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Views and Opinions.

Freethought in the New Year.

The Januarys of 1914-1918 saw the Christian world engaged in one of the most barbarous wars of modern times. January, 1919, saw the opening of what the papers facetiously called "Peace Year," a year full of wars and starvation, with blockades more deadly than battles and social unrest that threatened established institutions more seriously than the failure of a military campaign. The influence of the Christian Churches, which could not prevent the outbreak of war, has shown itself equally careless of, or impotent to create, a peace that would turn the world back to a policy of sane reconstruction and to the formation of a spirit of healthy humanitarianism. The Churches, which for five years could concentrate on the work of killing Germans, cannot concentrate for five months on a single question that makes for the health of the world. 1920 thus commences its course, like the proverbial young bear, with all its troubles before it. He would be a bold prophet who would confidently foretell what would be the state of the world twelve months hence. Some few things may be foreseen, but in the main the outlook is dark and confused. The War has done more than break up Germany; it has served as a solvent on century-old institutions and age-long customs. If the old men have not seen visions, the young ones have dreamed dreams, and dreams sometimes have a habit of struggling for realization in the waking world of everyday life.

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A Policy of Desperation.

And in the waking world of 1920 the Churches, and the cause of religion generally, stand to lose heavily. There is simply no questioning the fact that the credit of religion has never stood so low as it does to-day. Its enemies despise the Church, and its friends ignore it. Politicians of a class and social sentimentalists vapour about the establishment of a "true Christianity," without realizing that their praise of a "true Christianity," which the world is to see one day, is a positive condemnation of the only Christianity that the world has known. Canon Peter Green tells his fellow-clerics that organized religion simply has no future in this country, and in that revealing book, *The Army and Religion*, its

clerical editors remark that the only hope is for the clergy "to speak out what they believe with much greater candour than has been their practice of later years." Which is a very neat way of saying that the clergy must be less economical of the truth than they have been. But a clergy that gets into the habit of telling the truth about what they believe are doomed. If all the clergy of Great Britain said exactly what they believe about Christianity, half the pulpits would be empty, and the Churches a more ghastly assemblage of empty benches than ever. That, indeed, is a council of despair. A lie may still continue to do service, a pretence that religion is unaffected by recent changes may still impose upon many. But the truth about religion! As well invite the Editor of the *Freethinker* to deliver a course of lectures in Westminster Abbey. It might well be less disastrous than the clergy resolving to tell the truth about religion. Probably the advice is given cheerfully because it is felt that there is no danger of its being adopted.

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God and the World.

The Churches are breaking up, and it will be partly due to the laxity of Freethinkers if they are ever able to re-establish themselves. The five years of war that we have passed through have served to emphasize, as hardly anything else could, much that Freethinkers have been saying for years. Certainly, while the memory of the War is fresh, no one can speak of the moralizing power of Christianity without risking a smile on the faces of those who are listening. And what is the use of speaking of the fatherly care of God in face of the dumbness of Deity in all those years of agony? If the God whom Christians worship had been the carved idol of a tribe of South Sea savages, he could not have been more impotent than he proved himself to be. God would look after the right, explained the clergy. Then they decided that he was neutral, or that he was "permitting" the War for the education of the world. Anything but the real truth that the whole idea of a personal intelligence guiding the affairs of the world is pure myth, of no more value than the primitive tribal deity, of whom the modern god is a direct descendant. But other people drew the conclusion from which the clergy shrank. The War showed the world, not as a place that was governed by divine wisdom and watched over by divine love, but one that was torn by human greed and hatred and passion, which, if it is ever to be made a place fit to live in, it must be made so by human intelligence and brotherhood. To explain the world without God was a favourite problem for the Christian to set the Freethinker. The problem now for the Christian is surely how to explain the world of the past five years *with* a god. Without God the world is a problem. With God it is problem *plus* horror.

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The Growth of Freethought.

1920 is certain to be a troubled year, but so far as Freethought is concerned it is one that is full of promise.

The men that were to come from the War with their zeal for religion quickened have returned with their faith in Christianity shattered. All over the country the most inspiring sight at our meetings is the large number of young men and women who are eager listeners to what is being said. Certainly, never in our time, and we should judge, never in the history of the movement, has there been so large a proportion of young men who are taking an interest in our cause. And they are realizing that our movement does not represent a mere exercise in dialectics, but that it has far-reaching social consequences, and that until the question of religion in the State is settled nothing of vital importance can be done. There is a keen demand for our literature, and that is a still more encouraging sign. But, above all, there has come over the country a greater readiness to face intellectual issues and an impatience with that spirit of timid compromise that has for so long been a marked feature of British intellectual life. We have still a great way to go, and the fight is not by any means over. Indeed, there are large tracts of the country on which Freethought has scarce yet made an impression, and beyond the area covered by organized religion there are masses of superstition that would surprise all save the curious in such matters. But the issue is getting clearer and better defined. The social and intellectual implications of our position are better understood. The Freethinker, the Atheist, is no longer a rarity or a social sport. He is assuming a regular place in the mental life of the country, and is thus in a position to see that his views obtain more serious and more respectful attention. And this means a breaking down of the boycott, which has hitherto been the greatest obstacle that our propaganda has had to face.

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Break the Boycott.

The breaking down of the boycott is one of the tasks to which Freethinkers might well devote their energies during the year. And if we will, we believe it can be done with much greater ease than many imagine. The Freethought movement, like all others, has its traditions, and one of these is the boycott. It has always been the strongest weapon in the religious armoury, and it has been used so long that many Freethinkers have come to regard its exercise as quite a matter of course. They have not only expected the boycott, but they have accepted it. We beg to suggest to Freethinkers all over the country that this is a fatal mistake. The way to break down a boycott is to proceed as though it does not exist. It may be encountered all the same, but it throws upon those who use it the onus and the trouble of its exercise. We have in our minds numerous cases where halls are not applied for, because it is *expected* they will be refused, or newsagents are not asked to expose our literature for sale for the same reason. By this policy we make the work of the bigots easy instead of seeing to it that it is as difficult as possible. We believe that the time has arrived when we should put into operation a bolder policy. To-day is more favourable than ever before for asserting ourselves and to claim fair play. And if we do not seize our opportunity now we may never have so good a chance again. The cause is one that is worth working for, and it is one that each may do something to help. We cannot all speak or write, but we can all *help*, and that is the vital consideration. During the coming year we intend trying to make the *Freethinker* more useful than ever to the cause of mental emancipation, and with the aid of our readers we hope to be able to say that the year 1920 has, indeed, marked a turning-point in the history of Freethought.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## Stray Thoughts.

ALL Christians believe in and many eagerly expect the Second Coming of their Lord, though few are agreed as to the nature and manner of his coming. Some take the promise of his return literally, and declare that he will appear in the form of a man, as he is alleged to have done the first time. In perfect confidence they are waiting for his arrival. They often buttonhole strangers in the street, saying: "He may be here to-night—*are you prepared to give him a royal welcome?*" Others are equally convinced that all New Testament allusions to the Second Coming are to be interpreted spiritually. They regard almost every event of which they approve as a coming of the Lord. Dr. Orchard, preaching in the King's Weigh House Church the other Sunday evening, expressed the view that the aspirations of Labour was a sign of Christ's coming, the Labour Movement having been largely prompted by religion. The saying has been heard repeatedly that the Lord is always coming, but never comes. Curiously enough, the Second Coming has been expected in every age since the Christian story began. The Apostle Paul confidently looked for it in his day, and exhorted his converts to be in readiness for it. Of course, the Second Coming implies the First Coming; but the most significant fact at present is that the number of those who deny the latter is steadily increasing. Even in the Churches, Christmas means much less than it used to do. It is becoming more and more of a secular holiday than a religious festival. There are divines not a few to whom the Incarnation is a figment of the religious imagination and the Saviour-God a wholly fictitious character. They know only too well how the Pagan world teemed with Saviour-Gods long before Jesus Christ was heard of, and in reality they no more believe in the latter than they do in the former.

The Secularists enter upon the new year firmer than ever in the conviction that supernaturalism in all its forms is a dream that is slowly passing. We have no hesitation whatever in classing the Gospel Jesus with Adonis, Attis, and Mythra, or in affirming that the Christ of theology is simply a creation of the Church. Now, orthodox believers like the Rev. H. A. Mason, Prebendary of St. Paul's, describes us as wilfully blind. In a sermon published in the *Christian World Pulpit* for December 17, Mr. Mason says:—

Those who live without light rapidly lose the sight of their eyes. So the world, by living in the darkness of sin, grew blind to the light of God's love. It could not see the difference between right and wrong, truth and falsehood. Some men groped their way through the darkness of ignorance and superstition and sin, asking, "What is truth?" But the majority were satisfied to live blind lives, never desiring to see what is fair and pure and true and holy. Jesus Christ came into the world to change all this.

That sermon was preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, only a few Sundays ago, and the wonder is that intelligent people could sit and listen without protest to such a gross misrepresentation of the world before Christ. Of no pre-Christian people known to history is the description in that extract true. No nation ever existed that had no desire "to see what is fair and pure and true and holy." As a matter of fact, the moral difference between the world before and after Christ is wellnigh imperceptible. Indeed, for many centuries after Christ the Western world grew gradually worse, a fact frankly admitted by Baronius, the Catholic historian, whose one object was to defend the Catholic Church against the attacks of the early Protestant leaders.

After reading this famous annalist, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries were unutterably dark and degraded. For more than fifty years the Roman See was disposed of by harlots and their paramours, this being the chapter in its annals stigmatized as "the Pornocracy"—government by prostitutes. Such, alas, was the difference Christ had made. Ten centuries after the Redeemer had completed his work of salvation the portion of the world that bore his name was more corrupt and wicked than it had ever been before. "The more we believe," says Mr. Mason, "the more we shall obtain of spiritual blessing." Is he not aware that the tenth century was one of the Ages of Faith, when the people believed without stint? We are convinced that it is believers, not unbelievers, who "live blind lives." When Peter Abelard and Arnold of Brescia began to see themselves and teach others to use their eyes, the Church put an end to their careers, burning poor Arnold alive and hurling his ashes into the Tiber; and no terms are strong enough to depict the horrible immoralities and crimes of which the Papacy was guilty almost till the end of the sixteenth century.

On the assumption that the description of the world indulged in by Mr. Mason is accurate we must put the blame, not on the world, but on God. Humanity is God's offspring; and if any one is born blind or becomes blind by living without light, is it not inevitably the Maker's fault? "As the world grew old it lost sight of the true God," the preacher informs us; but how and why? Mr. Mason's answer amazes us: "Men loved darkness better than light because their deeds were evil"; but that answer only suggests another question, namely, why were men's deeds evil? Was it not because the Creator bungled in making them? Did God make darkness as well as light, and was it his object in calling it into being to make it possible for men to lose their sight by living in it? Even on the preacher's own showing spiritual blindness is, either directly or indirectly, the outcome of God's failure as Creator. But Mr. Mason introduces another difficulty which he does not even attempt to remove. He says:—

Some people are blind and will remain blind unless they understand their condition and have faith to call upon the Lord Jesus to heal them. Here comes in the work of such a society as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The grace and love of God are inexhaustible, but we must have something to draw with if we would receive them. A man may die of thirst beside a well of water because he has no means of reaching it. We may perish with the fountain of grace in our midst if we have no faith to obtain and make use of it. What we need, then, is to know our infirmity and have perfect faith that God can and God will give us what we need if only we ask him aright. We shall never receive the gift if we do not value it.

It follows, from the preacher's delineation, that God is an immeasurably greater failure as Saviour than he was as Creator. Man is dead in trespasses and sins, but the Redeemer will not give him life unless he asks for it in perfect faith. How can the dead humbly beg to be made alive? Would not a true Saviour bestow life without being urged to do it? And how on earth can anyone set its true value on a thing he has never had? Can the dead duly value life, or the blind sight? One of the Prophets says that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"; but the dead cannot call, and, consequently, the dead will never be saved.

The Secularists teach that supernaturalism is mankind's deadliest enemy, and, as such, has done incalculable harm in the world. God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost are merely objects of faith, not at all of knowledge, and the belief in them has proved the moral ruin

of millions. Their passionate faith in the next world rendered some of the best saints worthless in this. Had they attended with all their hearts to their social duties on earth they would have been utterly disloyal to their Divine Master. Believing themselves immortal nothing was more natural than that they should have lived exclusively for eternity. The Dean of St. Paul's was fully justified in his declaration that otherworldliness is of the very essence of the Christian religion. We do not find fault with Christians for being true to their religion, which few of them are nowadays; but we do conscientiously condemn the religion by which they are so fatally led astray. Our contention is that Christianity does harm simply because it is not true. It is our unshakable conviction that the Christian God does not exist, that Christ is a sheer myth, and that the Church is an entirely human institution, always working on purely natural lines. The only world and life of which we have any knowledge are the present, and our whole duty consists in so regulating our individual lives as to make them valuable contributions to the welfare of the race to which we belong.

J. T. LLOYD.

## Godly Folk in Glass Houses.

Rough work, iconoclasm, but the only way to get at truth.  
—O. W. Holmes.

Liberty's chief foe is theology.—Charles Bradlaugh.

MISS MAUDE ROYDEN, pastor of the City Temple, London, has been preaching upon the subject of "Popular Hymns." Too many favourites, she complained, "breathed a sort of intoxicated religiosity." She described the popular hymn, "O Paradise, O Paradise, 'tis weary waiting here," as "stuff and nonsense." She condemned hymns which insisted on the sinfulness of men and the worthlessness of life. She declared that such lines as "Here in the body pent, absent from Him I roam," were not Christian, and contained "false sentiment." Many hymns, she said, placed heaven "too far away."

Doubtless, the congregation was mildly shocked by the lady-like audacity of the preacher. Miss Royden, however, touched but the fringe of the subject. Her indictment could have been made so much more comprehensive. It is doubtful if the average hymn has any more claim to be considered as literature than the music-hall songs, about which the clergy are so indignant. This may well appear a grave indictment, but popular hymns are far too frequently antiquated in ideas and nonsensical in expression. Under the hypnotic influence of religion, the half-educated public has been too ready to accept bombast as the fine gold of poetry, and has hailed hysteria in adjectives as the quintessence of reverence.

The hymns used by Churchmen and Nonconformists are not really much better than those extraordinary compositions which are used by Salvationists, Revivalists, and other howling Dervishes of our streets and open spaces, which make cultured folk raise their eyebrows at their own species. The charge of sentimentalism is one of the least that can be brought. Some hymns are uncivilized in thought and feeling, and full of details which are repulsive. Here are some samples:—

There is a fountain filled with blood  
Drawn from Emanuel's veins.

Come, let us stand beneath Thy cross;  
So may the blood from out His side  
Fall gently on us drop by drop;  
Jesus, our Lord, is crucified.

Here I rest, for ever seeking  
Mercy poured in streams of blood.

By Thy red wounds streaming,  
With Thy life-blood gleaming.

Lift up Thy bleeding hand, O Lord,  
Unseal that cleansing tide.

If we turn to the purely literary aspect of these hymns, we find some of them very remarkable. For sheer, downright bathos the following lines are worth quotation:—

Faithful Cross, above all other,  
One and only Noble Tree,  
None in foliage, none in blossom,  
None in fruit Thy peer may be;  
Sweetest wood and sweetest iron,  
Sweetest weight is hung on Thee.

There is a frankness of Materialism in some of these so-called spiritual hymns:—

Lord, I believe Thou hast prepared,  
Unworthy though I be,  
For me, a blood bought free reward,  
A golden harp for me.

And, again:—

Oh! for the pearly gates of heaven,  
Oh! for the golden floor.

We might fill this paper with quotations, but we refrain. These samples, be it remembered, are from the most distinguished Christian collections, and they are by no means the worst of their class. If any reader wishes to pursue the subject, let him turn to the pages of the *War Cry*, and other evangelical publications. He will find out the painful truth that the enormous popularity of certain hymns is due to the music:—

As long as the tune has a right good swing,  
It doesn't much matter what trash you sing.

This explains why such hymns as have a distant claim to literary merit are little esteemed by the public compared with "The Glory Song," "Tell Mother I'll be There," and the "Bells of Hell go Ting-a-ling."

To an outsider, hymns would suggest restraint, sobriety, the dignity of reverence; but the Torrey and Alexander mission, like the Moody and Sankey crusade, and the American and Welsh revivalists, amply prove the association of Christianity with hysteria and theatricality. These evangelists know their public. It is all very well for the *Daily Telegraph* to boast that "King George reigns over an educated people," but the revivalists have gauged their public better than the Fleet Street penmen. Their audiences were, perhaps, better dressed and better schooled than those filmy-eyed innocents who listen spellbound to the trombones and tambourines of the Church and Salvation Armies, yet they sing similar rubbish. Christian congregations seem unable to distinguish between poetry and doggerel, pathos and bathos, civilized and uncivilized ideas. Singing their delirious rhymes, they are, intellectually, on a level with barbarians. Savages do this one way, and the countrymen of Miss Maude Royden and the Bishop of London another, but the nature of the act, and the results, are much the same.

MIMNERMUS.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S.—We closed our efforts for 1919 at Mr. Cohen's lectures on December 21 with very good audiences considering the bad weather. A record was established in connection with literature sales, and several membership forms were asked for. The Branch is much indebted to Mrs. Patterson and Miss Dorothy Maud for their musical treat during the day's proceedings. We commence the New Year's work with two lectures on January 11 by Mr. J. C. Thomas ("Keridon"), whose efforts were so much appreciated on his last visit. As subscriptions for 1920 are now due, will those members who are at present unable to attend lectures please remit to the Secretary?

## What Sustains Christianity?

SOME readers of the *Freethinker* may possibly remember a reading-lesson which used to be found in the older school-books dealing with the history of a wonderful pudding which it required the services of a huge number of people to produce. Although it had taken so many persons to make this pudding, it turned out to be only an ordinary plum-pudding after all; but the compiler of the lesson was able to show that from first to last quite a host of people were directly or indirectly concerned in placing it upon the dinner-table.

The writer has often thought that the Christian Church bears a strong resemblance to that remarkable pudding. Few of us realize what an immense assortment of individuals are interested in the maintenance of belief in Christianity. We are apt to speak as if the clergy alone were financially concerned in the perpetuation of the Christian superstition. Of course, as a class, the clergy are primarily interested in upholding Christianity; but if we ponder for a little, we can see what a stupendous army of men and women are economically involved in the modern presentation of the Christian pudding, quite apart from the clergy and their immediate connections.

Undoubtedly it is easy to lay too much stress on the economic theory of history; and the advocates of the theory that all things sublunary can be explained in terms of economics attempt to prove far too much. So it was that, when first I was introduced to the thesis of the influence of the economic factor on religious belief (or profession), I was inclined to think that many anti-religious critics unduly pressed the argument against the Christian believer. But increasing experience has persuaded me that it is scarcely possible to exaggerate the importance of the economic factor as one of the dynamic bases of the Christian religion.

Let us consider a moment the number and variety of occupations interested financially in arresting the decay of Christianity, and the almost numberless host of individuals whose livelihood either partially or wholly depends on the maintenance of the fiction that the Christian religion is inseparably bound up with the moral progress of the race. That the clergy are in the forefront of the mighty army of those who live, more or less, on Christianity, goes without saying. No doubt many priests and ministers think—they certainly say—that they conscientiously hold—notwithstanding all that can be urged against the credibility of their claims—that there is a substantial measure of truth in what they preach and teach. It is nevertheless quite obvious that in the realm of religious belief they are not prepared to accept the consequences of well-established scientific conclusions, and the real reason is not that they repudiate the teachings of science, but that if they overtly accepted them their occupation in a very real sense would be gone. In plain English, it is a question of bread-and-butter (with sundry trimmings) so far as the majority of them are concerned; and when we contemplate the meannesses and chicaneries to which men in other walks of life resign themselves as the price of worldly comfort and success, we need not be inordinately surprised that clergymen with a similar object in view can reconcile themselves to a continuous paltering with truth and not suffer more than an occasional evanescent qualm of conscience. Not many of us are of the stuff of which martyrs are made.

It is unnecessary, however, as already indicated, to labour the point that the Christian clergy, from economic motives, are as a body committed to the sustained advocacy of the Christian faith, irrespective of their private

opinions. Nor need more than a passing reference be made to the large number of relatives and dependants of clergymen who are inexorably compelled to assist in bolstering up the system which provides their means of support. It is rather the object of this article to consider briefly the number of trades, industries, and professions that have a monetary interest in resisting the overthrow of Christianity, or which, at least, cannot be expected to hasten its downfall. A mere detailed list of those so interested would fill no small amount of space.

To begin with, take the architects. An architect may be an Atheist—some architects are—but where he can earn a fee by producing designs for a church or any form of structure used for religious purposes, he does not feel called upon to refuse the work. There may be exceptions, but in the nature of things they must be very rare. Here, then, undoubtedly the tendency is to allow things to remain as they are, and, whatever may be the private belief, to refrain from giving public expression to it. A man cannot well take money for the erection of Christian churches and at the same time frankly voice his disbelief in Christianity. The same consideration holds good with building contractors. If the erection of chapels, or churches, or kindred institutions forms a considerable part of their business, they are not likely to take any overt part in the destruction of Christian belief, whether they themselves mentally accept it or not. Then the firms engaged in the stained glass industry—a large proportion of whose work is done for the churches—have naturally a friendly disposition (at any rate, in a financial sense) towards Christianity.

The numerous firms of joiners, slaters, plasterers, and painters up and down the country who get a share of Church patronage are likewise monetarily concerned in common with the above, not merely in the persistence of Christianity, but in the extension of its activities. Even the people who make a speciality of the manufacture of Church pews and benches have certainly one solid reason for upholding the truth of the Gospel. There is money in it. This reflection, of course, applies to all the others mentioned. Belief in Christianity on the part of the public, or, at least, the pretence of such belief, means food and raiment to them, and they cannot afford openly to quarrel with anything that helps to bring along these necessities of life in sufficient quantities.

And what shall we say of the mighty army employed in the printing, publishing, and dissemination of Bibles, hymn-books, tracts, and the multifarious literature associated generally with the Christian religion? What a gigantic money interest is at stake here! The National Bible Society of Scotland makes it a proud boast that during the War it was instrumental in putting into circulation amongst our own troops and those of our allies no less than five million copies of Scripture. One wonders what the soldiers did with them. Did they come in handy to boil their tea and coffee cans, or were they relegated to more ignoble uses? Of one thing we may be sure, and that is, those who make a livelihood by supplying the nations with Bibles, hymn-books, and other Christian literature, will keep the ball rolling as long as they possibly can. Business is business.

In enumerating those financially interested in the survival of Christianity, one must not forget to mention the people engaged in the manufacture of church organs and harmoniums, and the large number employed in the production of ecclesiastical habiliments of all kinds from choristers' surplices to bishops' gaiters. Then there are the composers, printers, and publishers of Church music, with whom we may group the organists, choirmasters, and choir soloists. Although all these have a share in carrying on the farce of this being a Christian country,

they are not necessarily all Christians. The present writer knew of a church organist who, in the confidences of private life, confessed to sheer Atheism. In view of his calling, however, and also of the fact that he was indebted for much of the rest of his income to his church connection, his heterodoxy was only divulged *sub rosa*.

We have not by any means exhausted the catalogue, our readers will be able to add to it themselves; but, from the instances cited, it can be seen that the number of those interested in the permanency of the Christian delusion assumes imposing proportions. Legal pickings are fairly numerous in connection with ecclesiasticism, and, as a consequence, the lawyers are in the main not at all disposed to countenance any movement having for its object the discrediting of Christianity. Here, again, we see the economic factor at work. It may be observed also in operation in most of our villages where the inhabitants, living under the eye of the parson and the neighbouring gentry, and subsisting largely by their patronage or through their countenance, have the strongest of reasons for acquiescing in the current orthodoxy. Indeed, the more closely the subject is considered, the clearer does it become that the continued dominance of Christianity at the present day is due, not to its intrinsic value nor to any widespread recognition of the truth of its claims, but, in a great degree, to the money power which it wields in ways either undisguised or clandestine.

GEORGE SCOTT.

### A Double-Cross Curate.

HE is a curate of the Church of England. His mind is quite out of focus respecting the affairs of this life that matter, and is even out of focus in regard to his own particular form of geographical dementia. Hitherto he has been a tame and harmless supporter of the scintillating intellectualism of the Church of England, but since an eccentric canon exploded rhetorically against the shortcomings of modern theology the curate is a changed man, and keeps his dear old vicar continually in fear that he will commit the only sin guaranteed by the Church as unpardonable. The change in the curate has been likened by some of his dear old friends to the fall of Lucifer, but such a comparison seems like trying to stretch the extreme.

One of the curate's illusions is that the powers of evil distract the world from time to time with strong "delusions"; that is to say, the Devil periodically makes poorly-fed and poorly-clad working men clamour desperately for more food and clothing. Some of the working men in his locality are not convinced of this. They say it does not need the Devil to make the east wind feel damnably cold, nor to make hunger feel damnably uncomfortable. However, these heretical workers are not dogmatic; they aver that everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but that he is not entitled to force his opinion on anyone else.

For all our social and industrial troubles the curate has one panacea—true Christianity—but up to the time of writing he has not succeeded in defining what true Christianity is. In his desperate attempts to formulate true Christianity, he has sought assistance from the latest rehash of Spiritualism. He has hopes of getting into communication with one of the devils cast out of the man who was possessed with seven, and he has tried hard to get into touch with one of the evil spirits which were cast into the Gadarene swine, his reason being that he would gain valuable information from eye-witnesses of the doings of Jesus.

The curate is like an enraged bull towards any evil he encounters, and he spoke his mind at the mother's meeting the other afternoon. Now a number of the older mothers are known in the locality as "nice old dears." It was against these "nice old dears" that the curate fulminated, only he did so indirectly. He took as his theme the evil of strong drink, and, in particular, he expatiated on the physical degeneration induced by an over-fondness for gin. The "nice old dears" listened benignantly to the tirade of the curate, and when the meeting was over they all trooped into the "pub." opposite and indulged in a "double-nip" by way of protest.

The curate has endeavoured to arouse in his very worldly-minded flock a taste for higher things than backing horses and swilling booze. His efforts in that direction are praiseworthy, but trying to wean rough working men from beeriness and petty gambling by lecturing to them about the influence of the Church in the Middle Ages is certain of failure. One would like to know of a real counter-attraction to the beerhouse and betting on "gee-gees," and we wish the curate luck in his search for the hitherto unattainable. Influenced by the recent palaver about national reconstruction, the curate wrote on paper what he really knew of Christianity. The following are excerpts:—

Christianity is a religion. Christianity was caused by some Jews, but not by all. Christ was undoubtedly of Jewish extraction, for his mother was a Jewess. Had the Assyrians exterminated the Jews, the dreadful probability is that Christianity would never have existed. There are some almost incredible stories in the *Old Testament*, and only the gift of faith enables me to believe them. I sometimes think that those old Jewish prophets were caused to exaggerate by reason of the privations they underwent. Failing this explanation, there is only one awful name by which to call them. How lamentable it is to know that Christians disagreed strongly with each other only a few years after the death of our Saviour. And it is more lamentable to know that they have continued and extended their disagreement with the passage of the centuries. How awful is the fact that at one period Roman Catholics burnt Protestants whenever they got the opportunity, and that Protestants retaliated in kind. Old women used, to be burnt and done to death in many frightfully cruel ways because it was said that they were witches, and because it is written in the Bible, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Now, I am firmly of opinion that this text is an interpolation by the Devil, and I intend to bring my view to the notice of the next Church Congress.

Some time ago I was told that Christianity is the detritus of many ancient religions. I strongly dissent from this opinion. If there is any resemblance between Christianity and ancient religions, it is because these ancient religions were more or less intelligent anticipations of Christianity.

As I hope for preferment, I humbly and fervently subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles of our Holy and Catholic Apostolic Church.

And now God the Father, etc., be with us all. Amen.

JAMES H. WATERS.

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Immortality! why the most of us don't know what to do with this one little personal life, and might well wonder how we came to be promoted to the dignity thereof: the claim to immortality is the claim to be trusted with millions of pounds because one has shown himself unfit to be trusted with sixpence. Leave me, O comical little men, with your talk about eternity; go and try to live a single happy and rational day.—James Thomson ("B.V.").

## Some Thoughts on Scripture.

SOME ecclesiastical wit has discovered that the Bible is not sufficiently well known in these islands, and regarding this position of affairs as an exercise for his ingenuity, he has conceived the idea of touring the country with a ponderous copy of the sacred volume, measuring some five feet by four feet, being the manuscript work of one thousand industrious Christians. The scheme has had the blessing of many overseers of the foid. The Reverend F. B. Meyer urged that the year 1920 should be made, in a special sense, "Bible Year."

Now, I am aware that many Freethinkers find themselves a little nervous in the presence of the Bible. Some of its pages are supposed to be not quite nice. There are Rabelaisian and Boccaccio-like strains in it, stated to be greatly detrimental to the morals of children and young persons. Considered as history, the book is regarded as unreliable, as science untrue, and as philosophy unsound. I must admit that there are prejudices against it, and that in defending the Bible at this time of day I am open to the charge of being paradoxical. For all that, I am of the opinion that this book is one of no little interest and instruction.

The works of M. Pierre Louys have not yet been translated into English, and the enthusiasm and candour with which he treats that part of life (to borrow an expression used by a recent contributor to *Punch*) is often talked about but never mentioned, makes it highly unlikely that they ever will be so translated. There are, however, one or two little stories in the Scriptures quite in the style of the French master, and persons unacquainted with the original can obtain a very fair idea of its literary flavour by consulting Genesis for the history of Tamar and Judah, Kings for the story of Abishag, the Book of Samuel for the amours of Amnon with Tamar, and David with Bathsheba. In Judges may be read a very characteristic little piece in which the unfortunate death of the mistress of an Ephraim Levite leads to her Osiris-like dismemberment, and the eventual slaughter of sixty-five thousand persons.

Just at present books are expensive, and it is not possible for all of us to have on our shelves those fascinating studies in the psychology of sex, for which we are indebted to the industry of men like Havelock Ellis, Krafft-Ebing, Sigmund Freud, Auguste Forel, and Iwan Bloch. The ancients, however, had made, even in those far-off times, many curious observations of the same set of phenomena, and it is of interest to note that the Book of Leviticus exhorts us to refrain from a series of bizarre practices, which are described in sufficient detail as will enable the learned or legal reader to attach to each its Latin name.

In the Bible one may meet some very delightful people. Jeremiah, like our own Gibbon, will discourse for us on the Rise and Fall of Empires. The polished author of Ecclesiastes, with less hope than Schopenhauer, will sparkle with pessimistic epigrams which have doubtless pleased Omar Khayyam himself.

The Jewish Prime Minister, Isaiah, will talk on cosmic metaphysics so long as we will let him, and if his philosophy be none too invulnerable (and what philosophy is impregnable?), it may be argued that Isaiah was at least as sound a philosopher as Mr. Balfour. And if the Jewish statesman differed from the Englishman in the possession of a wife and a considerable family, it has yet to be proved that he exceeded him in nepotism.

In spite of Lord Byron, and Swinburne, who sighed for the breasts of the nymphs in the brake, the English Muse of Poesy is a thoroughly respectable young woman,

and there are passages in the Song of Songs which would shock her. In fact, as Remy de Gourmont has been at the pains to point out, the translators themselves have not scrupled to tone down some of the inspired expressions of the inspired writer. Notwithstanding, Canticles does hint to our countrymen what can be done in the way of erotic writing when one is filled with the spirit; and it would not be an over-statement to say that some of our younger poets appear to be looking into the matter.

In the pages of the Bible one rubs shoulders with the philosopher, the fool, and the poet. One watches the betrayed husband as he waits for the homecoming of his erring but beautiful wife. Here a courtesan lets spies into a city, there a Roman Governor gives a good man over to the fury of the populace. Lovesick girls jostle with preoccupied prophets. Historians, thinkers, statesmen, each in their several ways, deals with the riddle of the universe. Harlots wanton. Men fight or pray, according to time or temperament. Children are born, suffer, and die. All the rich riot of humanity is here. To adapt the words of Carlyle, in this book what a fermenting vat lies simmering and hid!

It has always seemed to me a great pity that the Scriptures are so ill known. In France the Bible is almost a closed book. But perhaps in that gay country it is destined to remain forgotten until an edition, illustrated by George Barbier, Herouard, and Maurice Milliere, and published by the proprietors of *La Vie Parisienne*, is issued in weekly parts. If the promoters of the Bible Crusade mean business, I shall feel happy to make a present to them of this suggestion. The address of *La Vie Parisienne* is 29 rue Tronchet, Paris.

W. H.

### Acid Drops.

At a recent meeting of the Acton Board of Guardians one of the members proposed that, as they had three clergymen present, they should open the proceedings with prayer. Some of the members thought they ought to imitate the House of Commons, but a good fight against the proposal was made by several members, with the result that the motion was defeated, eight members voting in its favour. We think it high time that religious services were abolished from all public ceremonies and meetings. It is ridiculous, in a State in which all sorts of opinions for and against religion exists, that a section should thus force their particular views upon everyone. There is no more reason why a Christian should get up and mouth a prayer at the opening of public business than there is for an Atheist getting up and giving a discourse on Atheism.

Cardinal Andrieux, the French ecclesiastic, has frowned upon the new dances, and forbids the Catholic faithful to dance the tango, jazz, hesitation waltz, fox trot, and other varieties. Our office-boy declares this is "the jazz-banned."

Dr. E. Coplans says 90,000 children are born in London yearly, and of these 8,000 die in their first year. As the hymn says: "There's a friend of little children up above the bright, blue sky."

Christmas, says the *Church Times*, can have no meaning for those who reject or have never known the Christian Faith. Nonsense! The festival of Yuletide was known long before Christianity was heard of. These old Nature festivals have no more necessary connection with Christianity than they have with getting drunk—which is also a good old Christmas, and Christian, custom. We are often surprised that the Christians do not lay claim to the atmosphere.

Imitation is said to be the sincerest form of flattery. Here is a very worldly form of fixtures at the Young Men's Chris-

tian Association at Westcliff-on-Sea:—Dec. 18, Dance; Dec. 20, Whist Drive; Dec. 24, Social Evening; Dec. 25, Carols, Games, etc.; Dec. 26, Christmas Tree, Dance; Dec. 27, Whist Drive. Quite in accordance with the pious traditions of a merry birthday of the Man of Sorrows.

According to the new *Who's Who*, a remarkable number of clergymen go in for outdoor sports as recreation. Yet these athletic Christian priests were too proud to fight in the Great War. And *Who's Who* makes no mention that the clergy are "starving."

At Southall a tin tabernacle has been converted into flats. Presumably it was formerly visited by "flats."

The clergy avoided the War so far as possible, but they are turning the peace to their own account. At Herdon a local War-memorial takes the form of a new window in the parish church.

A South Wales correspondent writes informing us that there is a tremendous amount of newspaper "bluff" about the alleged religious revival in Aberaman and district. He says that to call the mission a revival is "a wild stretch of imagination." He describes Pastor Jeffreys as a very ignorant man of the Billy Sunday type, preaching hell-fire of the old description. But except for a small circle the "revival" is falling very flat, and looks like dying very rapidly. Our correspondent suggests that the papers have boomed the revival in the hope of its checking to some extent the prevailing social unrest. That, we think, is extremely probable, and we are glad to have the above report from a competent observer. We suggest to local Freethinkers that a good counter-irritant would be increased energy in Freethought propaganda in the district.

Religion is without money and without price. So the truthful clergy love to describe it. Yet the cat does get out of the bag sometimes. Referring to the Church cinema movement, a daily paper remarks that the organizers "do not seek profit." And a few lines further on it adds the touching words: "A company with a capital of £100,000 may eventually become necessary."

When Joanna Southcott died she left a sealed box that was to be opened after her death in the presence of twenty-four bishops. The bishops have declined to have anything to do with it. Now there is a chance for Sir Oliver Lodge and other Spiritualists. Let some medium inform the world as to what is in the box. That will provide a more reliable test than the delivery of messages that convince one here and there, and leave a much larger number unconvinced. But we do not think that Spiritualists will accept a test of this description.

The Manchester Licensing Committee had before it the other day a proposal to open the Free Trade Hall for Sunday concerts, a charge to be made for admission. It was decided to allow the concerts only on condition that 75 per cent. of the takings was given to charity. The decision illustrates the petty tyranny exercised by these local bodies who are acting in this case without the slightest shadow of legal justification. They are usurping a power that is not theirs, and they are dictating to others solely because these others lack the courage to tell them to go to the devil and mind their own business.

In the first place charging for admission on Sunday is positively illegal. It is made so by statute, and no local authority or judge has the power to override a statute. They cannot give permission to anyone to break the law, and even though the licensing magistrates granted permission to charge on Sundays, it would still be open to bring an action against those who did so. It is beyond the power of magistrates to either give or withhold permission. They can no more give permission than they can issue a permit for anyone to commit a burglary. We are surprised that some of these promoters of concerts have not the courage to open

their buildings and defy the magistrates. If they will only pluck up their courage and do this, we prophesy that nothing will happen. Of course, the authorities may oppose their getting a licence for week-days, but there are ways of bringing even the licensing magistrates to their senses if only one goes the right way to work. It will be remembered that the London County Council had the same exalted ideas of their powers, until they were taken before the court and read the lesson that even the British public were not quite so completely in their power as they had assumed.

And it is a piece of downright impudence to demand that men whose business it is to provide the public with music should either work for nothing or give 75 per cent. of their takings away. We haven't the least doubt but that some of these magistrates are financially interested in concerns that earn money on Sundays. And even if they are not, the question remains the same. Giving the public music is a legitimate business, and those who attend are not at all interested in supporting this or that charity, but in spending their evening in an agreeable manner. It is monstrous that these officials shall say they must be taxed to the tune of three-quarters of their takings before they are to be allowed to pursue their avocation. What would be said if it were demanded that the clergy should give 75 per cent. of their collections every Sunday? The development of the musical taste of the people is a public good. Those who work to that end are performing a public service. To make the following of their profession dependent upon their agreeing to be fined ninepence out of every shilling earned is a form of tyranny that only a people content to prate of their freedom, without a genuine appreciation of what freedom means, would tolerate for a single month. One day, perhaps, Britons, instead of howling that "Britons never shall be slaves," will decide on being free. And then we shall see things.

The London County Council has also been discussing the question of permitting Sunday games in the public parks. The question has been deferred for settlement, and the *Church Times* thinks the important question is whether it will "encourage our youth to ignore the sanctity of the day." We do not see that ought to bother the County Council at all. That body is not elected to act as conservator of the Churches, but to look after the welfare of London. And there is no question but that when the youth of London are playing games in the parks on Sunday they are far more healthily employed than lounging about the streets, or even attending church. We are warned that a certain amount of Sunday labour is involved. So there is in the opening of a church, the lighting of the streets, or even in keeping alive.

Bishop Deane told an Aberdeen audience the other day that it was infinitely easier to be a Christian to-day than it was twenty-five or thirty years ago. It all depends. If a genuine and honest Christian is meant, then the statement is not true. Every generation adds to the difficulty of accepting Christianity in a straightforward and honest sense. But it is easier to-day to put forward anything in the name of Christianity than it was, because the number of people who have a sincere belief dwindles, and a number of people who cling to the name, for various reasons, are ready to overlook anything so long as the name is retained. Bishop Deane adds that he himself was an Agnostic when he left Oxford. We have heard that kind of statement, and usually it means no more than that a man had a number of doubts concerning certain Christian doctrines, but lacked the courage or the strength to follow them up. Intellectual courage is very rare.

Ernest Bernard Scott, who was executed at Newcastle for the murder of his sweetheart, said in his last letter, just before his execution: "I am going to meet with friends I love dearly, and with whom I have never to part again through Christ who will carry me to them." It is in such cases as these that one realizes the comforting and moralizing qualities of true Christian belief.

There were 776 cases of divorce in Scotland during 1919. This breaks all records, and a correspondent wonders what the parsons feel like when the secular power is called in to undo what they have done. We suppose they will continue to warn their flocks against the civil marriage as leading to immorality. It is estimated that about 60 per cent. of the cases are soldiers and their wives, which forms a pretty comment on the alleged "moral uplift" which the clergy were so fond of telling us had been brought about by the War.

It sounds conceited, but, candidly, when we glance at some of the papers published for the "education" of the people, we are not surprised at the attachment shown to a paper such as the *Freethinker*. Here, for instance, is some one writing to *John o' London's Weekly* asking for a life of Christ to be recommended. And the questioner is advised to read *Farrar's Life!* The Apocryphal New Testament is also recommended, and that to an informed reader is very illuminating. But the man who is satisfied with *Farrar's Life of Christ* is scarcely the one to appreciate the other.

There have been nearly 2,000 more "irregular" marriages in Scotland this year than during 1918. "Irregular" in Scotland is the equivalent of "civil" in England. But owing to certain historico-legal considerations the word "irregular" has been retained to connote the civil ceremony. It is high time that this was rectified. To the general public the term stands as something derogatory, and doubtless is used as such by Christians. We think it is time that Scotch Freethinkers began to agitate for the abolition of so insulting a word in connection with what is easily the most important of all social contracts. And it is surely ridiculous that the State should submit to one of its own functions being called, even technically, "irregular," and applying the opposite word to a ceremony that is reminiscent of a tribe of savages.

A magazine published a full-page Christmas picture, entitled "The Angels appearing to the Shepherds," and the drawing seemed to be composed mainly of sheep. The letter-press explained that "the angels are behind the spectator. The effect of their appearance is all he sees." Perhaps the artist thought that his bogey's would challenge comparison with the "angels" of Mons, which, according to the least unreliable observer, suggested sailors on horseback.

When a new—the third—edition of Mr. Cohen's *Christianity and Slavery* is called for, which will be in the near future, it looks as though a new chapter might be added on the development of slavery in Africa since the beginning of the War. There was a very startling article in the *Edinburgh Review* for July, giving the moves made towards the enslavement of the natives in the Free State and in other parts of South Africa, and the Bishop of Zanzibar has just raised a protest against the natives of East Africa, just liberated from German control, being handed over to Belgium. Of course, the Bishop's protest may be no more than a professional one; but, on the other hand, Belgium's record in Africa is just about as black as it can be. For our own part, we are convinced that no white peoples are to be trusted in their dealings with coloured ones. The assumption of superiority in virtue of colour is always there, and for brutality the record of the modern white will hold its own in the world's history.

Mr. Charles Coborn, the singer of "Two Lovely Black Eyes," should prove an acquisition to the solemn ranks of Christian evangelists. Speaking at Whitfield's Tabernacle, London, the comedian-preacher said he was once pursued by an intoxicated elephant—a brother artist. Brother Coborn might have had a worse fate. He might have been actually swallowed by the whale who gulped down Jonah.

Bishop Stirling, who has been Bishop of the Falkland Islands since 1869, declares he is "in reality Bishop of South America." In which case, the South American peoples know the Bishop as much as he knows them.



**C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.**

January 4, South Place, London; January 18, Abertillery; January 25, South Place, London; February 1, Stratford Town Hall; February 22, South Shields; February 26, Glasgow (Debate on Spiritualism); February 29, Glasgow; March 7, Leicester; March 14, Birmingham; March 21, Manchester; April 18, Swansea.

**To Correspondents.**

P. WEINER.—Pleased to hear that you find *The Parson and the Atheist* so useful. It is selling well, and others express a similar opinion to your own.

J. M. HINDLEY.—It is good of you to "celebrate" the raising of the price of the paper by ordering two extra copies. That is the kind of spirit that is bound to succeed. We are greatly encouraged. We intend publishing a volume of "Views and Opinions" so soon as we can find the time for the necessary revision. The vol. will probably be under the same title.

J. W. WOOD.—Thanks. We are keeping very fit, but were glad of a few days' comparative rest over the Christmas holidays. Regards to you and yours.

ANNO DOMINI.—Quite an original use to put the circular to. We do not think that the "Lord Bishop of London" would feel happy if he knew the destiny of his circular.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges:—W. Stewart, 2s.

J. HARMAN.—We do not doubt that many of our readers would have found the required amount to keep the paper at twopence. But the readiness with which they have supported us throws upon us the responsibility of seeing that their support is asked for on adequate grounds and their contributions expended in an intelligent manner. We have acted on that principle throughout, and intend to do so to the end. As we explained, the changed circumstances warrant a change of policy. Thanks for your own offer.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—Anno Domini, £2; F. C., 5s.; Mr. Stewart, 1s.; A Friend, £25

A. W. FREER.—We also regret the need for raising the price of this paper. So long as there was a prospect of making the paper pay its way we kept it at its original price, but we see no chance of doing that now at twopence.

W. A.—Thanks for pamphlet. May notice it later. It will be useful anyway.

D. D. B. writes:—"A Christian friend says that he and others are very sorry for me. I can only reply that I am equally sorry for them, because I think that they have as much intelligence as I profess to have, and I cannot understand why men of intelligence cannot repudiate blind belief in things that are unseen and undemonstrable." We suppose that sheer conservatism explains much. It was Bagehot who said that the greatest pain humanity suffers from is the pain of a new idea. And certainly many dread it as others do the infliction of bodily pain.

F. C.—Thanks for good wishes. There is no doubt about our sleeping capacity. We can sleep anywhere, and at almost any time. And while we can do that, we are all right.

"JOHN'S GRANDPA" writes: "Your decision to raise the price of the *Freethinker* is indeed timely and wise.....Considering the reduced value of my twopence and the increased value of our intellectual treat.....there is not a penny among all I spend that I lay out with such pleasure, and for which I get so high a return."

"SCOT."—Received with thanks. We have handed your communication to Mr. Lloyd.

P. C. RUMBELow.—Thanks. The idea is a good one, but it is hardly substantial enough.

T. A. W.—Thanks for MSS., which we regret we are unable to use. The lines are not quite up to standard.

OWING to the holidays having been unusually prolonged this year, a number of replies to letters are held over till next week. The same applies to several letters which we intend publishing, or from which we hope to quote interesting passages.

AUTOLYCUS.—Thanks for cuttings. Quite useful.

C. SIBLEIGH.—Crowded out this week. Your letter is well worthy consideration.

**The Secular Society, Limited, offices 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.**

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**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, 15s.; half year, 7s. 6d.; three months, 3s. 9d.**

**Sugar Plums.**

A Happy New Year to all our readers. May their numbers rapidly increase and their troubles as quickly diminish. If the first is realized our own difficulties will speedily diminish, and theirs will certainly not weigh the heavier for a weekly reading of this journal. There is something about the *Freethinker* that appears to appeal with peculiar force to those who read it regularly, and nothing is more gratifying to all who are concerned in its production than the expressions of regard that are constantly reaching this office. We do not publicly acknowledge a tithe of what we receive, but we are not the less appreciative of their receipt. The task of keeping a paper, such as this one, must always be largely a labour of love, and, perhaps, the work would not be so well done were it otherwise. The best work of the world is usually that which is unpurchased and un purchasable.

We feel that with the enlargement the *Freethinker* is starting on a career of greater usefulness than ever. And we are not at all surprised to find so many of our readers expressing their approval of what is being done. We take this opportunity of thanking those who have written, and also for the high opinion they express, of what has already been done. The only doubt we find expressed is how far an increase in price will prevent the getting of new readers. We are, ourselves, quite alive to this aspect of the matter, and, as all are aware, we kept the paper at its old price right through the War, with that fact before us. But the rise in wages that have taken place since the War ceased has created a new situation, and we must face it. So long as there was some hope of the old values returning we struggled on. But we must all recognize that the old values have gone, and we are afraid that none of us will see them again. So we must adjust ourselves to the new conditions, and we shall probably find that it is no harder to get new readers at the new price than it was at the old.

Mr. Cohen opens to day (Jan. 4) the course of afternoon lectures at South Place Institute. His subject is "Do the Dead Live?" and the answer to that question should attract a good audience. We hope that our London readers will help to make these lectures as widely known as possible, and, above all, bring their religious friends along. South Place is easily reached from all parts of London; it is within three minutes' walk from Liverpool Street and Moorgate Street Stations, and can be reached from all parts by both 'bus and tram. The second lecture of the course will be delivered by Mr. Lloyd.

There is little to add to the notice of the death of Mr. Victor Roger which appears in another column. It was apparent to all who knew him that for some years he had not been his old self, and those who knew the nature of his complaint from which he suffered must have been aware that the end, whenever it came, was likely to come suddenly. Mr. Cohen was away in the provinces that week-end, and only heard the news of Mr. Roger's death when

he arrived at the office on the day of the funeral, too late to permit him to attend the ceremony, otherwise he would certainly have been present. Mr. Lloyd was also away in Scotland, and for that reason could not attend either. We say this in order to prevent misapprehensions on the subject. Mr. Roger had been for many years associated with the work of the Society, and his past services called for some recognition. His interest in the Freethought Cause was long and sustained. The Society was, however, represented by Miss Vance and Miss Kough.

Having to get out last week's paper earlier on account of the holidays prevented our giving any report of Mr. Cohen's visit to Ireland. It is only necessary to say now that the two meetings were very successful, being an improvement on the last visit. The Ulster Hall was well filled on both occasions, some of those present coming very considerable distances, and staying over two nights in the city. There was also a large sale of literature. It is quite clear that Ireland is ripe for a great advance in the direction of Freethought so soon as the political situation is eased. Mr. Cohen returned by way of Manchester, where, in spite of the awful blizzard that raged on Sunday, the meetings were exceedingly good. They were not the largest he has had in that city, but, considering the weather, they were far larger than one would have expected. Those who ventured out in the evening deserved a special reward. A special word of thanks is due to the vocalists and pianist who gave their services on both occasions.

Mr. Lloyd also had the benefit of the gale at Glasgow, but he, too, had excellent meetings, and one of his audience wrote us in very high terms of his addresses. We are not surprised. Those who hear Mr. Lloyd once generally wish to hear him again, and it would argue poor judgment on the part of our Glasgow friends if the state of things differed there from what one finds elsewhere.

To-day (Jan. 4) Mr. Dan Griffiths lectures in the Dockers' Hall, Swansea, in the afternoon and evening, at 3 and 7. There is no need to say anything on behalf of Mr. Griffiths in Swansea, but if there are any there who are not acquainted with him as a lecturer, we feel well justified, from what we have heard of his performances elsewhere, in advising them to be present on both occasions. As these are the opening lectures of the season, there is an additional reason why the hall should be crowded.

Mr. W. Skilling writes:—

I was much interested in your correspondent's (Mr. W. Skeate) letter with regard to his son's religious beliefs—or lack of them. I might take exception, however, to his statement that his son was "compelled to adopt some form of religion before he was permitted to volunteer to serve his country." I well remember the consternation I caused when joining up by answering "Atheist" when asked for my religion, and it was only after a considerable amount of trouble I carried my point. This same trouble was the bugbear of my life in the service, and it followed me through different camps and each of the four hospitals I went into. I was told at Chatham Barracks that my identity card (which entitled me to my rations) could not be completed until particulars had been given of a religion. I went hungry for a day through this, but eventually carried the point again. And so through each stage of my service career. To this day my identity disc carries only four dots in the place usually allotted to the name of one's religion, and it is the only one I ever saw like it. This shows, therefore, that you can penetrate the hide of officialism if you like to pay the price, and I sincerely hope Mr. Skeate will win the fight for his dead son's principles.

We take this opportunity of reminding all N. S. S. members that subscriptions for the year 1920 are now due. Except for a very modest minimum, the subscription is quite voluntary, and there has been no increase to make up for the decreased value of money. Doubtless many members will bear this in mind when remitting. Few societies have carried on a greater work than the N. S. S. with more modest resources, but headquarters have never expressed a partiality

for this form of self-denial. So we are hoping to hear, between now and the end of the month, that January, 1920, has created a record for both promptitude of despatch and size of subscriptions.

We have received from a friend, who desires that his name be not published, a cheque for £25, given with a desire to make the Sustentation Fund up to £400. As the £25 makes a few pounds over that sum, we have decided to apply the balance to the distribution of literature in quarters that we are sure will be productive of good. We are always receiving applications for such; and this will enable us to respond more liberally than we could do otherwise.

## Pages from Voltaire.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN ARISTUS AND ACROTAL.

*Acrotal.*—Oh, happy times when the scholars of the university, who had all beards to their chins, put the finishing touch on that villainous mathematician, Ramus, and dragged his body naked and smeared with blood to the doors of all the colleges, there to do penance.

*Aristus.*—This Ramus,<sup>1</sup> I take it, was an infamous wretch, surely he must have committed the most awful crimes.

*Acrotal.*—Nothing less, my friend. He wrote against Aristotle, and was suspected to be guilty of something still worse. It is a thousand pities they didn't knock out the brains of that other fellow Charron<sup>2</sup> who took it into his head to write a book on *Wisdom*. And Montaigne also with his contemptuous reasoning and immodest raillery. Oh! those accursed reasoners are a very plague in the State.

*Aristus.*—Bad reasoners, indeed, are insufferable; but I cannot see why you should hang a poor man for a few false syllogisms; besides, in my opinion, the men you are pleased to abuse reason tolerably well.

*Acrotal.*—So much the worse, that is what makes them all the more dangerous.

*Aristus.*—In what way, may I ask? Did you ever know philosophers to bring famine, war, or pestilence into a country? Did Bayle, for example, against whom you rail so bitterly, did he ever try to break down the dykes in Holland in order to drown the inhabitants, as a certain great statesman, who was no philosopher, is said to have proposed.

*Acrotal.*—Would to God that Bayle had been drowned, and all the rest of his Dutch heretics! Why, was there ever such an abominable fellow in the world? He sets forth things with such an odious falsity, places the argument on both sides before our eyes with so mean an impartiality, and is so insufferably intelligent, that he puts even those of the commonest understanding in a position to judge, and even to doubt of what they are told. It is impossible to stand this kind of thing, and, for my part, I confess that whenever I hear the name of this fellow and some others like him mentioned, it throws me into a fit of holy rage.

*Aristus.*—I don't think it was their intention to make you angry.....But where are you going in such a hurry?

*Acrotal.*—I am going to see Mr. Bardobardi. For the last two or three days I have been trying to get at him, but sometimes he is occupied with his page, sometimes with Signora Buonaroba, so that I have not yet had the honour of talking with him.

<sup>1</sup> Ramus (Pierre de la Rame, 1515-1572). He was assassinated on the day of the massacre of Saint Bartholomew. The English reader will find a sympathetic account of him in Owen's *Sceptics of the French Renaissance*

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Charron (1541-1608). His treatise on "Wisdom" (*De la Sagesse*) was published in 1601. It reads like Montaigne, but minus the genius of that writer.

*Aristus.*—He is at the opera, I fancy, at the present moment. What is it, then, that you are so anxious to say to him?

*Acrotal.*—Oh, nothing much. I only want him to use his influence to put a fiery end to a gentleman who is inoculating us with the ideas of an English philosopher named Locke.

*Aristus.*—But tell me; what are the horrifying ideas of this Englishman?

*Acrotal.*—Oh! I don't know precisely. Let me see; he tells us, for example, that our ideas are not innate; that God, who is all-powerful, can, as he chooses, endow any being with ideas and sensations; that we know neither the essence nor the elements of matter; that human beings do not always think; that one who is drunk and asleep has no clear ideas while slumbering; and a hundred similar ineptitudes.

*Aristus.*—Well, well! If your disciple of Lock is so ill-advised as not to believe that a drunkard thinks hard when he is asleep, must you persecute him for what is mere stupidity? What evil has he done? Has he conspired against the State? has he preached theft from the pulpit, or calumny, or murder? Between ourselves, tell me honestly if you think that the philosophers have ever caused any disturbance in the social group?

*Acrotal.*—Never, I must admit.

*Aristus.*—Are they not invariably solitary individuals? are they not poor, without protection or support? Is it not partly for these reasons you persecute them, because, in fact, you think you can do so with impunity?

*Acrotal.*—It is true enough that at one time there were some good men among this class of thinkers, such as Socrates, Pomponazzi,<sup>1</sup> Erasmus, Bayle, Descartes; but nowadays philosophers are in the senate, and even on the throne; everywhere we pride ourselves on our reason, save in certain countries where it has been put in the right place. That is why it is really harmful; and that is why we set about exterminating at least those philosophers who have neither wealth, nor power, nor honour in this world, since we are unable to avenge ourselves on those who have rich possessions.

*Aristus.*—Avenge yourselves, do you say? for what, if you please? Have these unhappy men ever disputed your offices, your prerogatives, or your wealth?

*Acrotal.*—No; but they despise us, if you want me to speak plainly. And sometimes they make us look ridiculous, which is a thing we can never pardon.

*Aristus.*—If they make fools of you, I think they are in the wrong, for jeering is never permissible; but tell me, will you, why people have never ridiculed the government and laws of any country, while, as you admit, they have ridiculed others without pity?

*Acrotal.*—Candidly, that is just what stirs up our bile; for we are above the laws.

*Aristus.*—And, let me tell you, that is precisely what makes a good man disposed to jeer at you. Laws based on universal reason, and named by the Greeks *the daughters of heaven*, you would have give way to opinions created by mere caprice, and destroyed by it too. Do you not feel that what is just, clear, and evident is eternally respected by everyone, and that idle fancies cannot always attract the same respect?

*Acrotal.*—Let us put on one side the laws and judges, and think only of philosophers. It is a fact that in former times they have said as many foolish things as we; therefore we ought to rise up against them, even if it be merely a matter of professional jealousy.

*Aristus.*—Undoubtedly many have said foolish things, since after all they are only men; but their vain imagin-

ings have never stirred up civil wars, while you have been the cause of more than one.

*Acrotal.*—That is just where we are wonderful. Can there be anything finer than to have disturbed the universe with a few arguments? Are we not like those ancient magicians who raised the winds by incantations? We shall be the masters of the world, in spite of these knavish men of brains.

*Aristus.*—Then what you ought to do is to tell them that they have no brains; prove to them that they reason badly: they have made you look fools; why not do the same to them? But seriously, I want you, as a favour to me, to pardon this humble disciple of Locke, whom you wish to have burnt alive. My dear and learned doctor, don't you see that burning alive has gone out of fashion?

*Acrotal.*—You are right; we must find some other way to impose silence on insignificant philosophers.

*Aristus.*—Then, believe me, the best thing for you to do is to keep silent yourselves, don't have anything to do with reasoning, be decent men, and compassionate; don't look for evil where it is not, and it will soon cease to be where it is.

Englished by GEO. UNDERWOOD.

## Ireland and Christianity.

IN the effort of the Irish Republicans to restore their country to health the germs of the disease have been overlooked, or, rather, have been incorporated in the process of reconstruction, a fact which reminds one of the practice of the professional rat-catcher of releasing a male and female ere he leaves the scene of his labours.

The priest, with his hypothetical gods and other worlds, and his still more pernicious loyalty to a foreign potentate, the Pope, has ever been the main cause of the trouble in Ireland, as he is the *sine qua non* of the organized sweating of the poor which dominates the "civilized" world to-day.

Mr. De Valera has said Ireland is the only country that has a claim upon the loyalty of Irishmen; but he has said no word about that hateful loyalty to a tyrant of souls which claims men away from their most human instincts to the glorification of Rome in the name of an anthropomorphic concept belonging to primitive times; time after time has Ireland been delivered, bleeding, bound, and helpless, into the hands of her enemies by this misguided loyalty, which has blessed the informer, swelled the infamous pay-roll of Dublin Castle Secret Service, and denounced from its impudent pulpits any who dared to attack British misrule of Ireland. Rome has always been a ready tool in the hands of the exploiter, stepping in with denunciatory bell, book, and candle, and all the paraphernalia of eternal damnation whenever there appeared to be danger that the mutinous slaves would win a place in the sun. Much pseudo-poetic nonsense has been poured forth about the great fidelity of the Irish from the time of their instantaneous (?) conversion by Patrick (?), and right corpulent has the little tyrant, the Irish parish priest, grown, by insistence on the piety of the ancient Irish and the vivid portrayal of the horrors of the next world for those who refused to follow that holy example. There is no reliable evidence that St. Patrick ever existed, unless one accept the fact of the absence of venomous reptiles from the Green Isle, as one might argue that the stones of the Giant's Causeway being where they are is a proof that Finn Mac Cumhail placed them there. There is, however, much evidence to prove that the Patrick myth was invented and carefully fostered by Rome in her efforts to subjugate the independent Irish Church,

<sup>1</sup> An Italian sceptic and Materialist of the Renaissance (1462-1525). See Owen, *Sceptics of the Italian Renaissance*, and Lange, *History of Materialism*, Eng. tr., i., 220-225.

which existed before the time of the nebulous Saint, as Roman apologists themselves admit in asserting that his credentials from Pope Celestine were superscribed "To the Scots (*i.e.*, Irish) believing in Christ"; evidence of the essential difference of the Irish Church from that of Rome is contained in a letter written by the celebrated Irish missionary, Columbanus, to Pope Boniface, which has the air of a communication to an equal, so admonitory is its tone.

It is pitiful to read the puerile tales which have been concocted about the shadowy Patrick; it is quite impossible to decide whether Patrick was Palladius, or Palladius Patrick, or both of them Succoth (the war-god), which is said to have been Patrick's Irish name. Patrick had several other names, and was born in so many places that one must sympathize with an old pious tale which escapes from the tangle by multiplying the Patricks.

The fanciful "instantaneous" conversion of Ireland by Patrick, which is pointed out to the ignorant multitude as evidence of the innate Godliness of the Irish, does not square with the fact of Moira, A.D. 637, where a bloody battle was fought between Christians and Pagans two centuries after the "conversion," and in the interdict laid on Tara by Ruadon, one sees that those early monks were reduced to desperate measures by their slight success. Tara, in Meath, was the meeting-place of what may be described as the oldest deliberative assembly of Western Europe. Those meetings were initiated by Ollamh Fodhla, king of Ireland about one thousand years B.C., and to them, every third year, came the provincial kings, the chiefs of tribes, the judges and the keepers of records, to testify as to their past labours, and to decide with the Ard-Ri, or High-king, as to future laws. Every man who had a grievance was free to enter and state it in the presence of the Ard-Ri, without the necessity of a representative, and modern readers are often surprised at the quaint scenes in which a peasant addresses the monarch familiarly by his name. This democratic idea was a danger to the new creed, which could brook no law but its own, and no law-makers but its purveyors of salvation and damnation; ignorant servitude, unquestioning obedience to whoever or whatever its ambitious ministers set up for worship, were the only right rules of life. In the year A.D. 554. Tara was solemnly cursed by a very holy, and, doubtless, equally dirty, hermit, named Ruadan; one of the great channels of conversion in those days was the sanctuary; all kinds of criminals and social outcasts sought the protection of the "holy" men, and when it was accorded, as it usually was, the Church being short of strength, all laws and kings stood defied, and society saw the most disreputable scoundrels held up as examples of repentance, just as the Salvation Army of to-day advertises the ancient wrecks of drunkenness whom it succeeds in holding from the beerhouse for a time. Dearmuid, Ard-Ri, took the view that the laws of his realm and the cause of public safety must prevail over the idiosyncracies of unwashed cave-dwellers, and he dragged forth from sanctuary several interesting murderers whom the holy Ruadan was hiding, and dealt with them according to the law of the land. The determined king was excommunicated and Tara cursed, other aspirants to the throne were encouraged by the "outraged" saints, and Diarmuid was slain in battle by an Ulster prince two years later. Years of contest for the kingship followed his death, and this piece of ignorant monkish tyranny probably broke the heart and brain of a nation advancing in learning and civilization, and left it a disunited crowd of petty kings, and an easy prey to the forces of barbarism then so active in Europe.

The long struggle of the Popes to subject the Irish Church to Rome, a struggle backed by the Irish clergy on account of their unimportance in Ireland, where they were held in contempt, culminated in the celebrated and infamous compact between the English Pope, Nicholas Breakspear, or Adrian IV., and Henry II. Adrian issued a bull authorizing Henry, the faithless and dishonourable scoundrel who had violated the unfortunate French Princess Alix, who had been entrusted to his care as the betrothed of his son, to lead the Irish into better ways, "to root out their foul sins and wickedness." This bull, whose main purpose was to root out Peter's pence from Irish pockets, has been feebly denounced as a forgery by Catholic writers; but, besides the fact that Bellarmine, a great Catholic writer of the sixteenth century, speaks of it as an acknowledged and right thing, and that Donal O'Neil, King of Ulster, in a letter addressed to Pope John XXIII., speaks of it as an Act dictated by false representations and the Pope's partiality to England, it is mentioned as a matter of course in many subsequent Papal Bulls.

The desperate state of religion generally, and Papal interests particularly, in Ireland, is attested by many old Irish documents, and the story of the Irish chief who burned down a cathedral, and on excusing himself by saying that he thought the bishop was in it, being acquitted of all blame, is not at all incredible to any one who has read *The Vision of Mac Conglinne*, a twelfth-century Irish tale, in which bishops are treated as inferiors by the poorest. The tribulations of Vatican legates to Erin are illustrated by the incident of Jacob Penceail, Papal Envoy, who as he was about to leave Ireland, laden, according to the Annals of Lough Key, or Kilronan, "with horseloads of gold obtained by simony and other malpractices," was met at a crossing of the Shannon by four Irish chiefs named O'Glaisin, O'Annor, O'Chelchin, and O'Sluasti, relieved of his plunder and left to mourn the "impiety" of the Irish. This occurred in the time of Donagh Mor O'Brien, King of Munster, and son of Brian Boroimhe. Another old Irish work, the *Leabhar Breac*, ascribes the infamous compact concerning Ireland between Adrian and Henry II. to such incidents as the above, the Irish looking upon the Pope's emissaries as greedy and impertinent foreigners, and treating them accordingly.

A curious comment on the Patrick myth is supplied by the controversy about Easter, which was not decided until the eighth century; the Irish method of computing the time, which differed from that of Alexandria and Rome, was said to be the method instituted by Patrick, the supposed Roman missionary; and another, and still more curious, comment is that no Irish king, chief, or celebrated man, even among the hosts of missionaries and saints, was ever named Patrick, which name only became the vogue when the old language was dying, and the Anglo-Norman Papal Cult had saddled itself upon an unwilling people, whose records of ancient civilization had been systematically destroyed or falsified by ignorant and interested priests.

AUSTIN RUSSELL.

(To be concluded.)

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Death is a cool and pleasant night,  
 Life is a sultry day,  
 'Tis growing dark—I'm weary;  
 For day has tired me with his light.  
 Over my bed a far tree gleams,  
 There sings a nightingale;  
 She sings of aught save love;  
 I hear it even in my dreams.

—Heine.

### Khaki Crusaders.

I CANNOT truthfully state that it was always the chief desire of my life to set foot in Jerusalem. This is a pity, for it is an extremely good beginning, whether one is writing of Jerusalem, Notre Dame, Madame Tussaud's or anywhere in fact. It was not my lot to march in triumphantly with a conquering army, for the city had had a month of British occupation before my chance came—fully long enough for the inhabitants to learn why the British soldiers had troubled to take it. (In case the reason is not so obvious to my dull fellow-countrymen as it was to the perspicacious Jerusalemites, I should here like to state that when the British soldier goes to the aid of the oppressed, when he scales perilous heights to storm a fortress, and when he goes to a place like Jerusalem for the day, it is because he has plenty of money and wishes to indulge in his favourite hobby of being fleeced).

My regiment, having taken certain lonely heights some distance N.W. of the city—spots where one did not get military honours with one's funeral, if lucky enough to be buried at all—was resting in a valley. That meant road-making eight hours a day. Life was proceeding somewhat monotonously, when orders appeared that a party of sixteen from the battalion would be "granted leave of absence from camp from reveille to tattoo for the purpose of proceeding, etc., etc.," to Jerusalem daily. I was fortunate enough to get on the first party.

We set off at seven in the morning, a joyous band of wayfarers, the sergeant-major leading, others singing in the rear. The shoemaker-sergeant, a deep-drinker, with a knowledge of Biblical matters (so we found later) almost as profound as his capacity for imbibing, came to me to make plans for the day. It seems that he had heard rumours that some stuff called cognac could be got in Jerusalem, all that was needed to obtain it being a little tact and a lot of money. These rumours had awakened in him a lively interest in the Holy City, and a keen desire to go there.

Our first halt was a quarter of a mile west of Nebi Samwel, the reputed burial-place of the prophet Samuel. Its fame to-day rests on a surer foundation of fact, for in General Allenby's campaign it was the key to Jerusalem. Others now keep company with the Hebrew patriarch on this rugged, lonely, height. For a few weeks it was the scene of murderous warfare, of supreme heroism, and then returned to its solitude of old, remote from both highways and byways, and to the occasional pilgrim even more solemn by reason of its newer associations.

We had accomplished about three miles of our journey. Before setting out we had received instructions from the adjutant, who informed us that Jerusalem was about seven miles away as the crow flies. There being no crows in our party this was not much use. Personally, I should reckon that as the man walks, slides, and scrambles, it was nearly double that distance. Of the first of these modes of progression little was possible until we came to within a couple of miles of our destination, when we struck the Jaffa-Jerusalem road. Till then, we slid down precipitous inclines into stony ravines and scrambled out again, only to find another in front of us every time. Twelve miles of this becomes irksome, and on the summit of one ridge somebody suggested that we should go to Bethlehem instead, which he pointed out about a mile and-a-half away. This appeared to be the usual Arab village with its squalid huts roofed with brushwood and turf.

The suggestion might have found favour with a number of us if the shoemaker-sergeant had not emphatically denied that the place was Bethlehem at all. "There's nothing bigger than a pigstye in the place, and we know there was an inn with stables at Bethlehem two thousand years ago. And even if it is, you can't get a drink there." This proved conclusively to everyone that it was not Bethlehem, so we laboured on in silence till we reached the Jaffa Road.

Now the scene becomes more animated. Arabs with strings of donkeys, each carrying a seemingly impossible load of figs, oranges, almonds, A.S.C. lorries with bully

beef, biscuits, S.A.A. and number nines to gladden the heart of the fighting man; but, at this rate, we shall never reach Jerusalem. So we will pass over the two miles of road zig-zagging up lest the journey try my readers' tempers, even as ours were tried.

We halted on the outskirts of the golden city with mixed feelings. The scent of Jerusalem artichokes, the braying of Jerusalem canaries—these were unmistakable signs that we were nearing holy ground. Fatigue fell from us as did the irritability that had grown upon us all during the journey. Before us stood the goal that the Crusaders laboured and died in vain to reach. Here were spots sacred to Christian, Moslem, and Jew. I noticed that the shoemaker-sergeant's face was transfigured. "It is something to be able to say you have seen Jerusalem, Bob," I ventured. "Ah, lad, and to think that in about five minutes I shall be having a drink!" he sighed.

The dusty road had given place to a street lined with shops all uniformly dirty. In their time these had been butchers' shops, bakers' shops, drapers' shops, etc., but now they all had a better paying line. "Souvenirs of the Holy Land" was what they dealt in, and nothing else could be bought. The Turks, when they retired, took with them all the food, all the clothing, everything of any practical use in fact, and left behind all the "Souvenirs of the Holy Land." These consisted of polished olive-wood boxes of all shapes and sizes, and of post cards, with flowers gummed on them, inscribed "Flowers from the Holy Land" in English, French, and German. And the buying of these was by no means a simple matter at that time. The only small change the shopkeepers had was Turkish, and practically valueless; we had been paid the night before in Egyptian fifty-piastre notes, and, therefore, if we wanted to buy one post card, it was necessary to buy ten-shillings-worth.

I shared a biscuit and some cheese I had carried with the shoemaker-sergeant, whose ardour was becoming damper as his throat became drier. Munching this, we reached the Jaffa Gate, the entrance to the old city, into which no one might enter without a pass. Here we met our padre, who had come on riding a mule, and had engaged a guide for the party. This man might have been a better guide if he had known a little more English and had not been a German. He told us he was a Greek, but he had a German accent, and seemed to think that the most important fact about Jerusalem was that the Kaiser had once visited it.

"Dis is der Jaffa Gate. It was a very leetle gate until der Kaiser come. For him dey make it much bigger." This was the first thing he told us.

"Dis is der German church dat der Kaiser have built when he come to Jerusalem." We were not interested much by this, his second item.

"Dis is der cotton market. It is der way der Kaiser have come when he visit der Mosque of Omar." After all, this was not what we had come to Jerusalem to see, and the shoemaker-sergeant ventured a question. "I say, guide, isn't this the place from which Christ whipped out the money-changers?" "I dunno about dat, but it is der way der Kaiser have come."

We thought it best to tell him firmly but kindly that as a guide he was a failure; that we were not interested in the Kaiser, whom we considered a bore; and that of all the things the Kaiser ever did, his visit to Jerusalem was the one of which we approved least. We added that unless he was prepared to tell us what we wanted to hear, it would be well for us to part company at once. I think he had had this experience before, because after this he did not prove a bad guide, as guides go. He told us what the places were, and the shoemaker-sergeant provided any further information we got. I am not certain that the latter's desire to tell us something did not encourage him to draw upon his imagination when his knowledge failed. "I should like to see 'the street that is called Straight,'" I said; and within five minutes he was showing it us. Now, I had always understood that this famous thoroughfare was in Damascus, and had known this when I expressed my wish to see it. But as everybody, including the padre, accepted the shoemaker-sergeant's statement, who was I to object?

We visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Seven Stations of the Cross, the Jews' Wailing-place; we saw the Mosque of Omar, built on the site of the old Jewish Temple, and the Mount of Olives. And at all these places we were approached by gentlemen in monkish garb demanding *backsheesh*. Doubtless some of the more serious spirits in our party were impressed by the historic route they trod; but all were disillusioned as to the character of the holy orders that infest the city. Perhaps it is on account of their lack of English, but their constant use of this term, *backsheesh* (the usual appeal of the street-beggar or cadger), gives a blatantly mercenary appearance to their calling.

We parted with our guide upon leaving the old city. He went his way, sorrowing, I think, for our lack of true Kultur. I am certain he will persist in his attempts to invest the Kaiser with the importance that is now given to others connected with Jerusalem's history. And if credulity remains as rife as it is to-day, who knows but that in two thousand years he may have succeeded?

Dusk is falling, and we must get back to camp. And the journey, bad enough by daylight, is ten times worse in the dark.

At midnight we seemed thoroughly lost. Nearly all the party were suffering from sore feet, but this was never a weakness of mine. Well might I sing with the poet, Henley:—

I thank whatever gods there be  
For my unconquerable *sole*.

The shoemaker-sergeant also showed signs of cheering up after his day of disappointments. "Lad, there's a rum issue when we get back," he told me.

We did eventually arrive. One of our party, whom I shall not betray, insisted on waking up the quartermaster-sergeant to ask for rum. "But, as you have been able to get plenty all day at Jerusalem, I haven't saved you any," he was told.

His face was terrible to behold. Later, as I was lying rolled in my blanket, I saw him pass with the empty rum jar under his arm. "Never the time, and the place, and the loved one, all together," he quoted despairingly.

But I could not sympathize. I had forgotten momentarily my day at Jerusalem, and was dreaming of another city. I saw it again, smoky yet smiling; resting-place of no holy relics, yet dearer to those millions that call it home than all the sacred places of the world.

P. V. M.

**Obituary.**

Another of the "Old Guard" passed away on Friday, December 19 in the person of Mr. Victor Roger, President of the South London Branch, N.S.S., and the oldest continuous member of what was originally Mr. Bradlaugh's Executive. Born in Alderney in 1853, Victor Roger migrated to Paris in his early youth where he served his apprenticeship as an artistic decorator. Forty-three years ago he came to London, and was at once attracted by the personality of Charles Bradlaugh, both as a politician and as a Freethinker, and from that time onward became a conspicuous figure in all the important events connected with the N.S.S. both in this country and on the Continent. He was at one time President of the then important North Lambeth Liberal and Radical Club, and served for many years as a vestryman in the same borough. Nominated by the late G. W. Foote as a Vice-President of the N.S.S., he was also one of the original directors of the Secular Society, Limited, and was rarely absent from any of the business meetings. Although strong and fearless in opposition, he was actually of a most amiable and kindly disposition, and was a general favourite and a leader of local opinion. His keen judgment and practical business capacities were always at the service of his friends. At all Continental conferences he was our most genial guide, philosopher, and friend. For thirty-five years I sat with him as a colleague, and in the early days of my connection with the Society received much valuable assistance and support from him. During the last three years it was noticed with regret that he had changed markedly, a change induced by the painful

malady (angina pectoris) to which he ultimately succumbed after three days of intense suffering. He was buried at Lambeth Cemetery on December 23. A Secular Service was read impressively by Mr. A. B. Moss, and supplemented by his intimate friend, Mr. Hanmer Owen, the South London Branch Secretary, in the presence of a large number of Branch members (including Messrs. F. A. Davies, S. Samuels, and F. Wood; Miss Kough and I representing the N. S. S.), local political friends, and the whole of his workmen, many of whom had been with him for more than thirty years. During his last painful hours he reiterated his firm adherence to Secularism, and his last words referred to the business of the Society. It will be long before our business meetings appear quite the same without our old colleague's familiar presence. To his sorely bereaved and invalid widow we send our deepest sympathy.

EDITH M. VANCE, *General Secretary.*

It is with regret that I have to announce the loss sustained by Mr. James Adlam, 3 Caemaen Street, Ynysboeth, Abercynon, by the sudden death, on Monday, December 22, of his wife, at the early age of thirty-eight years. Mr. Adlam is a Freethinker, and, at the request of the family, Mr. Geo. Garrett conducted a Secular Service at the graveside. The body was interred on Saturday, the 27th, at the Abercynon Cemetery, in the presence of a large crowd of sympathizers, who listened with deep interest to the Service. Mrs. Adlam leaves her husband and two sons to mourn her loss. Much sympathy is expressed locally with Mr. Adlam and family in their sad bereavement.—G. G.

**NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.**

*President:*

**CHAPMAN COHEN.**

*Secretary:*

MISS E. M. VANCE, 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

**Principles and Objects.**

Secularism teaches that conduct should be based on reason and knowledge. It knows nothing of divine guidance or interference; it excludes supernatural hopes and fears; it regards happiness as man's proper aim, and utility as his moral guide.

Secularism affirms that Progress is only possible through Liberty, which is at once a right and a duty; and therefore seeks to remove every barrier to the fullest equal freedom of thought, action, and speech.

Secularism declares that theology is condemned by reason as superstitious, and by experience as mischievous, and assails it as the historic enemy of Progress.

Secularism accordingly seeks to dispel superstition; to spread education; to disestablish religion; to rationalize morality; to promote peace; to dignify labour; to extend material well-being; and to realize the self-government of the people.

**Membership.**

Any person is eligible as a member on signing the following declaration:—

I desire to join the National Secular Society, and I pledge myself, if admitted as a member, to co-operate in promoting its objects.

Name.....

Address .....

Occupation .....

Dated this.....day of.....19.....

This declaration should be transmitted to the Secretary with a subscription.

P.S.—Beyond a minimum of Two Shillings per year, every member is left to fix his own subscription according to his means and interest in the cause.

**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.**

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Johnson's Dancing Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, near Edgware Road): 8, Mr. Ernest Dales, "Thoughts on Materialism."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, Percy Friedberg, "The Future of Democracy."

SOUTH PLACE CHAPEL (Finsbury Pavement, E.C.): 3.30, Mr. Chapman Cohen, "Do the Dead Live"?

**OUTDOOR.**

HYDE PARK: 11.30, Mr. Samuels; 3.15, Messrs. Ratcliffe, Baker, and Dales.

**COUNTRY.**

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