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Views and Opinions.

Easter.

Gods are born, and gods die. That is one of the safest generalizations in human thought. Gods are no more immortal than are men, and they fall even shorter of immortality than do many of the things that man makes. For we have monuments that have been erected to gods the very names of which are forgotten and their functions unknown. Man may still debate his own immortality; the mortality of the gods is beyond dispute. And if there is another world to which dead deities go, what a motley crowd they must present! Gods big and little, dark and fair, ugly and beautiful, cruel and kind, presenting all the characteristics of man at his best and at his worst. A glance over the land to which the ghosts of dead gods go must appear like a hurried run through a huge natural history museum—there would be left on the mind the same sense of innumerable forms answering to no useful plan or design. That the gods are born and that they die, we know. But, curiously, we know better the manner of their birth than we do the way of their death. For the conditions of their birth are few and simple. They can be studied in the lives of peoples that are living in various parts of the earth. It is the manner of their death that is more puzzling. For by the time that man gives his gods their quietus, life has grown very complex, and the causes of decay are not always easy of discernment. But we know that man the creator is also man the destroyer. Human thought brings the gods into the world, and it is human thought that carries them out again. Man is the great decider; were he not, life would become stagnant and progress impossible. * * *

The Resurrection Myth.

Last week I was dealing with the birth of a god, and it is only fitting—although I had no intention of doing so when I penned those notes—that I should deal this week with the death of one—particularly as the date of this issue of the *Freethinker* is Easter Sunday. On this day Christians are celebrating the resurrection of their God. And the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are vital to Christianity. They are the corner-stones of the Christian faith. If Christ was not killed for the sins of men, if he did not rise again from the dead, then the

whole Christian faith sinks into nothingness. But when we commemorate the death of anyone, we do it on a particular date. For a man can only die once, and he can only do it on one day. If people commemorate the death of Lord Kitchener, they will do it on one date; and whether that date falls on a Sunday or on a Monday, or on any other day of the week, that will be the date of the commemoration. Not the *day*, be it observed, but the *date*. But the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, like his birth, are not fixed by the date, but by the day. And whoever heard of anybody's birthday or death-day being determined in that fashion? The death-day of Jesus Christ is fixed by the phases of the moon—and there is an unconscious satire in the fact that the moon was in more ignorant times supposed to have some causal connection with lunacy. Not history, but astronomy, settles the date when we shall commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that was a gross oversight on the part of those who were responsible for the establishment of the Christian faith. Probably at that date it did not matter, and so the question was overlooked. Most probably, in this as in other things, Christianity was following so closely the lines of other creeds that it would not have done to have attempted any startling innovation. Sun-gods and vegetation gods had always been born and died and resurrected on particular dates that were settled by the seasons, and it would not have done to have tried to deceive a people who knew what these gods were supposed to do, whose birthday and deathday were fixed in the same way as those of ordinary men and women. Still, people who were establishing a world-religion that was meant to endure, ought to have looked forward to a time when conditions would have been different. Had they acted with wisdom, and given Jesus a fixed birthday and a settled deathday, it would not have been giving the game away quite so clearly to after generations. For, as Abraham Lincoln said, while you can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, you can't reasonably expect to fool all the people all the time.

* * *

According to Plan.

In the birth of gods, as in their death, there is a fashion, and Jesus Christ was true to the mode. A Pagan who was suddenly awakened from the sleep of centuries would see nothing unusual in the Christian celebrations of Easter. He would only feel that he was assisting once more at the age-long celebration of the sun-god's victory over winter and death. He would point out that as you are now doing this in the name of the slain and resurrected Jesus, so they had done it in the name of the slain and resurrected Adonis, so had the Syrians done the same over the God Tammuz. Even the name Easter gives the game away to all whose minds are not bemused with the stupidities of the Churches. For what has Easter to do with Jesus Christ? It is not even the name of a god, it belongs to a goddess, to the Saxon goddess Eostre, the goddess

of spring, who was annually glorified in the revivification of all vegetation. The annual festival that Jesus knew was not Easter, but the Passover, also a spring festival. Our Easter is an ancient German festival, but whether the ceremony be in the name of Jesus, or Tammuz, or Adonis, or Osiris, or Attis, or Eostre, the significance is the same. The fight between life and death is eternal, the struggle between summer and winter never ending. And exactly similar ceremonies to those which Christians associate with the name of Jesus Christ, and, in their ignorance, impute to an historical character, can be witnessed among the peasantry of all parts of Europe, and whose ancestors practised them long before the name of Jesus Christ was heard of.

* * *

Christian Bluff.

One does not lightly differ with an expression of opinion from a man such as Sir James Frazer, but it is not clear that there is enough evidence to justify his statement that:—

On the whole, the evidence goes to show that the great Christian festivals were arbitrarily timed by the Church, so as to coincide with previously existing Pagan festivals for the sake of weaning the heathen from their old faith and bringing them over to the new religion.....Christmas and Easter, the two pivots on which the Christian calendar revolves, appear both to have been instituted with this intention; the one superseded a mid-winter festival of the sun-god, the other superseded a vernal festival of the death and resurrection of the vegetation-god (*Golden Bough*, vol ix., p. 328).

This seems to perpetuate what is, to my mind, one of the many superstitions that Christianity has set up, even in its decay, the quite unfounded belief that the originators of the Christian cult were men of great spiritual or religious development, who were aiming at lifting a people who moved on a low religious level to an altogether higher one. I know of no real evidence in support of that view. On the contrary, I am convinced that when the facts—such as Christian tolerance have allowed to survive—are examined, it will be found that even religiously Christianity represented, not an advance, but a decided retrogression. If one tests the matter by taking the better class Pagan writers on religious subjects, and compares them with Christian writers *dealing with the same topics*, the intellectual drop is marked. There is all the difference that exists between the mental level of the Synthetic Philosophy and the *War Cry*. The truth is that Christianity represented the triumph of the dregs of the intellectual life of the old Pagan world, and the story of its superiority, religiously, to what then existed is just one of the many legends that have been perpetuated by the Christian Church, which has been made possible because of its control of the educational machinery of the world. Christianity was not a superior cult but a competing one, and the distinction is important. It perpetuated the old superstitions, not in mere form and as a means of leading the people to something higher, but because it accepted them substantially, merely offering another name. A religion that reinstated the crudest theories of demonic possession from which the Pagans were freeing themselves, can hardly plead that it was playing the part of a theological Montessori, and leading the people to something higher. The world has yet to fully realize the horrible intellectual catastrophe that was signaled by the triumph of Christianity. Unfortunately, the legend of the superiority of Christianity had been taught so assiduously that many non-Christians seemed impelled to do their part in perpetuating the myth. For ourselves we can only say,

as did John Wesley of those Christians who paid the "violent compliment to" non-Christians of backing their rejection of witchcraft: "I owe them no such service." And we are sure that when writers have liberated themselves completely from the numbing effects of their early Christian training they will agree with us.

* * *

From Faith to Farce.

At any rate, the nature and origin of the "Christian" festival of Easter is unmistakable. The early Christians did not deny this. They lived too near the source of Christianity for them to do so, even had they been so inclined. It was only as time passed and Christians became more ignorant of the nature of their creed that affiliation with the older cults was resented. The relation was commented on by the Pagans and admitted by the Christians. The former said that Christianity was a copy of their own beliefs, the Christians retorted that it was the work of the Devil, who, knowing that Christianity was coming, copied it while it was on the way. But whether from heaven or hell, the identity of Christianity with the older creeds is plain. The slain Saviour and the resurrected God, the event fixed by the first full moon following March 21, the eating of the newly-baked bread, and the eating of Easter eggs—an egg being the universal sign of life—the numerous practices that still continue in all parts of Europe in connection with Easter, leave no doubt that Christianity is not, as is so often said, a disguised Paganism, it is Paganism with a new name, but in a form that would be at once recognized by an ancient Pagan could he be brought to life. Had Christianity not been the old Pagan nature-festival might still have survived, but it would probably have been recognized for what it was. In taking a nature-festival and making it represent a commemoration of the death and resurrection of an actual human being, Christianity did but make what might have become an interesting piece of poetic symbolism a ridiculous impossibility.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Easter Reflections.

EASTER has often been a bone of contention in the Christian Church, and even to-day there are differences of opinion as to its true significance. In early times the theologians delighted in controversy, and the enjoyment of it was in proportion to its bitterness. There were two diverging views as to the time for observing the Easter festival. In the second century Polycarp and Anicetus did not agree on the point, but in a friendly manner, after a lengthy conference at Rome, they agreed to differ. Towards the close of the century the controversy became highly acrimonious. Victor, the Bishop of Rome, sent a letter to the Eastern prelates, ordering them to adopt the Western usage. Upon their refusing, Victor had the audacity to issue an edict of excommunication against the Churches of Asia; and the question was not settled till the Council of Nicæa in 325. In the seventh century the same dispute rent the British and Saxon Churches asunder. For a hundred years it raged with great severity. As Milman says, it "became not merely a speculative question, in which separate kingdoms or separate Churches might pursue each its independent course, but a practical evil, which brought dispute and discord into the family of the king" (*Latin Christianity*, vol. ii., p. 246). The Venerable Bede devotes many pages of his *Ecclesiastical History of England* to a graphic sketch of the ravaging strife. Of course, this was a controversy about an exceedingly trivial matter, though treated as if it were of the most vital

importance. It did not occur to anybody to doubt the resurrection of Jesus, although it was a highly debatable subject. The truth of the Church's affirmation was universally taken for granted. Dark were the ages, and, for at least a thousand years, getting darker and darker; but the Christians kept on singing, with serene confidence, that their Lord was risen from the dead. That faith was their common possession; and yet they fell foul of one another on the mere question of date. Whilst all agreed that the Resurrection was an accomplished fact, they cursed each other with avidity when they could not see eye to eye as to the day on which it occurred.

Easter is a term that carries us back to pre-Christian times and conditions. It comes from an Anglo-Saxon word which has no Christian connotation whatever. Eastre, or Ostara, was the goddess of light or spring, in honour of whom a festival was celebrated in April. Like Christmas, Easter is a solar festival. Solar and vegetable Gods, such as Mithra, Osiris, Horus, and Adonis, were slain and brought back to life again after so many days, thus symbolizing the annual disappearance and return of the sun. Such deities are simply natural objects, forces, or processes personified. We are often assured that Sunday is the Lord's Day because it commemorates the resurrection of Christ; but the truth is that Sunday was observed as the Lord's Day by Mithraists long before Christ was heard of, and that Easter is one of the most ancient and venerable festivals in the world. The natural inference is that Christ belongs to the same mythical category as Mithra, Attis, Horus, and Adonis. To-day many will sing:—

Christ the Lord is risen to-day;
Christians, haste your vows to pay;
Offer ye your praises meet
At the Paschal Victim's feet.
For the sheep the Lamb hath bled,
Sinless in the sinner's stead:
"Christ is risen," to-day we cry;
Now he lives no more to die.

As the sign of the Cross is entirely Pagan in its origin, so is the celebration of Easter, and the story of Christ's resurrection is no more historical than that of any other Saviour-God's return. This is what we ought specially to emphasize every Easter. As a matter of fact, there is an increasing number of people even within the Churches who no longer believe in the Resurrection either of Christ, or of mankind in general. Dean Inge candidly admits that the belief in eternal life has lost its roots in the souls of men. He cannot pretend to himself that the belief in a resurrection of our bodies stands where it did. As Browning says:—

The whole or chief
Of difficulties is belief.
Could I believe once thoroughly,
The rest were simple. What? Am I
An idiot, do you think,—a beast?
Prove to me, only that the least
Command of God is God's indeed,
And what injunction shall I need
To pay obedience?

But there is absolutely no proof that Christ rose from the dead, any more than that Osiris, or any other God did so.

Many are asking what happened to the body of Jesus after burial. Some think that his dead body was stolen. George Moore suggests that it was stolen before death overtook it, and that Jesus lived to regret his past life, even to atone for it. But this is a wholly useless inquiry. It is frankly conceded by Liberal theologians that the story of the Gospel Jesus is largely legendary, or in other words, that the Gospel Jesus, as such, never lived at all, never died as recorded, and, consequently, never rose again. This does not imply that to such imagina-

tive men as Paul and John he did not seem to be a profoundly real being. In the Pauline Epistles he stands before us as the creation of a most fervid, deeply-stirred imagination. Paul constructed him to suit his theory of the Universe and of mankind's place therein, which he derived from Neo-Platonism and the Oriental religions which were being so assiduously proclaimed in the Roman Empire when he was young. Even before he was born the conceptions of sin, guilt, redeemer, and salvation were commonplaces in men's minds; and there were minute accounts of the advent, work, triumph, and return to heaven of the Saviour of the world. To him the Redeemer was Jesus of Nazareth, in whose existence the only events worth remembering and ever dwelt upon were his atoning death and resurrection. The conception was in no sense original, the only new thing being its alleged exemplification in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ died that we might die to the world and sin; and rose again that the hope of immortality might arise and shine in our hearts. In short, Paul believed in the resurrection of Christ in order to believe in his own. Here is his argument:—

If Christ is preached that he hath been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised; and if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith is also in vain, yea, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we witnessed of God that he raised up Christ; whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither hath Christ been raised; and if Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable (1 Cor. xv. 12-19).

That argument, it will be observed, is in a circle, and necessarily proves nothing. No evidence whatever is adduced that God raised Christ from the dead; but if he did, it is certain that he will raise us at the last day; but if he did not raise Christ neither will he raise us. Clearly, such an argument is utterly valueless, and expresses a view of the present life which is despicable in the extreme. If we are not to live for ever, Paul declares that it is not worth while to live nobly and well at all. He boldly tells his readers that "if the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." The Christian pulpit has always echoed this vicious conception of human life; and even many of the poets have preached it. Tennyson's nurse is made to say that she could not do her work from day to day if she believed the hope of immortality was a lie. Again, he says:—

A voice spake out of the skies
To a just man and a wise—
The world and all within it,
Will only last a minute!
And a beggar began to cry
"Food, food, or I die!"
Is it worth his while to eat,
Or mine to give him meat,
If the world and all within it
Were nothing the next minute?

Thus, the message of Easter is seen to be, not only incapable of proof, but positively mischievous in its influence on character. Our consolation is that it is no longer believed except by an ever-dwindling minority. This is honestly admitted by a large number of modern divines, such as Sir George Adam Smith, Principal of Aberdeen University, and Dean Inge, of St. Paul's. True happiness, here and now, is possible only to those who love and practice virtue, and aim at raising the standard of life in this world; and if there is a future life they, of necessity, are the people best qualified to enter upon and enjoy it.

Making Love to Labour.

We shall never enfranchise the world without touching people's superstitions; and even if we abolish the House of Lords we shall still dwell in the house of bondage unless we abolish the Lord of Lords; for the evil principle will remain to develop into new forms of oppression.—G. W. Foote.

THE clergy are making love to Democracy. The purple-proud prelates of the Government Religion have actually arranged a "Labour Service" at Southwark Cathedral; and the President of the Free Church Council, the Rev. F. B. Meyer, who is old enough to know better, declares that "the axioms of the Labour Party" were first uttered by Jesus Christ; so, of course, every Democrat should at once attend a Christian place of worship. But the Rev. George Hooper, a subsequent speaker at the Free Church Council, has "out-Heroded Herod." Boldly and unblushingly he reminded Labour of the debt it owed to the Churches. Its leaders, he said, were born in the Free Churches and cradled in their schools. When it was illegal to hold trade-union meetings, the only places open were Sunday-schools, and so forth, and so on.

The clergy being what they are, this anxiety on their part with regard to Labour is not unexpected. The modern Labour Movement has never proclaimed, and never sought after, an alliance with the parsons, Anglican, Catholic, or Nonconformist. Thus it happens that, whenever the Labour Movement takes a step forward, the clergy are certain to break out into hysterical appeals to Labour leaders to remember that, in spite of appearances being against them, God and Christ and the Churches have always been on the side of Democracy. As an old proverb assures us, in vain is the net spread in full sight of the bird. The instinct of self-preservation on the part of Labour leaders prompts other and safer measures than a close contact with the wily Black Army, who, like their God, are always on the side of the big battalions.

Let us examine these clerical statements. If Jesus Christ were a Labour leader, how comes it that the real hard work of Labour comes nineteen centuries after his alleged death? During all those centuries the clergy of the Christian Churches anointed with oil every kingly scoundrel and despot in Christendom, but their actions showed that they cared as little for the working classes as the Sultan of Zanzibar for his unhappy and unfortunate slaves. So far as this country alone is concerned, the record is terrible. As late as 1860 a Government inquiry showed that of two and a half millions of children, only one and a half millions attended school, and that more than half of these received an education which was more nominal than real. The votes of the clergy in the House of Lords proves beyond all shadow of dispute the sympathy of Christian priests towards the working classes. The bare record is sufficient to rouse the lasting hostility of all right-thinking people, and their shameful opposition to all progress shows how hopelessly the clerical caste is out of touch with democratic aspirations and the humanistic tendencies of the age.

Seven bishops voted against the Bill for abolishing the death penalty for stealing property from shops over the value of five shillings. Fifteen bishops voted against the measure to authorize magistrates to provide schools where wanted out of the rates. Twenty-five voted against the Catholics Disabilities Bill; and twenty against the Jewish Disabilities Repeal Bill. Twenty-two voted against the admission of Nonconformists to the Universities, and sixteen against permitting funeral services in churchyards other than those of the Church of England. On many occasions they opposed the De-

ceased Wife's Sister Bill long after such marriage was legal in the British colonies. They even opposed a modest measure for providing seats for shop-assistants.

As for the Nonconformists, they were too busy singing hymns about hell and heaven, and the blood of Jesus, to worry their saintly heads about such worldly matters as social problems. In times of real danger, very few parsons are brave enough to voice the claims of the poor in the face of the wealthy pew-holders, who are really the Nonconformist parsons' employers.

The plain, blunt truth is that the leading men and women who founded the democratic movement in this country were Freethinkers. Thomas Paine, who wrote *The Rights of Man*, and risked his life in doing so, was so outspoken a Freethinker that scores of men and women were imprisoned for selling his book, *The Age of Reason*. Mary Wollstonecraft, the brave pioneer who voiced the rights of women generations before the modern Suffragists, was a Freethinker. William Godwin and Horne Tooke were also anti-clericals. Robert Owen, the first to call himself a Socialist, and Francis Place, were both Freethinkers. Even in recent times the same thing is true. Bernard Shaw, Sydney Webb, Graham Wallas, Belfort Bax, Hyndman, Blatchford, and many others, are all Freethinkers.

The present-day hypocritical pretensions of the clergy are nauseating. They have an aroma like that of a crowded cabin of a small steamer on a rough day. These men do not understand the alphabet of Socialism. Do they imagine that men and women whose watchwords are "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," contemplate in a Socialistic state the continued existence of a clerical caste, 50,000 strong, whose duty it will be to teach Socialist children the foolishness of half-forgotten centuries? When an educated Democracy comes into its own, the clergy will have to seek honest employment. Every real Democrat knows that clericalism is the enemy, for priestcraft and tyranny have been inseparable companions for thousands of years.

MIMNERMUS.

The Saviour Myth.

MR. EDWARD CARPENTER'S *Pagan and Christian Creeds: Their Origin and Meaning*, lately published by Allen & Unwin, is a valuable contribution to the literature of Freethought. The ground covered is largely identical with that of Sir J. G. Frazer's *Golden Bough*; but while that work is noteworthy chiefly for its unrivalled accumulation of facts relative to comparative religion and mythology, Mr. Carpenter aims rather at marshalling conclusions from the facts ascertained. The facts and conclusions together constitute a formidable array, and are, from the point of view of Christianity, unanswerable.

The legend that Christianity is a unique religion, superior to anything else of its kind, is by no means dead; and it is well that Mr. Carpenter should have put, in the concise form he has, the questions on this head which any sincere apologist nowadays ought to face. How is it, we may well ask, that the story of a virgin-born Deity—dead, buried, and risen again—is found among peoples long anterior to, or who never heard of, Christianity? How came it that Mithra, the Persian sun-god, was born on December 25, died and rose to life, and was commemorated by a sacramental breaking of bread? That Osiris, the corn-god of Egypt, was born at the same season, also suffered and rose, and was similarly commemorated? That the Syrian Adonis and the Phrygian Attis were the subject of roughly similar stories? That the Indian Krishna exhibits an even more astonishing parallelism with Christ (including

virgin-birth, miracles, transfiguration, descent into hell, ascension, and future advent as judge of all)? That the Greek Dionysus suffered death and resurrection? That even the Scandinavian Odin is made to say, in one of the old Sagas:—

I know that I hung on the windy tree
For nine long nights,
Wounded by the spear, dedicated to Odin,
Myself to myself?

The origin of this world-old and world-wide myth is an enormously interesting question, quite apart from its bearing on Christianity. The reason for its wide diffusion is readily intelligible when we consider that the gods of primitive man are, in fact, the forces of nature around him, whose operation closely concerns his welfare, but which he does not as yet understand or control. To the early tribes of hunters and herdsmen, dependent far more than we are on the vicissitudes of the seasons, the yearly alternation of winter and summer, the growth and decay of trees and plants, the breeding of animals, were occurrences of prodigious import. Living nature, thus dying and coming to life year by year, was personified as a beneficent being who gave his life for man and perpetually renewed it. He might be personified either in the form of some obvious animal, such as a lamb or bull—this would be the case if the tribe lived chiefly on its flocks or herds—or else, if the tribe had reached the agricultural stage of civilization, as a man-god, whose body and blood were consumed in the shape of bread and wine. The myths of Osiris, Adonis, Attis, and Dionysus quite obviously have this origin, and the same applies, partly at least, to Mithra and Krishna. In some instances the source has to be sought in the phenomena of the heavens. Mithra was predominantly a sun-god. Odin, again, was a sky-god—represented in the Sagas as an old man in a blue mantle, with only one eye (the sun), shaded by a great hat (cloud and mist), and dealing death to his enemies with a terrible spear (the lightning-flash). The reason for the mythical sacrifice on "the tree," in Odin's case, may be sought in the phenomenon of the dark northern winter, when the sun is invisible for long days together, and when the early Norsemen may well have fancied that Odin was renewing his power for the coming year by some mysterious self-immolation.

This, it may be said, is very interesting to the anthropologist; but how comes it that these obvious Nature-myths were transmuted into the doctrines of Christianity, which are usually understood to refer to the regeneration of the individual soul, and not of external Nature? To answer this question we must refer a little to history, and especially to economic history. So long as the basis of human society continued to be the primitive communism of the tribe or clan, these myths would live on quite naturally, as obvious explanations of phenomena closely concerning the life of the tribe and all its members. These had all one interest—to assist or propitiate the assumed Nature-gods to the best of their ability, and secure thereby the means of life for all. But with economic development, and inter-tribal wars, came the decline of primitive communism, the institution of slavery, the growth of private property, and the commencement of production for profit instead of for use. Two results followed: the members of society were no longer all in the same close relation to Nature as primitive man had been (the classes of merchants, craftsmen, and urban slaves, for instance, could not be expected to feel as their ancestors had felt about the "spirits of the corn and the wild"); and their material interests began to conflict. It was the interest of each man now to overreach his neighbour and "profiteer." The preservation of society required some bond

other than that of interest; and an anti-natural Deity, over and above the world, had to be postulated to thwart the natural, but conflicting, impulses of man as he now saw himself. This economic and psychological development culminated in the prophetic movement in Palestine, and in the philosophy of Socrates and Plato in Greece.

The primitive belief in a Saviour-God, shedding his blood for the good of man, and the consequent sacramental "mysteries," were too deeply rooted to be discarded; but their original significance was entirely lost sight of, and a new meaning imported into them, by the town-bred populations of the Levant, especially after the time of Alexander. The beneficent Nature-god, who renewed the life of man by his body and blood, was converted into a supernatural personage, who redeemed his devotees from sin, and guaranteed them renewed life in a future and better world. This supernatural personage might be named Osiris, Dionysus, or Mithra, but his leading characteristics were the same, and the cults tended to coalesce. Alongside of and jostling these religions we must figure to ourselves the innumerable Jewish colonies of the "Dispersion," by no means wholly as yet the narrow and intolerant sect that persecution and ghetto-life tended later on to make them. Their prophetic writings had been translated into Greek; and many curious inquirers must have noted an analogy between the predicted Messiah or Christ, who was to deliver the Jews from their adversity, and the gods of the mysteries, who delivered their worshippers from sin and death. It needed only a misapplication of the allegory of the "suffering servant" in Isaiah liii. to make the assimilation perfect. Among the aimless and depressed populations of the great Levantine trading centres—Alexandria, Antioch, Corinth—the time was ripe for a new fusion. It was effected by Paul—the inventor, or adapter, of Christianity as a world-religion.

The essential point about Christianity is that it is rooted in hatred of the world. It is a "pariah" religion. If the old communal society, founded on solidarity of interest, such as we get a glimpse of in early Greece and the Sagas for example, had not succumbed to military and economic forces, and left the common man aimless and hopeless in this life, an "other-worldly" religion would not have taken root and the monkish boycott of jollity, sex, art, intellect, and everything that makes life of value, would not have arisen. The two processes were cause and effect. Mr. Carpenter, in his book, speculates on the possible results of an economic re-transformation into a Socialist world-order based on production for common use, and anticipates a "third state of consciousness"—the rejection of asceticism, and the instinctive recognition of the unity of all Nature, including man, as the foundation of life and conduct. Such speculation is very interesting; and I, for my part, see nothing in it inconsistent with the position of a Freethinker and Secularist. I cannot, however, follow Mr. Carpenter into these paths in the present article. Suffice to say that his book is a fascinating one to read, and—if Christians would peruse it open-mindedly—a sledge-hammer blow to the established creed.

ROBERT ARCH.

If you want to find the true magic-pass into Heaven, scores of rival professors press round you with obtrusive supply; if you ask, in your sorrow, Who can tell me whether there be a Heaven at all? every soul will keep aloof and leave you alone. All men that bring from God a fresh deep nature—all in whom religious wants live with magic power, and who are yet too clear of soul to unthink a thought and falsify a truth, receive in these days no help and no response.

—J. Martineau.

Our Heavenly Father.

At the commencement of an article under the above heading, it is, I think, advisable to define one's terms. Such definitions need not be etymologically correct, but such that one's readers should have a working conception of the subject at issue.

Now, by "Our Heavenly Father," I mean the Christian conception of an omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, being, who, somewhere about 6,000 years ago, "created," or made, or formed, or fashioned, the world as it appears to us, and since that time has reigned in his heaven (wherever that is), and has taken, and is taking, a fatherly interest in everything we do, and is watching over us continually.

Briefly, that is the conception of a Heavenly Father which we will try to show answers to no real existence. We will adopt the inductive method, *i.e.*, we will draw inferences from particular instances, and argue from these to general principles, that is, we will travel from the known to the less known, and, by this, I mean, we will judge of the characteristics of the Christian God by his manifestations on the earth, and, by the earth, we wish to include what we may term everyday phenomena. We judge a man's character by his notions, and this will be the method we will adopt in regard to our "Heavenly Father."

There is, we believe, an army of professional Christians in England kept by the "Faithful" to demonstrate the benevolence of our "Heavenly Father," so now, with the reader's permission, we will turn our attention to another side of his many-sided character.

We therefore address ourselves to the "problem of evil." By evil, we mean everything that tends to man's unhappiness: hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons, earthquakes, famines, cancer, blindness, epilepsy, crippled children, insanity, etc. To give a detailed list of the suffering, pain, and widespread misery caused by hurricanes would take a lifetime; but mention may be made of the devastated homes, the homeless families, the tear-stained face of the mother, the terror of her child, the hopelessness of the father, when vast areas of land have been laid waste and bare, with his home destroyed, his means of livelihood threatened, yet, in face of this desolation, there are his children who sing "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

Who has not read of the famines in India—the dried and parched lands, the prayers and supplications of the inhabitants, the crops spoiling through want of rain, the appeals, the earnest beseechings of his children, the withered women, the dying babes, the starving men.

Our Father heard the prayers, saw the suffering, saw man and wife kneel and pray to him for rain, saw his children die in thousands, saw men and women of other countries vying with each other to render succour and aid, yet he made no sign; he was all-powerful, but gave no aid; heard their prayers, but gave no help; only human effort, nothing from God, nothing from him who said: "Suffer little children to come unto me," and his children died, and parts of India are a huge graveyard presided over by the God of love, our Heavenly Father.

A few words as to epidemics, plague, and cholera: Will some one "skilled in theology" tell us what God was doing a few years ago during the plague in Bengal, in Asia Minor? Fathers and mothers taken from their homes, buried in scores, countless homes made fatherless and motherless, pain and disease the order of the day, an army of noble men and women working heroically to stem the ravages of this fell disease.

Prayers offered as usual in such cases with the usual result, the usual answer. Yet we painfully listen to this:—

The Great Physician now is near the sympathizing Jesus.

How much nobler is Ingersoll's:—

The hands that work are better far
Than lips that pray.
Love is the ever-gleaming star
That leads the way,
That shines not on vague worlds of bliss
But on a Paradise in this.

As to shipwrecks—storms at sea. This is another phase where we see the efficacy of prayer.

Perhaps all of us have read from time to time of the horror of shipwrecks, of storms, of burning vessels. How the believers in God knelt and prayed to him in their dire necessity! How they appealed to him, at the same time looking earnestly, wistfully, at the shore for aid. Picture the heroic lifeboat-men striving to save their fellow-creatures battling with the waves, the noble hearts beating time with the oars. They look up to the heavens, angry and sullen, storm-racked and fierce. Our Heavenly Father is on his throne, but gives no help, withholds his hand, and the waves engulf and swallow his children.

Yet this is not all. Divine benevolence has prepared sharks, and octopus, and other denizens of the ocean to complete the awful terror of his children as they wish good-bye to life and fight their last battle with the sea.

Even then, if our Christian friends are right, they are not left alone. A hell burning for ever is waiting the majority of mankind.

What a conception of God! What a comforting religion! What an interesting people!

What are we to think of earthquakes? San Francisco, Messina, Mount Pelee—even his own joss-houses in these places were wrecked. We admit his impartiality, but where is his benevolence?

The mind staggers when one contemplates the awful suffering of the inhabitants. Epidemics, which the efforts of the doctors fail to stamp out, leave their traces after the earthquake shock is spent. The scientific theory about earthquakes being safety-valves, etc., is all very well in its way, but the necessity of such safety-valves proves to our mind the imperfect nature of the cosmic scheme.

Can we really believe that our Heavenly Father's gaze was on Mount Pelee, San Francisco, Messina? Can we really believe he heard the people's prayers? Can we, in face of all this terror and suffering, believe that he exists?

The Christian tells us he "permits" it. If a man were ill-treating a child, and we had the power to prevent him and did not, would you not think we were morally as bad as that man? Why, of course you would. But in our illustration we did not bring the man and child into being—we simply found them in that condition; but our Father is not only responsible for the earthquake, but is responsible for the populace living in the earthquake zone. Is this not true?

Our Heavenly Father's children, followers and disciples, have to a very large extent dominated thought in Europe for the past 1,500 years. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that his followers have made the most noise during that time.

It will, we venture to think, be admitted that for hundreds of years believers in him and his special providence have fawned upon, and been fawned upon, by the ruling wealthy and powerful classes of almost every European nation. The more religious the Court, the more vice was found.

What has been the influence of the belief in our Heavenly Father as a whole? We had, for brevity, better look at the matter from a national standpoint.

Our Heavenly Father has so ordained things, and so imbued us with his divine benevolence, that for nearly five years countless millions of armed soldiers and sailors were contending, struggling, and fighting on many fronts; Europe a vast battlefield—a charnel-house.

Two thousand years of belief in a Heavenly Father. What a mockery! Each Christian nation distrusts the other. The same spirit is found in the Church as was displayed by John Calvin, the murderer, who was the instigator of the murder of Michael Servetus. Is not the same spirit to-day to be found in Ireland that prompted the Church to cruelly torture and murder Giordano Bruno.

Our Heavenly Father's children formed a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in this our Christian land, and one has only to read the records of the Courts to be assured of the necessity for such an organization.

CLIFFORD WILLIAMS.

Acid Drops.

We have from time to time called attention to the fact that a great deal was going on behind the scenes in connection with religious instruction in the schools, and our warnings are justified by the recent speech of the Minister for Education. It is quite evident that Mr. Fisher has made a tentative deal with the Churches, and that unless the public stirs itself we shall have larger measures of religious instruction introduced into the schools on a more definite basis than now exists. We fancy that the plan will be definite denominational teaching with some sort of right of entry. Mr. Fisher has consulted the heads of the Churches, and, apparently, no one else matters. We seriously ask all trades unionists, and all others who are interested in education to stir themselves in the matter. If they do not they will find themselves too late. The Government will deny till the last moment that there has been a deal, but this Government will deny anything, and, frankly, for our part we would not take their word on any subject under the sun—least of all in connection with religion, where vigorous lying is more honoured than elsewhere. It is for the lovers of justice and education to bestir themselves.

A Swansea friend sends us a copy of a ticket for a "War Memorial Sweep" on the Derby, to be run this June, the proceeds of which is to be presented to the "War Memorial and Church Improvement Fund" of St. Mary's. The prizes will be drawn at the Church Institute, and we suggest that the parson is the one who should do the drawing. Then the choir might sing the Dcxology when the winning number is drawn. But no one will accuse the Incumbent of St. Mary's of being slow or bigoted.

We are all apt to overlook how little removed from the savage—mentally—are large masses of the population. And there is nothing like religion for giving us a healthy reminder of the fact. For not alone is all religion a survival of primitive ways of looking at the world, but when a really religious man begins to apply his religion to life, the savage is rampant. Thus, we observe a writer in the *Leeds Mercury* saying that the lesson to be learned from the present state of the world is that man has lost "his God-given right to conduct his own government." All we should like to know is, if man cannot govern himself, who is to govern him? We fancy the writer's reply would be: The clergy—or, in other words, the Church. It is a puzzle to us why editors open their columns to the rubbish that some of these rabid religionists send in. We presume it is a matter of circulation.

In reply to the question: "How many Christians see

Freethought publications?" the Rev. H. Cotton Smith writes:—

I read all I can. I read your *Freethinker* every week, and much enjoy your "Acid Drops." I use your paper as a tonic. It always spurs me to work all the harder. Many thanks.

We know that we have many clergymen among our readers, and some of the letters we get would surprise many if they were published. We do not think that many of them find us a tonic for their Christianity, indeed, we have very direct evidence to the contrary. Anyway, we are pleased to know that one more clergyman reads the "one and only," and we should like to know that all of them took it in regularly.

Professor David Smith, in his Correspondence Column in the *British Weekly* for March 25, presents us with an exact account of how the Bible was produced. The several persons of the Blessed Trinity as well as redeemed man were all concerned in the work: "First the Eternal Father was revealed; he was the subject of the revelation. Then the Eternal Son revealed him; he was the revealer. Then the Holy Spirit did his office of enlightenment, opening men's eyes to see and their hearts to receive the revelation." Such was the Trinity's part in the undertaking, while men served as agents. We envy the Professor his omniscience! But he omits to tell us how he acquired such marvellous knowledge.

Dr. Smith is equally well informed on the subject of the resurrection of Christ and his subsequent appearances. On the third day Jesus rose, or was raised from the dead by a mighty miracle. Almost simultaneously another stupendous miracle was performed; the body raised was transfigured and glorified, thereby becoming a "heavenly," or "spiritual" body. Then, whenever he "appeared" a third miracle took place, that of making the invisible temporarily visible. After forty days a fourth miracle happened, namely, his ascension, or final disappearance. Is it any wonder that unbelievers are rapidly multiplying everywhere? The Professor does not seem to realize that the Ages of Faith are gone, never to return.

We have often called attention to the misrepresentations of "Bolshevism" by both the Government and the press—not because we were interested in the political aspects of the Russian revolution, but because the popular ignorance was being used to cast discredit upon Freethought. We take no credit for "smartness" in denouncing these stories as lies, because anyone who knows the history of Freethought knows that the same tales have circulated about Freethought and Freethinkers when both were less known than they are to-day. All that is said of the Russians were said once of the French, when they had their revolution; it was tried with the Portuguese only a few years ago, and it was worked off against Freethought when it was struggling for its existence. We have the after influence of this in the fear of people in this country being identified with extreme Freethought, and their pitiable endeavours to find some name that will disguise them from the more respectably orthodox. Hence what we said about Bolshevism.

We have read many narratives correcting these "raw head and bloody bones" stories, and in a just issued work, *Bolshevist Russia*, by E. Antonelli, the author narrates from his own experience what really occurred in relation to religion. M. Antonelli tells that all the Bolsheviks did was to institute civil marriage, leaving those free to have a religious ceremony if they desired it. In this respect Russia is on all fours with France, and it is worth while noting that while we were beslaving France for its heroism, we were blackguarding Russia for its villainy. When the English people have sufficiently developed, they will, we hope, imitate both Russia and France with respect to their marriage laws. In place of the lurid stories about Churches in ruins, or closed, religion suppressed, and priests murdered wholesale, we are told that religion has not been touched, religious liberty is intact, so long as the clergy did not interfere in politics they were left quite alone, and when we remember that in order to conduct *our* War—and get

ready for the next—we have abolished trial by jury, and made it possible for a man to be imprisoned without either a statement of offence or trial, established a rigid censorship, and took to breaking printing plant when a paper offended the Government, the Russian action does not appear quite so black.

It also appears, as we learn from another source, that in February, 1919, the Soviet Government issued an order that Churches were to be left at the disposal of the citizens who needed them, religious objects were not to be touched, even though of gold, and the public were warned not to make the removal of ikons from the streets the occasion of demonstrations. And then comes a message that is quite paralyzing in its horrible blasphemy:—

The prejudices of religion and popular superstition must be cured, not by punishment and repression, but by good schooling and the propaganda of Communism, and the organization of public works on a communistic basis.

It is worth while recalling the way in which our press worked in telling us heartrending stories of the abolition of all religion at the very time when this decree was promulgated. We doubt whether a viler chapter in the history of the press exists than this. And the way in which people who ought to have known better professed to believe what five minutes' reflection must have shown to be lies, casts a light on the moral cowardice of men and women.

It is a sign of the times when a Glasgow paper, the *Weekly Herald*, prints an article from Judge Parry in favour of Sunday games. Glasgow has advanced considerably during the past five years; but the old Sabbatarian spirit is still strong, and, when circumstances are favourable, is as ugly as ever. Still, when a weekly paper permits articles in favour of Sunday games, there is positive evidence that the old spirit is breaking down, for one cannot expect the press to take up with a question such as that unless it is sure there is a body of public opinion behind which it may seek protection.

All the same, we wonder what precisely Judge Parry has in his mind when he says "There never has been any real religious question about the matter of Sunday games." Well, if there was no religious objection to Sunday games, what was the objection? It was not a secular one, nor one that was based upon any secular consideration. The truth is that the question of Sunday is wholly a matter of taboo. There is nothing else in it, and it carries us straight back to one of the most primitive of the phases of religion. The secular arguments, as Judge Parry notes, are all so many pieces of hypocrisy. They are used only when the religious argument fails in its appeal. Sabbatarianism is as clearly religious as anything we have, and it is one of the most demoralizing things that we have with us—but, then, all religion is ultimately demoralizing.

If people are left with any illusions concerning the nature of war, it will be their own fault; and if they tolerate conditions that make for a new war, they deserve all they get. Owing to the elaborate advertising required to keep the War going for five years, multitudes of people imagined that the destruction of mines, etc., was a peculiarly German form of "frightfulness." In a case at present in the Courts, concerned with the destruction of the oil wells in Roumania, it appears that the task was given by the Allies to Colonel Griffiths, who, because of his almost frenzied zeal for destruction, became known as "Colonel Destroy." Colonel Griffiths says that his instructions were to destroy at all costs, and he set about the work in a very thoroughgoing manner. There is really nothing new in all this. It is the common and regular practice of all armies in the field. There is not an army in the world which, if retreating, would not destroy everything which could be of the slightest possible use to the enemy. If people only read more and thought more, the true nature of war would soon be apparent. But they read little—of the right kind—and they think even less. The result is that, when a war does arise, they are the prey of all stories that are placed before them, and every attempt at enlightenment is resented as an act of treason towards the country.

The introduction of the Home Rule Bill in the House of Commons once more drives home the lesson that the great obstacle to settlement in that country is religion. Whatever may be the other forces behind the Irish trouble, it is quite clear that they derive a large part of their strength from religion. If it is desired to divide Ireland into warring camps, it is religion that enables it to be done. If Catholics cannot be trusted to deal fairly with Protestants or Protestants with Catholics, it is again religion. If neither statement is true, it is religion that gives rise to the false accusation. Whichever way we look at it, it is religion that ensures the continuation of the Irish difficulty. And there will be no real settlement until the power of religion is broken. Religion is the most anti-social and the most derisive of forces. Until that lesson is learned, nothing is learned.

"The Church in Wales" issues an appeal for one million pounds in view of the approaching operation of the Welsh Church Act. The Church in Wales has done very well out of the public purse, thanks to a Government which can see that the parson is looked after, but takes away readily the workhouse inmate's half pound of rice, but we suppose that some of the million will be found. At a time when the vested interests of the country keenly realize the need for some sort of a narcotic to keep the people quiet, they will not let religion languish if they can help it.

"Blessed be ye poor" says the New Testament, and the poor in Southwark have a good chance to meditate on the beauty of the text. The inmates of the workhouse have their tea, consisting of bread and margarine and tea, at 4.30, and then their next meal is breakfast. The workhouse authorities, thinking the interval too long, gave the people a half pound of boiled rice for supper. Such luxury was too much for the Ministry of Health, and the Board of Guardians has been ordered to stop. Public money is not to be wasted in that way. If the Board had voted a sum to decorate the streets while the King made one of his advertising parades, or to advance the cause of recruiting for the Army, the case would have been different. But to give workhouse inmates a half pound of rice! Meanwhile, "Blessed be ye poor"!

No less than sixty-five newspapers and periodicals this year have further increased their price. When this is necessary with publications run on purely commercial lines, it reveals some of the difficulties attending the issue of advanced propaganda papers.

The late Rev. H. G. Monro, of Binfield, Berks, disregarded Gospel teaching and left estate of the value of £39,990. He should now be in the red-hot-poker department.

According to the truthful newspapers, the late Adjutant Kate Lee, of the Salvation Army, changed the "wild men" of London into "gentle, virtuous, happy, respected members of society." What a picture! And why was not the Metropolitan Police Force disbanded years ago?

We are pleased to see that the comments that we have made recently on the non-taxation of the Churches appears to be arousing people in all parts of the country. Some of these we have already called attention to. Now, we see that the *Yorkshire Post* has published some letters from its readers asking that the Churches shall no longer escape their proper share of taxation, and so burden the rest of the community. We feel sure that some good will be done if the matter is only properly ventilated, for most people are quite unaware of the position. There is not the slightest justification for the exoneration of the Churches from a taxation that falls upon all citizens alike. And the remission of taxes certainly cannot be now defended on the ground of public services. It is bad enough for the State Church to evade taxation, but in the case of the Nonconformists the position is simply monstrous, for these people are loud in their professions that they are opposed to all forms of State patronage of religion.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

April 11, Stratford Town Hall; April 18, Swansea: April 25, Mardy.

To Correspondents.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—Sam Hamson, 5s.; C. Herbert, 5s. 6d.

W. BINDON.—Glad you received the literature safely. Hope that its distribution will do good. We should like to do much more in this direction if our means permitted.

H. YOUNG, M.D., suggests that our last week's "Views and Opinions" be either reprinted as a leaflet or enlarged and published as a pamphlet. We appreciate the suggestion, but we have a number of other things on hand at the moment.

"FREETHINKER."—Our comments applied to regularly appointed preachers on the same conditions as men. Does your remark cover such cases?

G. PAYNE.—We hope to publish one in a week or two. But we are badly overcrowded.

W. SKEATE.—The discussion is announced for publication, so that those interested will be able to read it in full.

E. B. STAFFORD.—MSS. to hand. Will appear shortly.

T. ELMES.—We see no chance of getting any rest for some weeks yet, but we are feeling well, so are not bothering about that. We may take it easier one day, but we do not see how we can do that for some time to come. Your previous letter came while we were away lecturing. Hence delay in dealing with it. We hope all will be well.

J. COOPER.—Received; but, with the present demands on our space, it may be some time before we are able to publish.

C. HERBERT.—(1) Sorry we are unable to help in the matter you name. (2) There is an N. S. S. badge, but at present it is out of stock. (3) You are mistaken as to your impression of the readers of the *Freethinker*. It circulates among all classes, and a very large proportion of our readers belong to the medical, legal, and professional classes. That is nothing new; it has always been the case.

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.

Some little time ago Mr. Cohen was asked to address the Herald Club at their meeting-place, the Liberty Club and Institute, 318 Green Lanes. He is giving Easter Sunday to that purpose, and his subject will be "Freethought and the Labour Question." The meeting will commence at 7 o'clock. We have no doubt but that there will be plenty of discussion.

We are pleased to be able to state that we have arranged with Mr. Horace Leaf to publish a verbatim report of the recent discussion with Mr. Cohen at Glasgow on the subject of "Does Man Survive Death?" The discussion will commence in our issue dated April 18. This will be an excellent opportunity for our friends to introduce the paper to new readers, and as we anticipate a large sale we are in-

creasing our printing order accordingly. All the same we advise all who require extra copies to place their orders at once. This will prevent disappointment, and will be more of a guide to us at this end.

Mr. Cohen had two fine meetings on Sunday last in Caeru and Maesteg. In the afternoon the meeting was composed of a number of Spiritualists, and Mr. Cohen's replies to questions evidently put the whole subject in quite a new light. Several medical men were interested and appreciative listeners. In the evening the hall proved too small, and many were turned away. The visit appears to have excited new enthusiasm in the district.

Our correspondence is a very large, varied, and curious one, but we never received quite so curious a letter as reached us the other day. One of our readers asked us whether we could recommend him some "swear words" that are free from religious implications. He says that he finds such mild expletives as "Blow it" very unsatisfying, but, on the other hand, he finds that all the principal cuss words have religious connotations, many of them have a religious origin, and he is anxious to avoid such. We are sorry we find ourselves helpless in the matter, and Mr. Lloyd and others of our staff to whom we have appealed are equally impotent. The cream of the matter is that the request appears to be propounded with the utmost seriousness. So, perhaps, we shall have our Christian friends putting this forward as one more argument for the retention of religion, and as evidence of how much the world will lose by the triumph of Freethought.

We are glad to learn that Mr. Lloyd had a good meeting at Stratford on Sunday last. There was a good and attentive audience, and Mr. Lloyd was in fine form—"Never better," says one of his hearers who has just written us. We are pleased to have so good a report.

Will all friends in Plymouth and district please note that a meeting will be held every Thursday in the Plymouth Chambers, at 8 p.m.? A paper on "Freethought" was given on April 1 by our old friend Mr. McCluskey. We are glad to see that the Freethinkers are getting to work, and we hope all in the neighbourhood will give the movement the support it deserves. It will help to get the movement in trim for the autumn season.

The conclusion of Voltaire's Count Boulainvillier's Dinner Party is, owing to pressure on our space, held over till next week.

Palm Sunday.

BEHOLD, he cometh on an ass;
So sing a pæan or a psalm,
Bestrew your blossoms on the grass,
Extend aloft the graceful palm.

O patient ass, you symbolize
The people with their Church astride;
Your Christ ascends, but you can't rise
While burdened morn to eventide.

The Church, she gives you dead'ning balm,
Which lulls your senses, leaves you dazed—
While she extends the graceful palm
To crop the harvest she has raised.

Arise, O ass! Shake off that drug;
For you there is a nobler guide;
Cast down that noisome Christian thug,
Enthroned fair Reason—she should ride.

DON PIP.

"Mors" means death, and decaying; and "vita" means life, and growing: and try always, not to mortify yourselves, but to vivify yourselves.—*Ruskin*.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Jesus.

WE think we shall always have a soft corner in our heart for the creator of Sherlock Holmes. The author of *Rodney Stone* and the *White Company* long ago secured the affections of all lovers of fine romance, and we are glad to pay our humble tribute to his genius. So, we trust he will forgive us for expressing our great regret that he should have left the splendid field in which he shone so brightly and entered another—in which his success, at least, can be questioned. No doubt Sir Arthur thinks he has a tremendous mission to accomplish, the regeneration of the whole world in the light of psychic discoveries. No doubt he feels it necessary to “do his bit” in bringing home to mankind the “sense of sin.” That he should see behind the war a purpose—an “inner” reason—“to shake mankind loose from gossip and pink teas” would be laughable were it not that we have also read the various reasons for the war emanating from such heroes as the Bishop of London and Father Vaughan, and we cannot laugh much more. Sir Arthur’s contempt for Materialism is well expressed in *The New Revelation*, and he exults hugely at the chance Spiritualism gives him to wipe the poor benighted Materialist off the face of the earth. Naturally he attributes all the faults and failings of the Germans to their “organised Materialism,” though it can be proved up to the hilt that Germany was probably more deeply religious taken altogether than even the Russians, and that is saying a good deal. Of course, Sir Arthur can retort that what we may call religion *he* would not, and to that we have every right to reply that what he may call Materialism *we* would not, and this only shows the utter folly of using such highly controvertible terms without distinctly defining them.

We have no intention of following Sir Arthur in the delightfully vague description of the spiritual world, as it has been revealed to him, and described to us in *Vital Message*. Rather do we wish to examine briefly his attitude towards Jesus. Like all religious enthusiasts, he at once endows the Christian Deity with all his own beliefs as to what religion—true religion—is, or should be. It is an old phenomenon. Every time a religious reformer has a new message—or thinks he has a new message—he puts all the faults of Christianity on to the Church—that is, the Church he belongs to as a rule—and screams “get back to Jesus.” To the Christian Socialist, Jesus is the greatest Socialist. To the Christian Scientist, Jesus is the greatest Healer that ever lived. To the Theosophist, Jesus is the greatest Incarnation that has ever appeared. To the Christian Labour Leader, Jesus is, of course, the greatest Labour Leader. (I am not at all certain that He was not put forward as the greatest Slave-Owner by the South, before the American Civil War.) It is not surprising, therefore, to find Sir Arthur claiming Jesus as the “greatest exponent” of psychic power “who has ever appeared upon earth.” Anything less than this might have given the crown to D. D. Home, whom Sir Arthur venerates nearly as much. Of course, in addition to His psychic powers, Jesus is also the greatest “everything else” unless one insists too much on the “literal” interpretation of any of his teaching with which Sir Arthur does not exactly agree. For,

indeed, a more delicious example of hedging it would be impossible to give than those portions of his book purporting to prove that Jesus is the greatest religious Teacher who ever trod this earth. In one place he tells us that the “Sermon on the Mount was more than many miracles,” and in another place he tells us that “We were meant to use our reasons and brains in adapting His teaching to the conditions of our altered lives and times.” Of course! Isn’t that exactly what Freethinkers have always taught? Use our reasons and brains! Why, that is exactly what distinguishes us from Christians of all denominations, and makes us reject the greater part of the teaching of Christ as superstitious and absurd.

Over and over again we find Sir Arthur believing the most absurd stories about Jesus on the most doubtful evidence. To the Rationalist the story of raising Lazarus from the grave “by far the most wonderful of all Christ’s miracles,” is just as ridiculous as the Apocryphal story of making mud birds fly or dead saints kicking their heels about in their opened graves, politely waiting for Christ to rise before getting out themselves. Will Sir Arthur tell us whether we are not justified in rejecting these stories if “we use our reasons and brains?” What is it that guides Sir Arthur in accepting the nonsense about Jesus being “levitated” over the lake and rejecting the puerile superstitions of the *Infancy of Jesus*?

One could multiply the instances of the most childish credulity shown by Sir Arthur in accepting practically the whole of the miracles attributed to Jesus in the New Testament, but there is really no need. He fulminates against the old Testament Deity, and with that we have no quarrel. We do not mind his borrowing the thunder of Paine and Bradlaugh, but surely he must be aware that that is precisely the conception of God that Jesus must have had. And there is one thing clear (which Ingersoll pointed out)—that bad as the punishments were that Jehovah meted out to those whom He hated, these punishments never went beyond this earth. It was left to Jesus and the New Testament to promulgate the frightful doctrine of Eternal Punishment. What has Sir Arthur done as his share in eradicating this horrible dogma? Is not he doing his best to perpetuate it?

There is nothing in this world so thoroughly uncertain as the so-called teaching of Christ. Literally thousands of books in every civilised language have been written to tell us what He “really” meant. And the blunt truth is that nobody knows what He taught, or what He meant by what He is supposed to have taught. At one moment He was cursing fig trees and Pharisees, at another moment He was asking pity for the widow and the orphan or the woman taken in adultery. But the idea that His teaching, one way or the other, even though interpreted by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, is going to do away with wars and poverty and misery and disease and make this world a veritable paradise to live in, is simply the childish dreaming of people who have no conception of history, sociology or economics. Let me quote the late Bishop Magee:—

That it is not possible for the State to carry out in all relations literally all the precepts of Christ, and that a State which attempted this would not exist a week..... If there really be a person who maintains this, I cannot argue with him. His proper place is in a lunatic asylum,

and the only person called on to discuss this question with him would be his medical attendant.

No amount of hedging can get away from these emphatic words, and the sooner the teaching of Jesus is relegated to the limbo of the past, as an interesting literary relic, the sooner we can, as Voltaire said, "cultiver notre jardin."

H. CUTNER.

Jack London and Zane Grey.

THE fascination of the wild places of the earth and the actions of the wild inhabitants lives ever before the imagination of the European white race. Having achieved the prosaic in civilisation, rudely broken into as the humdrum round of everyday security was by the culmination of the ambition of the German War Lords, the longing eye is constantly turned towards the edges of civilisation where life is a chance staked against the violence of man and hazarded with the gigantic and immutable forces of nature.

To read of these things, to hear of them in the talk of returned travellers, is the reward of us who have not dared, or who have been unable to see with our own eyes the vast space and the wonderful scene which it is the duty of these to bring vividly and truly before us.

Ever and anon a great writer comes from these parts, and the wonder of his revelation is sprung upon us without warning. By the magic of his word, his life, and the lives of those he has met, is lived again, and his word by the printed line reaches tens of thousands, who consume his tales with avidity, with a gluttony that knows no satiation.

Two of these modern "yarn spinners" are Jack London and Zane Grey. They tell of the wilderness, the one as often of land as sea, the other always of land, and that land, the land of never failing attraction, the great Wild West.

Both deal with action and men of action, men and women moulded into steel and iron by the severity of their life conditions, and of correspondingly fierce emotion and sudden, often violent action, almost always unexpected to the minds of the secure people who live out their dole of life in the comfortable surroundings of populous and settled lands.

When the one sees mere action, the other sees not only the action, but also the thoughts which precede and follow the action. Jack London is nothing of a psychologist; Zane Grey is a perfect one. The former, even in his most intimate personal reminiscences, does not give his reader a real insight into the workings of his mind. He tells that such things happened so and so, and that the results were actions of a definite sort. The nearest he ever gets to the mentality of his people is to depict the enthusiasm of a great deed in performer and audience, or the jest that comes so readily to the lips of all those who have taken the chance of the great adventure.

His most intimate revelations are contained in what may almost be claimed to be the best of his books, "The Cruise of the Snark." As a writer of memoirs he is perfect, as a writer of imaginative fiction, in which real people are seen at work and at play, in joy and in sorrow, he, in the language of his fellow-countrymen, "does not signify." His heroes are in very truth heroes such as are found in the Medieval Chronicles. They are

abnormal products of an abnormal life. They do not live upon sensations except of the extremely active kind. Strong in body, brilliant in intellect, they cannot fail ultimately to be successful in their undertakings, or to forfeit their lives in their heroic enterprises. It is hard to recall a single instance of one of his principal characters being other than a wonder-worker, and as his work culminates, this fault, if fault it be, is intensified.

Far other is it with Zane Grey. Her people, capable as they are of magnificent feats of endurance, of heroic self-sacrifice for their loved ones, hardened as they are in the fierce fire of desert life, come before the eye as ordinary persons engaged in normal everyday occupations. Indeed, that is just what they are. Their lives are the lives to which they have been born, or into which they have been forced by circumstances. Their work and play are normal work and play of the people engaged in the avocations which they follow. Good and bad, brilliant or dull, they are just people.

However they may from time to time be moved to deeds of daring, exceptional even for them, however greatly they may degrade themselves by meanness and futility, there is no doubt of their humanity. The great "gun-men" have always a reason for their deeds, always an ideal before them, though often enough that ideal is only the lust of gold and the increasing lust to kill. Yet they feel the ordinary emotions of love and home; even possibly, they feel these things more potently as they are less assured. That which is precarious is dear, that which is secure is cheap.

Just as Elizabeth Robins can show the normal citizen following out his normal idea of life, that idea which is the natural desire of all humanity, the love of hearth and home even in the far wilderness of the Yukon, so can Zane Grey show the natural instincts of mankind in the formidable environment of Arizona.

The material difference in quality of London and Grey are shown most potently by a comparison of both with Elizabeth Robins. The actual quality of that difference is shown up in a beam of intense light by the juxtaposition of Mrs. Robins' people of the Arctic, and Mr. London's heroes of the Great North. Mrs. Robins, had she known Arizona as she knows Alaska, might easily have written of people such as those who flit across Zane Grey's pages. Jack London, had he written of Arizona, could never have reproduced Grey's farmers, shepherds, outlaws, and cowboys, any more than his Arctic voyagers bear an analogy to Mrs. Robins' adventurers in that district.

For all that, and for all the possibly ephemeral nature of the writings of these two authors, they have great and growing popularity, not undeserved, certainly not unearned by real artistic effort, and they have both done much to render the ends of the earth real to city-dwellers, who live in peace, and who are only subjected to the uncertainties, factitious as they are, of the system under which they permit themselves to live.

G. E. FUSSELL.

He that finds Truth without loving her, is like a bat; which, though it have eyes to discern that there is a Sun, yet hath so evil eyes, that it cannot delight in the Sun.—
Sir Philip Sidney.

Religion, Rationalism, and Morality.

II.

(Concluded from p. 203.)

YET, whilst the practical code of conduct current in England to-day is not closely identified with the current theology, it cannot be said that it has a reasonable basis. And such a basis is all the more necessary in the absence of any strong belief in the supernatural authority for morality, since, unless there be either a firm conviction that deviation from rectitude will bring down divine punishment, or a vivid realization of the manner in which "a right or wrong act generates consequences, internal and external, that go on branching out more widely as the years progress," there is always the possibility that strong temptation or the weakening of the social bonds by strong emotion may result in folly and immorality. That the rare accumulation of knowledge, and the power of analysis and imagination requisite vividly to realize how a wrong action inevitably produces a chain of painful consequences, is possessed by comparatively few people, is immediately apparent if we examine the actions of those with whom we come into contact.

We have but to observe human action as it meets us at every turn, to see that the average intelligence, incapable of guiding conduct even in simple matters, where but a very moderate use of reason would suffice, must fail in apprehending with due clearness the natural sanctions of ethical principles. The unthinking ineptitude with which even the routine of life is carried on by the mass of men, shows clearly that they have nothing like the insight required for self-guidance in the absence of an authoritative code of conduct.....How, then, can there be looked for such power of self-guidance as, in the absence of authoritative rules, would require them to understand why, in the nature of things, these modes of action are injurious and those modes beneficial—would require them to pass beyond proximate results, and see clearly the involved remote results, as worked on self, on others, and on society? (*The Study of Sociology*, Herbert Spencer).

Before endeavouring to show how the establishment of an operative code of ethics rationally elaborated may become possible, it is advisable to examine the control that belief in the existence of a vengeful personal Deity exercises over conduct.

Religion (and the word is here used as meaning belief in the existence of a transcendental power which consciously shapes the course of human events, which may interfere with the operation of natural laws) bases its control of conduct chiefly on the threat of divine punishment, and tacitly ignores the fact that every delinquency has its appropriate or natural punishment, which cannot be evaded. Immorality is thus rather a crime against the Deity than an injury inflicted upon the individual or the society, and divine punishment is conceived more as being called forth by an outrage against the Supreme Lawgiver than as the natural corrective of the vicious moral condition of which the transgression is a manifestation. Again, to quote from *The Study of Sociology* :—

At the present time, as in past times, and in our own society as in other societies, public acts are judged by two tests—the test of supposed divine approbation and the test of conduciveness to human happiness. Though, as civilization advances, there grows up the belief that the second test is equivalent to the first—though, consequently, conduciveness to human happiness comes to be more directly considered; yet the test of supposed divine approbation, as inferred from the particular creed

held, continues to be very generally used. The wrongness of conduct is conceived as consisting in the implied disobedience to the supposed commands, and not as consisting in its intrinsic character as causing suffering to others or to self. Inevitably.....institutions and actions are judged more by their apparent congruity or incongruity with the established cult, than by their tendencies to further or to hinder well-being.....Social arrangements essentially at variance with the ethics of the creed, give no offence to those who are profoundly offended by whatever seems at variance with its theology. Maintenance of the dogmas and forms of the religion becomes the primary, all-essential thing; and the secondary thing, often sacrificed, is the securing of those relations among men which the spirit of the religion requires.

Moreover, it may be questioned whether religion, expatiating as it does on the celestial joys hereafter to be enjoyed by those who "walk with God," does not tend to cultivate selfishness." Certainly personal salvation, rather than social usefulness, is emphasized.

Let us now examine the Christian ethical code. It is justifiable to doubt whether a code of conduct which has failed to establish itself as a practical agency in human affairs after nearly 2,000 years' advocacy (and whatever may have been the ethical codes taught by organized religion during that period, the source of true Christian morality, the Bible, has been readily available to the whole nation for many generations), can ever be anything more than an ideal. On further examination, the suspicion that an ideal which is impossible of translation into practice is an undesirable ideal is confirmed. On the subject of Christian ethics, as on morality and religion in general, Spencer has some mordant remarks to make.

.....the untenability of the doctrine of self-sacrifice in its extreme form is conspicuous enough; and is tacitly admitted by all in their ordinary inferences and daily actions.....Were A to be careless of himself, and to care only for the welfare of B, C, and D, while each of these, paying no attention to his own needs, busied himself in supplying the needs of the others; this round-about process, besides being troublesome, would very ill meet the requirements of each, unless each could have his neighbour's consciousness.....While, however, no one is entirely altruistic.....while no one really believes an entirely altruistic life to be practicable, there continues the tacit assertion that conduct *ought* to be entirely altruistic. It does not seem to be suspected that pure altruism is actually wrong.....self-sacrifice passing a certain limit entails evil on all.....evil on those for whom sacrifice is made as well as on those who make it. While a continual submission to pains is physically injurious, so that its final outcome is debility, disease, and abridgement of life; the continual acceptance of benefits at the expense of a fellow-being is morally injurious. Just as much as unselfishness is cultivated by the one, selfishness is cultivated by the other. If to surrender a gratification to another is noble, readiness to accept the gratification so surrendered is ignoble; and if repetition of the one kind of act is elevating, repetition of the other kind of act is degrading. So that though up to a certain point altruistic action blesses giver and receiver, beyond that point it curses giver and receiver,.....physically deteriorates the one and morally deteriorates the other. Everyone can remember cases where greediness for pleasure, reluctance to take trouble, and utter disregard of those around, have been perpetually increased by unmeasured and ever-ready kindnesses; while the unwise benefactor has shown by languid movements and pale face the debility consequent on disregard of self: the outcome of the policy being destruction of the worthy in making worse the unworthy.

The absurdity of unqualified altruism becomes, indeed, glaring on remembering that it can be extensively practised only if in the same society there coexist

one moiety altruistic and one moiety egoistic.....So that pure altruism in a society implies a nature which makes pure altruism impossible.

If life and its gratifications are valuable in another, they are equally valuable in self. There is no total increase of happiness if only as much is gained by one as is lost by another.....Resistance to aggression is not simply justifiable but imperative. Non-resistance is at variance with altruism and egoism alike. The extreme Christian theory, which no one acts upon, which no one really believes, but which most tacitly profess and a few avowedly profess, is as logically indefensible as it is impracticable.—(*The Study of Sociology*).

The Christian injunction, "Take no heed for the morrow," is also actually immoral, as it asserted almost in our police-courts; whilst one has but to consider how the whole fabric of civilization would crumble away, with resultant death for the larger part of humanity, were this principle to be logically and universally adopted, to realize the impracticability and immorality of it.

The difficulty of establishing a rational code of ethics which shall be operative has already been referred to. Man being no less an emotional than a reasoning being, does not invariably take what he knows to be the wisest course of action. (Incidentally, it may be pointed out that even were the Christian ethical code a practicable one, the same difficulty in making it operative would exist). One might elaborate a set of rules, both physical and psychological, rationally derived from physiological and psychological principles, the guidance of conduct by which would assure individual and social well-being; yet the mere intellectual acceptance of them would not mean that they would be strongly operative in guiding conduct. In many respects, of course, wrong-doing which brings pain and suffering is the result of ignorance of natural laws (although abuse of one's physical powers, through ignorance of the laws of their constitution is not commonly included in the category of immoral actions), and definite knowledge of relations between certain causes and effects (being an extension of useful empirical knowledge), would, in these cases, have an appreciably valuable influence over conduct. But there is no sufficient reason for believing that in those activities which call forth strong emotion, increase of special knowledge would markedly affect conduct.

However, besides supplying detailed rules for the guidance of life, science provides an intellectual (one might almost call it a moral) discipline. It not only makes us aware of special laws, and of definite sequences in nature, but also generates a profound belief in the uniformities of nature, in the unchanging relations of phenomena, in the unvarying connection of cause and effect, and so, in the necessity of good or evil results.

It is upon the diffusion of a scientific knowledge of nature, then, that the growth of rationalism in morality primarily depends: upon organized knowledge of nature inorganic, organic, and super-organic. The progress of morality from a supernatural basis to a rational basis is slow, and we are still, even in the most highly-civilized communities, in the transition stage. Yet a sufficiently wide survey of history shows us that we are steadily moving in the right direction, and gives us reason to hope that the day may come when humanity shall have learned to live truthfully, and, therefore, wisely and happily.

The acquiring of natural knowledge and its diffusion among his fellows is, then, the first duty of the rationalist. With Huxley he should say:—

There is no alleviation for the sufferings of mankind except veracity of thought and action, and the

resolute facing of the world as it is when the garment of make-believe by which pious hands have hidden its uglier features is stripped off,

and should consistently seek to do that which in his power lies to promote truthful living.

W. H. MORRIS.

Some Thoughts from the Arabs.

In science and philosophy for two centuries, the Arabs were quite our masters.—*Renan, "Averroes."*

WHAT European civilization owes to the Arabs has yet to be written. No matter where we direct our gaze, whether in *belles lettres*, music, astronomy, chemistry, architecture, medicine, surgery, botany, natural history, mathematics, industrial arts, mechanics, and philosophy, there we find the influence of the Arab. In philosophy alone, it was their great teachers Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Massara, Al-Jabali, and Ibn Sina (Avicenna), who were the illustrious predecessors of Ibn Bajja (Avenpace) and Ibn al-Tufayl, the guide and master respectively of the famous Ibn Rushd (Averroes), who in making matter, as an external principle, co-existent and identical with Deity, shook the whole of the scholastic theories of the Middle Ages. These reflections have come to me in reading the *Risail* of the Ikhwan al-Safa ("Brothers of Purity") who wrote in the tenth century. These people compiled a collection of fifty-one treatises, which comprises the whole sum of Arab science and philosophy, and an excellent edition of these wonderful tracts in Arabic has been issued in Bombay.

In philosophy the Ikhwan al-Safa are immeasurably inferior to any of the foregoing philosophers, but taking into consideration the date of their writing, it is perhaps unfair to make this comparison. One passage on "first principles" is of interest. It occurs in the 4th *risala*, and runs as follows:—

Matter is composed of substance and length and width and depth, and from this absolute body are composed all other bodies.....Now, the glorious creator has a ratio in existing things, and it is like the 1 in numbers. The intellect is like 2, and the soul is like 3, and matter is like 4. The rest of the creatures are made from matter and form produced from the universal soul. The universal soul is sent out from the universal intelligence, and the universal intelligence is framed by the word of the glorious creator Allah, who created it from nothing.

So there you are. Whoever doubts creation after so clear and explicit a statement deserves all the pains and penalties which we are told awaits the unbeliever. To turn from this piece of obscurantism of the Middle Ages to the last number of the Arabic Journal, *Al-Hilal* (Cairo), makes a breezy change. The Arab loves a joke, and those who know Arabic poetry will recall how they love a play upon words, especially the *double entente* (or *double entendre* as some people say). In the *Hilal* (the Turkish problem is under discussion) God Almighty asks President Wilson what has become of his "Fourteen Points"? Wilson replies by asking God Almighty what has become of his "Ten Commandments"? A hit, a palpable hit!

H. GEORGE FARMER.

Latest Fashions in Religion.

IN "the good old days" it was simple enough. You were told what to believe, and either you believed it and there was an end of the matter, or else you did not believe it and you were burned, and there, also, was an end of the matter, or rather of you. But the times have changed; we have, alas, no longer the choice of one set creed or the stake; the number of "-isms" is on the increase almost daily, and "the plain man" becomes more and more puzzled as to what to believe. Nearly all the "-isms" are supported by the most plausible arguments, plus a string of respectable names, which would seem satisfactory enough were it not for the fact that the conclusions reached by equally plausible arguments and people of equally respectable names are apt to be entirely contradictory. Even one theory will contradict

itself right and left, such as the funny story about the one and only God who said he was three, and then the three who said "We're one," so that nobody ever could really make out which way it was—not that it much mattered. All sorts of lords and ladies, O.B.E.'s, members of the Stock Exchange, etc., have called this joke a religion; it constitutes, in fact, "an article of faith," or something like that, and if you don't believe it all the people say you're sure to go to hell. In fashionable circles, I am told, Materialism and Scepticism are no longer regarded favourably. Religion and science are now reconciled (no matter how much the poor scientists may protest). The people "in the know" consider that the progressive mind should believe in Christianity, as modified by the latest scientific discoveries on the one hand, and by the latest *seance* revelations on the other, the whole being by no means inconsistent with a leaning towards theosophy or fatalism (a la Omar Khayyam) or mascot superstition, according to the inclinations of the individual.

Attractive as this sort of hotch-potch religion may be to some, it would seem to the critical mind and the reasonable man nothing but a farago of ridiculous rubbish.

"COLIN EDGEWORTH."

Correspondence.

SOME ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's methods of conducting this controversy are of such a nature as to make it impossible to deal very much longer with him in a serious manner. With regard to the Codex Alexandrinus, I can scarcely credit his admission that he does not grasp the point at issue. If this is really so, then I, personally, have nothing more to say. On the other hand, I am glad to learn of Professor Zollner's amazing vigour, and that he *never* suffered bad health until the illness which carried him off! I cannot, however, refrain from expressing my astonishment that Sir Arthur, at the Queen's Hall debate, again brought up Zollner and his associates, since, as Hyslop pointed out, no one can defend Slade's claims or those of his supporters. Evidently Hyslop has not heard of the activities of the latest spiritistic champion.

With regard to Sir Arthur's account of Mme. Bisson's experiences as recounted at the end of her work, I need scarcely say that anyone at all acquainted with these subjects would hardly accept the spiritual hypothesis for an event concerning which the sole published testimony apparently consists of four lines and a footnote. I have said, and again repeat, that these investigations are not *necessarily* of a spiritualistic nature, even though Spiritualists have been talking for seventy years of the exudation by mediums of soft plastic matter. Many foolish things religious people have been saying for 700 years, and at the present rate of progress are likely still to be saying for another 700.

E. J. D.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF MONTHLY EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON
MARCH 25.

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, occupied the chair. Also present: Messrs. Kelf, Moss, Neate, Quinton, Rosetti, Samuels, Miss Kough, and the Secretary.

Minutes of last meeting read and confirmed.

Monthly financial statement read and adopted.

New members were received for Glasgow, Manchester, and West Ham Branches, and for the Parent Society.

A grant of £10 for propoganda was made to the South London Branch, and of £5 to the North London Branch.

Nominations for the Executive and notices of Motion for the Conference Agenda were received from the various Branches and discussed. Miss Kough and Mr. Rosetti were elected to serve on the Agenda Committee with the President, and the matter for the Agenda remitted to them for preparation.

Further routine business was transacted and the meeting adjourned.

EDITH M. VANCE, *General Secretary.*

Obituary.

On March 18 there passed away, at her home in Plumstead, one of the most kindly, courageous, and steadfast of women Freethinkers, in the person of Mrs. Allfrey, wife of Mr. W. T. Allfrey, in her sixty-eighth year. A member of the National Secular Society since 1884, Mrs. Allfrey remained to the last a staunch and uncompromising Freethinker, and worked assiduously in the old Plumstead Branch while it existed. A devoted admirer of Charles Bradlaugh during his life, she was instrumental in exploding the usual scandals circulated after his death, in the hope of tarnishing his memory. She bore an agonizing illness of many months with unexampled fortitude, and, when renewing her subscription recently, arranged for a Secular Funeral Service, which was read at Ilford Crematorium on March 24, by Mr. J. T. Lloyd, in the presence of her sorrowing husband and children, who have indeed lost a good mother, wife, and friend. I had the privilege of knowing her long years ago, and desire to add my personal tribute to her admirable qualities.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary.*

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Johnson's Dancing Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, near Edgware Road): 8, Dr. B. Dunlop, "Neo-Malthusianism."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): Easter Sunday. No Service.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (The Stratford Engineers' Institute, 167 Romford Road, E.): 7, Mr. E. Burke, A Lecture.

OUTDOOR.

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BELFAST BRANCH N. S. S. (Abercorn Hall, 101 Victoria Street): 3, Mr. W. Foster, "God and Immortality."

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

PLYMOUTH AND DISTRICT BRANCH N. S. S.—Meetings of the newly-formed Branch will take place in Room No. 7, Plymouth Chambers, Drake Circus, every Thursday evening at 8 p.m. until further notice. All Freethinkers residing in Plymouth please note. Any person desiring further information concerning the above Branch should communicate with E. H. Duffy, 38 Headland Park, Plymouth. April, 1, Mr. McCluskey, "Freethought."

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