liable to make through hastiness, or want of care or prejudice. If Coleridge was sometimes wrong, he was often enough right. He was ever loyal to what he thought to be truth. He set his face against the soulless industrialism of the period, he pointed out the evil of accumulated capital, he advocated a progressive tax on income, he noted the scandalously unjust treatment of Ireland. In philosophy he was one of the first to do justice to Spinoza, professing to find a Pantheistic Atheism more agreeable to an imaginative mind than Theism. Certainly his religious course was not edifying from the Freethinking point of view, going as he did from heterodoxy to Socinianism, and thence to the support of Church and State, founding, it is said, the Broad Church school—the school of Trimmers. But, on the whole, his support of Christianity was of doubtful value, and he has been discarded. It is small wonder; for even Christianity has not been able to resist the relative spirit against which Coleridge had always set his face. He was really a mediæval doctor of theology out of his element. In him, however, there was something which the pragmatic Christian could not understand, a transcendental disinterestedness which, to use his own phrase, loves truth with indescribable awe, and those of us who know the whole of his work are ready to believe him when he tells us, in his own beautiful way, "that he would creep towards the light, even if the light had made its way through a rent in the wall of the temple."

GEO. UNDERWOOD.

The Orb of Day.

V.

(Continued from p. 91.)

SURROUNDING the sun like a beautiful halo is the elusive corona. All attempts to view this pearly light have failed, save at such moments when the sun is eclipsed. The corona varies considerably in outline. Occasionally, it is comparatively uniform in appearance, and seems like a circle of light encompassing the sun. At other times the corona appears to project into space to a distance of double the solar diameter. So seldom do favourable opportunities present themselves to the observer, owing to the infrequency and transientness of eclipses, that any particular solar investigator would, in the course of thirty years, if all eclipses were visible and he were able to view them, even then, only about forty-five minutes would be available for successful study. These serious drawbacks are largely responsible for the fact that little concerning the corona has been definitely

determined. Moreover, the solar corona is a quite modern discovery, and until fairly recently it was not positively proved to form part of the sun. During the past generation improved methods of study have been adopted. In addition to telescopic study, photography has been utilized, and the spectroscope has been pressed into service for the purpose of ascertaining the materials of which this radiant solar crown is composed.

When the solar surface is much agitated by sun-spots, the coronal light is at its best. An astronomical expedition to California to study the corona in January, 1889, was marred by two difficulties. Instead of the average few minutes of complete obscuration, the total eclipse lasted a single minute only. Again, the eclipse took place at a period of minimum sun-spot activity; and as the several envelopes which environ the sun seem to become disturbed in sympathy with the periodic evolution of sun-spots, this proved a further disadvantage. When the corona departs from its circular form, and sends forth its streams of light with most marked magnificence, there usually occurs a splendid display of solar prominences. There also exists a cycle of changes in the form of the corona, which possesses a period of about eleven years, and this cycle is regarded as identical with that of sun-spot frequency.

Astronomers have surmised that some connection may be traced between the corona and the zodiacal light. This exceedingly delicate glow is most noticeable in the tropics, but may be seen in England, in the evening, after a mild spring sunset, in our Western counties. This light is also visible just before sunrise in the fall of the year. In full sunlight this hazy light is extinguished by the powerful solar beams; but as our luminary dips beyond the horizon, and the afterglow gladdens the sky, despite its faintness, the zodiacal light serves to prolong the radiance of the dying day. In the morning, its appearance in the eastern heavens heralds the sun's awakening; for, in company with the dawn, this pearly glow ascends above the oriental sky. The faint zodiacal light is, perhaps, an attenuated extension of the solar corona, and in that case forms part of the sun. This nebulous haze rises to a height some sixty times that of the solar diameter, and if really part of the sun's atmosphere, then the encircling substances of our luminary must occupy a stupendous region of space.

There is a steadily accumulating array of evidence which indicates that epochs of intense solar activity coincide with periods of magnetic disturbance on the earth. Experts differ widely in opinion concerning the correct interpretation of these coincidences, but the facts appear to speak for themselves. The earth is a huge magnet, and perhaps this is true on a much vaster scale with regard to the sun. There appears little doubt that the phenomena of terrestrial magnetism are in some way related to the electric currents which circulate round our globe, and these currents are apparently connected with the movements of the solar orb. It is well known that when the sun is in a highly disturbed state, as shown by a great abundance of sun-spots, that then the earth is subject to magnetic storms and auroral displays. Maunder recorded one outstanding magnetic disturbance registered by the instruments at Greenwich, which seemed to accompany the appearance of a great sun-spot in 1892. And that authority goes on to state that:—

In a period of nearly nineteen years, therefore, we have three magnetic storms which stand out pre-eminently above all others during that interval. In that same period we have three great sun spot displays—counting the two groups of 1882 together—which stand out with equal distinctness far above all similar displays. And we find that the three magnetic storms were simultaneous with the greatest development of the spots.

Among other evidences, there is the testimony of Ricco, another celebrated solar observer. Ricco compared his own results with those obtained at the United States Naval Observatory. He demonstrated that in 1892 eleven large spots were visible on the solar disc. And in seven out of the eleven instances noted, there occurred magnetic disturbances on our planet. Forty-five hours after the giant spot of February 12 had crossed the central meridian, a magnetic storm of "extraordinary vehemence was manifested." When, with the rotation of the sun, the spot reappeared on March 10, a powerful magnetic storm was recorded by the photo-magnetographs, forty-five hours once more intervening. It is most significant that, as a rule, the bigger the spot, the more intense the magnetic disturbance.

Kelvin adversely criticized the theory that the sun's influences as a variable magnet were sufficient to develop magnetic storms on a planet 93,000,000 miles distant. In any case, there is ample evidence that terrestrial magnetic storms tend to succeed solar outbreaks. Possibly the numerous coincidences recorded will find their complete solution in other relations than those of cause and consequence. It may be that they constitute the outcome "of some other influence of electro-magnetic waves on a vast scale sweeping through our system, and influencing the magnetic phenomena in the various bodies of which our system is composed."

A very interesting problem of solar physics is that which relates to the chemical composition of the photosphere—the luminous envelope of the sun. Our light and heat arrive to us from our luminary's wonderful stratum of glowing cloud. The photosphere is comparatively shallow, apparently, when related to the magnitude of the solar diameter. Yet this layer of incandescent cloud is the chief radiator of our orb's effulgence and thermal power.

If our world were viewed from some outside area, it would appear encompassed by the clouds which float in the terrestrial atmosphere. These volumes of vapour arise from water. Now, is there some special element in the solar clouds also which confers upon them their predominant features? Dr. Johnstone Stoney strove to solve this problem in 1867, and the hypothesis he then propounded has never been seriously shaken since. The water which forms the earth's clouds is a chemical compound, but it is utterly unlikely that the photospheric substance could possibly remain in a condition of chemical combination at the enormously exalted temperature which obtains in the sun. Therefore, the material composing the photosphere must be reduced to an elementary state. Out of the eighty odd terrestrial elementary substances most, and probably all, are present in the sun, and the element coronium, so far as we know, is special to the solar globe. Helium was first discovered in the sun, but has recently been detected on our planet. It seems likely that our orb is mainly composed of elements quite common on our planet, and it is a fair inference that the material of the photosphere is a terrestrial substance also.

The solar envelope has been proved by spectrum analysis to be something different to a pure gas. Its spectrum is continuous, although the spectrum, as viewed from our earth, is traversed by an array of black lines. But it is quite certain that these lines are really present in the cooler vapours outside the photosphere, while some are caused by the vapours of the earth's atmosphere. Were it possible to eliminate these interposing and absorbing media, the spectrum of the photosphere would stand out as an unbroken ribbon of light. It is demonstrable that a strictly gaseous material,

however high its temperature may be, never displays a continuous spectrum. The spectroscope invariably reveals in a pure gas the presence of a number of vivid lines. On the other hand, the spectrum presented by a liquid or solid in a state of incandescence is usually of a different nature. It manifests an unbroken spectrum, and as the photosphere furnishes a continuous spectrum, it must contain either liquid or solid particles suspended in its clouds.

There are weighty reasons for concluding that the vapours of the photosphere are non-metallic. As a matter of fact, carbon or silicon, perhaps both, are the most likely constituents of the photosphere. Rowland's researches prove that about 200 lines of the sun's spectrum are those of carbon, while other lines point to the presence of silicon. But carbon is an element of lower atomic weight than silicon. That of the former is 12, and that of the latter 28. Carbon, therefore, will constantly tend to ascend into the solar atmosphere, while the higher it rises, the lower is the temperature it encounters, and this increases its proclivity to assume a solid or liquid state. Carbon, as we know it, is an element so refractory that it becomes extremely difficult to heat it to a condition of vapour. Their low atomic weights permit carbon vapours to soar upwards in the solar atmosphere where they become cooler, and, although still at a temperature too high to allow other vapours to form liquid particles, are yet at a temperature sufficiently low to liquefy or solidify a substance like carbon which ceaselessly tends to resume a solid form.

The part played by carbon on the earth lends substantial support to the theory that this element is the main source of solar emission. The illuminating powers of a candle are derived from particles of carbon. Carbon filaments were used in incandescent lamps, because this element retains the solid state at a temperature even above that at which platinum fuses. Carbon is the best known radiator, and it refuses to abandon its solid form at enormously exalted temperatures. Thus, it is enabled to utilize its vast radiating powers. For the foregoing, and for various other reasons, it appears a practical certainty that carbon performs a *role* of immeasurable importance in evolving the effulgence of the lord of day.

(To be concluded.) T. F. PALMER.

The Psychology of the Ranter.

THIRTY or forty years ago, before the Salvation Army had become the international (or even national) business affair into which it has now developed, the *nuclei* of it, as we may say, were distributed in scattered groups all over England. These groups—the very lowest intellectual types of Nonconformity—mostly called themselves Methodists, and to them excitement was synonymous with religion. They lashed themselves into moral furies whenever they had a public opportunity of doing so. To outsiders they were generally known as “Ranters.” They were the sort of enthusiasts who honestly believed that a brick thrown at Bradlaugh made the angels in heaven rejoice.

Those of us who have come into personal contact with Ranters, and have attended their meetings, realize that the shrewdness of the late General Booth lay in his appreciation of the ignorance, credulity, and craving for excitement, which are the leading characteristics of such people. His success lay in founding an organization which could meet their requirements. And, as has been demonstrated by the results which have followed in the wake of the Salvation Army drum, the Ranter is not peculiar to any particular country.

But the acquisition of wealth and the growth of knowledge are the two things that are most inimical to the multiplication of the Ranter. He is not by any means so numerous as he was in the days of Sankey and Moody, when irreverent boys were soundly thrashed and put to bed for parodying such a well-known classic as “Hold the Fort” :—

Hold the Fort for I am coming,
Sankey's on the sea:
Up to the neck in a rhubarb pudding—
That's the game for me!

The educated member of the fashionable City Church would not, we should suppose, descend to the vulgarity of such rhymed resolutions as are set forth in these lines with which we have in boyhood been almost deafened over and over again :—

My old companions, fare you well
I will not go with you to Hell:
I mean with Jesus Christ to dwell,
Fare you well: Fare you well!

One has difficulty in understanding upon what ground the Ranter should suppose anybody who was rapidly on the road to Hades could fare well; but the Ranter has never been famed for accuracy or precision in thought, or for punctiliousness of phrase. Still, let us do him justice. He was, in most cases—we have tested it by experience—honest.

It is really the educated member of the fashionable church that gets one's gorge up. For what in effect are the relative positions of him and the Ranter to one another? *Publicly*, the former, far from deprecating, commends and praises the religious enthusiasm of the latter—though he does not personally attend Ranting demonstrations. *Privately*, we know how the cynical grin overspreads his features when the subject of the enthusiastic Ranter is brought up. So let us have the Ranter, if *you* please, in preference to the gilded hypocrite of the big city church! The latter and his kind have social and business interests to be served by the Ranter. Let the Ranter have plenty of religion, they say; but he is, all the time, to be kept as far away as possible from those inimical influences—wealth and knowledge—which would at once dissipate some of the fiery fervour of the Ranter, and incidentally take away some of the fat of the fashionable hypocrites.

The Ranter must have plenty of curry and ginger with his religion. A faith that cannot make you wrestle and sweat is not worth a farthing. Salvation that does not make you shout and jump is no salvation at all. The pugilist who had newly been received into the Salvation Army, giving his “testimony,” cried: “I'm that glad I'm saved, that I could knock hell out of the big drum.” The reality of hell is what makes religion precious to the Ranter. He has no doubt about a personal Devil. Like Sir Walter Scott's covenanting leader, he has nocturnal contests with him. The Ranter is out-and-out; he is no compromiser; he knows the clean-cut line of demarcation between the divine and the devilish. He is a man who has to undergo considerable physical exertion—apart from his religious exercises—and he is therefore usually a powerful trencherman, and not markedly appreciative of the rules of the Food Controller; but he can tell you definitely that beer, tobacco, playing cards, theatres, novels, and last, but not least, the brimstone-smelling productions of infidels—which he would not touch with the tongs—are all clearly and undoubtedly the temptations of the Devil.

The Ranter may be dying out. But we contemplate his passing with mixed feelings. For he was honest.

IGNOTUS.

The Blank Wall.

VIII.

THE "Ultimate Goal" of humanity has yet to be created or discovered. It is more than probable that it would be as ineffectual as any other form of mental daring if it were. That the life of man has a predetermined direction; a knowable meaning, and an ultimate destiny, glorious or otherwise, does not interest the modern mind. It may be because of this indifference that we have to acknowledge the barrenness of popular thought. Barren, that is, when we take it into perspective with the fundamental problems of life which remain unsolved. And were modern thought prolific with discovery of the destiny and meaning of life, we may be certain that the complacent majority would keep on the other side of the road.

Is the obstinate conservatism—the shocking apathy of the normal mind, an indication upon a cosmic scale of the ultimate vacuity and stupidity of life? The thought is insistent, real, and very terrible. Happiness, joy, pain, disease, life and death, the thought of these things has tortured the consciousness of all intelligent people at some time or another. Yet these great universal facts seem to be, in a general way, no more vital and dynamic in normal human existence than the emotions experienced by a servant girl when she finds a bad egg or a broken water-tap.

Is one to believe that the commonplace daily incidents of our material existence are as important as the reality of death, birth, life, pain, joy, disease, and health? Must humanity for ever overestimate the little prosaic things, and relegate the important things to the narrow activity of "advanced thought"? Will the mystical Rationalist attitude to life ever draw the consciousness of man into some thrilling and magnificent dream, wherein the blinding fact of life shall dominate and direct all our inspired energies, and create a world of mental illumination? There would be no need for religion in such a world. Religion would lose all significance in a society which afforded no necessity for third-rate illusions. Religion exists because men are blind, and will cease to exist when men shall receive a light which religion is unable to give.

ARTHUR F. THORN.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF MONTHLY EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON FEB. 7.

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair. Also present: Messrs. Braddock, Brandes, Eagar, Gorniot, Leat, Neary, Palmer, Quinton, Roger, Samuels, and Wood; Miss Kough, Miss Stanley, Mrs. Rolf, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed.

Monthly cash statement presented and adopted.

New members, 35 in all, were admitted for Goldthorpe, Liverpool, Manchester, Nuneaton, South Shields, Southampton, Swansea, and the Parent Society.

The President and Secretary reported increasing interest in the propaganda at Nuneaton, and that arrangements had been made for lectures to be delivered in the town by Messrs. Lloyd, Palmer, and Willis; and also that the success of the afternoon meetings at the West Central Hall justified their continuance during February.

The continuance of the demand for the tract, *The Massacre of the Innocents* ("God and the Air-Raid"), was also reported, and it was resolved that it be reprinted with other of the Society's stock tracts.

Ordinary routine business was dealt with, and the meeting adjourned.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary.*

The latest device for inspiring devotion amongst Catholics is a luminous crucifix, which shines in the dark, and, in the touching words of the advertisement, "speaks to the heart by night as by day." The thing should be popular among light-headed Christians.

The Grocers and Allied Trades have contributed £41,015 to the Young Men's Christian Association. Is this to further the cause of Christianity or to promote the sale of groceries?

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, "That Materialism is an Insufficient Rendering of the Universe." Affirmative, Mr. Percy H. Muir. Negative, Mr. T. F. Palmer.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, near Kennington Oval Tube Station): 7, Annual Meeting.

WEST CENTRAL HALL (31 Alfred Place, Store Street, Tottenham Court Road, W.): 3.15, Mr. T. F. Palmer, "The Antiquity of Man."

OUTDOOR.

HYDE PARK. 11.30, Mr. Saphin; 3.15, Messrs. Dales, Shaller, Swasey, and Kells.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Repertory Theatre, Station Street): 7, Mr. A. D. Howell Smith, B.A., "The Influence of the Church on Marriage and Divorce."

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (Good Templars Hall, 120 Ingram Street): 12 noon, Important Business.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. Chapman Cohen, "The Savage in Our Midst."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Baker's Hall, 56 Swan Street): 6.30, General Discussion for Development of Branch Work. Attendance of Members earnestly requested.

SOUTHAMPTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Waverley Hall, St. Mary's Road): Mr. Rayner, "The Life and Work of Charles Darwin."

South Place Ethical Society, SOUTH PLACE, MOORGATE STREET, E.C.

Sunday Morning Services.

February 17, at 11 o'clock—

Right Hon. JOHN M. ROBERTSON, M.P.
"The Future of Rationalism."

February 24, at 11 o'clock—

JOHN A. HOBSON, M.A.
"Democracy and the Press."

PROPAGANDIST LEAFLETS. New Issue. 1.

Christianity a Stupendous Failure, J. T. Lloyd; 2. *Bible and Teetotalism*, J. M. Wheeler; 3. *Principles of Secularism*, C. Watts; 4. *Where Are Your Hospitals?* R. Ingersoll; 5. *Because the Bible Tells Me So*, W. P. Ball; 6. *Why Be Good?* G. W. Foote. *The Parson's Creed*. Often the means of arresting attention and making new members. Price 9d. per hundred, post free 1s. Samples on receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—N. S. S. SECRETARY, 62 Farringdon Street, E.C. 4.

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