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Views and Opinions.

The New Education Bill.

The new Education Bill of Mr. Fisher has not yet been brought before the House of Commons. Education can always wait, although in this case the plea of military necessity has some justification. Still, with a Government in which a Minister classifies books as "luxuries," and which sees in an educational scheme little more than a possibility of turning out more efficient human adjuncts by way of creating more trade, one cannot expect the task of education to be undertaken with a due sense of the importance of the question. In this, at least, the Government may be said to reflect the nation. The bulk of the English people never have taken education as they ought to have taken it. After lagging far behind many continental countries, a few ardent reformers, in 1870, forced a general Education Act on the country. It was agreed to by the people, mainly on account of the docility of the general public—a docility which in this case made for good. Since then, people have sent their children to school mainly because there was an Act of Parliament which said they should do so. But large numbers of the working classes have always regarded schooling as more or less of a nuisance, as is shown by their readiness to get their children away from school as soon as possible; and others have treated education as a sort of introduction to the "upper classes," to reach which the average Englishman will make any and every sacrifice.

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A Probable Policy.

The new Education Bill does not deal with the question of religion in the schools. But it would be folly to assume that it has been either overlooked or forgotten. Too great a vested interest is involved for that. The question has really been more or less under discussion all the time. The upholders of religion in the schools have been busy, and unless the friends of Secular Education are on their guard, they will find, almost before they are aware of it, that the clergy have scored another triumph. And this Government of tricks and traps will be equal to the occasion. It is clearly its intention to get its Education Bill without touching the religious question at all. And if it is not raised on the discussion of the Bill, it will be because an agreement to that effect has been reached behind the scenes. Conferences between the various religious denominations have been

going on all the time—some public, some private. It was because we were aware of this that we urged Freethinkers all over the country to get resolutions passed in favour of Secular Education, and to see that they were sent on to the Minister for Education. And when some kind of a bargain has been struck between the sects and the Government, and the Education Bill passed, we may expect to see a small Bill, dealing specifically with religion, rushed through the House of Commons and placed on the Statute Book. And that will mean the establishing of religion in the public schools on a firmer foundation than ever.

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A Warning to Freethinkers.

The danger of this is real. And to leave it to the existing House of Commons is quite useless. The present House of Commons will submit to anything; it will agree to anything. The Government can order it to do as it pleases, and it will obey—unless it receives a more imperative order from without. That is the vital thing to bear in mind. As the majority of members do not appear to have any convictions of their own, it is well that those who elect them should make them feel that *they* at least possess opinions, and are determined that those opinions shall receive attention. There are, there must be, some millions of Freethinkers in this country. There were seven millions in France at the last census, and we refuse to believe that Britain is so far behind her in mental development as not to have at least two-thirds of that number. And, beside avowed Freethinkers, there are large numbers of people who sufficiently recognize the justice of Secular Education as to support it. Let, then, the friends of Secular Education get everywhere to work. See that resolutions in its favour are passed wherever and whenever possible, and that these are sent to the proper quarters. See that members of constituencies are written to, let them know the opinions of at least some of their constituents; that strong opinions are held on the subject, and that voters will act on them when the time comes for recording votes. It is really time that Freethinkers aimed at making their existence felt as Freethinkers. If churches and chapels organize for a purely sectarian advantage, there is no reason whatever why Freethinkers should not also organize to secure an act of justice towards the whole of the nation.

* * *

Justice for the Child.

An Act of Justice! That is the strength of our position. We, at least, are not out for a sectarian advantage. We have no desire that children shall be taught in the public schools, at the public expense, our particular views on the nature of religion. That would be to take the same advantage of the child that the religionist takes, but in the other direction. We aim at justice for the adult, and freedom for the child. It is little short of an outrage that generation after generation the childhood of the nation should be exploited in the interest of a selfish sectarianism. Not even the parent is justified in forcing upon the child as absolutely true, religious doc-

trines which he knows are probably false, and which are, at any rate, questioned by the leading thinkers of the civilized world. The political injustice of compelling all sections of the community to pay for the religion of a selected few is manifest—so manifest that on that ground no one defends it. But the moral injustice is greater still. We want the child to grow up mentally fitted to select any religion it pleases, or able to intelligently reject them all should it feel so inclined. Childhood has one clear demand from the adult—the right of protection. And the adult fails conspicuously in that when he does not protect the growing mind of the child from the machinations of an interested priesthood.

* * * *

The Flowing Tide.

The secularization of life is one of the chief signs of advancing civilization. All over the world we see the growing separation of the life of religion from the life of the State, and, in some instances, as in France, the process is complete. The life of the State is common to all, that of religion is an idiosyncrasy of the individual. Even where the Church is still part of the State, sheer force of circumstances prevents the State forcing a particular religion on the individual. And in ceasing to force religion on the adult individual, the State, surely, surrenders all right to force it on the child. The only reason why the child is forced to have religion is the reason why a man beats a child—it is not big enough or strong enough to hit back. It is the child's weakness, its ignorance, its trustfulness, that is being exploited, and through that there goes on the exploiting of civilization. Freethinkers know this to be the case, they should see to it that others recognize it as well. In this matter a more militant policy is needed, and we, for one, hope that it will be pursued.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Defeat of the Cross.

IN the *Times* there now appear weekly articles on the Christian religion which, though ably written, are characterized by tantalizing vagueness. What the real theological position of the writer is no one can tell. The title of one of the latest is highly significant, namely, "Preaching the Gospel: the New Evangelism"; but it is impossible to discover from it what the Gospel or the New Evangelism stands for. The opening sentence is of a perplexingly ambiguous nature: "At the heart of Christianity there is unchanging truth"; but as to what that truth is the article does not furnish us with the faintest glimmer of an idea. We are assured that "it is truth which matches the needs of all men," and that "every one may understand it and respond to it"; but such an assurance conveys no enlightenment whatever. We do not even know what the heart of Christianity is, much less, what truth, if any, is deposited therein; and to assert that an unspecified, undefined, truth "matches the needs of all men" is to be blindly dogmatic. The next sentence is a veritable glorification of vagueness: "But Christianity is not merely truth; it is also life." Christianity is here stated to be what in the former statement it was said to contain. As a matter of fact Christianity, as described in the New Testament, is neither truth nor life, but a system, device, or power whose supreme object is to remove guilty but believing sinners from under the wrath of God. We are now confronted by the most astounding claim conceivable:—

The Gospel is the proclamation of this Truth and the gift of this new Life. It thus transfigures those who accept it, conferring on men powers by which sooner or later they recreate the world in which they live.

The distinguishing mark of that extract is its untruth. St. Paul defines the Gospel as the power of God unto the salvation of those who believe and put their truth in it; but the *Times* reduces it to a mere proclamation. And yet it is alleged that those who accept it as such are transfigured, becoming new men and women under its moulding influence, charged with "powers by which sooner or later they recreate the world in which they live." Those who are fairly well versed in the history of Christendom, if not dominated by prejudice, know how absolutely false that allegation is, the truth and the life which Christianity is declared to be having produced, on the one hand cruel tyranny, and, on the other, abject slavery. Popes and emperors were invariably jealous of one another, and for ages each fought with all his might to gain ascendancy over the other, while the subjects of both were trodden under foot. The amazing fact is, however, that after making such great claims for the Gospel, the writer of the *Times* article, in the second decade of the twentieth century of Christianity, is obliged to make the following humiliating confession:—

Organized Christianity is under a cloud; the Church does not attract the great mass of the people, who, failing to gain from it what they need, have either abandoned all spiritual effort, or have turned for the inspiration of great ideals and the challenge of strenuous service to trade unions and friendly societies, the labour and women movements, or religious cults such as Theosophy and Christian Science. The Gospel is not attracting men and women to-day.

Now, had Christianity, particularly in the Ages of Faith, transfigured its professors, conferring upon them powers by which they could recreate the world, such a passage as the one just cited could not have been written to-day. We would have been living in a transformed, regenerated world in which such a calamity as the present War would have been an impossibility. The mass of the people are now alienated from the Church simply because it has at last dawned upon them that its Gospel is a sham, and that its claims for itself have been completely falsified. The writer of the article is wholly mistaken when he affirms that "the great mass of the English people are Christians in feeling, sentiment, and desire," and that "nothing is farther from their thought than to reject Christianity." Has he never heard of the propagandist activities of the Ethical Societies, the Rationalist Press Association, and the National Secular Society with its numerous Branches? Has he not learned that modern science is non-Christian, and in some instances anti-Christian? Does he not know that in all sections of society, specially among the workers, unbelievers in their tens of thousands are to be found? He is evidently under the delusion that churches and chapels are being deserted solely because the clergy have lost the art of preaching. As to the mass of the English people, we are informed:—

Nothing is farther from their thought than to reject Christianity. Too often, however, it is presented to them in a jargon they do not understand. The forms of worship to which they are invited offer them rites and ceremonies which are meaningless to their minds. The sermons they hear take for granted views about which they have grave doubts, and the preachers, if they do not discuss topics of minor importance, use arguments which bring no conviction. The official representatives of the Church seem to live in another world than that of the average man's experience. Consequently, many are "Gospel hardened," while others are puzzled if not chagrined by a presentation of a religion from which they know they can derive no benefit.

In that extract there is considerable truth, but its main contention is contradicted by the facts. It is incontestable that the majority of the clergy do their

work as well as it can be done. No remissness of any kind can be laid to their charge. In intellectual calibre and loyalty to duty they compare favourably with those of any past age. Their non-success is due to no professional fault of theirs, but to the fact that the Gospel which it is their business to preach has lost its hold upon the minds of the people, because its central message no longer appeals to them as true. It is true that "men do not ask for a new Gospel," but that is no proof whatever that they would welcome the old Gospel if only it could be differently presented to them, the truth being that they desire no version whatever of a supernatural Gospel. Such a Gospel cannot be expressed "in terms level to their experience and needs," because experience and observation combined have convinced them that supernaturalism in all its forms is powerless to deliver the world from the evils which darken and befoul its life.

What is needed to-day, therefore, is not a new statement of the old Gospel, or a reconstruction of the theology of the Cross, but a vivid realization of the truth that the Church's teaching as to the power and glory of the alleged supernatural factors in human life is but the baseless fabric of a dream. With the honest historian's eye upon us, we are driven to the conclusion that in conflict with the world's forces the Cross has been totally defeated. Dr. Fort Newton recently preached an eloquent sermon on "The Victory of the Cross"; but on his own showing, a more appropriate title for his discourse would have been "The Defeat of the Cross," as we hope to prove in a future contribution.

J. T. LLOYD.

Browning as a Religious Teacher.

Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher.
By Professor Henry Jones. (Nelson.) 1s. 6d.

ROBERT BROWNING will live as a poet, but his attitude as a philosophical thinker was unimpressive. In fact, his intellectual position was simply that of acquiescence with current theology and codified morality. His situation in regard to the thought of his age was paradoxical, if not inconsistent. His admirers counted him as a second Shakespeare, but he sentimentalized where Shakespeare thought; he stammered where Shakespeare sang. Browning was less in touch with the intellectual movements of his own time than Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, or George Meredith. He was content, in his own peculiar fashion, to fight during an exceptionally long life in the ranks of religious conservatism.

Browning was obsessed with theology, and wrote much on theological subjects. His early Nonconformist education, his serious cast of mind, the very character of his genius, all tended to make religious matters interesting to him. In *Saul*, *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*, in *The Ring and the Book*, and many other poems, he has attempted to depict the heart of the Christian superstition. Truly, he had a robust faith. He was as anthropomorphic as any half-lettered tradesman who sat at the feet of the Boanerges of the Newington Tabernacle, whose passport to remembrance is that he was the last of the notable preachers of the doctrine of eternal damnation. Browning was a poet, and Spurgeon was the prosiest of preachers, but they had too much in common. Here, for example, is Browning's poetical way of expressing his childlike belief:—

'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for! My flesh that I seek

In the Godhead! I seek, and I find it! O Saul, it shall be
A face like my face that receives thee; a man like to me
Thou shalt love, and be loved by, for ever; a hand like this
hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the
Christ stand!

Browning was quite certain about immortality. He apostrophises the dead Evelyn Hope:—

So hush! I will give you this leaf to keep;
See, I shut it inside the sweet, cold hand!
There, that is our secret; go to sleep!
You will wake, and remember, and understand.

With blithe, critical assurance Browning expresses the cheap, current ideas regarding Rationalism:—

What can I gain on the denying side?
Ice makes no conflagration.

Browning did not lack critical acumen, but, like Pascal and Newman, he chloroformed his intellect with the supernatural. As Joubert says, wittily, it is so easy to believe in "God" if one never troubles about definitions. In *Christmas Eve* the poet listens to the theological professor, who, after demolishing the divinity of Christ, tells his audience that the myth thus destroyed still leaves a man. The poet goes on to say, with a plainness which leaves no room for quibbling, that if Christ were not God he was nothing. He cannot even find him a place among the great ethical teachers. The same idea occurs in *A Death in the Desert*:—

If Christ, as thou affirmest, be of men
Mere man, the first and best, but nothing more—
Account him, for reward of what he was,
Now and forever, wretchedest of all.

Call Christ, then, the illimitable God, or lost!

So often called a profound thinker, Browning's conclusions, which harmonize too well with popular religious prejudice, are dangerously facile and commonplace. The wish is too frequently the father of the thought, and the grandfather of many dogmas. It is this which vitiates his claim to be considered a philosopher in verse. Truth may ring regnant in the lines of *Abt Vogler*:—

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
For the fulness of the days?

But, unfortunately, the conclusion is in itself illogical. Browning's optimism was as robust and as impertinent as that of Doctor Pangloss, so brilliantly satirized by the great Voltaire. To read Browning in sickness, or in great sorrow or physical suffering, in that dire resort to which men are pushed often, "with close-lipped Patience for their only friend," would be well-nigh impossible. There are moments when the statement, "God's in his heaven," seems very questionable to the staunchest believer. And there are frequent moments when "All's right with the world" is a gratuitous insult to common sense and ordinary eye-sight. Optimism is well; but, pushed too far, it becomes, not optimism, but sheer callousness and insensibility.

It is all of a piece, like the all-embracing faith of the complacent Bishop Blougram;—

I hear you recommend, I might at least
Eliminate, declassify my faith,
Since I adopt it, keeping what I must
And leaving what I can—such points as this;
I won't—that is, I can't—throw one away.
Supposing there's no truth in what I hold
About the need of trial to men's faith,
Still, when you bid me purify the same,
To such a process I discern no end,
Clearing off one excrescence to see two,
There's ever a next in size, now grown as big
That meets the knife: I cut and cut again!
First cut the Liquefaction, what comes last
But Fichte's clever cut at God himself?

Note the lame and impotent conclusion:—

Experimentalise on sacred things!
I trust not hand, nor eye, nor heart, nor brain,
To stop betimes; they all get drunk alike.
The first step I am master not to take.

Christian apologists never tire of speaking of Browning as a typical Christian poet. They are justified in

making the most of a man of real genius when they possess one. We do not quarrel with them for that. It is perfectly plain that if Browning were not a Christian, his language is elaborately adapted rather to conceal and misrepresent his mind than to express it. His was a religious temperament. About that, at least, any doubt is impossible to any reader of his poetry, and his letters to his wife show it almost on every page. He always writes as an apologist for the belief in God, in free will, and human immortality, the "three buttresses of superstition," as Haeckel has termed them, happily. In all Browning's voluminous writings there is only one utterance in which he really runs counter to the current views on the Christian superstition. In his powerful lines, "*Apparent Failure*," describing the tragedy of the old morgue at Paris, he almost forgot his orthodoxy. For a few fleeting minutes he realized that there were more things in heaven and earth than he had dreamt of in his pietistic philosophy.

All his life long Browning went on repeating, with inexhaustible fertility of illustration and ever-changing choice of language, the old shibboleths. The old leaven worked furiously in his veins, the cherished superstitions clung like mandrakes to the soil of his mind. Intellectual timidity runs through his work, bounding his outlook, shortening his hands, cramping the effort of which, had it been backed by more mental courage, such a genius as his might have been capable. Some of his poetry will survive, but his excursions into theology were belated when he wrote them. The orthodoxy of the Victorian era is to-day but a feast of husks, "vacant chaff well-meant for grain." Browning was too near, in his theological standpoint, to the clever, shifty Bishop Blougram. In religious speculation, Browning never launched out into the deep. He hugged the shore, never directing the prow of his ship towards the illimitable ocean, but ever seeking safe shelter under the shadow of the land. It was the safe rather than the heroic course that he exalted. For this reason, Browning, as a philosophical and religious teacher, can never give the full satisfaction to intellectual minds which they can derive from those who have gone forward wherever their intellect may have led.

MIMNERMUS.

A Farewell Sermon.

AND OTHER MATTERS.

My friend from the city was having a week-end at the coast. Said friend is, mentally and physically, built on large and generous lines—a man, in fact, of astonishing mentality—and a serious, imperturbable cheerfulness radiates from his ample Ingersollian countenance; he is, moreover, a "saintly" person, in the secular sense; a self-made saint, withal, for when very young he scrambled into the light from the most inner crypt of the Catholic Church. His brother, by the way, who was being educated for the Jesuit priesthood, much later in life, learned to laugh, and more derisively, at his sacred Alma Mater.

When I mentioned to my broad and genial visitor that the Rev. Trumbull Stipend would that Sunday preach his farewell sermon, on leaving the pulpit's narrow curve for the arena of Labour politics, he was at once interested. It came to pass that three or four of us drove up in a cab, as became a matter of so much moment; and, being late, we waited by the church plate—carefully emptied—while a lugubrious prayer was being said, and the minister and congregation pretended to abase themselves before the Most High. "Is this the rebel?" said my friend, as his face assumed a troubled expression very unusual to it. We were finally ushered into the very front pew, and literally sat under the pulpit, but with the compensation of being within "kissing distance" of the very pretty young ladies of the choir. They were irresistible. We stood or sat, at hymn

or prayer, and patiently awaited the *denouement*. It never came. My friend seemed sad, but observant, and oh! so thoughtful. It was his first experience in twenty-four years, and he bore it like the stoic philosopher he was. The preacher was young, almost boyish-looking, with fresh, full voice, but only half used, in the subdued, submissive whine of the pulpit—that very language of slavery. There was not one spark of vital fire. Was this the man that was to head the revolt of the oppressed? His face was full and fair, and all unlined—the constant enemy, it would seem, of famine and thought. He spoke prettily and emotionally of Christ washing the disciples' feet to teach them humility. One reflected that "the Master" might have begun at the other end of his disciples, and taught them sense. The preacher, faithfully following his "Master's" example, traded—perhaps quite sincerely—on the emotions and superstitions of his hearers. Young ladies wept outwardly at his final words. The stranger crowd of Atheists, Agnostics, Socialists, Unitarians, Trinitarians, Nothingarians, etc., wept inwardly. (The church will be duly fumigated.) For the matter stood thus: the Rev. Trumbull Stipend was coming out of the Church to do the larger work he was not allowed to do *within* the Church; and the preacher gave the Church not even a parting rebuke, much less the wholesale condemnation it deserved. So much for the Church. The question now is: Will the politician be any better than the preacher? In Paine's phrase, Will the representative be any better than the man?

A few weeks ago the writer attended a patriotic temperance demonstration in the local town hall. The audience was small. The large platform party was composed of parsons and pious laymen. Prayer opened the proceedings. A benediction closed them. The speaking was of the most mediocre kind. Even the "orator of orators," a certain Dr. Poling, a new great "Ingersoll" from America, spoke only the common press gibberish about the War in crisp epigrammatic nasal phrases. He was refreshing, but not convincing, even of his own sincerity. The whole exhibition was futile, effete, and pathetic; and the platform party inevitably suggested flotsam from an ancient wreck slowly breaking up in the winds and waves of time. For at that very moment Britain's "drunken soldiers" were opposed to the full fury of the German War machine. And these pitiful moralists would dictate to these men their parsonic idea of perfect conduct—men living—and dying—at their country's command, in such a hell as the world has never known before.

They would "reform" us these people. We would reciprocate, and reform them. A journalist, at the local "Literary," commenting on a paper read by the present writer, said he had "put his Foote in it," but was not without hope that essayist would yet return to the fold. "God forbid!" What! Exchange for a mouldy superstition the sublime certainties of a lifetime? Turn my back on the modern spirit, and return to the shadow of the Middle Ages? Come down from the mountains of vision and live a mole's life, blind, underground? No, thanks; and no fear. Besides, it is impossible.

One turns from these puerilities to the battlefield and the question of war itself. In those torturing "night thoughts," when the mind, strained and sensitive, lies awake, and the last big German offensive bulks in the foreground, and the facts have filtered through, and we see all too clearly, with the eye of sympathy and understanding, reason, and humanity, those soldiers disputing every inch of blackened soil, or in confusion firing on one another, perishing in myriads by wounds, poison, hunger, and sheer exhaustion, in the awful exigencies of the great retreat. And then we think of our Christian journalist, suggesting a change of menu, or a return to his muddled piety, and we can only ejaculate: "Good God!" For why, the thing itself is there, staring in the face all who are not blind and idiotic, or merely bestial.

A. MILLAR.

Philosophy can add to our happiness in no other manner but by diminishing our misery.—*Goldsmith*.

Among the Lasses O!

THERE are three leading reasons why the clergy should exercise all their ingenuity to obtain the support of women. *Firstly*, male church adherents are a dwindling band; *secondly*, women are more directly in contact with the rising generation at its most impressionable stage than men are; and *thirdly*, women now have the Parliamentary vote, which enables them to share in the control and direction of the national economy, and incidentally to help in deciding a question that we may be sure will arise in the not distant future, namely, whether the Established Churches are to remain in their present position with relation to the State, or whether that position is to be modified.

In view of these newly acquired rights and responsibilities, we are somewhat surprised to learn that Scottish Suffragettes should have given the clergy a gratuitous and wholly unearned advertisement by assisting at the performance of a farce, in the shape of a "United Thanksgiving Service," which was held in the Synod Hall at Edinburgh on Feb. 16, 1918. The Christian Suffragette has apparently, by the exuberance of her feelings, placed herself in a very invidious position (to say the least) with reference to her unbelieving sisters and brothers. Her participation in a "Service of Thanksgiving" for the Parliamentary vote betrays ignorance or misconception of history, which it is hoped cannot be laid to the charge of the majority of women voters. But, of course, it gave the D.D.'s and a group of clerically minded laymen an opportunity of posing as friends of freedom and reform. Such individuals are always to be found vociferously cheering the winners; and in these trying times the Churches cannot afford to neglect any opportunity of making a bid for popular patronage.

The newspaper report of this "Service," which has just been brought to our notice, states that the Societies represented were the National Union, the Women's Freedom League, the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise (where were the Radical and Socialist women?), the United Suffragists, the Northern Men's Federation, the University Graduates, and the Churches League. We cannot believe that, with all its capacity, the last-mentioned organization managed to gobble up all the rest! Nevertheless, it is an imposing show—on paper—and Freethinkers will do well to recognize that if the Churches can succeed in nobbling the bulk of the Suffrage and Socialist organizations (which is patently their objective) they will be doing extremely good business for themselves. But we reserve our opinion as to the significance of the term "represented" in this connection. One may represent a thousand (to an extent) just as the other 999 or any other one of the 999 may. Freethinkers have ever been consistent advocates of safeguarding the rights of minorities as well as majorities, whatever their opinions. Even one solitary Freethinker who is a member of a society composed of 999 Christians and himself (or herself) is entitled to have his (or her) opinions represented and respected. And we venture with confidence to assert that the proportion of Freethinking members of Suffrage Societies (meaning thereby members who are definitely hostile to Christianity and every other species of supernaturalism) is much larger than one in a thousand. It is impossible to commend the manners of Christian Suffragettes who, ignoring all that has been done by Rationalistic agencies in the teeth of the bitter Christian opposition to secure emancipation for women, are foolish enough to represent organizations of which Freethinkers are members as mouth-ing thanks to the Christian deity for a boon that his principal and most influential representatives have strenuously striven to have withheld.

The Apostle Paul was very much in the background at this remarkable thanksgiving service. Indeed, his name does not seem to have been mentioned once in the course of the proceedings. A quarter of an hour of his presence would have given some spirit, and, probably, added considerable liveliness to the service, because, besides being an authority on woman's proper sphere, we are given to understand from the report of a conference at Jerusalem that he was remarkably tenacious of his opinions, and was not easily sat on or put down. But the twentieth-century parsons may breathe

freely on this score, for the Apostle Paul, like Queen Anne, has gone over to the majority. And the worst that poor Paul can do is to writhe in his grave.

We regret that the newspaper report of the service does not give a sample of any of the "Special Suffrage Hymns" stated to have been rendered. As the service was held on a week day why were the songs of Robert Burns all excluded? People will be getting the idea that the Scots are progressing—backwards. "Green Grow the Rashers O"!

IGNOTUS.

Acid Drops.

Says "The Rambler," in the *Daily Mirror*: "A Frenchman who knows General Foch tells me that he is an ardent believer in the power of prayer. 'We shall yet be saved by it,' he says, 'and it will not be the first time in this deadly struggle.'" There it is! An unknown person tells an anonymous writer that General Foch said something—which he probably never said at all—and some of the public will no doubt take it for "Gospel." We believe it is an offence under D.O.R.A. to do anything that will discredit his Majesty's Allies. Doesn't that apply to making the French Commander appear on the level of an evangelistic idiot straight from some chapel meeting?

We have considerable sympathy with a case of exemption granted at the Southwark Tribunal the other day. The applicant was a maker of padded rooms for lunatic asylums, and it was explained that if he were taken, the work would have to stop. The Tribunal decided that the work must not stop, and granted three months' exemption. With Europe in its present state, we incline to the opinion that the fitting up of lunatic asylums is really an "essential" industry.

A pocket Testament and a watch in his tunic pocket saved the life of Private Crouch, of Rotherham, by intercepting a German bullet. The watch was badly damaged, and some leaves of the book nearly destroyed. It thus appears that the secular watch did more than the sacred volume to save that soldier's life.

Over 350 nurses have fallen in the present War. This is a nobler record than that of the clergy, who have been exempted from military service. There are 50,000 parsons in this country, and the Army Chaplains receive officers' pay and do their work at a safe distance from the fighting fronts.

It looks as if the long-promised revival of religion will not come after all. A Church of England committee, which has been inquiring into the Evangelical work of the Church, reports that "public worship is on the decline," and that attendances at Sunday-schools are in a similar plight. This state of affairs may explain the bishops' anxiety for unity with other Christian bodies. What they are losing on the swings they hope to gain on the roundabouts.

We do not know who edits the *Efficiency Magazine*, but, judging from a page sent us by a correspondent, it looks as though it were edited by someone qualifying for an idiot asylum. A large type, extra leaded paragraph runs, "Darwin studied earthworms for twenty years, and then wrote a book; but what a pity that no earthworm studied Darwin." Judging by this paragraph, the editor's desire has been realized. A worm has been studying Darwin, and the product is worthy of its origin.

A meeting of the Newport Corporation, several members of which are clergymen, was recently converted into a prayer meeting. Several ministers engaged in prayer and hymns were sung. The Rev. A. A. Mathews moved that a united service of intercession should be held in the town. It was generally felt that we had arrived at a crisis in the War, and that, unless the Almighty was specially, and by a united town, besought to intervene in our favour, the biggest battle in history might go against us.

Driven by the dread of defeat, the Newportians, at two crowded gatherings, bombarded the Throne of Grace with passionate appeals for direct aid from on High. The mayor was present, "in scarlet robe and chain of office," supported by members of the Town Council; and many overflow meetings were held. One disadvantage was that the rules of his Church made it impossible for Father Hickey to be present, much as he desired to be. But the mayor even made a speech which was brimful of valuable information to the Deity. These meetings were held on the Wednesday, and on the Friday and Saturday the War news was much more favourable.

Following the appointment of General Foch as Generalissimo of the Allied Forces, a paragraph has been going the rounds of the press that the distinguished French soldier has given his testimony of the value to prayer. The statement is made on the authority of "a Frenchman." It would be far more interesting to hear the General's own version of the matter.

The clergy are slim! A similar statement to that put into the mouth of General Foch went the round of the papers recently, and was given to General Robertson. Then the Bishop of Birmingham writes to the *Daily Post* (Birmingham) suggesting that as these two Generals believe in prayer, might it not be well to organize daily prayer from 12 o'clock till 2 o'clock, etc.? Now, we are wondering! Who sent these paragraphs to the press? Did they really suggest the Bishop's advice, or were they intended to prepare the road for it? Decidedly, the clergy are slim!

Mr. Robert Blatchford, writing in the *Sunday Chronicle*, hits the nail on the head regarding the Irish question. He says that "the Irish difficulty is a religious difficulty," and that "if every man in Ireland were a Roman Catholic, or a Protestant, a Hindoo, or an Agnostic, or a Quaker, the Irish difficulty would be settled as early as daylight-saving or woman's suffrage." Politicians would do well to ponder these shrewd words.

In weak moments even the men of God tell the unvarnished truth about their own cause. The Rev. J. E. Roberts, of Manchester, on being elected President of the Baptist Union, confessed, as reported in the *South Wales Daily News* for April 24, that the Churches are a lamentable failure; that Tommy's invective about them was "hair-raising in its directness and its shattering simplicity"; and that at last "the men of Britain are ripe for a real religion," the only possible inference being that hitherto they have never had such a religion. What this journal has been saying for over twenty years is thus verified from an unexpected but welcome source.

The Bishop of London says the Christian Church is the "Oldest fighting regiment in Europe." As it has been responsible for many of the wars in Europe, it is only natural it should do some of the fighting. At present the officers of "the oldest fighting regiment" have decided to do their leading from behind, and the Government has acquiesced.

The Bishop says: "the first thing is to appeal to Almighty God. Well, they have been doing that ever since the War commenced, and the result is before the world. It was the Bishop of London who said of the War that there had not been such a day of God for a thousand years. A man who can say that can say anything. And the people who can put up with balderdash deserve anything.

But sometimes even the Bishop blunders into saying something that is sensible, as in the following: "Labour had gradually fought its way from serfdom, with little help from the richer classes, and less than no help from the official Church." The last, certainly, is saying no more than the truth—even if not all the truth.

Every one in the United Kingdom between the ages of eighteen and fifty-one are "deemed" to be in the Army

Reserve—except women, the physically unfit, the mentally defective, and the clergy.

Professor Spenser Wilkinson, the famous military critic, has some pertinent remarks on religious ideas concerning the War in a recent issue of the *Daily News*. Speaking of a lady who had remarked that "if there is a God in heaven we must win," the Professor says "it expresses the instinct of many good women and of some good men, but it involves a view which I cannot make my own. My friend's view implies a miraculous intervention on behalf of righteousness. The nature of things is never modified for the convenience of mankind, still less of any fraction of mankind."

Saint George's Day was observed with becoming solemnity at Windsor and many other places. Is this because "the saint" was a successful army-contractor?

The dear *Daily News* is supposed to know something of religious matters, but a cryptic utterance appeared in its severe pages recently. Referring to a political rival, the *Daily News* said that it was "the paper which once used to talk blasphemously about 'Uncle Five Heads.'" Presumably, the reference is to Mr. Asquith, but why call it "blasphemous"? Has this Liberal politician been deified?

Principal Forsyth tells us that Christianity acts on the principle that cure is better than prevention, which is sheer nonsense but sound theology. The Ven. C. A. H. Green, Archdeacon of Monmouth, is equally certain that prevention is better than cure, which is good sense, but bad theology. Dr. Forsyth advocates orthodoxy at the expense of morality, while the Archdeacon sacrifices orthodoxy in order to be loyal to truth. According to Christianity, God allowed sin to enter the world when he could have prevented it, that he might enjoy the luxury of bearing it away himself, which makes an essentially immoral being and the Gospel a wicked farce.

In spite of Government appeals to save money and to find men for work of national utility, there is an obvious waste of clerical time and Church income, particularly in the City of London. A case in point is quoted in the *Daily News*. The living of St. Mary Woolnoth is now vacant, and the patronage falls to the Crown. The living is stated as £1,100, with a parsonage-house. The resident population is 125, mostly caretakers of offices.

What infinite nonsense is being talked by the clergy just now about the alleged life beyond the tomb. Some of them pretend to know all about it, exclaiming: "Death is naught and love is all." The Rev. A. W. Anderson, B.A., of Newport, Mon., speaks of "a saintly mother who still loves and influences from the unseen world" all those for whom she cared when on earth. Even her minister-son might be unconscious of that continued love, but he is being moulded and helped by it all the same. A widow is mentioned who kept on praying night and day until she gained absolute assurance that her dead husband still lived and loved her in the Unseen Holy. This is what Mr. Anderson calls the "deeper knowledge based on something greater than the intellect." How the ignorant multitudes love to be gulled by spiritual charlatans!

"Here God comes in," dramatically exclaims a well-known divine. We should like to see that spot or that moment; but, unfortunately, our divine is unable to identify it. Like Job of old, he cannot find God anywhere, nor can anybody else. He is, indeed, a God that hideth himself from all alike. They say he is in this awful War, but the Kaiser is the only one who is quite sure of him.

"The War has made me think," cried a layman the other day; "and thinking has caused me to doubt." That is the case with thousands to-day. No wonder the Church thunders out "Believe, only believe," for thought, given free course, kills belief, and puts Monarch Reason on the Throne."

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

May 5, Abertillery.

To Correspondents.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—R. Terroni, 5s.; James Davie, £1 10s.; J. L. Vickery, 10s.

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.—Received with thanks, and shall appear. Glad to hear you are well.

WILL correspondents please note that we cannot undertake to deal with unsigned communications. A pen-name may be used for publication, but the name and address of the writer must be supplied to the Editor.

H. BUSH.—Pleased to have been of use. Glad to see you at any time.

W. J.—No other class of the community is exempted from Military Service as the clergy.

W. ROSCHER.—*Buddhism*, by Rhys David (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge), will probably give you what you require.

F. C. WYKES.—What you say quite bears out our statement. Selfishness, and want of a sense of personal responsibility towards the rest of the community, are responsible for many of the greatest evils around us.

MR. A. ALDWINCKLE writes from Paris suggesting the reprinting of our notes on "Man Power and the Clergy," and the distribution of the leaflet "by millions." He also offers to contribute towards a special fund to defray expenses. A similar suggestion has reached us from other quarters. Perhaps the better plan would be to write a leaflet dealing with the clergy generally. We will take the first opportunity of doing this, and we think it can be done without any appeal to readers for help—beyond that of their aiding in distribution.

TRUTH-SEEKER.—We cannot publish letters that do not bear the name and address of senders.

A. G. LEWIN.—It is not difficult to deceive "hard-headed" men of business on such a matter as Spiritualism. The subject is out of their line, and your "practical" business man often fails through sheer want of imagination. He is so practical that he cannot see beyond the tip of his nose.

MR. JACK BARTON asks: "Why don't you double the price? We would all pay it, and still have the greatest value for 4d. that the literary world offers." Naturally, we agree; but we are looking ahead, and the larger we can make our circulation now, the better prospect when the War is over. So we stick to our plan in spite of the difficulties, and we do so cheerfully, as we know we have the support of all our readers, including Mr. Barton himself.

R. CHAPMAN.—Please tell your friend we will deal with the subject when occasion offers. Hope to see you in good health by the time of the Conference.

W. MACFARLANE.—Pleased to learn that the *Freethinker* "helps to cheer the boys in Italy." Shall be pleased to send a parcel of literature for distribution.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges:—West Ham Branch, 10s.

W. ROWE (Johannesburg).—Sorry, but we are unable to find out anything of the person about whom you enquire.

H. O. BOYER.—We hardly think there is the one per cent. of disagreement between us on the impersonal side of war. With religion we are on different ground. The good which you and others attribute to religion, we should say, resulted from the operation of those social forces with which religion has been associated. Thanks for sending quotation which is interesting, and may be useful.

JOSEPH BRYCE.—Thanks. As early as possible. We appreciate your sympathy with us in what you call our "herculean struggle."

J. FOTHERGILL.—Crowded out of this issue. Shall appear next week.

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.

Mr. Cohen lectures in the Tillery Hall, Abertillery, Mon., afternoon and evening. He has been asked to lecture in the afternoon on "Freethought and Economics," and has agreed to do so. A lively discussion is anticipated. In the evening he lectures on "The Savage in Our Midst."

We print this week the Agenda of the N. S. S. Conference, which will be held in the Queen's Hall on Whit-Monday. Some of the resolutions thereon are of far-reaching importance, and there promises to be a larger attendance of delegates from all over the country than has been the case for some years. This speaks well for the revival of interest that has taken place of late. Generally speaking, we can safely say that the Movement is fuller of life and activity than it has been for some time.

From one of our men serving with the British Army in Italy:—

Very glad to say I have not been bothered yet for Church Parade. Three days after I enlisted a corporal came in our hut and informed me that the officer wanted me to go on Church Parade, but I declined. He asked me what was my religion, to which I replied "None." The corporal left remarking that he would tell the officer, but I have heard nothing of the affair since. The thing that I mostly object to is that when anyone reports sick the ridiculous question is asked, "Your religion?" I had a good mind to answer, lumbago. When will there be an end to such nonsense?

This letter bears out what we have said, that the majority of officers are gentlemanly enough to be without desire to force upon soldiers a duty that has no real connection with their military efficiency.

On the other hand, another soldier writes:—

When I first enlisted I was accepted and affirmed as an Atheist, and was given [conditional upon my doing some light fatigue] complete exemption from Church Parades by my C. O. For the last seven months I have been on Class W. A. Res., and joined up here a week ago. Last Sunday I tried to get permission [whilst on Church Parade] to "break off," but there seemed to be the usual prejudice, and I was refused permission; the "orderly sergeant" telling me "it was time I b— went." My only way out was to refuse, and I was arrested. I have been under "open arrest" until to-day. I was tried by the O. C., B. Camp. He commenced by abusing Atheism, and used his authority to prevent my making an adequate reply. Then he gave me a lecture, and told me that he thought I was acting foolishly. His manner was now so conciliatory that when he asked me whether I would take any punishment from him, I said "Yes; conditional upon my being exempt from Church Parades in future." He told me "alright, he would see," and then awarded me six days C. B.—no mean punishment here. Apart from that, I am "up against it" in every sense. Both M. O., S. M., and a host of smaller fry rub it into me.

These two letters make plain two things. First, that compulsory Church Parade is a very real grievance amongst the men; second, that where the officers are at all bigoted, those who make a stand for their opinions are apt to have an unpleasant time. The moral is, that in the Army, as out of it, whether a man attends Church or stays away, should be decided by himself alone.

We are tempted to make one more dip from our lucky bag:—

You will be gratified to know that the free parcel of literature sent has been the final means of securing two converts to our cause. Religious discussions often take place among the men, and the pamphlets sent have been used with good effect. Religious literature is sometimes sent round also, but it does not seem to have near the same effect on the men; perhaps because it is too well known. We ought to have reserve dumps of literature at the base.

Well, we have a small reserve dump, and we shall be pleased to send free parcels of ammunition so far as we can. And we are careful to send out no "dud" shells.

We are glad to learn that the Swansea Branch, one of those opened by Mr. Cohen last year, has had a highly suc-

cessful winter season. The lecturers included Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, Snell, McCabe, "Keridon" (J. Thomas), and Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner. Two clergymen were also invited to address meetings, and consented to do so. The Secretary, Mr. B. Dupree, writes that the attendance, interest, enthusiasm, and support have been a source of inspiration to the "saints" responsible for the meetings. The Branch closes its season with a small, very small, balance on the right side. The Secretary properly says that the fact of "so much having been done, with so few, prompts us to speculate as to what might be done if all sympathizers lent a hand." We sincerely hope that these will take the hint.

The Manchester Branch is arranging a series of Sunday "Rambles" during the summer. The first one will take place on Sunday next (May 12). The party will leave the Chorlton-Cum-Hardy tram terminus at 10.30; Sale friends at Jackson's Road 11.30; by river bank to Northenden lunch, 2 o'clock; return by meadows to Didsbury, etc.

East End Freethinkers will please note that the Bethnal Green Branch commences its out-door propaganda in Victoria Park (to-day), May 5. Mr. Storey is the speaker.

A very "straight" letter appears in the *Evening Express* (Cardiff) of April 22 on the exemption of the clergy, and we are pleased to see that it is leading to a correspondence on the topic. The writer says that a deputation of Welsh Non-conformists went to London specially on the matter, and that the exemption has brought "relief to the distracted." We are pleased to see this discussion in the press, and we hope one day to see full advantage taken of such opportunities by regular press representatives of the N. S. S.

The Mechanism of Man.

IV.

(Continued from p. 249.)

ALTHOUGH the bony framework is bound into a united mass by its ligaments and cartilages, the joints enjoy so much freedom of movement, and the centre of gravity of the erect structure is so highly situated, that the skeleton cannot be made to support itself in the upright posture. The erect position so easy of attainment in living man results from the contraction of various muscles which resist and balance one another. The foot provides the surface of support, and the muscles of the calf contract to prevent the lower limbs and body from falling. This contraction tends to bend the leg, and then the thigh muscles operate to sustain the limb in its upright position. But the action of the thigh muscles inclines to curve the body forward, and if the corporeal structure is to be maintained in the erect position, these muscles must be counterbalanced by the muscular influences of the buttocks and the back.

The muscles are more numerous than the bones, and those muscles that control the movements of the skeletal system number 526. All muscular activity is directed by the nervous system. Muscular contractions are frequently initiated by the conscious animal, but many result from nervous changes which never ascend to the realm of consciousness. Those muscular organs which are usually governed by the will are termed the voluntary muscles, although even these occasionally act automatically. These muscles regulate the movements of the bones, and they are seated in the limbs and trunk. The inferior muscles never respond to the will, and are termed the involuntary muscles. The involuntary muscles are situated in the internal organs, mostly in the cavity of the trunk. Over their activities the superior nervous centres are precluded from exercising any control whatever.

Butcher's meat is composed of fat and lean, and the latter is formed of voluntary muscle. In a piece of stewing steak, the cordlike muscle bundles may be easily identified. With a needle, these muscle structures can be separated into their constituent fibres. Examined under the microscope, these fibres will be seen as delicate strands termed fibrils. These fibrils are muscle-cells, and are characterized by many dark lines. Voluntary muscles such as these are therefore called striated, or striped, muscles. When dissected, muscle is shown to be surrounded and held together by sheets of connective tissue.

The fibrils of involuntary muscle, on the contrary, are spindle shaped, and are devoid of lines. Thus they are known as smooth, or unstriated, muscles. The fibres of the heart, however, provide an exception to this rule, but they are the only involuntary muscles that are striated.

The more active a muscle, the more lavish is its blood supply. The blood-vessels enlarge, and the flow of blood increases. Then the muscles increase and multiply. Owing to the oxidation which occurs, an active muscle has a higher temperature than it possesses when at rest. Constant muscular labour leads to the development of larger, firmer, and healthier muscle, while the absence of exercise causes the muscles to deteriorate in size and to become flabby and pale. Immoderate muscular activity is to be deprecated, particularly in the immature organism, but a fair amount of activity is essential to bodily health.

When taking deliberate aim at an object, nearly every organ in the body co-operates in the action. Our eyes, spine, limbs, lungs, and heart, all become modified. When we decide to perform an energetic action, such as felling a tree or leaping a fence, then nerve impulses travel to all the organs involved, and these are excited to the degree necessary for the accomplishment of the projected deed.

The nerves which direct the muscles are composed of many fibres. On entering a muscle, the fibres of a nerve separate, and ramify in all directions throughout the muscular tissue. Each muscle fibre thus becomes the recipient of its own special nerve fibre. All the fibres peculiar to a muscle possess the property of contractility. When contracting, muscles shorten or widen; but it is well to observe that when a muscle decreases in length, it increases correspondingly in width, so that its volume really remains constant. As a muscle consists of a multitude of fibres, it follows that when its fibres contract the whole muscle contracts. Consequently, it becomes shorter and thicker, and draws its two ends together, and whatever organ is attached to the muscles participates in this change. Thus muscular contraction sets up the motion of the organs to which the muscles are attached, and such motions are the antecedents of locomotion.

The contraction of a muscle fibre through the passage along a nerve fibre of a nervous impulse consists in a modification of nerve matter which is conveyed along the fibre. Hence, such a nerve fibre is termed a motor fibre, because through its action on a muscle it propagates the impulse which induces motion. But the nerve functions as an accessory factor only. It cannot furnish the energy which the muscle expends when it contracts. As a matter of fact, the cells of the muscle itself have previously accumulated energy from the food and oxygen supplied to them by the nutrient materials of the blood, and in reality the process known as oxidation liberates the energy displayed. It is noteworthy in this connection that muscular activity may increase the production of carbon dioxide fivefold, while intellectual labour produces no such result.

After contraction has taken place, a muscle immediately relaxes. If the muscle is to be maintained in a state of contraction, a rapid succession of nerve impulses is demanded. But a continued contraction is really the consequence of many contractions, and this is occasionally made manifest by the vibratory movement of the muscle.

Work is for life, not life for work, remarks our great philosopher. Reasonable exercise promotes digestion and sweetens sleep. It assists in the excretion of waste and poisonous matters from the body, and helps to furnish that certain index of fitness, a healthy appetite. Moreover, active exercise serves to consume the oxygen and promotes the well being of the lungs, while, above all, every contraction of a muscle helps the circulation of the blood stream. The reason of this is perfectly simple, for when a muscle contracts it exercises pressure upon the blood vessels and lymphatics, and thus propels the vascular and lymphatic fluids onwards.

Many of the chemical phenomena of muscle are still imperfectly understood. Some physiologists hold the view that muscular contraction is explosive in character. The explosive materials appear to be generated within the muscles themselves. We may conveniently regard muscle as the residence of stored explosive material of relatively small amount, while muscle also contains the mechanism and fuel for its development, and the structural materials which form its seat of manufacture. This structural substance is considered to be of the nature of protein, while the other accessories are regarded as non-nitrogenous. As rapidly as the muscular energy is expended, new explosive material is evolved through the active oxidation of other substances of which sugar appears to be the most prominent. The oxidation of the muscles is shown by their consumption of the sugar stored in the blood, and by their absorption of oxygen from the blood, as well as by their excretion of carbonic acid into the blood, and in the muscular evolution of heat.

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

National Secular Society.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

QUEEN'S HALL, LANGHAM PLACE, LONDON, W. I.
WHIT-SUNDAY, MAY 19, 1918.

Agenda.

1. Minutes of last Conference.
2. Executive's Annual Report.
3. Financial Report.
4. Election of President.

(a) Motion by Manchester, Glasgow, West Ham, Bethnal Green, Kingsland, and Birmingham Branches:—
"That Mr. Chapman Cohen be re-elected President."

(b) Motion by South London Branch:—

"That Mr. A. D. Howell Smith, B.A., be elected President."

5. Election of Vice-Presidents.

(a) The following are nominated by the Executive for re-election: Bailey, W.; Baker, W. H.; Bartram, J. G.; Bowman, E.; Chapman, R.; Charbonnel, Victor; Collins, W. W.; Cowell, H.; Davidson, W.; Dobson, J. G.; Dodd, W.; Elstob, T. H.; Fathers, R. G.; Gorniot, T.; Grange, John; Hammond, J.; Heaford, W.; Hins, Eugene; Hurd, S. L.; Kough, Miss Kathleen B.; Leat, W.; Lloyd, J. T.; McCluskey, G. B. H.; McGlashan, James; Moss, A. B.; Neate, J.; Nelson, Wallace; Nichols, R. T.; Partridge, J.; Pegg, C.; Pitt, W. T.; Quinton, C. G.; Robertson, Thomas; Roger, Victor; Rolf, G.; Rolf, Mrs.; Rosetti, R. H.; Ross, J. T.; Ross, Miss Mary; Samuels, S.; Shore, T.; Silverstein, H.; Stanley, Miss

Alma; Terry, J.; Thurlow, T. J.; Turnbull, John H.; Vance, Miss E. M.; White, G.; Whitewell, C. J.; Williams, E. Clifford; Willis, F. E.; Wood, Frederick

6. Election of Auditors.

7. Motion on Reconstruction by Mr. C. Cohen:—

(a) "That the Executive consists of ten members elected at the Annual Conference. Not more than one member of a Branch to be eligible for election. Anyone not belonging to a Branch must have been a member of the Society for at least three years before being eligible for election on the Executive. The names of all candidates for election, with the Branch—if any—to which they belong, shall appear on the Agenda, which shall be issued one month before the Conference."

(b) "That the present Conference (1918) nominates and elects the Executive."

(c) "An Annual Report and Balance Sheet shall be issued to all members of the Society."

(d) "Each Branch shall appoint a Corresponding Member of the Executive, who shall receive a report of all business done by the Executive, and be advised of any special and important business coming before the Executive."

(e) "In places where no Branch of the N. S. S. exists the Executive shall have power to appoint a representative who shall keep the Executive informed of all events touching the work and welfare of the N. S. S."

(f) "Branches to be grouped over given areas and an organizing secretary appointed as early as possible."

(g) "There shall also be appointed, as early as possible, an organizer for the whole of the country, with such duties and on such terms as shall be afterwards decided."

(h) "Either in conjunction with, or separate from, other officials there shall be appointed local press representatives, and a general Press Representative at headquarters, his duties to consist in watching all matters connected with Freethought work which may arise in the public press."

(i) "That it shall be an instruction to the Executive to appoint a Finance Committee and a Propagandist Committee."

(j) "That in place of the Interim Conference ordered by the Conference of 1917, the Executive be authorized to call an annual meeting of members and unattached Freethinkers for the discussion of such subjects as are of general interest and importance."

(k) "That the place of the Annual Conferences shall be determined by a vote of the Branches, the Executive having first ascertained what places are prepared to receive the Conference, and that the Conference shall not be held in the same town more than once in four years."

(l) "That whenever possible the Executive shall require a prospective member to be proposed and seconded by two members of the Society."

8. Motions by South London Branch:—

(a) "That the first duty of a Society being to furnish rules for the acceptance and guidance of its members, this Conference instructs the Executive to print and circulate forthwith the Revised Rules which were approved and adopted by the Annual Conferences of 1916 and 1917."

(b) "That this Conference desires to enter its protest against the publication of the President's Scheme of Reconstruction without the knowledge or consent of the Executive, and feels that in these circumstances the scheme as published in the *Freethinker* should be referred to the Executive."

(c) "That this Conference is of opinion that an Executive consisting wholly of members elected at the Conference, and not removable by the Branches, is practically an irresponsible body; and that a body consisting of ten members only would mean an average attendance so small that it would become an autocracy, and therefore totally opposed to the spirit and traditions of the N. S. S."

(d) "That the decision of the House of Lords in the Bowman case having made it clearly legal for the N.S.S., in its present unincorporated state, to receive gifts and bequests for the furtherance of its objects, there is neither use nor sense in its becoming an incorporated body."

9. Motion by Mr. Victor Roger:—

"All Delegates to the Executive residing more than twenty miles from the place of meeting of the Executive shall be termed Corresponding Members, and all business of which notice has been given shall be printed and sent to the Corresponding Members, who shall be allowed to vote on it by letter."

10. Motion by North London Branch:—

"That this Conference instructs the Executive to prepare a revision of the 'Immediate Practical Objects of the Society,' and that a sub-committee be formed from the Executive to secure this end. Further, that the recommendations of the sub-committee be submitted to the forthcoming interim conference."

11. Motion by Mr. C. Cohen:—

"That at an early date steps be taken to (a) combine the N. S. S. and the Secular Society, Limited, under the general title of the National Secular Society, Limited, or (b) convert the N. S. S. into an incorporated body."

12. Motion by Manchester Branch:—

(a) "This Conference strongly supports the suggestions for reorganizing the N. S. S. as outlined by Mr. C. Cohen in the *Freethinker* of April 14, 1918."

(b) "This Conference regrets the absence of all reference in the Government Education Bill to the position of religion in the schools, and is strongly of opinion that adequate educational progress is impossible until the education given in State-supported schools is confined to secular subjects, leaving the inculcation of religion to parents and ministers of religion."

(c) "That arrangements be made by which the N. S. S. may take a more active and prominent part in the promotion of such social reforms as are outlined in its 'Immediate Practical Objects.'"

13. Motions by Birmingham Branch:—

(a) "That the Chairman at all Public Freethought Lectures of Branches be instructed to read 'Our Immediate Objects,' and then press for membership."

(b) "That the time is now ripe for presenting in definite form the constructive side of our work, and that the Executive be instructed to prepare a statement of our position and its various aspects as embodied in 'Our Immediate Practical Objects.'"

14. Motion by Glasgow Branch:—

"That in order to promote a complete representation of Branches at the Annual Conference, all railway fares be pooled."

15. Motion by Swansea Branch:—

"That steps be taken to open shops in various parts of the country in connection with Branches of the N. S. S. for the sale of Freethought literature."

16. Motion by West Ham Branch:—

"That this Conference affirms the justice of equal pay for equal work regardless of sex, and sympathises with all organizations throughout the country that are endeavouring to establish this principle."

17. Motion by Kingsland Branch:—

"That an annual balance-sheet be sent by each Branch to the Executive each year, giving an account of work done, with income and expenditure, so that the Executive may issue a complete statement of the Society's work; and that the sending of such a report shall be a condition of granting any financial aid."

18. Motion by Manchester and Birmingham Branches:—

"That this Conference protests against the practice of compelling freethinking soldiers and sailors to attend religious services, and is of opinion that, in the interests of justice and freedom, members of the Army and Navy

should enjoy the same freedom of conscience as obtains in civil life; it therefore urges upon the War Office the necessity of abolishing compulsory Church Parade as adding nothing to military efficiency, while inflicting a serious injustice upon those who place a real value upon mental freedom."

19. Motion by Birmingham Branch:—

"That this Conference protests in the strongest possible manner against the action of the Government in exempting the clergy from the operation of the Military Service Acts (1916-18) as being entirely without justification."

This Conference will sit in Queen's Hall, Langham Place, W. 1. Morning session, 10.30 to 12.30; afternoon session, 2.30 to 4.30. Both are purely business meetings, and are open to members only. A public meeting will be held in the evening at 6.30 o'clock.

By order of the Executive.

C. COHEN, *President*.

E. M. VANCE, *Secretary*.

Correspondence.

CONSCIOUS VILLAINY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I thank Mr. W. O. Parker and Mr. Chester Keith for their letters in the *Freethinker* for April 14. Possibly what I had in view was a kind of villainy lower, more cowardly, and more despicable than villainy, generally speaking, appears to them to be, e.g., the secret taker of backsheesh who becks and bows and grins and winks and leers behind his unconscious victim's back. I was thinking, perhaps, of the most sordid kind of villainy, which has no adventurous vein in it at all; which contains no redeeming, romantic streak, which cannot claim the slightest merit of courage—of piracy, whose flag, whatever other adjectival adjunct may be suitable to describe it, is at any rate emphatically *not* the "Jolly Roger." I have been engrossed, probably, too much in studying the psychology of the Fagins.

And yet your correspondents will have it that I am more generous than they to the social plunderers of our day! But am I? On this point I am not just sure that Mr. Parker and Mr. Keith are at one. They are, however, at one in this: that what I claim to be conscious villainy they hold, in the main, to be self-deception. Let us see.

I must remind your correspondents that even I have only contended that it is a small minority in the community who practise conscious and deliberate villainy. But it is the *power* of that minority that perpetuates the unconscious folly of the mass which allows them that power. Villainy I am unable to imagine as ever having a moral basis. After all, the test is whether a thing advances or impedes Truth. Applying that test to the powerful minority of conscious villains, can it be maintained that these narcotic manufacturers and dispensers are the "lesser evil"?

Maybe I should not have written "legal" penalties. What my object was, was to show that the villain conscious of his villainy may also be a very recreant. If he knows that he need not apprehend any evil results to himself from practising his villainy, he will practise it; otherwise, in 99 cases out of 100, he will avoid personal risks by refraining or (playing the parasite) he will hang on to the coat-tails of some more powerful villain or coterie of villains, who can afford protection even should disaster ensue. But, then, disaster is so very remote and unlikely when you have the huge majority effectually narcotized!

Unconscious villainy *may* have as a basis moral courage, conscious villainy, I hold, never. The heroes of Freethought were not always right; but they always had courage of that high order that personal consequences did not enter their calculations. On the contrary, the prospect of persecution was often a spur—not the fashionable kind of persecution that involves a brief incarceration in comfort and a place in the limelight and the picture papers. No!

After all, I may be more generous to the minority of social tyrants than your correspondents. Still "I hae ma doots." I may concede the clever cunning of that minority, but I fear that is only at the same time proposing their gross abuse of their mental enlightenment! May I suggest to Mr. Keith that it is quite possible for a villain to find justification for his villainy without himself believing it to be justification? It is the easiest thing in the world to cite with effect to the unthinking mass traditional authorities well established by time, custom, and usage, though, to the Freethinker, these authorities are worthless and, perhaps, worse. And I might not be so sceptical about the conscious virtue of the unconscious villainy of many of the villains who burned men and women for a difference of opinion if it could be shown that their villainy involved them in personal danger. Such extremes of brutality are not possible to-day, because Secularism has provided restraints. If, in face of the opposing humanistic forces of the twentieth century a committee of Churchmen kidnapped a few heretics and burned them on Ben Nevis, I might almost be persuaded to concede a measure of "moral courage" and "conscious virtue" in that committee. But though such a thing be impossible now, we know perfectly well that religionists have several other shots in their lockers for the hated heretic. And it is "all-my-eye and Betty Martin" to tell me that the great majority of religionists who have had the advantage of a first-class, all-round Secular education do not clearly perceive and are not conscious of the villainy—ay, cowardly villainy if you will—implicit in the employment of vindictive and socially-protected indignities against unbelievers.

In conclusion, I wish to say to Mr. Parker that I do not appreciate the existence of a moral "sense" apart from the reason. "Sense" is the sole guide of primitive man. Sense governed by reason is the guide of civilized man.

IGNOTUS.

THE LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY.

SIR,—I would like to thank "Mimnermus" for his very friendly and appreciative article on the Leicester Secular Society.

In one statement there is a possibility of misunderstanding. We recently celebrated the thirty-seventh (by an error in our announcement we said thirty-sixth) anniversary of the opening of our Secular Hall, not of the birth of the Society itself. We are much older than that. Since Mr. Gould wrote his little History of the Society, we have found the original Minute-book, showing that the Society was formed as the "Leicester Secular Society" in 1851 or 1852 (I have not the book by me as I write), so we are now at least sixty-six years old. Quite aristocratic! In the early days there were breaks in the continuous existence of the Society, but there has been no break since 1867. It would be interesting to see the story of other Societies in the *Freethinker*. I believe the Failsworth Secular Sunday-school has a particularly interesting history, which ought to be recorded.

If "Mimnermus" will visit Leicester, and will look me up, or any member of the Society, we shall be delighted to show him around, and talk over the stories of the past and hopes for the future.

SYDNEY A. GIMSON.

National Secular Society.

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON APRIL 25.

The President, Mr. C. Cohen, in the chair. Also present: Messrs. Baker, Brandes, Braddock, Eager, Gorniot, Leat, Lazarnick, Neate, Neary, Palmer, Roger, Samuels, Silverstein, Spence, Thurlow, Wood, Miss Kough, Miss Stanley, Mrs. Rolf, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed.

New members (twelve in all) received for Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, and South London.

The Executive's Annual Report to the Conference was discussed and adopted, and the various notices of motion for the Conference Agenda also discussed and remitted to the Agenda Committee for preparation and insertion, in

accordance with the usual custom, in the current issue of the *Freethinker*.

The Secretary received instructions on minor matters connected with the Conference, and thus the final business of this year's Executive closed.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary*.

Society News.

Our London out-door work, which commences to-day, is hampered, unfortunately, by the absence of so many of our speakers, who are engaged either at home or abroad in the present unhappy struggle. But we hope to "muddle through," and keep our flag flying as heretofore.

The Liverpool, Manchester, and Birmingham Branches report good meetings. Manchester is in a flourishing financial position, and well equipped for carrying on future work. The Branch has decided to hold a series of monthly Sunday rambles during the summer, commencing in May, and asks members to watch the columns of the *Freethinker* for further announcements.

The provinces generally are preparing to reap the harvest we see maturing before us.

The arrangements for our Annual Conference are now complete, and a full list of speakers will appear in next week's issue.

Delegates from the provinces who desire information and assistance as to accommodation during their stay should write to me at once, mentioning the class of accommodation they require, and for how long.

The food question gives one to think, but some provision, though probably not an ideal one, will be made for "a snack" during the luncheon-hour for delegates only. Those who wish to partake of this must please let me know.

All who are attending the business meetings please note that admission is by production of the card of membership, for the current year only, at the door. Those who have not yet renewed their subscriptions for 1918 should remit to me at once. Branch members obtain their cards from their respective secretaries. Delegates are admitted on their credentials.—E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary*.

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.

LONDON SOCIETY, *Morality based on the Laws of Nature* (West Central Hall, 31 Alfred Place, Store Street, Tottenham Court Road): 3.30, M. Delchevalerie, "L' evolution morale d'un poete contemporain: Emile Verhaeren." Lecture in French.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.): 11, John A. Hobson, M.A., "Hypocrisy."

OUTDOOR.

BATTERSEA BRANCH N. S. S. (Battersea Park Gates): 11.30, Mr. F. Shaller, A Lecture.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 6.15, Mr. H. V. Storey, A Lecture.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Corner of Ridley Road): 11.30, Mr. J. W. Marshall, "God's Omnipotent Impotence."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill): 3.15, Mr. J. B. Johnson, "To Those in Doubt."

REGENT'S PARK BRANCH N. S. S.: 3.15, A Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15, A Lecture.

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

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

ABERTILLERY (Tillery Institute): Mr. Chapman Cohen, 3, "Freethought and Economics"; 6.30, "The Savage in Our Midst."

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Hall Buildings, first floor, Fowler Street): 6.30, Conference Business.

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