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Views and Opinions.

Death and Freethought.

We received the other day a review copy of a neatly got-up booklet published by Mr. Grant Richards at the price of one shilling, and consisting of *A Burial Service*, compiled by Mr. W. S. Godfrey. The title is not quite correct, since no one could read through the whole of the pamphlet at a single service, but it contains the germ of many services. It is made up of selections from the Bible, Omar Khayyam, some of the Latin writers, Shakespeare, George Eliot, and many others. It is Catholic enough to suit all tastes, and its very catholicity will be its chief offence to many. We intended to write a paragraph or two on the pamphlet, and we were reminded of our intention by a cutting sent us from the *Westminster Gazette* of a recent date. The paragraphs to which our attention was drawn are written by one of the regular contributors who signs himself “Diarist,” and he wonders why on earth Mr. Godfrey wanted to make such a compilation as the “Burial Service.” For Mr. Godfrey intends his pamphlet for “the use of people who do not subscribe to any orthodox creed, who worship no gods, and who cherish no expectation or life after death.” And it is precisely that which sets “Diarist” going on what he doubtless considers a philosophical excursion. For to some people stupidity and philosophy are almost convertible terms. When their philosophy has a background of theology, and when that theology is of the Christian variety, then stupidity joins arms with impertinence in an almost invincible alliance.

A Decaying Type.

We had better let “Diarist” speak for himself, and it would, indeed, be a pity for so complete an example of English religious journalism to suffer, even by compression. As the service is intended for unbelievers, “Diarist” is—

puzzled to know what they want with a burial service at all. Something which, in their view, is of no further use, and in which they have no further interest, is to be deposited in a hole in the ground or pushed into a furnace, and they are invited to gather round and read quotations from the poets or from the Psalmist while the work is being done. Why? If I had done this when my late lamented fox-terrier was buried somebody would have expressed a doubt about my sanity; and where—in their view—lies the difference?

Now, there is nothing here that will be startlingly new to those who are acquainted with the commoner and coarser kind of Christian advocacy. It is the kind of thing that the more ignorant and abusive kind of Christian Evidence lecturer was fond of shrieking at the Secularist lecturer some twenty-five years ago. It is occasionally met with among survivors of that class today. But most Christian controversialists have outgrown that way of putting it. They may still say the same thing, but they put it in a more suave and polished way. They are more decently indecent, and disguise their insolence under a more humanitarian cloak. They will admit that Freethinkers may be quite human, even though they cannot altogether suppress a mild surprise when they find the possibility realized in fact. It is quite interesting to find a survival of the old-fashioned type of Christian Evidence larrikin disporting himself in the chaste columns of the *Westminster Gazette*.

* * *

Sense and Sentiment.

“Diarist” says that he has “never been sufficiently attracted by the doctrine which rejects the idea of God and of immortality to be moved to make any deep study of the views of those who profess it,” and that is quite borne out by the passage already cited. Still, one would have thought a little better of the qualifications of one who so calmly rules as to what is and is not fitting in the face of death, had he shown some evidence of having given a little serious attention to the emotions that gather around the natural fact of death, or had he shown even the smallest perception of the part played by death in the creation and the maintenance of human feeling. As it is “Diarist” not only writes what is, from the Christian point of view, shockingly bad religion, but he writes horrible science, and quite disreputable psychology. For example, he cannot understand why a Freethinker should want a burial service if he believes the body is of no further use. But on Christian lines that is precisely the case. If Christianity be correct the body that we bury is of no further use. Does he, then, think the Christian service is absurd? And if not, why not? And does “Diarist” really think that, either in the case of the Christian or the Secular service, what is said is addressed to the dead body? Does it not strike him that the service which takes place round the graveside is far more of an attempt to express our human sympathy with the mourners, to put into words, and to place on record our opinion of the dead person, and to make even death play a part in the upbuilding of the social life of the race. If the fox-terrier he names had left behind it a family, and if that family would have had some consolation in their mourning at hearing a few words of sympathy on their loss, does it not strike “Diarist” that there may be something to be said in favour of even having a few words of farewell said over the grave of his dead terrier? At a venture, one dare say that a full religious service has been said over many humans that were less worthy of it than that poor dead terrier

who was not so honoured because he had no soul to be damned eternally.

* * *

Man and the Race.

Religion has nothing to do with the grief that gathers round the fact of death, or with the sympathy that will find expression in its presence. All that religion has done is to circumscribe the latter and to add terror to the former. The cat crying over her dead kittens, or the bitch howling over her dead puppies, is only another form of the sorrow that stands at the bedside of the dead human. Civilization has only refined its expression, and the development of intelligence has served to show us the part played by death in the creation and the growth of affection. Sorrow at the death of those dear to us has not the remotest necessary connection with the belief in a future life or in the existence of a God. The breaking of associations with even inanimate objects may cause a feeling of sadness, and that is intensified when the separation is from those to whom we have gone for sympathy or companionship. This will be sufficiently obvious to most people, and, we fancy, would have been obvious also to "Diarist" had his mind been less obsessed with Christian vulgarities. Man is, after all, a gregarious animal; he goes to his kind for sympathy in his sorrows and for companionship in his pleasures; and more than even this fact is the complementary one that the "consciousness of kind" links his conscious life to what has gone before and to what is to follow. The grave is, therefore, of as great a social significance as is the cradle. Morally it is even more so. For it is in the sorrow that gathers round the fact of death that the joy which centres around the cradle finds its significance and full interpretation. In the life of the race the cradle and the grave, birth and death, are stages; and it would be indeed strange if the humanitarianism of Freethought had no place in its philosophy for so important a brace of facts. Interest in the dead body we can have no further than decency and respect demands. But interest in the life that has been lived, in its bearings for good or ill on the life of those who are left, and on those that are yet to be born, we cannot fail to have without forfeiting some of our deepest interests and emasculating our nature of some of its finest qualities.

* * *

Religion's Last Stand.

But this, we are afraid, is taking a writer such as "Diarist" rather too seriously. In this matter he is probably no more than the unconscious and unthinking mouthpiece of pulpit verbiage. For the talk of the Freethinker being, logically at least, dead to emotion and deaf to all appeals to sympathy, that to him man can be no better and of no higher value than a dog, is no more than an echo of pulpit talk and no more than a manifestation of pulpit policy. The curious thing is that just now, when the better minds of the clergy are becoming ashamed of such talk, one should find it springing up in the pages of one of our leading London papers. And so far as religion is concerned, it is not difficult to see why it has always fought to retain a commanding hold over some of the more important functions of social life. To begin with, birth and death and marriage are more intimately connected with our emotions than are the more intellectual processes of associated existence, and to retain control here was to make attack more difficult in other directions. Through the marriage ceremony it hoped to gain control of the child, just as by gaining control of the child it completed the circle by securing dominance over the adult. To admit that the functions of life, beginning at the cradle and ending at the grave, could go on as well in the absence of religion as in its presence, was clearly fatal to its claims.

So long as it was possible, the secularizing of certain social ceremonies was opposed on the ground that, without religion, these were absolutely invalid. When that became no longer a wise card to play, it was then discovered that dispensing with the religious formulæ made the ceremonies ridiculous, and that if man really had descended from the animal world there was no reason why his actions should be upon any higher emotional or mental level than those of the lower animal world. The Church was thus contesting the advance of the enemy step by step. It saw whole tracts of life, on the intellectual plane, taken from it, and saw no possibility of regaining them. It was therefore vital that it should not lose its hold on the unreasoning—but not unreasonable—feelings that are connected with birth, marriage, and death. But all these are social, not religious, matters. Religion has no more genuine authority here than it has in astronomy or geology. And the fate that has overtaken its pretensions in the regions of exact science is a promise of the fate that is overtaking it on the field of human emotion, endeavour, and ideals. That fate may be delayed, but it cannot be avoided.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

"The Synoptic Christian."

TEN years ago the divines laid supreme stress upon the evidential value of Christian experience. In both pulpit and press we were confidently assured that the truth of Christianity is demonstrated by the daily life of believers. By Christian experience was understood the deep spirituality and conscious communion with Christ enjoyed by his disciples. The Rev. Arthur Pringle, however, holds the view that the overwhelming majority of genuine Christians go through life without ever rising to the height of Christian experience. In an article, bearing the above title, in the *Christian World* for February 12, he refers to an occasion on which a group of clergymen were addressed by a distinguished theologian, who spoke "on what he regarded as the distinctive characteristics of the Christian experience." Mr. Pringle remarks:—

What he said was impressive, but it struck me, as he proceeded, that any such high test would exclude all but a small number of people. Not only it would find little response in the experience of the average person, but it would rule out large and important tracts of the New Testament. Its demand for Anglicanism, intense spirituality and conscious communion with Christ, dealt with something real and enviable, but, in the Bible or out of it, these things, manifestly, are only for the select few. Is there much of them, for example, in the New Testament outside Paul and John? And, above all, where does Christ give any warrant for insisting on them as exclusively valid and essential?

The reverend gentleman is fully justified in appealing to the Gospel Jesus; but he forgets that even the Gospel Jesus was never a Christian. Christianity is a product of theological evolution, not a religion that can be traced back to a single founder. It is true that the Gospel Jesus is a fictitious and historically impossible character, but it is equally true that Christianity owes practically nothing to him but its name. The teaching ascribed to him is in no sense Christian, being the common property of all the great religions, particularly of such philosophies of life as Confucianism and Buddhism. In so far as it is true, it is nothing but humanism. The virtues insisted upon are plain, straightforward human qualities "which illumine the corners and byways of everyday life with courage and thoughtfulness and love." The "eminent modern theologian" admitted that there is much truth in Mr. Pringle's contention, and that "we

must make room in our outlook and sympathy for what he happily called the 'Synoptic Christian,' as contrasted with the Johannine type. But, in such a case, we object to the use of the term "Christian" at all, because it is highly misleading.

Mr. Pringle makes admissions of a nature highly damaging to his case. In order to be fair, we give his own words:—

The type of Christian on which most stress is laid in the first three Gospels is pedestrian and practical, and far more doing than "experience," and far more human kindness than spiritual ecstasy. Nor is this all; for Christ suggests significantly that people nearest to him in spirit may often be without consciousness or suspicion of the glory that has touched them. "We visited the sick and fed the hungry, how could we do otherwise? *But when did we see thee?.....*" So from Christ himself comes the word not only that men may be Christians without what is ordinarily regarded as spiritual experience; they may even be Christians *without knowing it*.

We naturally infer from such passages that the reverend gentleman is a member of the Liberal Christian school. He seems to have renounced the Pauline Gospel—the Gospel *about* Jesus, as Professor Bacon, of Yale University, aptly calls it—in order to fall back upon the Gospel *of* Jesus, or the Gospel Jesus is believed to have preached and lived by. With much of what Mr. Pringle says we are in complete agreement; but what puzzles us is his retention of the term Christian. Take the following as an example:—

We know that nine out of ten of us, if we are Christians at all, are Christians of the Synoptic type; and a great responsibility lies on preachers not to speak beyond their experience, as though they possessed a spiritual consciousness and wealth which, according to Christ, it is no shame to be without. By unreal, exaggerated ways of talking of the Christian life we puzzle and alienate vast numbers who, as they listen to us, are made to feel that there is within "something lacking" which keeps them outside the true circle.....Past failure, on the part of the Church, to recognize the Synoptic Christian has been disastrous; present failure will come near to being fatal. For, in the nature of the case, so far as religion goes, our day puts life before profession, and practical philanthropy and sacrifice before "experience." After all deductions have been made there remains a great mass of potential and actual goodness that regards itself as disfranchised from religion, because it cannot subscribe to certain beliefs or lay claim to a particular form of spiritual consciousness. What are we to do with it? With the warrant of Christ and the inspiration of the Gospels, why a moment's hesitation in claiming it for the Church?

We are amazed at the unprincipled effrontery displayed in that extract. It is an incontrovertible fact that there is a vast amount of actual goodness which even glories in its independence of supernaturalism and the Church. It is possessed and practised by men and women to whom neither God nor Christ is an objective reality, and who regard the Church as at bottom a fraudulent institution. Are we to understand that Mr. Pringle would welcome such people as Church members? We doubt it, and are quite sure they would not wish to join any Christian society. We thoroughly appreciate the reverend gentleman's candour in acknowledging the existence of goodness outside the Church; but fail to see on what ground he can justly claim it for Christ. He must be aware that about two-thirds of the population of this Christian country have no connection whatever with any of the Churches, and that most of them are people of the highest and noblest character. It sounds very magnanimous to admit that "the higher society of struggling souls in all ages have been the true

Church"; but the vagueness of the language renders the admission practically valueless. Does either Mr. Pringle or Mr. Coulton, to whom we owe the new name, Synoptic Christian, honestly regard virtuous Atheists as belonging to "the higher society of struggling souls" and as members of the "true Church"? If so the terms God, Christ, and Christian, should no longer be associated with the Church. Another sentence, however, shows conclusively that the magnanimity is of a most restricted application: "The Church of Christ is the multitude of those who are trying to follow Christ after their own fashion." In reality, what Mr. Pringle dislikes is dogmatic theology; as if theology could be anything but dogmatic. There can be no religion, in the popular acceptation, without some definite doctrine of God, nor can there be a Christian, in any intelligible sense, without trust in and worship of Christ, and it follows, of necessity, that it is sheer nonsense to say that the Christian Church can honourably lay claim to the goodness of utterly Godless and Christless people.

Is it not a terribly humiliating confession for a clergyman to make that "nine out of ten of us, if we are Christians at all, are Christians of the Synoptic type," without "intense spirituality and conscious communion with Christ"? Ten per cent. of all Christians have no Christian experience—no intoxicating rapture, no soul-stirring ecstasy, no heart-lifting visions. Only "a select few" are privileged to enjoy Christian experience. Ever so many are Christians "*without knowing it*"!

With all its generous offers of hospitality the Church's guests are steadily declining in numbers. It has nothing to give worth the trouble of taking, and thoughtful people are deserting in ever-growing multitude. Its life is a perpetual struggle against rapidly multiplying difficulties. Supernaturalism is being played out everywhere. And yet, even in these days, the preachers speak of the "victorious," "all-conquering" Christ as about to come into his own. At present the popular drift is away from all forms of supernaturalism. The Synoptic Christians are fast becoming practical Secularists, many of them adopt the Secular creed, finding in it ideal peace and joy, and their attitude to the supernatural becomes one of utter unbelief and unconcern.

J. T. LLOYD.

An Uncensored Celebrity.

Dismiss whatever insults your own soul.—*Walt Whitman*.

THE reading world has been threatened with what has already been described as a "standard" life of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the most popular preacher of the nineteenth century. The Boanerges of the Newington Tabernacle has now almost faded into a name, but in his day he was a power. Outside of the British Isles he could neither have grown nor thriven. His personality was the oddest blend imaginable, for it included a good deal of Stiggins, a touch of Pecksniff, and a suggestion of John Knox, together with an arrogant want of breadth of mind impossible to parallel outside English Nonconformity. It was as if the man had been born in a ginger-beer bottle, and never looked over the edge.

Just imagine it! Spurgeon was but a shiny-faced boy of sixteen when he preached his first sermon. From that time until his death, near sixty, he was very busy as an evangelist—too busy for his lasting reputation. His early theology was mainly learned from an old servant—and it bore the flunkey's impress. During his life his mental attitude changed but little, during which he was the darling of the half-educated Nonconformists.

To win and keep such a commanding position for a generation, Spurgeon must have had peculiar claims to attention. He was narrow, bigoted, ignorant; but it was precisely because breadth, tolerance, and learning would have been foreign to his enormous following. The central fact in his career, the corner-stone of his fortunes, was that his utterances reflected the thick, wooden ideas of the lower middle-class. He was plain John Blunt, saying a thing straight out, and, occasionally, Jack Pudding, reckless in raising a laugh. The very names of his books show this: *The Cheque Book on the Bank of Faith*, *A Double Knock at the Door of the Young*, *The Salt Cellars*, and so on, all in the time-honoured tradition of Georgian and early Victorian Dissent.

Spurgeon was a most copious writer. He published a sermon a week, without a break, for two generations, and there are many unpublished to-day. His *Treasury of David* consisted of seven volumes, containing a thousand pages, and he also edited a magazine, the *Sword and Trowel*. His sermons show his limitations. Not for him were the harmonies of Jeremy Taylor, the cadence of Milton, the dignity of Newman. He could not even echo Baxter or Bunyan. His language was simply the speech of the lower middle-class purged of its slang. There is not an original idea in all his thousands of sermons. Everything is second-hand and threadbare, and the paucity of the prose is emphasized by quotations from the worst doggerel in the Baptist hymn-books of his time, which is saying something. No one with a scintilla of literary taste would have quoted such balderdash, and rolled it trippingly off the tongue. His best passages, characteristically, are where he rolled the horrors of damnation off his tongue as a dainty morsel.

Spurgeon was the last preacher of any eminence who taught the savage dogma of eternal torment. In truth he was obsessed with the dogmas of Christianity. He had no patience with people of liberal views in religion, no interest in any point of view but his own. He never tried to understand the meaning of Freethought. He had no time, he explained with unconscious pathos, "to play tom-fool with Socinians, Rationalists, and such-like people."

To Spurgeon the magic of bygone things, the necromancy of learning and art and literature, save as it may have touched the tiny circle of his Baptist creed, were repellent. Like a fanatical Mohammedan, he would have destroyed all literature but the sacred volume. He was a perfect example of the Philistine, whom Matthew Arnold loved to banter, and who caused cultured foreigners to raise their eyebrows. Spurgeon's verbal knowledge of the Bible was nearly complete; but he treated the volume as if it were last night's newspaper. Hence his success with half-educated tradesmen and their wives, and his enormous limitations. Because people crowded to his tabernacle, Spurgeon thought himself an apostle. He was, in reality, the last preacher, with a reputation to lose, who taught the brutal, Biblical dogma of everlasting damnation. For which, as often as we think of it, we are satisfied. For man of to-day is better and nobler than the gods of yesteryear.

MIMNERMUS.

For religions woman is mother, tender guardian, and faithful nurse. The gods are like men; they are reared and they die upon her bosom.—*Michelet, "La Sorciere."*

Whenever good men do some noble thing the clergy give their God the credit, and when evil things are done they hold the men who did the evil responsible, and forget to blame their God.—*Ingersoll.*

Something We Do Not Want to Believe.

IT affords an indication of at least a moderate improvement in the theological atmosphere when we find religious dogmas once insisted on as essential to salvation regarded in a shamefaced apologetic fashion. The Churches to-day are ashamed of a good many things of which they were formerly proud. They apologize (and in this connection apologetics are really condemnatory of the thing excused) for much in which the earlier generations of Christians used to glory. It is many a day since the more thoughtful and more honest Christians began to have compunctions about upholding the miraculous element in the Old Testament. Nowadays the smile evoked by recollection of Jonah and the whale, of the plagues of Egypt, of the baldheaded prophet and the two bears, is not confined to the atheistic visage. Many Christians have long since come to appreciate the ludicrous aspect of such stories. An identical critical attitude has been applied to the New Testament with similar results, and Christians are steadily adding belief after belief to the category of the absurd.

The old-fashioned beliefs in the doctrine of hell-fire and in a personal Devil have by many Christians been relegated to the list of effete dogmas. The jesting fashion in which such topics are treated by the multitude is evidence that though belief in hell may survive in certain quarters, it is far from being regarded seriously by the general public. The Devil himself has fallen on evil days, which state of affairs—paradoxically enough—does not suit him. To an earlier generation he was a terrific personage; now few so poor as treat him respectfully. He is, of course, not unknown in modern fiction; but he scarcely carries conviction in that guise. It is, indeed, quite comprehensible that lack of faith in a personal Devil should synchronize with a waning belief in a personal God. The one belief is but the counterpart of the other.

Perhaps no more damnable doctrine ever constituted part of a religious creed than the doctrine of eternal punishment. Future retribution has no doubt been taught by many religions, but never has it been preached with such peculiar zest and ferocity as by the Christian Church in the zenith of its power. It was a very real hell in which the mediæval Christian believed. There were legions of lively devils in it, with business-like pitchforks; there were rivers of boiling pitch and lakes of burning brimstone; the flames of hell reached an intensity of heat infinitely greater than that of any earthly fire; there was a special variety of torture for each particular sin; the overwhelming majority of the human race were doomed to spend eternity in the bottomless pit, and comparatively few even of the Christians would escape it. In spite of all this—or because of all this—human beings were expected to love and adore the infernal monster who had provided such an abode for the accommodation of the majority of their fellow-creatures after death.

Latter-day Protestants, in response to the growing feeling of humanity, talk of the larger hope; but a few generations ago there was no hope. "Out of hell there is no redemption." And this is the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church to this day, though not so much stress is now laid on the strictly material punishments of hell. The more intelligent Roman Catholics have quietly dropped Fathers Furness and Pinnamonti, and have left the crude and barbarous ideas of hell entertained by these loving and tender Fathers in God to do duty amongst the vulgar and semi-illiterate. The Roman Catholic mission preacher (or revivalist) still usually

rants in the old way, and strikes terror to the hearts of his sinful and credulous auditors. Otherwise there is an increasing vagueness as to the exact location of hell and the precise nature of the tortures undergone by the damned souls. Nevertheless the former lurid conception of hell is utilized yet to terrorize children into following the path of virtue, and there is no hesitation in affirming the permanent nature of the post-mortem punishment that falls upon the unrepentant evildoer. To the question in the R. C. Catechism of Christian Doctrine, "Shall not the wicked also live for ever?" the stern answer is, "They shall live and be punished for ever in the flames of hell." And in the volume of *Catholic Belief* the faithful are reminded that mortal sin, unless remitted before death, entails a punishment of "everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels"; Matthew xxv. 41 being cited as conclusive on the subject. So that, unless we send for a priest before we die and obtain absolution, a great number of us are booked for a perpetual roasting in the land of spooks. It is true that Conan Doyle has not yet been able to confirm this aspect of the spirit world, but the Roman Church has spoken, and from whence shall the water of truth flow if not from that pure well?

The older race of priests were delightfully definite in their pronouncements regarding the nether region. They could describe its internal economy with mathematical exactness and blood-curdling realism. They knew its extent, and had estimated the thickness of its walls, and their description of the stench arising from the pit is enough to make one hold one's nose. So much for past generations, but, as has been indicated above, even in the twentieth century, the old barbaric conception of eternal punishment is upheld by the Roman priesthood. Expatiating on the topic, this mission preacher attempts to convey to his simple hearers some faint idea of what is meant by eternity. He asks them to think of the uncountable numbers of grains of sand on the seashore, and to reckon a thousand years for every grain of sand. He tells the deluded unfortunates who listen to his tirade that when the damned souls in hell have suffered for as many thousand years as there are grains of sand on the seashore, they will be only on the threshold of their punishment, for even after the lapse of such a tremendous era of time, eternity will merely be commencing. And this may be the penalty for one deliberate mortal sin! What a consoling doctrine is eternal punishment. Well may we chant: "Praise the Lord, for his mercy endureth for ever."

Freethinkers are familiar with the contention of the orthodox and semi-orthodox Christian that we reject the dogmas of Christianity not so much because they are false as because we do not want to believe in them. Were this the case no kind of reproach rests with us on that account. Everyone knows, of course, that if you begin by accepting a given belief or theory it is always possible to furbish up more or less specious arguments in its support. It used to be said of Gladstone (whose mind was "a mint of logical counterfeits") that he could find a host of reasons to justify any course he chose to adopt. There are really a surprising number of people like that, though they all have not the Gladstonian aptitude in mental and verbal jugglery. They do not reason from facts to conclusions, but once having accepted a current convention, they can evolve any number of arguments to justify their position. That is the way with the average modern Christian. He has never absorbed the tenets of Christianity by any process of reasoning; indeed, in the overwhelming majority of cases, intellect does not enter into the matter at all. The Christian believer has been trained from infancy to regard certain religious doctrines as unquestionable, and when

their tenableness is seriously impugned the industry of a multitude of defenders of the faith has provided ample supporting testimony for those who "want" to believe.

But—so they say—we do not *want* to believe. To this objection the pertinent retort is: "Why should we want to believe?" Some of the teachings of the Christian Church are not merely repugnant to reason, they are abhorrent to the consciousness of civilized humanity. The doctrine of eternal hell-fire is one of these, and until some more positive evidence of its reality can be produced than the ravings of a primitive or mediæval priesthood, sensible people need not be ashamed to avow that they do not want to believe in it. When the present writer was in the Roman Catholic Church, it used to be said that those who did not believe in hell were sure to go there. The thesis that those who *do* believe in it *deserve* to go there seems much more defensible.

GEORGE SCOTT.

Prophets, Priests, and Piffle.

And there came one out of a strange country who told strange tales of unheard of things, and the people harkened unto him and were amazed, and murmured one to the other, "That man must be a god!"

THE old adage has it, "A prophet is without honour in his own country." What I want to know is, what does prophesying profit a prophet anywhere? Mohammed was a prophet, but he married a rich wife, and didn't need to mind the prophet business very much. Elijah was fed by the ravens, and was wrapt up to heaven in a chariot of fire—in other words, he died. Jesus the Nazarene prophesied many things—which have not happened—and he was crucified. Moses was most wonderful of all, for, after conjuring with serpents, he described his own death and funeral.

With latter-day prophets, the end of the world has been a favourite subject, and the only people who pay any attention to them are the good Christians who (in the words of Lewis Carroll) "weep like anything" at the approaching consummation of their translation to the glorious paradise which, in their moments of devotion and prayer, they have so devoutly desired. But one can't play noughts and crosses all one's life. Even prophets perform one sensible act—they pass away. The principal property of prophets is astuteness. For that reason I apply the title to the compilers of the Old and New Testaments. In these books, the only prophecies that came true were those interpolated after the event prophesied had happened. I would suggest that all future prophets should go and do likewise.

The prophets made the path of the priests smoother, even though it remains "a reeling road, a rambling road, that rambles round" the world. The prophets were often blind, albeit they were called seers; not so the priests. In truth, our priests do often fail to discern the prophets in their true light, but they never fail to see the profits. But for the prophets there would be no salaried inactivity for second-rate intellects. The preacher of the Old Testament was honest. He was an Agnostic. The preachers of to-day are nonentities. They have no opinions, but this void is filled by the loudness of their voices. They repeat what has gone on being repeated for thousands of years. If an untoward phenomenon occurs, they wait to see what their paymasters say about it, and then pipe the same ditty on "their scrannel pipes of wretched straw." One pities them, and those who listen to them. If their studied gestures, their polished periods, their airs of inspiration were made before a mirror, the effect would be the same. Their high-flown phrases may

tickle the ear, their costly vestures may enamour the eye, and their stories of future happiness may raise hopes, but reality dashes all to the ground.

Future happiness premises present unhappiness. Alas, that at least is true. But our priests interest themselves only in their *own* present: the world must wait till death for the dawn of *its* happy day. And we who would work for happiness for all in this, the only life we can be sure of, anathemas are hurled at our heads. We are told we are degrading mankind, that we are stealing their heritage of hope. These things may be. I will not dispute them, although I easily could. It is enough that we are doers, strivers, actors in the great drama of life, not mere supers waiting the consummation of a dream that was dreamt two thousand years ago.

The immense output of piffle on the subject of a happy after life is only useful in eliciting a little laughter from thinking people. We needn't worry ourselves about everlasting happiness; a lifetime of it would be sufficient. Only while unhappiness is the lot of the majority can the vista of a celestial paradise hold any charms. Let priests and prophets rant at will of eternal bliss: we shall continue to work for the good of the man while he lives. His soul (if he has any) can look after itself. Dream palaces vanish, the hopes of a lifetime are shattered, one after one the dearest pass away from the cockpit of praying, and preaching, and prophesying, and even the most faithful feels the thought steal over him: "What if it is false, if death ends all?" It lasts a moment, and then he is lulled again to sleep by the assurances of his ghostly healer.

That devout inactivity that is called faith in the omnipotent is the curse of civilization and *the* stumbling-block to progress. Fed on vain hopes that centre on self, men forget the awfulness of the conditions under which mankind struggles. They are blinded by the thought of a questionable Paradise, and cannot see the real Paradise that earth might be, shall be, turned into.

The prophets and the priests have been doing their work well. They have numbed the intellect and imagination of the people with phantasies. But they and the phantasies will make one common dust with the prophets, and the priests, and the prophecies.

H. C. MELLOR.

Acid Drops.

In view of the increasing cost of living, we have been impressing upon our readers that the present is a most favourable moment to agitate for the taxation of all Churches and Chapels on the same basis as other buildings are taxed. We are glad to see that a correspondent of the *Bedfordshire Times* has been making the suggestion, but we are not surprised to find that journal disagreeing with it. It "shudders to think" what the world would be like without the "wholesome influence" of the Churches. But no one is asking for the Churches to be forcibly closed, only that they shall not be kept open by the forced subscriptions of those who do not believe in them. As to their "wholesome influence," we suggest that the *Bedfordshire Times* gets the life-history of all the wrong-doers in its neighbourhood, and it will probably be surprised when it discovers the large proportion that have had the benefit of this same "wholesome influence." Or, perhaps, the editor thinks that the people around him are a specially bad lot and need an extra quantity of artificial help to enable them to keep straight.

The Rev. R. H. Bloor says that the tower of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, was a hundred feet higher in the fourteenth century than that of to-day. It may interest Brother

Bloor to know that the Saint's reputation has also shrunk in the interval.

The Rev. W. A. H. Collisson, of St. John's Church, Great Marlborough Street, London, died in the street at Hawarden, Flintshire. There is no moral, but had he been a Free-thinker there would have been.

There is an ironical note in the news of the conversion of four disused Lincolnshire chapels into dwelling-houses, and of the same fate overtaking another chapel in another county. These are "conversions" which Christians will not be proud of.

It is surprising how rational Christians can be when it is somebody else's superstition that is in question. Thus, the *Christian World*, commenting on Spiritualism, says that when the alleged discoveries of Spiritualism are established it will be time enough for average people to put faith in the matter. Marvellous! And imagine a writer who accepts Christianity counselling others that they should not put faith in a teaching until its truth has been established! We should very much like to know which of the Christian doctrines has been established, in the sense in which it asks that spiritualistic performances should be established? Why, if we accepted Christianity, we don't think we should find it very difficult to swallow anything else. The man who can accept Christianity should be ready for anything. If we could believe in a child being born without a father, that blind men were made to see by having their eyes anointed with spittle, that men rose from the dead, etc., we should find it child's play to swallow the stories of mediumistic miracles. The *Christian World* shows far too fastidious a taste in this matter; it is, indeed, straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel. Why not take the wind out of the sails of the Spiritualist by showing him that his miracles are nothing to those of the Christian's by swallowing the lot? That is the way in which the early Christian practitioners used to overcome their Pagan competitors. But, then, there was no doubt about the genuineness of their belief.

The Churches are all pretending to be democratic nowadays. A "Labour" Sunday-school has been started at St. Pancras, London. Will the teachers tell the children that the twelve disciples were all trade-unionists?

The Rev. P. Howard, Rector of St. Michael's Church, Lichfield, declares that most of the matter in parish magazines is "absolute rot." Most people will agree with the statement.

A newspaper paragraph states that two plays have been on tour at Y.M.C.A. huts in France, one play being entitled *A Lively Honeymoon*. It sounds more attractive than the "old, old story" of the Divine carpenter.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton, who is a literary maid-of-all-work for the Catholics, has written a book, entitled *The Superstition of Divorce*, which is intended as a counterblast to recent legislation. He finds much fun in the idea of poor men and women getting divorce; but he sees nothing humorous in the priestly idea of celibacy, which has been described wittily as "a vow a man takes that he will enjoy none but other men's wives." There is humour in the suggestion, only Catholic laymen seldom see it.

The conversion of this country to Roman Catholicism proceeds slowly. A Stechford curate has been received into the Catholic Church.

The law of supply and demand in ghosts is exemplified in the Sunday papers. The *Dispatch* has the suggestive-faced Vale Owen, and the *Sunday Times* has its own spook specialist in the person of a Mr. J. S. Purcell. Presently we shall have each of the papers with its special correspondent in the spirit world—so long as the public credulity calls for this kind of thing. When the craze wears itself out we shall

have the same papers with another class of specialist explaining how it is done, or clamouring for all mediums to be imprisoned as rogues and vagabonds. In either case the purpose of the papers will have been achieved; sales will have been maintained, and that is the only thing, apparently, that matters. And the public will be quite ready for the next method of exploitation that comes along. That is where the ordinary paper has everyone at a disadvantage—it can always count on the unthinking quality of the vast majority of its readers.

The *Sunday Times* announces that Lord Molesworth is a convert to Spiritualism, and, after reading his lordship's account of himself, we are not surprised. He did not pay any attention to Spiritualism, but he lost his son in the War, and, walking in the garden, he felt that his son was near him. So he and his wife went indoors and commenced to hold a sitting. The table "literally jumped up," but as later it "literally waltzed round the room," that is not surprising. He has since had many messages from his son, but on one occasion another spirit communicated in his son's stead, because the latter "was in hospital"—in the next world, where Sir Arthur Conan Doyle says we all get back to full maturity and perfect health. We sympathize with Lord Molesworth on the blow of the loss of his son, and not less on the manner in which his grief has been overcome.

Lord Molesworth says that at first the written messages were in a large hand. But the letters are getting steadily smaller. The explanation of this is that the son has gone to a higher plane, and the farther away from the earth plane one gets the more difficult it is to communicate. Now, that explains a lot. It explains, for instance, the nonsense that is received in these spirit messages. For as the spirits get wiser, and farther away from the earth, the less they can tell us. The consequence is that we are most in touch with the spirits of the foolish and the ignorant, which explains why we meet with the spirits of dead doctors who have forgotten how to write a prescription, or diagnose a disease; of travellers who have forgotten their geography; of Latinists who forget their Latin, etc. The wiser ones get far away from earth, and cannot get back to the *seance* room. The fools have the place to themselves. And we should be the last to deny that, judging from what goes on at these meetings; staying away from them does generally indicate a higher level of intelligence than is manifested by attending.

Pity the sorrows of a poor old Deity! At a meeting of bank employees at Winchester House, London, one of the speakers said that "out on a lonely island off Wales there is a monk, formerly a bank-clerk, who, every night, mentions the Bank Officers' Guild in his petition to the Throne of Grace." There are so many guilds and associations, from the Cats' Meat Mens' Union to the British Medical Association, that we tremble as to their fate if they all worried Omnipotence nightly.

The Christian religion is being whittled away by Christians to such an extent that it will presently be unrecognizable. A short time since the Bishops and higher clergy of the Anglican Church judiciously edited the Psalms by deleting some of the more barbaric passages. Now the school-teachers have compiled a new hymnal for the children, and edited the hymns. For example, the old favourite, "All things bright and beautiful," appears without the verse beloved by Primrose League officials:—

The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at the gate,
God made them high and lowly,
And ordered their estate.

The favourite Christian apologetic, during the Bradlaugh fighting days, was that any religion was better than none. There was no nonsense about it. It was better, Christians used to bleat, for a man to worship a snake in his own back garden than to have no religion at all. Perhaps the Rev. J. E. Rattenbury agrees with this. Speaking on the errors of the Church of Rome, which he proved were very numerous

and extremely dangerous, he turned on his audience and said that even the Roman Catholic Church was better than "blank Atheism." No wonder the old classic writer said that it was impossible for two soothsayers to meet without smiling.

Although the clergy are "starving," it has not prevented the ecclesiastical authorities from consecrating a new Bishop for the fresh see of Bradford, with an appropriate allowance which would make a curate's mouth water.

Convinced theologians have at least the courage of their convictions; and while their opponents can admire, it is very awkward for their more opportunist colleagues. Looking at the Bible and the New Testament, and the practice of the Churches, it should be plain what the attitude of the convinced Christian should be on the question of the equality of the sexes. But of late a number of parsons who are quick to trim their sails to favouring breezes, have decided that it is no longer politic to oppose the complete enfranchisement of women. Public opinion makes itself felt, even with the oracles of God; and conviction with many is only another name for convenience. And a Church that has managed to accommodate itself to the theory of evolution is not to be despaired of being able to discover that even the New Testament is not against the equality of the sexes.

But there are theological as well as political diehards, and these had their innings at the Lower House of Convocation the other day. The Joint Committee on the Ministry of Women reported in favour of, with certain reservations, allowing women to "speak and pray in consecrated buildings." But this was too much, and too great a departure from Christian traditions. So the Dean of Canterbury moved that:—

In view of the statements of St. Paul on the subject, of the uniform practice of the Church in the past, it is not desirable to grant the permission proposed in the resolution before the House.

This was carried, and the historic attitude of the Church endorsed. And, truth to tell, we have far more respect for these men who have the courage to stand for a genuine Christian teaching than for those who are ready to swallow anything and endorse anything so long as they think it will pay.

Our congratulations to Councillor Brierly who has been telling the Blackburn people some home truths with regard to education. The clergy, he says, have been allowed to have too much say in the matter. Schools have been selected by them, and there was too much interference from them. They were concerned with the wrong things, and the Blackburn people would be better without them. We hope that Councillor Brierly will bring the Blackburn people round to his way of thinking. They will be all the better for it.

Rev. Fred. Hibbert, of Blackburn, says that he cannot understand men who do not believe in the continued existence of their loved ones. Well, that is quite frank, and we suggest that he has put the cause of his wonderment quite plainly—he does not understand it. Lack of understanding is at the bottom of many things.

Commenting on the refusal of the House of Convocation to sanction the institution of women preachers, the *Daily News* remarks that Convocation was going back on a deal of history, because there were women preachers in ancient Egypt and in the Early Church. Exactly, and so there were in many other places beside Egypt. And in the beginning the Christian Church was unable to altogether break away from the old practice. But, as readers of Mr. Cohen's *Woman and Christianity* are aware, the Church lost no time, and in the end it established a lower conception of woman's nature and social functions than was common to the Roman and Greek world. But, as we have often said, it is an idle superstition to assume, as many do, that in spite of its defects Christianity was a move forward. It was not. It

was a reversion to a lower type, even in the case of religion. In morals and sociology its influence was simply disastrous. When history is written without prejudice it will be recognized that no greater disaster ever overtook the world than the establishment of the Christian Church.

A religious contemporary declares that the curse of Adam, that he should eat bread in the sweat of his brow, is upon his children. That journalist must have been very green. When he grows up, he will learn that, for example, newspaper shareholders eat cake whilst the poor reporters do the perspiring.

A writer in *Lloyd's Sunday News* declares that the Archbishop of Canterbury "never said an unkind thing in his life." Perhaps this is why the indefatigable Mr. Kensit cannot make him angry with the Romanists in the English Church.

Hadleigh District Council is offering district Churches a number of old German rifles, kept as war trophies. When a Labour Government later on proposes to tax Church property, the clergy may find them useful.

Not three tailors of Tooley Street, but three parsons of Newton-in-Makerfield, have solemnly published a manifesto in the *Earlestown Guardian* calling attention to the desecration of the Lord's Day, and the growth of Sunday labour. It is very sad, but we do not think that the working men of Newton-in-Makerfield, or elsewhere, require the warnings of these solemn servants of the Lord to prevent their working too hard on Sunday. We have not noticed that workmen at any time require watching to prevent their working too hard. We had an impression that the watching was usually for quite another purpose. One never knows, and it may be that the men of Newton-in-Makerfield stay away from Church in order that the parson's rest shall not be disturbed on the Lord's Day.

Mr. Noel Buxton, speaking at Wells-next-the-Sea, says he has come to the conclusion that the party whose aims are nearest to the Christian ideal is the Labour Party. Mr. Buxton is a recent convert, but there is no need for him to make himself ridiculous. The Labour Party has primarily an economic aim, and after that a political one. And we should like to see Mr. Buxton try to convert a sensible body of men to the value of the economics and politics of the New Testament. "Render obedience to the powers that be, for the powers that be are ordained of God," is the measure of its politics and the blessings of poverty the standard of its economics. We should like to have the opinion of the representatives of the Dockers, the Miners, and the Railwaymen on these points. It is a thousand pities that these ardent reformers do not appreciate the value of clear thinking and the dangers of encouraging muddle-headedness.

The *Daily Herald*, which might easily have put both its time, type, and space to a better use, prints in its issue for February 12 an interview with the Bishop of London on the Church and Labour. And the Bishop said—just what one would expect him to say. It is a misunderstanding to think that the Church is on the side of the capitalist; the Church is the most democratic institution in the country; it was the Church which started "the idea" of education in this country; and, after reading Mr. and Mrs. Hammond's books, he thinks that the Church has been backward in standing up for the claims of Labour. Well, that is at least something. But a Bishop who knew so little of the history of his Church as to only arrive at that conclusion after reading the works named makes one wonder why he was made a Bishop at all. Perhaps it was because brighter men might have been dangerous.

What we should like the Bishop to explain next is why, if the Church is really so anxious to give the working man a reasonable kind of life, the very worst conditions prevailed precisely when the Church was at its strongest? The worst horrors of labour life in factories and workshops existed

without the Church being at all upset over the matter. And have the capitalists been such fools as to see that the people had plenty of religion—while they were simple enough to take it—without their feeling that they were getting good value for their money? Religion is always one of the most useful instruments that any Government has with which to delude the people, and the Christian religion is certainly no exception to the rule. As to the Church's interest in education, that matter is so plain as to obviate comment, except to marvel at so fine a specimen of episcopal cheek.

Judge Atherley Jones ought really to be more careful. Sentencing, on February 12, a Russian for an offence against a girl he said that it was no use saying that the man was a foreigner, he belonged to a great and highly-civilized race, and "the standard of morality obtaining in that country was not less than that obtaining here." Now, that is little short of downright blasphemy, and if he goes on at that rate he will be saying, before long, that Germans are human beings. Many ideas are in the melting-pot, but if it is once admitted that any other nation can be as moral as we are, the average Briton will feel that the heavens are falling. For one thing that has kept us up has been the assurance of our impeccable and unapproachable morality. Even our admitted faults illustrate it; for these same faults in others show downright criminality, in us they are the accidental falling away from a lofty ideal. In all our annexations, in all our wars, we have never lost sight of our lofty moral mission. Regretfully we have become wealthy, sorrowfully we have built up an empire, mournfully we have taken over the control of the coloured races, and we have done these things more energetically than others because of our impelling morality. And now to be told that another nation may be as moral as ourselves is too much. Why it would sanction these other nations doing as we have done. The League of Nations ought to see to it that our superior moral character should be an accepted principle with all nations that are permitted to join the League.

Jesus Christ no longer draws, the Gospel has lost its attractiveness, with the result that Church attendance is everywhere on the decline. In the realization of this: "free motor rides to church have been decided upon as a means of ensuring larger attendances at the parish church of Claverton village, near Bath." Other churches adopt other means, but they are all secular, all "spiritual" means being of no avail.

Mr. Jacob Epstein, the eminent sculptor, is showing an exhibition of his works, and, among them, a figure of Christ has raised much controversy. Mr. Epstein has discarded Christian tradition, and evolved a quaint figure with a magnified hand raised in supplication. It is not always safe, from an artistic point of view, to break with tradition in religious subjects. In Mr. Epstein's statue the illusion is produced of a Metropolitan policeman controlling the traffic.

How You Can Help.

GET your newsagent to display a copy of this journal in a prominent position.

Show or hand your own copy of the paper to a friend who is not acquainted with it. It is surprising the number of new readers that can be made in this way.

If you do not file your copy, leave it in train or tram-car when read.

Send us on the name of anyone to whom you think that specimen copies of the *Freethinker* would be acceptable. We will see that they get them all right.

Send us any suggestions you have to offer as to the way in which our circulation may be increased.

O. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

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.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—February 22, Manchester; February 29, Porth, Glam.; March 7, Birmingham; March 21, Abertillery.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—Miss Tyrell, 2s. 6d.; J. E. Edwards, 2s. 6d.; "Chesterite," £1; A. F. Irickey, 2s. 6d.; W. Mortimer, 2s.; G. Gerrard, £1 3s.; D. Sutherland, 2s. 6d.; Miss C. B., 2s. 6d.; Socially Interested, 2s. 6d.

W. R. WATSON.—Thanks for pushing the paper in the way you have done. We are sending you on some literature for distribution.

W. J.—The paper is being sent to the address you gave. Your friend's query amounts to asking us why we don't play the fool in the hopes of becoming sensible.

G. ATTEWELL.—Many thanks for book which we are very pleased to have. It will prove very useful. If you turn to "Acid Drops" you will see that we quite endorse your point of view.

E. RATTRAY.—Please tell your informant that he is a liar. Plain language is the best in such cases. Mr. Cohen is not paid anything by the N.S.S., not even for incidental out-of-pocket expenses. And his salary from the *Freethinker* is one that any labourer would turn up his nose at. And so far as his lecturing is concerned, he has never in his life made payment a condition of his speaking. It should be added that he has no objection to payment, but in the Freethought world one has to make the best of the situation.

W. T. HOOKER.—There are no direct grants of money now to the Church, but the Church is by law exempt from rates, and that is a form of endowment. Large sums of money have been voted for the building of Churches, and taxes imposed for the benefit of the Church. The fund known as Queen Anne's bounty is really public money, for although Queen Anne gave up the "First fruits and tenths to establish the fund, the sum was restored when the Civil List was made up. The term "State Church" expresses that fact that the Church is a department of the State, with its ritual settled by the State, and is the only form officially recognized by the law of the State.

D. D. B.—See "Acid Drops." Thanks.

J. MABES.—Your letter is quite a good one, but we are not surprised that it was not inserted. The English press, with two or three honourable exceptions, is, we should say, both hypocritical and cowardly. It will attack no opinion that is in power, and it will carefully exclude from its columns any expression of an unpopular one. The way in which it deals with Freethought is an example in point. The serving up of obviously "faked" revelations of the next world is another. It sneers at the "Peculiar People" because it is upheld mostly by poor people, it is respectful to Christian Science and Theosophy because there is money behind it. Next to the Church it probably does more to misdirect public opinion than any other agency in the country.

E. A. H.—The reference to the Present Pope as being the successor of Leo XIII. was an obvious slip. Thanks all the same for pointing it out. We have noted your other observation. We may publish the Voltaire stories in book form. We do not believe that any of them have been before translated. Certainly the majority of them have not.

F. COLLINS.—We are obliged to hold over your letter till next week.

E. F. B.—We are so overwhelmed with work at the moment that we are afraid we cannot undertake a share in the correspondence. If it is still going on when we have a little more leisure, we will see what we can do. But we have only one pair of hands, and there are only a limited number of hours to the day.

T. BUNNIN.—Thanks; we read the debate many years ago. But one needs a rather different presentation of the case nowadays. The cutting sent must be several years old. We should say more than ten.

A. HEATH.—We have handed your Postal Order to our Shop Manager, who is sending you a few pamphlets, and placing the balance to your credit. We do not know what aspects of the controversy you wish information on. You will find many points dealt with in Mr. Cohen's discussion with Dr. Lyttelton, which, indeed, gives a general outline of the case for Freethought.

WILL Correspondents please forgive any delay that may occur in dealing with their letters during the next week or two? We have an extra amount of work to get through, and we must ask the indulgence of our readers.

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

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

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

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

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

All Cheques and Postal Orders should be crossed "London, City and Midland Bank, Clerkenwell Branch."

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.

The delays in the printing world are past understanding, and we have exhausted our stock of "language" without any other effect than that of easing our temper. We were faithfully promised a delivery of the bound copies of Mr. Cohen's *Determinism or Free-Will* by February 10. They did not arrive, and we cannot now receive them till February 23 or 24. We must, therefore, ask the indulgence of those who have sent in orders for copies, and can promise them that they will be despatched immediately they are received. There has been no disappointment over the paper-covered copies only with the bound ones. We are pleased to say that the orders for the second edition are coming in more rapidly than they did for the first. The book is evidently a "steady seller."

Mr. Cohen had two fine meetings at Plymouth on Sunday last, and the attention given to the lectures and the appreciation manifested proved that Plymouth, like many other places, is quite ready for systematic Freethought propaganda. Our old friend Mr. McCluskey took the chair at both meetings, and, as the result of his appeal, quite a number of names were collected to form the nucleus of a Branch of the N.S.S., the formation of which is to be proceeded with at once. In order to get the matter going, a meeting of all those in sympathy with the Movement is to be held at Braidwood Institute, off North Hill, Plymouth, to-day (Feb. 22), at 11 a.m. We hope that all who can will be present, as this meeting will largely determine the course of Freethought work in the immediate future.

To-day (Feb. 22) Mr. Cohen lectures in the Marsden Miners' Hall, Imeary Street, South Shields, at 3 and 6.30. Every attempt is being made to secure large meetings, and we hope with success. Arrangements are being made to accommodate with refreshments visitors from a distance; South Shields, like other places, not yet having overcome the gloom of the British Sunday.

On February 26, Mr. Cohen holds a debate with Mr. Horace Leaf on the question of "Does Man Survive Death?" in the St. Andrew's Halls, Glasgow. The doors will open at 6.45, there will be an organ recital at 7, and the debate will commence at 7.30. Admission is 1s. and 2s., and tickets may be purchased at either Patterson, Sons & Co., 152 Buchanan Street, or at the hall on the night of the debate, if any are then available. But it will be well for those who wish for a good seat to be at the hall in fair time.

Our readers will be glad to learn that, after carrying on a fight with the London County Council ever since the summer of 1916, in order to maintain the right to sell publications in the Parks under control of the Council, the matter has been brought to a satisfactory conclusion. In the first instance the Council issued its decree that no more publications should be sold. This decree was ignored; publications were sold, and several summonses were issued. The matter was then carried, by the Committee that had been formed to fight the matter, into the higher Court, and it was ordered that the resolution passed by the Council should be rescinded. Smarting under its defeat, the Council framed a resolution that was clearly aimed at the *Freethinker*, which would have rendered the sale of any weekly paper impossible. After some discussion, the Council agreed to act on another plan; it showed its hand by refusing any permit for the *Freethinker*. Again the fight went on, and at its meeting on Tuesday, February 10, the Council unanimously decided on a course that will permit all periodicals to be sold as before—that is, if the Council acts in the spirit of the resolution. If it does not, there will be more trouble.

It is only right to point out the very great assistance that has been given the Committee by Mr. F. Verinder. Mr. Verinder has watched the Council like the proverbial cat watching a mouse, and has always been ready to go to any trouble in defence of a public right. That Mr. Verinder is a staunch Churchman only adds to our appreciation of his very valuable services. Old Freethinkers will not be surprised. Mr. Verinder was one of those who strongly supported Bradlaugh in the old fight for the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws and for his parliamentary rights. Mr. H. Snell, now a member of the Council, has also done very valuable service on the Council itself. Unlike many, his assumption of public office has not prevented his doing what was right where so notorious a journal as the *Freethinker* is concerned. He has been unremitting in his attendance to what was really a matter of the greatest public importance. The Rev. Stewart Headlam has also been true to his record in standing up for the free expression of opinion.

Now that the matter is so far ended, it may be pointed out that the concern of the *Freethinker* was not of a selfish or personal nature. We had every reason to assume that this was the first stage of an attack on the right of propaganda in the Parks, and but for our article in the *Freethinker* for June 11, 1916, it is quite probable that the attempt would have succeeded. That article put the fat in the fire, and after a long fight the Council has had to give way. We were not, however, concerned with the sale of the *Freethinker* in the Parks. There are not twenty copies a week sold in the Council Parks. But we were concerned with the right to sell, and we hope always shall be. Others were far more concerned with actual sales than we were, and the committee did not always get from these others the wholehearted support it was entitled to expect. However, the matter is now settled, finally, we hope.

There was another capital audience at Stratford Town Hall on Sunday last to listen to Mr. Lloyd's address. The address was received with the utmost appreciation, and some opposition, of no very marked character, was offered by a lady and gentleman at the end of the lecture. Mr. Warren occupied the chair.

The *City News* contains a well-written report of Mr. Thresh's recent lecture at Manchester on "The Search for a Soul."

Mr. A. B. Moss lectures to-day (Feb. 22) at the Repertory Theatre, Birmingham, on the subject, "Is the Bible a Safe Guide?" Birmingham friends will please note. From the report we had of Mr. Moss's last visit to Birmingham, we have no doubt but the theatre will be well filled.

A lengthy review of the *Parson and the Atheist* appears in the *Manchester City News* of February 7. The writer gives a remarkably fair view of the discussion, and describes the

debate as "almost unprecedented," inasmuch as both disputants remained calm, courteous, and reasonable to the end. We do not see why it should be otherwise. It is possible to be quite uncompromising without being coarse or violent, and, so far, Mr. Cohen has never been found lacking the one quality or exhibiting the others. He has been known to use the lash on an opponent when he deserved it, but that is another matter. The reviewer concludes that the volume would be cheap at ten times the published price for "its samples of clever and resourceful argument on both sides, for its strength combined with good temper, for its presentation of a case as viewed from two different angles." We have only to add the volume is selling well, and appears to be exciting some amount of discussion. It will please some of our readers to note that Messrs. W. H. Smith & Sons have taken a large number for display on their book-stalls. That is something that certainly would not have been done only a few years ago.

We have received, too late for insertion in this week's issue, a reply from E. J. D. to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's letter which appeared last week. It will be published next week.

Will all Freethinkers in Chester and neighbourhood who are ready to co-operate in propagandist work please communicate with Mr. G. Gerrard, 44 Eginton Street? We are not quite sure that we have the name of the street correctly, but the address has been blurred in writing.

Too late to note it in last week's issue, we see from a local paper that our friend Mr. Andrew Millar has been debating with Mr. A. Rutherford in the Town Hall, Ardrossan, on "Charges Against and a Defence of Christianity." Mr. Millar, it is almost needless to say, takes care of the charges. Scotland is waking up, and we shall be glad to learn how the debate progressed.

Early Christian Frauds.

IV.

(Continued from p. 107.)

WE have now to see whether there be any evidence of the existence of the so-called apocryphal Gospels in the New Testament books themselves.

In Luke ii. 41-52 we have an account of the boy Jesus, when twelve years of age, "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions," and carrying on the discussion with such ability that "all that heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." Now, where did Luke find this story? None of the other Evangelists mention the circumstance.

In the Gospel of Thomas—the veracious history in which the child Jesus, at the age of five, is related to have made sparrows out of clay, and then brought them to life, and to have made muddy water clear by the simple word of command—the account of the boy Jesus in the temple, at the age of twelve, is given (par. 19) almost verbatim with that in the Third Gospel. This undoubtedly was the source of Luke's inspiration. The story, too, is in its proper place amongst the narratives in the apocryphal Thomas, and it is, moreover, the least ridiculous of the stories in that Gospel—which latter fact possibly accounts for Luke inserting it in his own compilation.

In the First Epistle of Peter, a document which is considered authentic by many who reject the Second Epistle, we read:—

"Because Christ also suffered for sins once.....being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit; in which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.....For unto this end was the gospel preached even to the dead, that they might be judged according to men in

the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit" (ii. 19; iv. 6).

There is no record in any of the canonical Gospels of "the spirit" of Christ preaching to "the dead" or to "spirits in prison." The writer of the Epistle drew his information from the apocryphal "Acts of Pilate." This work, as it has come down us, is in two parts—the *Acts of Pilate*, properly so called, and the *Descent of Christ into Hades*. It was the first part to which Justin appealed in proof of the reality of the miracles ascribed to Christ; the author of the Epistle of Peter refers to matters narrated in the second part. In the latter we have a somewhat confused account of Jesus, in "the spirit" going down into Hades, where he finds the spirit-forms of Adam, David, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and others. Having bound Satan, and plunged him into an abyss, Christ invites all the faithful in Hades to follow him. "For behold," he says, "I again raise you all up through the tree of the cross." This descent into the above of departed spirits is supposed to have taken place between the time of Christ's entombment on Friday evening and his resurrection on the Sunday morning following.

We will now see the earliest period to which the apocryphal Acts of Pilate can be traced. Eusebius tells us that in the writings of Papias and Polycarp (who were contemporaries of Justin) quotations were made from the First Epistle of Peter. This statement we can verify in the case of Polycarp, whose Letter to the Philippians contains ten undoubted quotations from that Epistle. The case, then, stands thus: Papias and Polycarp, writing about A.D. 140, quote from the First Epistle of Peter; the author of the Epistle of Peter, writing (say) twenty years earlier, refers to matters in the apocryphal Acts of Pilate as genuine history. The latter work must, therefore, have been in existence at the end of the first century. This is farther back than the most primitive form of any of the canonical Gospels can be traced. Of course, if the Epistle of Peter be authentic, and of the first century, the Acts of Pilate will have to be placed earlier than that Epistle.

In the Second Epistle to Timothy (iii. 8) occurs the following passage:—

And like as *Jannes and Jambres* withstood Moses, so do these also withstand the truth.

There is no mention of *Jannes and Jambres* in the Old Testament; the magicians who "withstood Moses" are not named, neither is their number stated. The writer of the Epistle to Timothy must, therefore, have drawn his information from some apocryphal source. The names of these two mythical magicians are mentioned in the first part of the Acts of Pilate. In chap. v. of that fraudulent history we read:—

For assuredly Moses, being sent by God into Egypt, did many miracles, which the Lord commanded him to do before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And there were there *Jannes and Jambres*, servants of Pharaoh, and they also did not a few of the miracles which Moses did.

This, most probably, was the source of the author of Timothy's information.

In the Gospel of the canonical Luke, Jesus is represented as saying to the Jews:—

.....that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel unto the blood of *Zachariah*, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary; yea, I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation (xi. 50, 51).

Now, it is quite clear from the foregoing passage that the murder of this *Zachariah* is cited as a recent instance of the martyrdom of a righteous man. In the

parallel passage in Matthew (xxiii. 35) the martyr is called "*Zachariah*, the son of *Barachiah*," though it is obvious both accounts were copied from the same pre-existing document. Many commentators assert that the allusion is to *Zachariah*, the son of *Jehoida*, in the reign of *Joash* (2 Chron. xxiv. 20, 21). But this martyrdom (if historical) took place 900 years before the time of Christ, and could not be cited as a recent example. The passage speaks of "all the righteous blood shed on the earth" up to that time (A.D. 30), or, at least, all of which there was any record, from the first to the last notable instance; from *Abel* to *Zachariah*. The martyred *Zachariah*, then, must have lived somewhere near the time of Christ. There is no record of such a martyr in the canonical books of the Bible; we have, consequently, to look for him in the apocryphal writings, where, of course, we find him.

In the Protevangelium (par. 23) it is related that King *Herod*, after vainly searching for the child *John* (afterwards the Baptist), caused the child's father, the high priest *Zachariah*, to be put to death. This priest was slain, according to one reading, "at the vestibule of the temple of the Lord"; according to another, "in the midst of the altar." Luke renders it "between the altar and the sanctuary," which combines the two readings. This undoubtedly is the *Zachariah* to whom Christ is represented as referring.

The story of the martyrdom in the Protevangelium was suggested probably by the murder of *Zachariah* the son of *Baruch*, which took place in the court of the temple during the siege of Jerusalem (*Josephus: War. iv., v. 4*). Matthew, in his account, has simply turned *Baruch* into *Barachiah*.

To the foregoing examples it may be added that Luke represents Jesus as quoting from the apocryphal 2 *Esdras*, which he calls "the wisdom of God," and that the author of the Epistle of *Jude* makes a direct quotation from the lying book of *Enoch*, which he places on a level with the Old Testament scriptures.

The result of our examination, then, so far, is that we have indisputable evidence of the existence of fictitious histories of Christ prior to the appearance of the canonical Gospels, and also that these writings were the work, not of *Ebionites* and *Gnostics*, but of orthodox Christians. There cannot be the slightest doubt that the age which witnessed the advent of the Gospels was one of great literary frauds, joined to the grossest ignorance and the most amazing credulity. Neither can there be the smallest doubt that, as *Mosheim* says,—

a pernicious maxim which was current in the schools not only of the Egyptians, the Platonists, and the Pythagoreans, but also of the Jews, was very early recognized by the Christians, and soon found among them numerous patrons—namely, that those who made it their business to deceive, with a view of promoting [what they believed to be] the cause of truth, were deserving rather of commendation than censure.

As already remarked, the authors of these lying histories were the most learned among the early Christians, and, to take the most favourable view, if they did not themselves deliberately concoct the marvels they relate, they committed to writing, as matters of historical fact, all the stories reported of Jesus in their days, without ever troubling their heads about evidence. Investigation of any kind was foreign to the spirit of the age, and none was ever made. And this applies to all the histories relating to Christ, canonical as well as uncanonical. All originated in the same fraudulent age, and long after the deaths of those so-called apostles.

(To be continued.) ABRACADABRA.

Long Hair and Dirty Linen.

MR. ROBERT BLATCHFORD is one of the sanest writers in English journalism to-day, but his very love for the common people and their ways occasionally leads him into the acceptance of their ignorant prejudices. In a recent article in a contemporary, Mr. Blatchford, in attacking the absurd pretensions of the Englishman who wishes "the whole world in Norfolk suits," incidentally has something to say on the "artistic temperament," disparaging the "ill-groomed Bohemian," the creator of "a third-rate rondeau, landscape, or novel," who is "too great an artist to get his hair cut or change his linen."

As a man of genius, a possessor of abundant hair, and a wearer of linen that is not always immaculate, I would like to defend myself and my brother "Bohemians." It is very likely that, if vulgar persons did not pass rude remarks about my locks, I might visit the barber oftener; but to be bullied into conformity by the guttersnipe's jeer of "Git yer 'air cut!" is a weakness that no proud genius could capitulate to. Anything new, anything different, or anything beautiful or artistic annoys, and even enrages, the commonplace mind. Bald men, men with heads like convicts, men with bleary eyes and repulsive countenances, may be sure of courtesy and respect in England, while the wearer of long hair is always a subject for ridicule *until he is rich or famous*; for even Mr. Blatchford himself would tolerate idiosyncracies if the artist could give the world a *Hamlet*, a *Messiah*, or a *Principia*. Yes, that's the vulgar idea: "If you really *are* somebody, you may be permitted to be different; but until we have decided that you are a genius, or have been told by Mr. Blatchford that your words would be 'winged for two thousand years of flight' (how he could tell is irrelevant), we must conclude that you are a third-rate performer. So change your shirt regularly, wear a stiff collar, and above all, get your hair cut."

It is disappointing that, in protesting against British Prussianism, "Nunquam" should want to cut my hair because I'm not W. B. Yeats, and to change my shirt when the neckband of my other one is torn.

Thirty years ago Oscar Wilde showed clearly that it was the man in the frock-coat who was "affected," for he tried to be like everybody else; but the wearer of velvet jacket, sombrero hat, flowing necktie and long hair, could only be a "poseur" if he pretended to be conventional, to respect "white mud," and to be regularly "groomed" (good expression!) by having a horse-clipper run over his head.

I am afraid Mr. Blatchford's hair is getting a little thinner on the top for he has evidently contracted the bad habit of thinking with his hat on—a hard, close-fitting, ill-ventilated hat, mark you; very English, very ugly, and quite unsuitable for slovenly "Bohemians" with long hair. The gibe at the spring poet comic paper creation may be merely silly, but the allusion to the linen is not what we expect from one who knows anything of poverty. I have never yet known a well-to-do man who wore dirty linen. One might as well sneer at the gallant Tommy who carried on when there was no shirt to change, as to make a cheap joke at the artist compelled to live in squalor because he thinks only of the beautiful. This "clean" fetish is so detestably English after all, and so superficial. One may have a face on which brutality and licentiousness are plainly written, yet if one shaves every morning one is "clean." Years ago, through my activities in a certain sport, I was thrown into the society of a very rich man of dissolute character. He wore the

best clothes, and the finest linen in the world, *and yet he was dirty through and through.*

Better a soiled shirt than a dirty soul.

Look at your England to-day, Mr. Blatchford. Think of the dirt and degradation in your industrial centres brought about and maintained by short-haired men with irreproachable linen; and then, if you please, take a thought of one "ill-groomed Bohemian" who worships Truth, and whose craft is Beauty, who would not barter his ideals for a gross of shirts, one who is "too great an artist to get his hair cut or to change his linen."

J. EFFEL.

The Joys of Book Hunting.

THE collecting of books is a passion at once harmless and inexpensive. For the weekly outlay on a visit to the theatre or the cinema, a library of the best books may be accumulated in the course of a few years. I do not refer to the purchase of brand-new volumes, which are so enticingly advertised in publishers' catalogues, as it is only a millionaire who can respond to the offer of *The Spirit of Russia*, in two fat volumes, for thirty-six shillings, or the seven volumes of Von Treitsche's *History of Germany*, for the price of a new suit of clothes.

The haunts which I shall describe are sufficiently familiar to a widely-scattered brotherhood, and the vocation of dealer in second-hand book wares is old and honourable, and sometimes lucrative. Holywell Street was demolished before my interest in books was awakened, and of its glories I only know by hearsay. I was acquainted with the pre-war splendours of Farringdon Road, but my earliest glimpse into the enchantments of the second-hand book traffic was obtained in Charing Cross Road.

It must have been when I was about sixteen years of age that I conveyed my Sunday school prizes to the overflowing mart of Foyle, there to exchange them for a bundle of the sixpenny reprints of the Rationalist Press Association.

In those days I was a fresh convert to Socialism, and it was my special aim to secure books relating to Socialism, written from the Socialist side. The first volume of *Capital* was an early acquisition, although it cost me four shillings. On the other hand, I only paid twopence for an elegant French version of the late Auguste Bebel's famous book *Die Frau*. A penny more was the price asked by a Farringdon Road barrowman for Renan's *Vie de Jesu*, with wide margins, and in big type.

Although I was first of all interested in books with a certain sectarian bias, I found that my mental horizon was being widened, and came to recognise that in the world there are many different temperaments and all kinds of movements.

There are many ways of spending the long summer evenings and the precious institution of Saturday afternoon. For those who have been initiated not the least attractive is to pay a round of visits to the London bookshops. The sordid market in Lower Marsh, Lambeth, is scarcely noticed by the devotee who is inspecting the thousands of books in the shop just off the Westminster Bridge Road. Amidst much deplorable old rubbish, numerous books of real utility are to be had at prices ranging from twopence to two shillings.

The prices are lower than in the majority of other shops in London, and the war had nearly run its

course before they were marked up fifty per cent. For sixpence I bought an odd volume of the handsome library edition of Moncure Conway's *Life of Thomas Paine*, and a week later I was fortunate enough to espy its fellow on the same shelf, and to obtain it for a further shilling.

The tradesmen in Charing Cross Road are sufficiently alive to the value of the wares they offer to the public. But the assiduous bargain-hunter will sometimes turn up a prize in the sixpenny boxes. Thus I once found there an American edition, in one volume, of the four books of Froude's *Life of Carlyle*, together with the *Letters and Memorials* of Jane Welsh Carlyle. Dealers in old furniture occasionally display a few dozen books, of whose relative merits they are quite unaware. Unsaleable tomes are marked an exorbitant figure, but in such a shop I once picked up a cloth-covered *Evan Harrington* for sixpence.

As was to be expected, German books have been a drug in the market for the past five years. For an outlay of three shillings I became the possessor of complete sets of Heine and Schiller, which were exposed in a shop in the New Kent Road, and it was only a thought of the brief span of human life that restrained me from buying the thirty volumes of Goethe for a trifle more. By some strange chance a street dealer acquired a number of volumes famous in German Socialist circles, and, being interested in their subject matter, I secured for a matter of four shillings enough recreative reading to last half-a-dozen years. On this same barrow was a copy of the first German edition of the celebrated *Das Kapital*, which has caused such a ferment in the world, and the stall-keeper was perfectly acquainted with the value of such a book.

One dinner-hour I was looking over the contents of a barrow in Shoreditch. By my side was a seedy man who sniffed with disgust as he caught sight of an old volume in Gothic characters. "We don't want none of that here," he muttered. The book which excited his disapproval was a survivor from the first edition of Schopenhauer's masterpiece, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, which was going for a few pence.

In a side street near Regent's Park I came across a dingy little shop, with a window display of dog-eared novels. On exploring the interior, I discovered some volumes of Voltaire, and held converse with the proprietor, who told me he was about to move to larger premises, where he would concentrate on the shilling novel. A boy entered the shop, and bumped on the counter a large family bible, with gilt clasps and coloured illustrations. The shopman shook his head, and pointed to a similar heirloom lying on the floor, which he could not get the local grocer to take off his hands for the purpose of wrapping up sugar. After a short parley the boy asked if he could exchange the bible for a few coloured comics, and the transaction was then completed.

It is delightful to stumble on unexpected book-stores in strange provincial towns, or fresh seaside resorts. At Margate I remember paying twopence for Mill's *Logic*, and threepence for Huxley's *Lay Sermons*. Passing an old curiosity shop on the road which leads to Pegwell Pay I found a rare book by the little-known Swedenborgian genius, *Garth Wilkinson*, offered for less than sixpence. Opposite the house in Clevedon, in which Coleridge spent his

honeymoon, is a tumble-down cottage, full of the sweepings of neighbouring country houses. Amongst the assortment of books was all that Schiller had ever written, contained in one stout volume. The price was threepence, but owning a Schiller already, and not wishing to add to the weight of the luggage, I left the book where it was.

Those who have read the book will know that Mr. G. H. Perris's *Germany and the German Emperor* is a scholarly study, packed with valuable historical information, and written with unusual ability and insight. I saw it recently on a stall for two shillings, but remembering that the late Emperor of Germany was under a cloud I surmised there would be no great call for the book. This proved to be the case, and on my next visit the price had been reduced to one shilling, and so I added the volume to my collection.

There is a class of men for whom book hunting is not pleasure, but a drudgery. They are generally in the last stage of shabbiness, and spin out a thin livelihood by tramping London to find books which are wanted by various dealers. They will see no romance in what I have described. The book hunter enjoys himself best if he goes alone. His intimate friends may be on the same errand as he, but he will rarely see them. The eager throng in front of the shops and stalls are so intent on the books that they have eyes for nothing else.

H. J. STENNING.

Correspondence.

THE GUTTER PRESS AND THE FREETHINKER.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The following fine lines by Harry Lyman Koopman seem to me to give the spirit that should animate the Press at this crisis. Yet during the last five years of blood and hatred, terror and disaster, lying and hypocrisy, the *Freethinker* stood almost alone in defence against the prevailing barbarism. From week to week, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in his "Views and Opinions," fearlessly turned the searchlight of reason and sanity upon the horrid welter, and with unerring and untiring hand kept the light-ship *Freethinker* safely afloat.

Compare this with the action and spirit of the Gutter Press, and, verily, it is Hyperion to a Satyr. Just now, having exhausted the profiteering possibilities of the Bolshevik atrocity stunt, this Gutter Press is busy debauching the public mind by flooding the country with spirit revelations so grotesque and self-contradictory that they could have sprung only from the distorted imagination of a mental defective; as, indeed, a specialist in mental diseases informs me, the appearance of Rev. G. V. Owen indicates. Pushed to their logical conclusion, these weird hallucinations obviously convert Jack the Ripper from a social pest into a public benefactor, and paralyse every effort at social reform, for why bother about housing when a pinch of morphia will carry you comfortably and at once to those lovely mansions in the skies? Again, too, how the tricky mediums and clever clairvoyants must be chuckling over their rising profits, and thanking the Gutter Press for so widely and gratuitously advertising their wares and throwing a mantle of respectability over their nefarious trade.

Moreover, Scotland Yard would be very grateful for some information from the spirits of the poor victims of the many undetected murderers, yet none whatever is forthcoming, although the spirits can, apparently, furnish full details of their present circumstances:—

Here shall be smiling fields, where now the fell
Fanged wolf howls to the echo of his howl;
Babies shall prattle where couched panthers growl,
And lovers clip and coo in many a dell
Which now the savage wakes with midnight yell
To blood and flame and frenzied orgies foul.

But what strange light breaks in on bat and owl
 O'er crashing trees? The settler's axe aims well.
 How desperate are beginnings! But, at last,
 Where one and then a hundred sadly wrought,
 Throng on a sudden, millions, and the past
 Becomes heroic, with men's praises fraught.
 Take my praise now, while still thy toils loom vast,
 Lone outpost on the far frontier of thought.

G. O. WARREN.

FREETHOUGHT IN WEST HAM.

SIR,—Presiding at Mr. Cohen's lecture at the Stratford Town Hall on February 1, Mr. Rosetti, the President of the local Branch, appealed for all unattached Freethinkers to join the Branch and so make it one of the strongest in the country. Seeing several of those present who were members of the old Branch in the days of Bradlaugh, but who on that great man vacating the chair, acted as though they thought the Movement was getting its death-blow, I felt that the meeting should act as a fresh inspiration to them. Our President's lecture and its reception by a large audience, though on a most abstruse subject, was instructive and entertaining to the delighted listeners, and very destructive to that stronghold of superstition—the all-ruling God idea.

I felt pleased at being present at the meeting, and proud of my membership, and noting the present position of militant Freethought as represented by the N. S. S. one could not fail to realize that the work done by Bradlaugh and his brilliant successor, G. W. Foote, was being well carried on by our third President, who, if I may be allowed to say it, has well fulfilled my prophecy made on his taking the Presidential Chair.

Having been a member of the N. S. S. for half a century and, listening to our President's address, I felt proud of my association with the Movement, and if unattached Freethinkers felt the force of Mr. Rosetti's appeal as I did, his appeal for more members will not have fallen on deaf ears.

J. T. THURLOW.

JOHN KNOX AND REFORM.

SIR,—It is not often one disagrees with Mr. Lloyd's ideas or "facts," but when he says (as per your issue of 1st inst.) that John Knox was not a social reformer, he would do well to read the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. xxi., p. 506, which says (speaking of Knox):—

His scheme for the reform of the Church and application of its revenues was in advance not of his own time only. He contemplated free education for the children of the poor who really required such aid—a graduated system of parish schools, burgh schools and universities, which would have forestalled the most recent educational reform.

And this was not the only respect in which Knox showed himself a most enlightened social reformer. Mr. Lloyd will, no doubt, humbly apologize to his shade. Do not let us imitate (even unconsciously) the Christians, and be unjust to the memory of the great and the good simply because they did not belong to our "side."

A. GRITTY-CUSSE.

Obituary.

We regret to record the death of yet another of the "Old Guard." Mr. Henry Maddock Ridgway has died in the eighty-eighth year of his age, having been a militant Freethinker for the long period of sixty years. In the Cause of Freethought he was always profoundly interested, which he served on the intellectual side with eminent ability, and to whose funds he was a most generous contributor. He was an ardent admirer and supporter of the late Charles Bradlaugh and G. W. Foote. In fact, there was no good cause with which he was not in active sympathy. He was a convinced vegetarian, and gave considerably to the Humanitarian Society. He was cremated at Golder's Green, in the presence of several old friends, on Friday, February 13, when a Secular Service was conducted.—J. T. L.

We deeply regret to record the death of Mr. W. Gregory, Secretary of the Kingsland Branch N. S. S., on February 14,

aged sixty-nine. Mr. Gregory was a very old worker in the Cause, his associations with it commencing in the stormy Bradlaugh days. No man was more devoted to a great Cause, which he served to the utmost measure of his abilities and opportunities. The body will be cremated at Golder's Green Crematorium on Monday, February 23, at 1 o'clock.

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. T. F. Palmer, "The Life and Times of Charles Bradlaugh."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, C. Ratcliffe, "Why has Christianity Failed?"

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W., three minutes from Kennington Oval Tube Station and Kennington Gate): 7, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, "Primitive Brains in Modern Skulls." Music from 6.30 to 7.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, Joseph McCabe, "The Position of the Churches."

OUTDOOR.

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Repertory Theatre, Station Street): 7, Mr. A. B. Moss, "Is the Bible a Safe Guide?"

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Andrew's Halls): Thursday, February 26, at 7.30, Debate: "Does Man Survive Death; Is the Belief Reasonable?" Affirmative, Mr. Horace Leaf; Negative, Mr. Chapman Cohen.

LEEDS SECULAR SOCIETY (Youngman's Rooms, 19 Lowerhead Row, Leeds): Every Sunday at 6.30.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. A. D. Howell Smith, "Christianity in the Light of Physical Science."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Co-operative Hall, Downing Street): Mr. J. T. Lloyd, 3, "How and Why I Became a Freethinker"; 6.30, "The Prince of Peace in History."

PLYMOUTH (Briadwood Institute, off North Hill): 11, Meeting to consider the formation of a Branch of the N. S. S. and the organization of propaganda.

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Marsden Miners' Hall, Imeary Street): Mr. C. Cohen, 3, "A Freethinker's View of the League of Nations"; 6, Augmented Music; 6.30, "Do the Dead Live?"

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