

THE

# FREETHINKER

FOUNDED · 1881

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

Registered at the General Post Office as a Newspaper.

VOL. XL.—No. 22

SUNDAY, MAY 30, 1920

PRICE THREEPENCE

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## Views and Opinions.

### A Very Special Person.

Priests and potatoes have this much in common—the better part of each is underground. There is, however, one distinction between them. The buried part of the first named offers no sustenance, it only explains the reason for the part that is exposed to view. Otherwise the analogy holds. With most people there is a sneaking kind of a feeling that in some way a priest differs from ordinary folk. The priest comes to his particular and peculiar occupation in a singular manner. In theory he doesn't select it, it selects him. He is called to it by the "Holy spirit"—and then complains that his ghostly patron has failed to accompany the selection with a satisfactory salary. When he walks abroad he dons a special kind of dress, and when he talks he often assumes a special tone of voice. His official concern is not with this world but with the next, and carries with it the clear assumption that on that topic he is better informed than the plain Smith or Robinson who "sits under him." He is a special man, in a special job, specially selected by a special power. No wonder that ordinary folk think that he must be a special kind of a person, or even that he comes to think that of himself.

\* \* \*

### A Question of Survival.

Now, the obvious and only cause of this state of mind is that part of the parson which is underground. The parson is an institution, and while the reason for an institution may be in the present, it is more often in the past. Sometimes the present justifies the perpetuation of an institution, more often it only explains why it is here, much as a knowledge of the past of animal life explains why certain rudimentary muscles still cumber the human frame. In the social structure the parson is a rudimentary organ. He looks with reverence to the past because it was the past that created him. And he is suspicious of the present because it is the present that will destroy him. He began to exist in a different world from ours, and he had an obvious use to those who then believed in him. He was the great middleman between man and his gods. If they were angry he stood and warded off danger. If a good harvest was required he used his magic or his influence with the powers that governed such things

and secured it. If people were sick he cured them with his spells. If they wanted rain he brought it about with his magic. Whether he actually did these things or not was of no real importance. The important thing was that people believed he did them, and folly is paid for cheerfully when it is believed to be wisdom. But while the priest is believed to possess these powers there is a clear justification for his existence. And it is to be observed that he still retains what one may call the ghost of these functions, even when nearly all will regard them as ridiculous. He still offers up prayers for a good harvest, and one may charitably assume that he at least doesn't prevent it. He still prays for the sick, and during a war he still offers prayers for victory. Ridiculous as are these things to-day, the parson goes on doing them because thousands of years ago his forbears learned these tricks, and their repetition is on all fours with the action of a dog treading down the drawing-room carpet, because thousands of generations ago the wild dog trod down the grass to make sure that nothing dangerous lurked where he intended to rest. So the priest continues to perform the tricks his ancestors learned when they danced round in feathers, and masks, and paint, and the congregation was made up of naked savages. The alteration in dress, language, buildings, etc., are matters of mere detail.

\* \* \*

### Pulpit and Pew.

We have been led to write the above because of an article which appeared in the *Star* of a recent date from the pen of Miss Maud Royden. Miss Royden was for some time associate minister of the City Temple; she is a woman of considerable ability, and, one would judge, force of character. She is now engaged in running a Church on a new plan, the main idea of which appears to give the congregation as little religion as possible, and to persuade them that they are getting a lot. She says that she is resolved to tell the people the truth about religion, and, in the article in question, she certainly does tell some of the truth about the clergy. Not many of them, I think, will thank her for her frankness. Her general impression of the clergy appears to be that of a number of harmless, not over intellectual, simple-minded men who are humoured by the laity, not because of the faith the laity has in the clergy, but because of the faith the clergy have in themselves. For she points out that the relations of the clergy are such that while the parson thinks that the truth about religion would never do for the congregation, the congregation is quite sure would never do for the clergy. Thus, as we have often pointed out, while the clergy are engaged in the very ancient practice of fooling the laity, the laity are engaged in the more modern occupation of fooling the clergy. It may be that the clergy are not so completely fooled as the laity imagine; they may only be acting on the principle of being content so long as the people pretend to believe what they are told. When, for example, the British Association goes solemnly once every year to listen to a sermon from some bishop, one wonders which



one is fooling the other. Is the fooling mutual, or are the two engaged in the joint occupation of fooling the outside public? That the whole performance is foolery there is no "possible doubt whatever."

Paid Advocates. \* \* \*

Miss Royden has a very cruel cut in the following passage. "Imagine," she says, "my surprise when on first working with clergy in large numbers, I found that they really believed themselves to be 'thinking people.'" And she goes on to explain that, while the laity generally are thought of as "unlettered folk," the laity are firmly convinced that it would be quite improper to talk frankly to the clergy on matters of religion. The duty of the clergy is to preach certain things, and if these things cannot be accepted by the clergy, there seems all the more reason why they should not be rejected by them. She cites in support of this a deliverance from an old lady of her acquaintance, which it would be a pity to spoil by compression:—

"Isn't it shocking?" she said to me. "Do you know, I am told the clergy are riddled with unbelief nowadays. Riddled! They don't believe in Jonah and the whale or Balaam's Ass, or—anything!" I hesitated and reflected that truth is not good for the old. I temporized. "Of course, if they say they do when they don't, it is very shocking," I replied. "Yes, indeed," she said, firmly; "yes, indeed. Of course, *we* may just say to ourselves, 'Well, that's a bit of a tale,' but the clergy have got to believe it. *They're paid.*"

This is not quite so uncommon as even Miss Royden seems to think. There are evidently large numbers of people who expect the clergy to believe. Whether they really believe does not seem to be considered. The truthfulness of the clergy does not enter into the question. They are no more impressed by the assertion of a clergyman that he believes certain things than they place reliance upon the word of a professional politician. The clergy are paid to believe, salaried advocates of a particular teaching, and the question of their private conviction does not arise. It is not a very dignified position, but the occupation itself is not a dignified one either. That it is a dignified office is one of the pretences that keep the institution alive.

The Two Paths. \* \* \*

All this is the inevitable result of trying to keep alive in a modern environment an institution that belongs to a very primitive one. We know to-day that a parson has no more control over the weather, or the crops, or disease, or the outcome of a battle, than he has over the phases of the moon. We know that he is not selected for his job by the Holy Ghost; that there is nothing supernatural about his acceptance or rejection of a "call." But while we know that none of these things are true, we go on acting as though we still believed they were. And the only way in which this pretence can be at all maintained is by the dressing up of parsons in a peculiar way and attributing to them a rather different mental make-up from that possessed by ordinary folk. But even that pretence is wearing dangerously thin. It is, indeed, probably true to say that the attitude of the average man towards the clergy is a compound of his feeling-attitude towards a child, a mentally deficient, and a simple-minded old lady. How could it be otherwise? It is interesting enough to watch the medicine-man in a savage community. One is then filled with curiosity. But to meet the same person operating before a civilized people—the alteration of costume and language is quite immaterial—fills one with nothing but amusement and contempt. We ought to really make up our minds whether we wish to be considered civilized or not. We should really try to decide

whether we intend keeping this rain-making, harvest-getting, disease-charming, miracle-working medicine-man an active and privileged member of society or to relegate him to his proper place as a much-observed item in an anthropological collection.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## Pulpit Arrogance.

(Concluded from p. 323.)

WE have no choice but to accuse Dr. Horton, either of not knowing what Darwinism really is, or of deliberately misrepresenting it. Of course, the theory of evolution is fundamentally anti-Biblical; and it is difficult to understand how a believer in the Bible as a Divine Revelation can honestly accept it. Dr. Horton rejects it, not because it contradicts the Word of God and undermines the very foundation of Christianity, but because of its alleged unscientific character. He speaks in the name of science, saying, "It is well admitted now by scientific men" that Darwinism "is a misstatement, a misconception"; but he omits to specify which science, and he supplies no scientific authorities. As a matter of fact, that statement is wholly false. Sir E. Ray Lankester devotes the second chapter in his *Kingdom of Man* to a narrative of the advance of science between 1881 and 1906. He says:—

In looking back over twenty-five years it seems to me that we must say that the conclusions of Darwin as to the origin of species by the survival of selected races in the struggle for existence are more firmly established than ever (pp. 124-5).

In an article, entitled "The Maligners of Science," which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* some years ago, Sir Edwin includes men like Dr. Horton who aver that Darwinism is discredited by the present day biology. Nothing could be further from the truth. Himself one of the most eminent zoologists, founder and President of the Marine Biological Association, this is his estimate of the soundness of Darwin's work:—

Though Darwin held that natural selection acted most widely and largely on minute differences, he did not suppose that its operation was confined to them, and he considered and gave importance to a number of other characteristics of organisms which have an important part in the process of organic evolution. The assertion that the theory of organic evolution as left by Darwin is now generally held to be inadequate is fallacious. Darwin's theories are generally held to be essentially true. It is obvious that they are capable of further elaboration and development by additional knowledge, and always were regarded as being so by their author and by every other competent person. But that is a very different thing from holding them to be "inadequate." They are adequate, because they furnish the foundation on which we build.

Dr. Yves Delage, Professor of Comparative Zoology in the University of Paris, and Marie Goldsmith, editor of *L'Année Biologique*, joint authors of *The Theories of Evolution*, a work first published in the United Kingdom in 1912, are in complete agreement with Sir Ray Lankester. They affirm that Darwin's idea of natural selection and of the struggle for life was universally adopted by biologists. They are pronounced Darwinians, regarding man as "an animal species descended from other species." Then they add: "And the facts prove that such is the case, that there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher animals from the point of view of intellect, sentiments, emotions, social instincts, and moral sense, the last two being identical" (p. 343). Professors Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur



Thomson, authors of *Evolution*, in the Home University Library, declare that Darwin made the world "think in terms of evolution," and converted "the evolution idea into current intellectual coin" (pp. 143-4). Professor Judd contributed a volume, entitled *The Coming of Evolution*, to the series known as the "Cambridge Manuals of Science and Literature," in which Darwinism is treated as the greatest discovery of modern times. "As a result of the labours of Darwin, new lines of thought have been opened out, fresh fields of investigation discovered, and the infinite variety among living things has acquired a grander aspect and a special significance" (p. 159). Fifty years after the *Origin of Species*, a memorial work—*Darwin and Modern Science*—was published, wherein zoologists, botanists, geologists, physicists, chemists, anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, philologists, historians, and even politicians and theologians enthusiastically unite in placing their hero on a high pedestal as an original revolutionary thinker.

Is it not an indisputable fact, then, that Dr. Horton has no ground whatever for saying that "the Darwinian theory of Nature no longer holds the field," or that "the nightmare of Darwinism is passing away"? Can he name two accredited biologists who hold such a notion? Professor Bergson is not a biologist, nor is he in a technical sense a scientist at all. He is not even a philosopher, but a poet irresponsibly dabbling in metaphysics and science. Dr. Horton mentions no names, nor makes any quotations, but contents himself with making bald assertions. "It is now quite recognized," he avers, "that the struggle for existence has been misinterpreted," but by whom is it now so recognized? Who are the scientific men who testify that Darwinism is "a misstatement, a misconception"? Is it morally right to mislead uncritical hearers in that wildly dogmatic fashion? Darwinism is not a nightmare, and it is not passing away. As Professor Judd truly says, "Darwin has been universally acclaimed as 'the Newton of Natural History.'"

Dr. Horton now presents us with his own theory of evolution, or is it creation? We are not aware that any biologist anywhere gives the slightest support to such a theory, though it may be looked upon as an extremely crude version of the view advocated by Sir Oliver Lodge, or Professor Bergson. The reverend gentleman admits that there is a struggle, but claims that it is psychological rather than biological, and that it is not so much between different individuals, or even between species and species, as "a struggle of life to express itself." Life is conceived as possessing a mighty, irresistible, and conscious energy or urge in search of suitable forms of expression which the older biologists called "vitality," or "vital principle." Here is the theory in Dr. Horton's own words:—

We now have begun to recognize that the essential principle of the world is this urge of life, which, when it produces forms that are stable, leaves them, well satisfied. When, for example, it reached the vegetable form of life, that form of progress is arrested in equilibrium. When it reaches the insect type of life, there again it is arrested. The insect does not go beyond the insect, but remains for ever there. And when man appears there again the urge of life has achieved an equilibrium. Man is settled. He has not changed within recorded times. When the human form was reached, when the human mind was reached, there was an end. There Nature reached a terminus, and it is seen that, so far from the struggle for existence being the principal feature, the principal feature is the achievement of life, of forms of life, and of the coordination of these forms one with another.

That is not science, but the complete negation of science. Fancy a man of learning in the twentieth century

having the effrontery to champion the utterly exploded notion of the immutability of species, and to justify his belief in it on the ground of the alleged fact that "man has not changed within recorded times." Why, the theory of transmutation had been formulated by the French zoologist, Lamarck, and what Darwin supplied was a minute explanation of the process through which one species changes into another. He showed clearly that the dominant species oftenest produce well-marked varieties, which he ventured to call "incipient species," and that only those varieties survive which are qualified to triumph in the universal struggle for existence.

Dr. Horton is convinced that "the mechanical and material conditions of life did not explain man"; but curiously enough he admits that they did explain him "up to the point where he became man." They gave him his implements and habitation, and completed his physical system, but having accomplished all that, they could do nothing more; "he was beyond them." Listen to the oracle:—

The trend of thought which identified man with animals, with Nature, was obviously wrong, because here was the fact that man was able to observe his connection with Nature, and Nature could not observe her connection with herself. Obviously man had got above Nature, because he could control Nature, could use Nature, could use the other forms of life, the rest of the creatures. In a word, here was man upon this planet totally different from those stages through which presumably he had passed. He had emerged, emerged a man—that is, a spiritual being. However he came to be there, he stood on the earth a spirit related to God.

This is the climax of the reverend gentleman's metaphysical fabrication, every single particle of which is based upon mere fancy. It is theological dogmatism, unaccompanied by a single attempt at verification. What does he mean by saying that man is a spiritual being? No science can find any trace of spirit anywhere, spirit being an object of belief, not of knowledge. Spirit is said to be without body, parts, or passions; and yet Dr. Horton *can see man standing on the earth a spirit related to God*. He speaks of the baleful influences of materialism and mechanism, though science knows of nothing else. It is an obvious fallacy to describe man as above Nature, for Nature has him in her grip every moment; and it is to her he succumbs at last. Meredith is much wiser when he calls man Nature's "chief expression, her great word of life," on whom she looks—

She hears his wailful prayer,  
When now to the Invisible he raves  
To rend him from her, now of his mother craves  
Her calm, her care.

But, with fine insight, the poet adds:—

His cry to heaven is a cry to her  
He would evade.

No; man is not above Nature, and she treats him in precisely the same way as she does all her other offspring. It would be more accurate to define him as representing Nature at her highest and best. There is nothing in him that is not in embryo in all the animals below him. Metaphorically speaking, he is higher up in the scale of existence than they are, but he possesses nothing that is radically peculiar to himself. He can love and serve his fellow-beings, says Dr. Horton, but so can and do most of the animals, a truth of which Darwin, Kropotkin, and others have furnished innumerable practical illustrations.

J. T. LLOYD.

No power of genius has ever yet had the smallest success in explaining existence. The perfect enigma remains.

—Emerson.



## Canonizing a Heretic.

It is a lie—their priests, their pope,  
Their saints, their — all they fear or hope  
Are lies, and lies. —Robert Browning.

The infidels of one age are the aureoled saints of the next.  
—R. G. Ingersoll.

DURING the Great War, Notre Dame, the most famous Church of Paris, was the scene of a pilgrimage of the Roman Catholic faithful, inaugurated by the Patriotic League, to supplicate Joan of Arc to implore the intercession of the Virgin Mary for victory. Recently, at Rome, a number of elderly gentlemen, mostly Italians, canonized Joan, and added yet another saint to their lengthy calendar. Thus has the whirligig of time brought in its revenge. Burnt as a heretic, Joan is now claimed by the Great Lying Church, and exploited by a questionable political association.

We know how the world wagged in the far-off days of Joan of Arc, the French peasant, who has been transformed into a Roman Catholic saint. Its dirt, its grime, its sordidness, and also the fair flowers of human nobility mark out the fifteenth-century France in which this peasant girl lived and exerted so potent an influence. With a king as mad as the ex-Kaiser, a profligate court, and a corrupt and persecuting priesthood, France was in a condition of chaos. Long years of domestic warfare had reduced the French nobility to the condition of barbarians, and the peasants almost to the condition of brutes. It was, indeed, an age of faith. The Holy Catholic Church was supreme. The wildest and most fantastic legends found ready believers. One French knight was said to have sold his hand to the Devil. A great baron—as Marshal of France, and one of Joan's companions in arms—is said to have decoyed children to his castles and offered their bodies as sacrifices to the Evil One.

In such an age of faith, in a Christian country, and in this atmosphere of ignorance, credulity, and murder, Joan of Arc arose. Believing herself to be the destined deliverer of France, Joan sought out the Dauphin. At Chinon the Church, which murdered her and exploits her memory to-day, sought to stop her. She secured, however, the confidence of such soldiers as D'Alencon, and she was permitted to join the Royal Army. It is an old and inspiring story, how, at the head of ten thousand men, she drove the English invaders from their entrenchments, and afterwards conducted Charles to Rheims to be crowned, standing beside him till the coronation ceremony was ended. With this act Joan considered her mission ended, but she was persuaded to assist in raising the siege of Compiegne, and on the occasion of a sally was taken prisoner by the Burgundians, and sold to the besieging English.

A little stone slab in the Rouen market-place shows the spot where the heroic peasant-girl was burnt to death for heresy and sorcery. For, after being imprisoned and treated with great brutality, Joan was brought to trial on January 9, 1431. The trial was a mockery of justice, and Pierre Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais, supported by the University of Paris, procured her condemnation as a sorceress and a heretic. The record of the trial is a human document of great value. Remember, she was a peasant-girl, and could neither read nor write. Knowing absolutely nothing of law, nor academic theology, she presented an unyielding front to her inquisitors. Undoubtedly, Joan was heretical, however pious. She committed, in the eyes of her judges, the unpardonable offence of putting her own inspiration above that of the Christian Church. And she aggravated her offence in the eyes of her saintly murderers by the complete independence of her replies.

On May 31, 1431, this brave woman mounted the hangman's cart, which took her over the rough stones to the market-place, where thousands of Christians met to watch her burning slowly to death. Misjudged, maltreated, martyred, the execution of Joan of Arc produced an enormous impression everywhere, an impression which the Great Lying Church will never efface by a trumpety and belated rehabilitation many centuries later.

Joan of Arc's sanctification is an object lesson in Roman Catholic methods—that is to say, the methods of the largest and most powerful of the Christian Churches. The Dreyfus struggle and the Ferrer murder have proved conclusively that, even in our own times, the Galilean serpent has not lost its fangs. There are other and as grave reasons for disquietude. For years past the Roman Catholic Church has lent itself to new and extravagant devotions, which should have shocked a people pretending to civilization. The material worship of the sacred heart, of the holy face, of Christ's bodily organs, as distinguished from his entire person, the delirium and hysteria over his "parents," the honours paid to the saints, the pilgrimages, and the "miracles"—all these things which spell decadence must fill thoughtful observers with surprise and misgiving. The clerical press, which can only be described as a journalistic Chamber of Horrors, is itself a portent. A decadent Catholicism may exist for a time, but sooner or later its pathological tendencies must be fatal. And this Catholicism, be it remembered, is the largest and most influential of the Christian Churches.

MIMNERMUS.

## Religion and the Fine Arts.

THE perusal of a paragraph in Mr. W. H. Morris's article in your issue of March 28 has led me to refer back to a letter of Mr. J. T. Lloyd's in your issue of March 14. Mr. Lloyd refers to "Catholicism and all the fine-arts associated with it," and I take it for granted that Mr. Lloyd means "Roman Catholicism." Mr. Morris's paragraph is that beginning with "The same lack of vitality in the current religion is observable if we contemplate science and art," and the object of this article is to clear the air as to whether religion (R. C. or otherwise) has any real bearing on what is best in the world of art. Mr. Morris states the case very lucidly when he says, "Similarly art, which in the Middle Ages found all its inspiration in religion, has progressively come to find less afflatus in it."

This means that the world of art is beholden to religion only in so far as "marking time" was concerned. Once freed from religious shackles, art made prodigious strides, and it must therefore be gratifying to us as Free-thinkers to believe that art will continue to progress without religious inspiration.

When Mr. Lloyd refers to the "Fine-Arts," I presume he means literature (poetry and prose), sculpture, and architecture, music and painting, and if so, it must be confessed, that the two latter owe more to religious inspiration than the others, the reason being that the "technique," *i.e.*, means of expression, of literature and sculpture was in a high state of development long before Christianity was born or thought of, and I am not aware that anything greater has been produced during the Christian era in the realms of literature and sculpture than the mighty works of the Greeks and Romans. In the case of music and painting, we have no very tangible information as to what state of development existed prior to the Christian era, but we do know that the "technique" of these two arts was exceedingly limited.



Musical instruments were few in number, and none of the varieties possessed much scope; and in the case of painting, little was known of colour pigments and oils.

With the Renaissance came a great awakening in the world of art, particularly in the sister arts of music and painting.

Religious shackles were cast away never to be worn again, with the result that masterpieces have been produced in both the arts which are worthy to take rank with the literature and sculpture of the Pre-Christian Era, but owing to the narrow sphere prescribed by the Church over 1,000 years elapsed before their materialization. Coming to our own times, the art which matters has no religious inspiration. We have had a "cenotaph," it is true (" 'Tis true 'tis pity, pity 'tis, 'tis true"), but it is not on record that the "sculptor" was prostrated by brain fever in its execution.

The picture galleries give us little or no indication of religious inspiration. We have a Lavery with his Madonnas, but he is R. C., and, therefore, excusable. Of all the fine-arts, I take it that music is the one to which the Church still clings, as a drowning man clings to a straw, and, as a musician myself, I must protest against the association as being *inevitable*. Admitting that the "Great Masters" of music were religious (more or less), I do not admit that their greatest works were inspired by the Christian religion—the *Messiah*, notwithstanding. Like Shakspeare's plays, the works of these men were not for an age, but for all time, and I venture to think that it will be by their purely *secular* compositions that future generations will judge of them. The great enigma of the musical world was Beethoven. What was he—Christian or Atheist?

The Church will say, "He wrote sacred music, therefore he is ours."

My musical inclinations induce me to look upon Beethoven as perhaps the greatest of the "Genius Epoch" in music, but, up to the present, I have neither heard nor played any of his sacred music, nor do I know of any other musician who has done so. I am bound to admit that he did enter the field of sacred music, but that is all. Perhaps the following *authentic* anecdote will reveal the real Beethoven to the average Freethinker: Beethoven's intimate friend, Moscheles, came rushing to him with the piano score of *Fidelio* just completed. After the last bar written, "Finis, with God's help," Beethoven returned it to him supplemented with "Man help thyself."

There is no gainsaying the fact, however, that a large number of musical artistes are indebted to sacred music for a considerable portion of their bread and butter, and any elimination of the sacred element would cause them to rise up in arms against their despoilers. As a Freethinker and a musician, I have a lively hope that time will remedy this evil, and that full and ample scope will be found for artistes and composers alike in the *boundless* field of "Secular Music."

MUSICUS.

#### A PEACEFUL CHRISTIAN DEATH.

We allude to the famous words which he [Addison] is said to have addressed in his last moments to the young Earl of Warwick: "See in what peace a Christian can die." The story originated with Young, who said he had it from Tickell; adding that the Earl led an irregular life, which Addison wished to reclaim. But, according to Malone, who was a scrupulous inquirer, there is no evidence of the Earl's having led such a life, and Walpole, in one of his letters, which were published not long ago, startled—we should say shocked—the world by telling that Addison "died of brandy."

—*Leigh Hunt, "Old Court Suburb."*

## N. S. S. Conference.

### Executive's Annual Report.

BY THE PRESIDENT.

IN presenting its Annual Report the Executive, in spite of the greatly improved condition of the balance-sheet, desires to point out that the income and expenditure there shown must not be taken as representing the full financial activities of the Society. Each Branch of the Society is, within the general Constitution, self-governing, and receives and administers its own funds. The balance-sheet represents only the sums received by the Executive, with an account of its stewardship thereof.

Although the War, so far as the actual fighting was concerned, ended in 1918, it cannot yet be said that even approximately normal conditions prevail. The conditions are still abnormal, and the work of this Society is much hampered by their continuance. With the cost of travelling what it is, with printing abnormally high in price, and the added difficulty of securing halls in which to arrange lectures—for the housing question invades even the lecture field—obstacles to propaganda are greater to-day than they have been, probably, in the history of our Movement.

In the circumstances it is, therefore, more than usually encouraging to note the growth of Freethinking opinions with the public at large. There has been going on since the Armistice, not alone a demobilizing of the Army, but also a demobilizing of the Churches. From all quarters the evidence accumulates that thousands have been aroused from their passive acceptance of Christian teaching to active hostility towards it. And one evidence of this hostility has been a greater desire to become acquainted with the Freethought position and to understand its teaching. This is not alone true of demobilized men returning to England; it is true elsewhere, as is shown by the demands for literature received at the *Freethinker* office, from men who have returned to India and to other parts of the Empire.

Restricting ourselves to a more parochial view, it is pleasing to record that, speaking generally, the lecture platform has been well maintained during the year. The President and Mr. Lloyd have been as busy as ever, and other lecturers have also been active. Mr. A. B. Moss has again renewed his activity on the platform, and hopes to devote more time to this form of propaganda during the coming autumn and winter. Mr. Rosetti has also visited some of the provincial Branches, but his business engagements prevent his travelling far afield as a regular matter. Messrs. Willis and Williams have also been active at Birmingham. Other speakers have also played their part; but there is room for many more lecturers than the Society has at its command, and encouragement should be given by all to new and promising advocates. So far as the Executive is concerned, it feels that it is only expressing the desire of the whole body of members in saying that it will do all it can, and in every way, to encourage speakers who hold out hopes of being serviceable on the platform. More speakers means more propaganda, and a more extensive and more intensive propaganda would soon establish Branches of the Society in every centre of population.

In addition to the need for more speakers, there is a present difficulty—it is hoped of a temporary character only—in the getting of suitable halls for meetings. In some places the work is being held up from this cause alone. Thus, in Newcastle-on-Tyne no public meetings have been held for years, and the local Secretary reports the impossibility of getting a hall in which such could be held. Liverpool has also found its work greatly hampered from the same cause. The same difficulty is encountered in other parts. It is to be hoped that this obstacle will remove itself gradually, but it is a serious one while it lasts.

Meanwhile, where meetings are held regularly, the audiences are good and the interest sustained. Birmingham continues its meetings in the handsome Repertory Theatre, and reports a marked improvement in the attendances. In South Shields the Branch has managed several special lectures during the winter to improved audiences, and an attempt is being made to arouse a more vigorous propaganda



in the whole of Tyneside. Glasgow has also the ambition to serve as a centre for the revival of work around the Clyde district, and there is no reason why it should not succeed. South Wales continues to show a growing interest in Freethought, and the meetings addressed by special lecturers are invariably well attended. A new Branch has been formed at Plymouth, in consequence of a visit from the President, and it is hoped that there will soon be a revival of work throughout the West of England. There is urgent need of it. A new Branch of the Society has been formed at Leeds. The Manchester Branch continues to make good progress, and its report of work done offers every encouragement to the Committee that has worked so well during the past few years. In London the Branches continue their work both in and outdoors, and special courses of lectures arranged by the Executive at South Place and in the Stratford Town Hall were more successful than any yet attempted. More work had been done by the Executive during the winter, but there was the common trouble in getting halls.

Having in mind the many requests concerning the rights of Freethinkers with regard to the law on such matters as the education of children, the rights of soldiers and sailors, marriage, burial, and similar questions, the Executive prepared a small handbook giving the necessary information. This would have been published by now, but the state of the printing trade caused it to be held over for a time. It will, however, be proceeded with at the earliest opportunity, and may be enlarged to cover a brief account of various forms of Freethought activity.

Turning to more general aspects of the Society's work, it may be noted that the contest with the London County Council over the sale of literature in the London parks may be said to have been at last brought to a close. This struggle has been going on ever since 1916, quietly, but with determination, so far as the N. S. S. is concerned. It will be remembered that the L.C.C. passed a resolution that no more permits for the sale of literature would be granted. This would have become the rule but for the exposure of the Council's action in the *Freethinker*, and the action of the N. S. S. Executive. On the initiative of the Executive, a Committee of London organizations was formed, of which Mr. Frederick Verinder was Chairman and Miss Vance Secretary. Mr. Cohen represented the N. S. S. on the Committee. Ultimately, and after Police Court action had been taken by the L.C.C., the case was carried into the High Court by the Protest Committee, and the Council forced to rescind its offensive resolution. The next move was that the Council proposed to carry out the regulations in a way which would have rendered the victory of no avail. Once more the fight began, and in the end, thanks to the persistence of the Committee, the help given by Mr. Harry Snell, now a member of the L.C.C., and the unremitting attention, tact, and resourcefulness of Mr. F. Verinder, the question was settled on lines agreeable to the Committee, and the matter is, we hope, ended.

A glance at the balance-sheet will show that the National Secular Society has to its credit a larger sum of money than it has ever shown on a balance-sheet during the whole of its history. This is a consequence of a legacy of £1,000, less legacy duty, received from the late Mr. Antonini. The legacy is important from more than a monetary point of view. When the decision of the Bowman case was given in the House of Lords, the Editor of the *Freethinker* was alone in pointing out that it was a decision which went much further than a reference to the case before the Court. Its significance was that it made absolutely legal and unquestionable a legacy to any Secular Society, whether registered or unregistered. A bequest could now be made to the National Secular Society with the same feeling of security that one could leave money to the British Museum or to the Church of England. Although this opinion was called into question by some, events have proved it to be correct. A small legacy of £10 was paid over without comment, and then the Antonini legacy was paid into the Society's funds, not by an ordinary executor, but by no less a person than the Public Trustee. That is a consummation that a generation ago would have been deemed impossible. And it is at least a guarantee that those who wish to benefit the National Secular

Society at their death need have no hesitation in doing so. Such a bequest is absolutely secure. It is pleasing to record that information has already been given of two wills that have been so devised, and without doubt many others will follow.

In this connection it may be noted that the resolution of the Manchester Conference, ordering the Executive to go forward with the incorporation of the N. S. S., is being proceeded with. The matter is now in the hands of the Registrar, and there is every expectation that the incorporation will soon be announced. Security of receipt having been already gained, security of expenditure will thus follow. The funds of the Society can only be spent on the furtherance of the principles of the N. S. S. It will be something to say that, after a lifetime of legal ostracism, the National Secular Society will exist as a perfect legal entity. It will be at least a tribute to the memory of those brave men and women who for more than a century past suffered imprisonment, ostracism, and all the petty spite of an enthroned superstition, that the cause for which they fought should have gained so signal a triumph.

During the year the Society has to record the death of two of its prominent members—Dr. R. T. Nichols and Mr. Victor Roger. Both were for many years members of the Society's Executive, and both well known to members of the Society. Dr. Nichols was a quiet, unostentatious worker in the Cause, and a generous supporter of its activities. He shrank from any sort of notoriety, and the larger part of his generous acts were in all probability known only to himself. He thought and spoke evil of none. Mr. Victor Roger was better known at these Conferences, from which he was very rarely absent. His connection with the Society dated back to the days of Bradlaugh, he was the oldest member of the Executive, and he remained an active worker to the end. He had been for some time in more or less indifferent health, but his death occurred quite suddenly, from an affection of the heart. His death removes one more link with a past that to the majority of present-day Freethinkers is little more than a name. The more need for a word of tribute for the work done by these men and women as they pass from our midst.

A question on which all Freethinkers are interested, that of the right use of the day of rest, is at present bulking in the public eye. Many years ago, when a handful of Freethinkers led the way by the inauguration of Sunday lectures, excursions, and concerts, the outcry from the religious world was very great. Gradually these began to take their place as a normal part of the national life, and there are few to-day who would declare publicly that the result has been anything but beneficial. Nevertheless, the day of rest cannot and will not be properly utilized for the moral and physical and mental health of the people until the superstitious observance of Sunday is completely broken down. And there are signs that the breaking point is approaching. Quite recently a proposal came before the London County Council in favour of throwing the people's parks open for games on Sunday. The clergy of the various Churches at once mobilized their forces, and enough of the members of the Council were terrified into voting against the proposition. That is a victory for which the bigots may have to pay dear. All over the country there is now going on an agitation in favour of a rational observance of Sunday, which shall include the playing of games in all parks and open spaces under the control of the various municipal bodies. Returned soldiers are naturally asking, as are others, why, if killing could be done for five years on Sunday, if war work could go on on Sunday, if moreover, the soldiers were permitted to play games in France on Sunday in order to keep them fit for the task of fighting—why, if all this could go on in time of war, with the full consent of Christians of all classes, why games cannot be permitted during times of peace? The clergy are quite frank in their opposition. They say it will interfere with the attendance at church. That was the plain admission of a large body of clergy who recently presented a memorial to the Birmingham authorities against Sunday games; and whatever is said, that is the real reason everywhere. It now remains to be seen whether people will insist on the right to use their own playgrounds on the one day they have complete leisure, or whether they will shut the



young off from healthy and pleasurable games, and so permit themselves to be terrorized by a body of men who have their own narrow professional interests to serve. We have no doubt as to the ultimate result of the fight, and whenever complete victory is achieved it will be another triumph of which the Freethinkers of this country were the pioneers, and for very long the only champions.

There is some evidence that before long we may once again have to face the question of religious teaching in the schools as a live political issue. Undeterred by the repeated and conspicuous failure of his predecessors in office to settle the religious difficulty, Mr. Fisher has ventured on a course which is, in some respects, more reactionary than anything that has been attempted for some years. Under the pretence of unifying our educational system, Mr. Fisher proposes to take over the Church schools of the country, and, in return, to give in all schools, provided and non-provided, definite and "denominational" religious teaching, either through the teachers or through the operation of some form of right of entry. Unquestionably this will involve the establishment of religion in the schools in a more drastic form than it exists at present, and it will mean a larger measure of power to one whom the teachers dread more than any other—the parson.

Neither the Executive nor this Conference is directly concerned with discussing the educational bearings of this proposal, our interest lies with it so far as it affects those principles for the promotion of which we exist. And Mr. Fisher's proposals make it more evident than ever that the only way out of the impasse is the establishment of complete secular education in all State-aided schools, with a proper and adequate educational provision for all the children of the country. For half a century the people have permitted the education of the country to be obstructed in order that Church and chapel might continue their fight for the control of the mind of the child. They have tried compromise where no compromise should have been tolerated. Nonconformists, who protest against the State teaching religion to adults, have, with a few exceptions, eagerly accepted the policy of the State teaching religion to children. Those who denounced State patronage of religion were found eagerly grasping a more or less disguised form of State patronage. It is largely owing to the way in which the bulk of Nonconformists threw all principle to the winds, when it paid them to do so, that the position has remained what it is. And the conclusion appears to be that where the interests of church or chapel are at stake considerations of principle lose their force.

In these circumstances the Executive feels warranted in urging Freethinkers, all over the country to take advantage of the interest excited by Mr. Fisher's proposals to bring the principle of secular education forward as prominently as possible. They will find a much larger public opinion in its favour than might be imagined, and, indeed, the justice of the case is so patent that no effective reply is conceivable. Perhaps something might be done if all avowed Secularists, in addition to withdrawing their own children from religious instruction in State schools, would try to induce other people who are opposed to the State teaching religion to withdraw theirs. If this were done the Executive feels that there is a sufficient body of enlightened opinion in the country to make the question of Secular Education a matter of practical politics. There is really a large body of public opinion in this direction in this country if it will only make its presence felt.

This report may well draw to a close with a word or two on some aspects of public affairs to which the attention of Freethinkers may fittingly be directed. Within the N.S.S. nothing in the shape of a sex question has ever existed. Discussions on the question have never arisen, because the need for them has never existed. Within the Society men and women have always moved on a platform of equality, both as regards membership and in eligibility for office. It is the more gratifying to note, therefore, the recent advances made in the direction of abolishing sex distinctions, and to record in that advance one more triumph of those principles for which this Society has so long stood.

But every advance made invites a new adjustment of the forces of reaction to the altered circumstance. During the

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## Acid Drops.

There is no limit to what the Salvation Army will do. A correspondent, who happens to be a shareholder in the Maypole Dairy Co., sends us a circular letter which comes from the Salvation Army to every shareholder, through "the kindness of the Chairman and Board of Directors," asking for donations towards the Army's funds. £232,000 is asked for, and General Booth thinks that many of the shareholders will be ready to give, because the Army stands as "a bulwark against the materialism and selfishness of the age which is leading to so much unrest among the masses." That is quite plain and substantially true. The Salvation Army is just one more method of applying the religious "dope" to people, and we are glad to see it so plainly expressed—even though it occurs in a private circular. And once more we can only wonder at the tactics of those labour leaders who pander to religion, and who are so fond of pouring out sentimental slush about the goodness of the "Army."

In New York a verdict of manslaughter has been returned against Andrew Walker, a Christian Scientist, whose daughter had died from diphtheria. Walker had taken his daughter to the theatre, and had declined medical treatment. That is the worst of living in a country where faith in God is taught. If you merely believe in it you are all right, but if you are fool enough to practice it, then you may look out for trouble

Preaching on the subject of "Christ and Social Reform," the vicar of St. John's, Southend-on-Sea, said "the authoritative advice of Christ would redress all social wrongs." Christians have acted on this so-called "advice" for nearly twenty centuries, and Europe to-day is seething with discontent. The vicar had better try again.

"A most important duty of churchwardens is to admonish parishioners who do not attend church" says the Bishop of Chelmsford. Our reply is that it could not be done if the churchwardens only worked eight hours daily.

A copy of the *Johannesburg Star*, dated April 24, reaches us containing the following advertisement headed "Holy Ghost Message":—

This day I declare unto thee, a Great Earthquake shall destroy this City. To-night it shall take place. I, I thy God hath spoken.

We have seen nothing about it in the ordinary press, but perhaps our press censorship will not allow it to appear. We have many subscribers in the city, though, and we should be sorry to lose them. Let us hope that the Holy Ghost has relented. But there is generally trouble when he is hanging round.

A Leicester vicar, so the newspapers say, has been forced by poverty to give up his vicarage and take a small house in a court. Yet Crockford's Clergy List states that the income of the living is £371—which ought to be enough to prevent the reverend gentleman from eating his bootlaces.

A London newspaper made inquiries concerning the congregations at six of the nineteen churches recommended for demolition by the Bishop of London's Commission. One church had an attendance of nine persons, and another of eleven, and the choir and clergy outnumbered the worshippers at each of these churches.

The late Rev. J. C. Prescott, of Carlisle, left estate to the value of £29,843. He will never join the heavenly choir.

The Dean of Worcester recently announced his intention of taking over a cinema theatre for a week for religious and educational purposes. Perhaps we shall now see on the screen the animals going into the ark two by two.



The following letter appeared in the *Daily News* of May 21 from the Rev. F. E. Powell, of Ladbroke Rectory, Southam, near Rugby. It is *apropos* of the Archbishop of York's attempt to settle the question of divorce by an appeal to the Bible and the Church:—

SIR,—I think it undesirable, or indeed quite impossible, to regulate human society permanently by means of a literal application of uncertain historic documents.

The Archbishop of York the other day, from his place in the House of Lords, quoted from these as though the whole question was thereby settled for all time. Surely the Archbishop, and those for whom he speaks, should remember that precisely the same kind of disastrous appeal to documentary authority has been made in the past in matters concerning which the religious world of that day was hopelessly in the wrong, as the religious world of our day is prepared now to acknowledge. Or are he and his friends, like the Bourbons, to "learn nothing and forget nothing"?

The New Testament was made the bulwark of the slave trade. An edition was specially published with all the slavery sanctions marked and annotated. Wilberforce complained that the Church of his day raised no voice against that monstrous and predominant evil. The Bible, too, has been authoritatively appealed to in the persecution and burning of wretched women reputed to be witches. It is not two hundred years ago since Britain burnt its last "witch." "The giving up of witchcraft," said Wesley, "is in effect giving up the Bible." Again, the Bible has been used as an authority for the atrocious treatment of lunatics.

Slave-emancipation, the cessation of witch-burning, the better treatment of lunatics, were all achieved in the teeth of the opposition to "religious authority"; and this should be a reminder and a warning to those who now probably lament the short-sightedness which left to humanitarians what it was hoped Christianity would have been able to achieve.

We congratulate Mr. Powell on so sensible a letter, but what is he doing in the church? —

A church is popularly supposed to be "God's" house. Hence, as Atheists, we are hard put to it to understand the true inwardness of the following paragraph, which appeared in a recent issue of the *London Evening News*: "After being closed for eighteen months through the scandal caused by the vicar, Rev. H. J. Martin, kissing his servant-girl, Holy Trinity Church, Old Brompton, has been reopened."

The Rev. Charles Mackie, of Aberdeen, says that it is an open question whether couples married in a kirk were bound together by God. They might be bound by the Devil. In this connection it is pleasant to recall that civil marriages have nothing to do with "God" or "Devil."

As the ordinary parson uses the word "Pagan" for the opposite of Christian, we do not think that the people of Portsmouth have any real cause for complaint. It should be no reflection on a man to say that he is a Pagan; it should be to say that he is a Christian. But the Rev. Gilmour Neale says that eighty per cent. of the people of Portsmouth are not "decent Pagans," and that is a different matter. But then we gather that what is really upsetting Mr. Gilmour is that people will not go to church: so that his lament may not be more than the cry of a tradesman who has his shop stocked with goods that no one will buy. The Lamb of God seems at the moment as unwanted as the Food Controller's mutton. So that after all, if we lived at Portsmouth, we should not be upset. After all, we fancy that Portsmouth might very profitably exchange Mr. Gilmour for, say, Marcus Aurelius.

The curious thing about Mr. Gilmour is the character he gives the people who attend church. He said that a large proportion of the people worshipped gold or pleasure, and "when they were cajoled to church they had to be dug from a pile of filthy novels." Well, we really feel for Mr. Gilmour, with a congregation made up of that class of people. And we begin to understand why he said that the people were not even decent Pagans. He has evidently been closely studying his congregation. But we would advise him not to judge the rest of the people by those he finds in church. If he goes among those who have nothing to do with the churches, he will find quite a large proportion of decent people. We

are not surprised at his pessimism when he looks round his church. We might feel the same way ourselves.

If you take the different civilizations that have been "built," says Bishop Gore, "Mohammedan, Buddhist, Brahmin, Christian: and if you analyse their differences, you will find that at the bottom they depend upon what people have believed about God." Passing by the frightful crudity of such a comment, one need only point out that Bishop Gore makes a very indiscreet advocate. For out of all the civilizations that have been "built"—the word to a Freudian would in itself be a revelation—Bishop Gore believes that only one has been of any value. It doesn't look as though the belief in God was of very much real value after all. Perhaps it would now be as well if we looked round for some other and more reliable principle on which to build.

The Vicar of Chobham is to conduct a party of his congregation round some of the battlefields. Perhaps he will point out the safe distance from the fighting line occupied by the chaplains.

Christians sometimes let the cat out of the bag. In an article on "The Religion of Every Man," in *The Flame*, the writer admits that "the test of belief still exists in milder forms. It still divides the human family into a thousand sects." This cannot be repeated too often.

We see from the *Chicago Daily Tribune* that at Tangier Island, Va., there is a law requiring citizens to either go to church or remain indoors during divine service. A youth of seventeen, who was not at church, was ordered by a constable to go home. The boy went home and sat in the porch, but the policeman ordered him into the house. As the boy refused, the policeman tried to arrest him, and, on attempting to run away, the constable drew a revolver and shot him. The boy is in hospital and the policeman is in custody. But what a law to be in existence to-day! It is pleasant to know that America, like ourselves, won the War, and so secured freedom for the world.

Sir Oliver Lodge is not getting it all his own way in America. Dr. Stephenson Smith, head of the Department of Psychology at Washington, says:—

It is neither strange nor unusual that an old man should be both credulous and superstitious. If he was just plain Jim Brown, he wouldn't attract very much attention. But of course, Sir Oliver has a title, and the reputation of being a scientist, and that's what creates all the furor.

People think that physicists always do their thinking straight, but the truth is they are just as credulous as anybody at times. All of us have a pet hobby of which we are too fond to submit it to common sense.

The concluding sentences deserve special attention. Reliance upon mere authority is no more justifiable in science than it is in theology—it is, in fact, the theological spirit carried into science. One can tell the thinker by his independence of authority, just as one can tell the man who cannot do his own thinking by his dependence upon this or that authority. The function of an authority is to supply facts, including points of view. When that is done, each man must do his own thinking. And if he doesn't, no other kind of thinking is of much use to him.

Between the acts at the Surrey Theatre, the Bishop of Woolwich addressed the audience from the stage. We wonder if he wore his full ecclesiastical war-paint?

Bishop Welldon has been speaking against the scanty dress of women, and says it is a sign of barbarism. Maybe, he imagines that the ample draperies of the clergy are a sign of civilization.

A terrible story of clerical suffering is told by a London evening newspaper. A middlesex vicar, taking part in a jumble-sale, missed his new hat. It was found afterwards that one of the stallholders had sold it for threepence, and the customer could not be traced. Clearly this is a matter for petitioning the Throne of Grace.



### To Correspondents.

E. G. BASKERVILLE.—We cannot say how many subscribers we have in your locality, as most of them will be getting their paper through local agents. We do not mind publishing you desire to meet them if you would wish us to do so.

F. COLLINS.—We have not yet decided the question of publishing the discussion, but hope to make an announcement soon. Meanwhile, we are sending the copies for which you ask.

H. V. G.—By all means send. News cuttings are always acceptable. Thanks.

E. BEARDELL.—We do not doubt but that our readers will cheerfully give all that is required, if asked. But it is precisely because they help so generously and so cheerfully that we feel impelled to ask for as little as possible, and to struggle to avoid asking at all. However, we shall see. But there need be no fear—the paper will go on. As we have said before, we can conceive the *Freethinker* without Europe, but we can't think of Europe without the *Freethinker*—at least we don't intend to.

WILL Mr. G. Rule, late of Battersea, please send his address to Mr. J. Neate, 250 Victoria Park Road, E. ?

C. T. SHAW.—The idea of the advertisement is not a bad one, but in the present circumstances we have to be cautious in anything that involves printing.

G. P.—Received, and shall appear soon.

H. BURGESS (Johannesburg).—Thanks for congratulations. We have done our best, and suppose that we really ought to feel pleased that we are still alive. But we never lack faith in the *Freethinker* and its future.

D. STEHELLS.—You appear to have covered the ground pretty well. We quite appreciate your opinion of G. W. Foote. But he always did command the respect of *big* men who knew him. His detractors were made up of two classes. Those who did not know him, and those who felt how much above them he was and didn't like it. Perhaps the wildest of all superstitions was that he was uncultured, and that the *Freethinker* was a vulgar paper. Men, like Meredith, and others that we might name, knew better. But slanders are hard to kill, and those of the "superior" variety hardest of all.

S. H. WITHEY.—Next week.

A. BOSTLEMAN.—Thanks for good wishes. We really don't think we should find it worth while changing our place of residence. We can understand the Americans not wanting another European invasion. It has taken them all these years to partly overcome the terrible consequences of the invasion of the Puritans. Naturally they dread another.

*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*

*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.

It was asking a great deal of the delegates and members at the N. S. S. Conference to sit indoors all day during the brilliant weather that prevailed on Sunday last, but they did it, and the fact argued well for their devotion to the Cause. The very high rail fares and other inconveniences of present-day travelling kept many away who would otherwise have been present, but otherwise the Conference must be pronounced a complete success. The discussions that took place on the various resolutions were of an interesting nature, and there was no mistaking the keen interest of the delegates in the future work of the Society. All seemed deeply concerned in the ways and means by which the work of the Movement might be promoted, and we shall be surprised if the influence of the Birmingham Conference does not bear good fruit in the forthcoming year.

The evening public meeting of the Conference was also encouraging. Naturally, the fine weather prevented so large a meeting as would have been present in less brilliant holiday weather, but it was a good meeting, and keenly interested in the speeches, and they were worthy of attention, which, considering the fact that the speakers had been at it since 10.30 in the morning, says something for their power

and freshness. There is no need to particularize here the various orators; they are sufficiently well known to all. The only new feature was a brief speech from the Glasgow delegate, Mr. C. Mellor, whom the President called on at a few minutes' notice, and whom we hope to see more active on the Society's platform in the future. Mr. Mellor is, happily, a young man, and to youth and ability all things are possible.

On Monday there was a very enjoyable trip to Stratford-on-Avon, which would have been still more enjoyable had the town been less crowded. Somehow a crowd, with an endless procession of motor cars and bicycles, does not provide the proper setting for a place such as Stratford, but as we helped to make some of the crowd the observation must be taken as a comment and not as a complaint. There was a boat trip down the Avon, and, of course, a visit to the various places of interest. Most of the delegates returned from Stratford to their homes, but a few returned with the local friends to Birmingham. It only remains to add that, as usual, the Birmingham friends spared no efforts to make the Conference a success, and the comfort of the visitors complete. And they scored in both directions. All the local members appear to work well together, and there is great promise for the future of the Branch in the number of ladies and of young people who are taking an active share in the work.

We publish this week the Executive's Annual Report. Want of space and time prevents our doing more in this issue. Next week the Report of the business proceedings of the Conference will appear.

We are asked to announce that the Manchester Branch will have a ramble and an "American Tea" on Saturday, June 5, at Mrs. Wilcocks', 8 Light Oaks Road, Pendleton. Eccles, Peel Green, Moaba car, *via* Eccles Old Road; alight at Stott Lane.

We printed the other week a letter from one of our readers on the question of advertising. It is an aspect of the matter which our business readers appear to neglect, but which might be of service to them. It is probable that the *Freethinker* is as good an advertising medium as any paper in the country, and there really is no reason, so far as we can see, why Freethinkers who are in business should not avail themselves of its columns. The paper is read from cover to cover, and advertisements come to readers with a special appeal. There should be a regular revenue accruing to the *Freethinker* from this source, and this would to some extent help to counterbalance the heavy increased expenses in other directions. We suggest to our business readers that they think the matter over. Application to our Business Manager will give them any information they require.

The trials of a paper, such as the *Freethinker*, may be gauged by a very grave report issued by the weekly organ of newspaper owners. This points out that owing to the tremendously increased cost of production there is every prospect of a number of the smaller journals coming to an end. Wages are now about two-and-a-half the pre-War cost. Paper is about six times, and everything else in proportion. There seems no hope of relief for the next eighteen months, so the prospect for an easy time ahead is not very rosy. As is pointed out, in this matter, it is the smaller papers that suffer most. The large and wealthy ones pass it on, mainly to the advertisers, and they in turn to the purchasers. Smaller concerns have to grin and bear it.

A fortnight ago, as a means of gaining new readers, we offered to supply, to the order of any of our present subscribers, the *Freethinker* post free for thirteen weeks for 2s. 9d. This is an easy way to introduce the paper into new quarters, and so many of our subscribers have taken advantage of the offer that we have decided to keep the offer open during the whole of June. We are quite certain that when one has had the *Freethinker* delivered for three months it will not be easily dropped. This is a very easy and inexpensive way of assisting us to build up a larger circulation and so increasing the measure of our usefulness.



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whole of its history woman has had no greater enemy that it has found in the Christian Church. And now that the principle of sex equality is gaining recognition, the Churches are making desperate efforts to obtain the support of women in the political field, and so gain a new measure of support in their various activities. What they cannot suppress they will exploit. And, in the case of women, there is the added inducement to activity that control of the woman gives a hold on the child and on the family. Break the influence of the Church here, and you have broken the chief source of their power.

From two points of view, that of the dignity of woman and the progress of Freethought, we desire to urge Freethinkers all over the country to see that the efforts of the Churches to enlist in their services the activities of women are frustrated. We can all do that by making a special effort to enlist the sympathies of our own women-folk in the cause, and that will pave the way for gaining the adherence of outsiders. The number of women who are entering our ranks, year by year, the much larger number of women who attend our meetings, are all indications that show the time to be ripe for a concerted effort. And it is high time that the effort was made.

In the next place it is obvious that a determined effort is being made by the Churches to enlist the working class on their side. When the working class movement was struggling for existence, the Churches either gave it their active opposition, or stood aloof, while consciously or unconsciously diverting attention from real issues to theological problems. Now that the working class movement threatens to assume formidable proportions, the Churches are alert to gain its friendship, or, failing that, to avert its enmity. And the habit with so many of the public men of this country to pander to religion threatens to make the work of the Churches much more successful than it would be otherwise.

At any rate, a very active propaganda is being carried on throughout the country, large sums of money are being spent on propagandist literature, and every attempt is being made to yoke the labour movement to the chariot of the Church. In no other country but this, could that policy be pursued with any hope of success. But here conditions are such that the success of the policy is less doubtful. One thing is certain. If the people who have so far liberated themselves from the control of the Churches permit themselves to be recaptured, their last position will be worse than the first, and they will have only themselves to blame. In the long run, the salvation of the working class, as of other classes, depends upon mental clarity and moral courage. And a first step towards this is surely to visualize social life free from distorting and dangerous influence of theological speculations. The Churches have always shown themselves the most slavish servants of any interest it paid to them to serve, and they are not likely at this time of day to alter their policy or their character.

It is customary to take a brief glance at the state of Freethought on the Continent before closing these reports. It is, of course, not to be expected that on the Continent, where the people were more exposed to the fury of the War than ourselves, conditions should yet be normal. But, on the other hand, it is gratifying to record that Freethought activities, necessarily suspended while the War was on, are now being resumed in all directions. In Italy and France the movement is being reorganized, and there appears to be a considerable Freethought development in Spain, where the spirit of Ferrer still goes marching on. There is also being arranged for September of this year an International Congress at Prague. That is in itself an encouraging sign, and indicates that in the shaping of the new after the War world Freethought will play its part.

Whatever decision the Conference comes to with regard to the resolution, on the Agenda bearing on this matter, it may be taken for granted that the International Congress will have the best wishes of all in England for its complete success as a Congress, and also that it may lead to a great forward movement in international Freethought.

In closing this report the Executive desires to express its gratification that the prophecy it ventured on at the outbreak of the War has been borne out by the course of events. It

was then said that whatever was the outcome of the War the Churches and religion stood to lose heavily. In the midst of a civilized people religion maintained its position largely because nothing occurred of sufficiently general and striking character to fasten attention on the hollowness of its claims. Those who from temperament could be brought to examine the preposterous claims of the Churches rejected their teachings quickly enough. But the mass of the people went on thinking, apparently, that there must be something useful if not truthful about so ancient and powerful an institution. The consequence of the War, with its ferocity, its brutality, the naked reliance of all the Christian peoples on no other or higher instrument than physical force, and the endorsement of this in all the countries at war by the Christian Church opened the eyes of thousands. And amid the throes of civilization of to-day, the one clear and outstanding fact is the decline of religious authority and of religious belief. Nothing can restore them to their ancient place of power or privilege. The way is thus cleared for a vigorous propaganda work, in a way that has never before occurred. It remains only for Freethinkers everywhere to take advantage of the situation. This can be done in various ways. We can do it by enrolling new members in the Society, by enlisting the sympathetic help of the much larger number who are willing to help, but not, perhaps, to join the organization, by enlisting on our side the newly-emancipated army of women, by driving home to the minds of the working classes that an essential condition of the right ordering of society is to break the power of supernaturalism, and by instilling into the minds of all the teaching that social justice and progress are ultimately dependent upon bringing to the work of human welfare a liberated intellect. Our work is, as ever, that of pioneers. We are carrying on the traditions set by those who have helped in all ages to make the world what it is, and the fact that so much has been accomplished, should only nerve us to complete the still greater work that is yet to be done.

## Spiritualism.

### XI.

#### THE INVESTIGATIONS OF SIR WILLIAM CROOKES.

A FEW weeks ago I attended a lecture by Mr. Horace Leaf upon the subject of materialization. He dwelt upon the mediumship of Florence Cook, and showed us several slides illustrating the appearance of the "spirit" Katie King, which was photographed by Sir William Crookes during his investigation of the case. In the course of the lecture Mr. Leaf threw upon the screen a number of slides entirely composed of lists of Sir William's scientific attainments, which were presumably supposed to show his fitness for the investigation of psychical phenomena. It has always seemed to me a great pity that spiritualists should rely so faithfully upon the testimony of big names. At the Queen's Hall debate Sir Arthur trotted out the names of astronomers and chemists by the dozen whom, he says, have been convinced, but I listened in vain for one first-class psychologist whose opinion on these subjects might be worthy of serious consideration. Why the expert in physics should be considered capable of solving the problems of psychics I am at a loss to conceive, and I do not think that the experience of the past has shown that they are likely to do so in the future. But the most unfortunate thing about Crookes' researches is the fact that the accounts concerning them are so meagre. We have his own bald statements in his *Researches into the Phenomena of Modern Spiritualism*, supplemented now and then by published extracts from his note-books and diaries, and by the evidence of other sitters. When these are examined together a



sufficiently startling fact seems to emerge. The accounts do not tally; important details vary in a remarkable manner, and sometimes are omitted altogether. Let us take a simple example. For this purpose I shall not select some trivial detail or minor experiment, but shall take one of the most remarkable examples of psychic phenomena in the whole book. The seance at which it occurred was held on May 7th, 1873, and D. D. Home was the medium. Sir W. Crookes describes the incident thus:—

A phantom form came from a corner of the room, took an accordion in its hand, and then glided about the room playing the instrument. The form was visible to all present for many minutes, Mr. Home also being seen at the same time. Coming rather close to a lady who was sitting apart from the rest of the company, she gave a slight cry, upon which it vanished.

Amongst those present on this occasion was Lady (then Mrs.) Crookes, Stainton Moses, Serjeant Cox, and Miss Douglas. Moses has left an account which seems to have been jotted down about the same time as the seance, whilst Mrs. Crookes' account was not given till twenty years after, namely, in 1893. It will be remembered that Sir W. Crookes says nothing about the light with which the room was illuminated. Moses, however, supplies this deficiency. According to his account the fire-light was lowered, the reading lamp put out of the room, and the gas turned down. He continues: "We sat in gloom. . . . During the evening Home stood near the fire-place and kept us informed of his position." He then goes on to describe how a hand was seen descending from the top of the curtain and then playing an accordion, which was on a table in the back room, near the curtain. A form was then materialized as far as the middle. Floating near the folding doors which separated the double room, it advanced towards Mrs. Crookes, who screamed, whereupon it vanished. The important part to note here is that the light was so low that Home's movements could only be located by his telling the sitters where he was. Another extraordinary fact is that Moses never says anything about the phantom form playing the accordion as described by Sir William Crookes. Lady Crookes' account is even more curious. According to her the gas which was burning behind a window at the further end of the double room was bright enough to show everything distinctly. She then says that the accordion was taken from Home's hand by "a cloudy appearance, which soon seemed to condense into a distinct human form clothed in a filmy drapery." The figure then advanced playing the accordion and approached Lady Crookes, who screamed, the figure responding by sinking through the floor, still playing the instrument.

We have here three separate accounts from three independent witnesses, although it seems probable that Lady Crookes' account was partially derived from that of her husband. The most important discrepancies are those concerning the light, the position of the accordion, and the actions of the phantom. Moses says that it was so dark that Home had to say where he was in order to be located at all, whereas Lady Crookes says that everything was perfectly visible. Even supposing that Lady Crookes is merely referring to the back room, sufficient light

would have come through into the front room to enable the sitters to see a person moving about. Moses, it would seem, never saw the phantom playing the accordion at all, whilst Sir William and Lady Crookes say nothing about the hand which Moses saw descending from the top of the curtain.

As they stand these accounts cannot be made to correspond. That the sitters saw, or thought they saw, something, is evident, although how far the light rendered them capable of seeing anything clearly is uncertain. It is true that the three narratives are interesting as casual recollections, but their scientific value is almost entirely nil.

The above is one of the most striking of the psychical experiences of Sir William Crookes, and we have seen that when analysed no real weight can be attached to the documentary evidence. The same criticism can justly be levelled against the majority of the Crookes' researches. On being read for the first time they appear convincing to the novice in these matters, but once additional evidence is obtained, and the accounts are compared, their evidential value rapidly diminishes. For instance, Sir William rarely tells us the details of Mr. Home's movements during the sittings, and when fuller accounts are examined it is found that the medium was constantly moving about, and, in short, directing all the operations. The light also is rarely mentioned, and the reader is left with the impression that ample light was always employed. As a matter of fact, this was far from the case. In many instances the illumination simply consisted in one or two spirit lamps, with salted wicks, which were put on the top of the gasalier. Anybody who has worked with such light knows how feeble it is and how difficult it would be to see clearly what, for example, was going on beneath a large diningroom table around which several persons were sitting. In submitting considerations of this sort to my readers I do not mean to imply that Home was a fraud, that all the phenomena were due to trickery, and that Sir William Crookes and his assistants were invariably duped. Such an explanation is in my opinion wholly unjustified, and can scarcely be held by any except those who are ignorant of the limits of the deceptive art. But after every allowance has been made, the fact remains that the evidence is not sufficient for us to be able to accept the spiritistic hypothesis, and even more risky is the faith spiritualists place in the performances of Florence Cook, the celebrated materializing medium. Miss Cook had been giving seances before Crookes got in touch with her, and after an attempted exposure, which was largely a failure, she approached the great scientist and offered her services for the purpose of investigation. The offer was accepted, and in 1874 a long series of sittings took place, either on Sir William's own premises or at the young lady's residence at Hackney. At these seances the figure of a "spirit" calling itself Katie King was materialized, and a large number of photographs were taken by Sir William and his assistant. The accounts left to us by Crookes are really of an extraordinary nature. Far from being scientific, they partake more of the nature of romance, the narrative glowing with admiration for the beauty of the "spirit" and of her marvellous medium. As for the tests they seem to me to have been scarcely adequate. It is true that Sir William declares that he assured himself that



Katie and Miss Cook were two distinct persons, and on one occasion, whilst bending over the entranced form of the medium he scrutinised the features of Katie, who was standing near by. But it never seems to have occurred to him that perhaps his efforts were useless, and that there were actually two persons, namely, the medium herself and a possible accomplice. The best tests were always at Hackney, where the medium resided with her parents, and an amusing but rarely quoted account of such a sitting is recorded by a friend of Mr. C. M. Davies (*Mystic London*, 1875, pp. 314 seq.). The Hackney seances, he says, took place on the parlour floor, where two rooms communicated by folding doors. The back room had a second room communicating with the passage and so to the other parts of the house. During the materialization the sitters were requested to sing and talk, and the buxom character of the ghost brought to his mind the recollection of the "brawny servant girl who used to sit sentry over the cupboard in the breakfast room." Generally speaking the sitting did not impress him and he speaks with a certain amount of amusement of the "effusive Professor," whose prejudice was scarcely becoming an F.R.S. What steps Crookes took to search the cabinet and to secure the second door we do not know, nor does he give us any idea of the furnishing of the apartment. In the case of the experiments conducted in Crookes' own house a confederate of Miss Cook would imply collusion with possibly one of Crookes' own servants, a hypothesis which is by no means far-fetched. Unfortunately, however, as in Home's case, sufficient evidence is lacking, but the tests as far as Crookes himself has recorded them certainly do not eliminate fraud, and there is nothing inherently improbable that fraud was actually practised. That Miss Cook was finally observed in conscious fraud or trance deception seems to be certain. On January 9, 1880, she gave a seance at the offices of the British National Association of Spiritualists. Some sitters, suspicious at what they had seen at two previous sittings, the sound of disrobing being distinctly audible, seized the "spirit" Marie, when it appeared, and discovered it was the medium half undressed. Again, in June, 1899, she was investigated in Warsaw by some Polish savants, and in their report it is stated that "they, as a result of reflection, have come to the conclusion that all the phenomena enumerated and observed by them can be reduced to miserable, badly-conducted comedy, and have nothing in common with mediumship." So much for Florence Cook. Of course, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the spiritualists will say that seeing her power waning she resorted to fraud and was found out. The other alternative is that the medium was impersonating the ghost, although being in a trance she did not know what she was doing. This certainly is quite possible, and there is no valid reason to suppose that such indeed is not the true explanation. Here, perhaps, it is as well to offer a word of warning to the clever sceptics, and especially to those gentlemen who go to seances armed with black paint or red ink wherewith "to smear the ghost." Supposing, for example, such an abominable trick succeeds, what does it prove? That the medium is consciously fraudulent? Not at all. It merely shows what ought to have been perfectly evident beforehand that the medium is unconsciously imper-

sonating a spirit. I do not mean to say that in every case in which a "spirit" has been seized and found to be the medium it is a case of trance deception, but I do say that such a possibility is a very real one, and must always be taken into account. If the clever "exposers" of psychic phenomena cannot distinguish the different sets of material with which they are dealing they had better make way for those who can. The very existence of trance deception is interesting enough by itself to justify the most careful and delicate investigation, and the breaking up of such phenomena by ignorant pseudo-investigators cannot be sufficiently condemned.

E. J. D.

## Socialism and Religion.

Mr. G. W. Foote's prophecy, made some years ago, "that the parsons will nobble the Socialist movement" receives further confirmation as time goes on. The latest religious stunt is no Socialism without Christ.

The practice of Idealism or Altruism, without a belief in the Incarnation, is, according to Father Bull of the Church Socialist League, doomed to utter failure and disaster. I unhesitatingly affirm that idealism or altruism, as we may like to term it, is a perfectly natural and rational outcome of circumstances, heredity and environment, and has its roots and origins in the three primary necessities of mankind, namely, food, clothing, and shelter. Altruism, I contend, means nothing more and nothing less than the blessed word of Robert Owen's utilitarianism in practice.

When the first man on this planet shared the first meal with another for some purely natural reason, then idealism began to obtain. As time went on, that interesting animal—man—the creature run to brain, formed into tribes in order to get more protection from wild beasts, more food, clothing, and greater security for the individual; and so idealism advanced a further stage along the path of evolution. Hence arose communism, a purely materialistic conception arising from the wants and necessities of the tribe. Early man in his tribal state starved only when Nature failed, owing to various causes, to materialise the elk, deer, wild-fowl, and the fish in the lakes, rivers, and streams. Hero worship was in all probability not unknown among our remote ancestors in those far off days. The strong, hefty man, fleet of foot, and quick in getting home with the business-end of his huge stone axe or spear in desperate fights with the mammoth, the cave bear, and the sabre-toothed tiger, must have speedily climbed to the position of head man of the tribe. Hence more idealism.

With his powers of observation quickened, and becoming more fully developed by fortuitous circumstances and congenial environment, the creature run to brain began to dimly speculate on the why, what, and wherefore concerning the rocks, mountains, rivers, and seas, the terrible thunder and lightning, the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the other strange and inexplicable phenomena that surrounded him. Here, then, was a long felt want that somebody had got to satisfy. The desire of primitive man to get satisfactory answers to his questions anent causes and effects brought into his life some entirely new factors. Hence arose



the rainmaker, the soothsayer, and the medicine man. Here also we get the rise of anthropomorphism synchronising with the birth of a false idealism. And so the individuals just mentioned, whose special function in life was to explain the unexplainable and impart a knowledge of the unknowable to our credulous forbears, gained a permanent place in the general scheme of things. Trade Unionism is idealism rampant, and it is out for exactly the same ideals which prompted the cave man to engage in his Homeric combats 50,000 years ago for food, clothing, and shelter. Let us clear our minds of the wretched drivel we sometimes get from religious labour leaders anent materialism. A rise of five shillings a week in a working man's wages means an increased purchasing power over the commodities of life. Consequently the standard of living is raised to a higher level. If increased wages mean a rush on family Bibles, or flagrant profiteering in abstruse theological works, I, for one, know nothing of the matter. Before leaving the subject of idealism I must refer to a little incident which happened to me in pre-war days. One fine morning in June found me asking for information at a gipsy camp ten miles from anywhere as to the possibilities of getting work on a farm in the district. The lady engaged in cooking the dinner replied "You won't get any work round here, master; there ain't none." Other conversation ensued relative to the weather and the inhuman conduct of farmers who object to gipsy encampments on their premises. I was rather taken aback when her begrimed, unlawful spouse emerged from a tent near at hand and bawled out in tones of frightfulness "Stow yer jaw yer crimson idiot and give the man some dinner." His rough rebuke was merely a reminder that she had forgotten the idealism of the tribe.

G. PAYN.

### The Fourth Age.

#### VII.

##### A SLICE OF BREAD.

Truth is reality, and reality is never either glad or sad, since it comprehends both these categories in itself, and therefore surpasses them both.—*Croce's "Logic," trans. by Douglas Ainsley.*

WHEN the throat and gums are sore through eating salt bully-beef and biscuits, and bread has only been seen on rare occasions, one admires Mark Antony's fortitude when he was beaten from Modena. Strange meat and drink passed his lips. I doubt whether the delicate ears of the she-cats of society could endure its recital. I mean the society that imagines that there is one code of morality for ladies and another for charwomen. We were near St. Leger. We arrived about mid-day on the spot from whence the Guards had advanced that morning. They had left a lot of equipment behind, and, in foraging about for a roof, I found a slice of bread in a field. God may have put it in that place, but I think a Guard threw it there—he may have been "fed up," or it was possible that he would never again need bread on this earth. I seized it with joy, and later on gave a portion away, and made two meals of the remainder. After all, the staff of life may be bread; the symbolic aspect of this question did not then interest me in the least. I laughed at the Battery saying that "we'd have ham and eggs for tea if we'd got any ham, but we've no eggs." Concealed bitterness could find no better expression.

In the valley there was a massing of troops, which reminded me of a review at Aldershot. They had been allowed to concentrate without any attention from the

enemy. Suddenly shells began to fall among this dense body. All was in a state of confusion. Men and horses fell. This state lasted for about fifteen minutes. Then the shells ceased, and our surroundings became comparatively calm. A chaffinch began to sing on a tree. Round our hole in the ground there were puttees stained with blood; a gunner was lying on his side, his left leg broken, and his bare foot had the appearance of marble. Divine irony that set a bird singing amidst such madness! Nature, through its songsters, was about as interested in human beings as it was in logs of wood.

And God, if he was anywhere, was worthy of an artillery driver's prayer: "O Lord, make me pure like Cadbury's cocoa." Short and sweet, like a donkey's gallop, as one described it. From this place we moved out of action for one night. There was a terrific stench in our new quarters—the place had been the scene of a fierce battle a few days previous. In the morning whilst washing, the wind was blowing in my face. A few yards away one of our officers was using wallflower perfume. I caught a few faint whiffs; rather unkind it is, that I shall be penalized to ever remember that scene by the memories that perfume will always recall.

Near to us in a trench lay one of the enemy dead. Part of the trench had fallen over and covered him up to his head. Through his steel helmet on the crown the blood had oozed; Barbusse's comparison of it to black currant jelly is a correct description. Now that the War is over, perhaps some of our journalists may be induced to call things by their proper names; that is, if they are not too busy describing commercial pugilism, and giving a list of our cultured plutocratic philanderers who visit the prize ring—to look on. The phrase "sanctity of human life" should choke not a few of the long-eared animals these days after one has seen the dead flung pell mell into a big hole, face downwards, arms and legs at all angles, equipment, all to be covered by the kindly earth, shut off forever from the fears and frets of life, and mute witnesses to the tender care of a loving father who must have been away on a long journey.

We moved away next morning, still with the smell of the dead in our nostrils. On the way to our place in action again, little parties were busy burying the fallen. Dead horses lay about, some disembowelled by shrapnel, others mercifully killed by a piece in the right place. Desolation, destruction, waste, what time our wives and families were getting thinner on war-bread—prophetic fruits of victory. Ironic ratification that man cannot live by bread alone; one bows the knee again in adoration to the scientists who bent their energies on extermination of the human race, in our homage not forgetting our university professional economists who can do sums with margarine and kippers.

WILLIAM REPTON.

## Correspondence.

### A CORRECTION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Your contributor "Mimmermus" quotes two passages from chap. xxx. of my *Outline of History* to justify his abuse of me as "Mr. Facing-Both-Ways." The first quotation is half a sentence. "Mimmermus" has cut off the late half and replaced that by a full stop which is all his own. The second quotation omits several sentences with no indication of the omission. These are not graceful proceedings on the part of a controversialist who wishes to impugn the good faith of the man he attacks.

H. G. WELLS.

### AN EXPLANATION.

SIR,—The house in which I was to re-open school is not yet available. It would have been so if the force of law had been used, but the owner is not framed to use such a method. To re-start at Southend is impossible for a time. I may make an attempt in North London. I wish to state that the school will open so soon as I can find a house in a healthy locality. I owe it to the many friends who have helped me to again state that nothing but death can alter my course.



Some unhappy situations have unavoidably arisen out of the recent attempt, and I therefore ask my Freethought friends to rely upon my keeping the promises I have made.

W. H. THRESH.

#### FREETHOUGHT AND MR. WELLS.

SIR,—I read with regret "Mimnermus's" two attacks on Mr. H. G. Wells. Personally, I have read the first thirteen parts of Mr. Wells' *Outline of History* with enjoyment and profit, and I cannot conceive how anyone can regard them otherwise than as furthering the cause of Freethought. There is not an atom of supernaturalism in them.

It is true that Mr. Wells uses the terms "God" and "religion" in a sense that some of us think scarcely legitimate. His "God" is merely human good-will personified, and his "religion" merely ethics writ large. It is a matter of terminology. If everybody, or the majority, meant no more than this by "God" and "religion," I should have no further quarrel with either. Unfortunately, they are apt to mean by them Jehovah and other-worldliness. But it is only fair to Mr. Wells to recognize that he does not mean this.

As to Christ, Mr. Wells treats him exactly as he treats Buddha. He attaches no supernatural halo to either. Cannot we Freethinkers be content to fight supernaturalism—the real enemy? That discarded, the question of the existence and place in history of a person called Jesus is one we can treat with detachment and tolerance.

ROBERT ARCH.

#### THOMAS PAINE.

SIR,—Your notice of T. C. Shaw's post card with a portrait of Thomas Paine on the back of it recalls to my memory a little story in connection with the original painted by George Romney, the famous portrait painter, which may interest many of your readers. The story is to be found in Allan Cunningham's *Lives of the Great British Painters*, and is a real gem of Christian tolerance. For those whose reading may not have taken them on this track it may be as well to state that Romney was contemporary with Sir Joshua Reynolds and Gainsborough, and that some rivalry existed between them. After the death of the great Sir Joshua, however, Romney had made up his mind to make the best of the few remaining years that were likely to be his to paint some works that would be worthy of remembrance when he was gone. Here Cunningham gives a quotation from the Rev. John Romney (son of the painter) to this effect: "In the midst of these noble resolutions he saw Thomas Paine whose name as the author of *The Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason* has been heard from far and near, and was persuaded by a believer from Manchester to paint his portrait." It is one of the finest heads, continues the reverend gentleman, ever produced by pencil, both for professional skill and physiognomical expression. The character is simple but vulgar, shrewd, but devoid of feeling. "It is much more, says Allan Cunningham, it expresses deep and almost scowling malignity. Did a painter wish to limn the looks of a fiend of the lowest order he might adopt those of the arch fiend of misrule. How diabolical is the face of Paine compared with that of the pious Cowper which the painter considered one of his best works. Here is learning with benevolence and genius." "In it dwells no relentless wrath against the human race." How is that as regards practising the Christian decree—Love your enemy? You will observe the first persecutor here has Rev. in front of his name, and is therefore a *bonafide* Christian teacher, and Allan Cunningham's credentials are also unimpeachable. Was it not Sir Walter Scott himself who named him "Honest Allan"? Was it not Professor Wilson who wrote: "He speaks boldly but reverently of genius and of men of genius, and is in a few words an admirable critic of art and an admirable biographer of artists"? Moreover, in 1831, when Cunningham visited his old home in Nithsdale, his friends instituted a dinner in his honour, at which Thomas Carlyle, then a young man, was present, and made his first public speech, in which he told the assembled company that—

He had come down from his retreat in the hills to meet Allan Cunningham at a time when scarcely any other circumstance would have induced him to move half a mile from home. He conceived that a tribute could not be paid to a

more deserving individual, nor did he ever know of a dinner being given which proceeded from a purer principle. When Allan left his native place, he continued, he was poor, unknown, and unbefriended, nobody knew what was in him, and he himself had only a slight consciousness of his own powers. He now comes back, his worth is known and appreciated, and all Britain is proud to number him among her poets.

Of course, Carlyle's remarks were made before Cunningham's book was published. Still, it proves unmistakably how some of the vilest slanderers can pass through life as moralists simply because of the apathy and indifference of the people who hardly ever read or think for themselves. Indeed, one has sadly to agree with Paine himself when he says: "It might be said that until men think for themselves the whole is prejudice, and not opinion, for that only is opinion which is the result of reason and reflection."

GEORGE ROBERTSON.

#### KINDNESS OR FORCE?

SIR,—Mr. G. O. Warren has stated that when wrong has been done, no other weapon should be used save argument tempered by kindness. He has ignored the fact pointed out in my last letter that argument is often silenced by a despotic censorship, and that the Irish and Indian people not only have failed to achieve freedom by argument, but have frequently been forbidden the freedom of speech. That the Irish might maintain their power by violence after achieving independence is beside the point. I have cited Russia as an instance where, by violence, the Communists have overthrown despotism; but Mr. Warren, being opposed to a communistic State, accepts the capitalistic propaganda statements regarding social affairs in that country. He asks me to cite a single case of any good being achieved by violence. Instances occur daily where resistance to aggression has had a salutary effect. How were the negro slaves of America freed? Was it by the slaves "being kind" to their masters and humbly kissing the rod; or was it by force of arms? Mr. Warren states that only one with a craven spirit flies to arms to fight against tyranny. Was Spartacus a coward? The "thousands of men who sacrificed their lives in fighting against religious and political tyranny, were they cowards, their sacrifice in vain? Spencer, one of the greatest philosophers, has said: "Resistance to aggression is not only justifiable but imperative; non-resistance hurts both altruism and egoism." When I advocate violence, I advocate not aggression, but resistance to aggression. To be kind to those who *continue* to wreck human life and happiness is immoral because it perpetuates evil; it encourages aggression. Is it not far better to suppress a tyrannical system of society by force than perpetuate it by being kind to those responsible for it; and to resist aggression on every possible occasion rather than be kind to the aggressor.

RONA MAYO.

#### 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.

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

###### OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 6.15, Mr. E. Burke, A Lecture.

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

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, A Lecture.

HYDE PARK: 11.30, Mr. Samuels; 3.15, Messrs. Ratcliffe, Baker, and Dales, "Reflections." Every Wednesday, 6.30, Messrs. Hyatt and Saphin.

##### COUNTRY.

###### INDOOR.

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

SWANSEA AND DISTRICT BRANCH N. S. S. (60 Alexandra Road): 6.30, *Re Lectures* for next season.

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