

# 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. 23

SUNDAY, JUNE 6, 1920

PRICE THREEPENCE

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## Views and Opinions.

### Religion and Rebellion.

There is something significant in the fact that the Christian religion traces all the miseries of mankind to a primal act of disobedience. It is a conception which discloses the character and function of religion. Man's duty is to obey, the pious man is the one who obeys the commands of God without question, the "good" citizen is the one who obeys the orders of his governors in an equally unquestioning spirit. The two conceptions work together with the mutual advantage that results from the adjustment of the two halves of a pair of scissors. And it explains why the powers that be have always favoured the maintenance of religion. It enabled them to denounce rebellion as a sin against God, and to rally to their aid the stupefying assistance of supernaturalism. Satan is the arch-rebel; hell is full of rebellious angels and disobedient men and women. Heaven is reserved for the timid, the tame, the obedient, the sheep-like. When the Christ of the Gospels divides the people into sheep and goats, it is the former that goes to heaven and the latter to everlasting darkness. The Church has not a rebel in its calendar, although it has many rogues and not a few fools. And by the emphasis placed on the sin of rebellion one may gauge the social value of religion. For in spite of the discomfort caused by the rebel he remains one of the most useful of our social assets, an expression of social activity from which all benefit, although most denounce it as a nuisance or worse.

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### The Moral of Martyrdom.

Various circumstances disguise the truth of what has been said. There is, for example, a spectacular aspect to martyrdom that is apt to blind many to consequences that are of very great significance. Men and women burning at the stake, or writhing on the rack, or spending years of their life in prison, are pictures that lend themselves to oratorical effects in both writing and speaking, and man being the dramatic animal he is, often gratifies his craving for dramatic effect at the expense of losing sight of important aspects of what is before him. And yet the socially important aspects of martyrdom are not with the man who is burning at the stake, but rather with those who are playing the part of onlookers. From one point of view the man who is killed suffers less

injury than the one who escapes that fate. Bruno was not a worse man because he was killed. He would have been a much less worthy one had he escaped his fate by recanting, and ended his life in a comfortable position of profit and power in the Church. Bruno was not injured because he was killed; the people who were really injured were those who were affected by his death to the point of veiling their opinions or avoiding his opinions for fear they should share his fate. The root objection to all punishment for opinion is not that a particular individual suffers, but that it inflicts an irreparable wrong upon society. The injury is done, not mainly to the man who is burned, but to the one who is left alive. That is why the Church made the death of the heretic a public holiday. It was not an assassination that was required, but an execution. The Church was aiming at the heretic, but it aimed also at preventing others following his example. And the injury it did was proportionate in the extent to which it achieved this second purpose.

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### Opinion and Social Growth.

The fact is that opinion, both in its origin and application, is social; the individual is only the condition of its manifestation. Behind every idea there is a lengthy ancestry; and just as there lies behind the miracle of the modern steam vessel a series of forms which carry us back to the primitive dug-out, so there lies behind every opinion a series of thought forms that are racial rather than individual property. It is society that supplies us with the organ of transmission, it is in virtue of a social medium that we have created that mass of traditions, customs, literature, institutions, etc., which makes civilization possible. Opinion is, consequently, a social asset. It is voiced through the individual, of necessity, but it is created and perpetuated by the continuity of social life. Therefore, to strike at opinion is more than to make an attack on the liberty and well-being of the individual. It is to attack the vigour and value of the collective life itself. That is what we mean when we say that the worst evil of persecution is not that certain people are killed, but that the greatest wrong remains with those who are alive. When Bruno died a man was killed for the offence of voicing certain teachings, but there were thousands of others who were terrified into dissimulation or mental apathy. Bruno died a man; but one consequence of his death was that thousands lived hypocrites. It was accidental that the Church, when it struck, killed a man; its real aim was at the progress of the race.

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### The Value of the Rebel.

It is the perception of this fact that has led the *Free-thinker* to stand for the right to express an opinion whether we agreed with it or not—all the more, perhaps, when we did not agree with it, for anyone can champion an opinion with which he is at one; the test comes when we stand up for an opinion with which we do not agree. That is also the reason why, when the question of the Conscientious Objector was before the country, we said that it did not matter whether these men were right or

wrong, assuming that they had a genuine objection to war, and were prepared to suffer rather than go against their convictions, they represented a social asset of the very highest value. The fact of their attitude rousing popular antagonism was no reason in our mind for remaining silent, or joining in a cheap and general denunciation. The antagonism aroused was only a proof of what we had said. Had there been a love of real freedom in the country, we believe that this view would have prevailed. Politicians who spent their time blackguarding these men would then have been looked upon as a disgrace to the country instead of an honour to it. We should have been saved one of the most discreditable chapters of our recent national history, for it would have meant that, in spite of our being at war, we had not failed to keep alive a form of intellectual life of enormous value to the community. Society may *exist* on a matter of averages; that is, it is perpetuated by the average character carrying out its duties in an average manner; but it *moves* through those who have the courage which does not belong to the average—that of standing against the crowd when occasion demands and expressing its opinions careless of consequences.

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#### Something Worse than Rebellion.

Perception of the truth of what has been said justifies the assertion that, right or wrong, the heretic or the rebel has a considerable social importance. His social value does not lie in the fact that he is in the right; mere revolt and mere heresy can never carry that assurance; but in his representing a spirit, a temper, that is of immense importance. It is bad when a people rebel without cause, but it is infinitely better that they should do so than that they should have the cause for rebellion but lack the courage of a kick. That man should have the courage to revolt against what he feels to be wrong is of infinitely greater value than that he should be right in his rebellion. Whether he is right or wrong, events will prove; but nothing can make good the misfortune of a community reduced to sheep-like acquiescence to whatever may be imposed upon them. Replying to those who shrieked about the "horrors" of the great French Revolution, and who preached the virtue of patriotic obedience to established authority, Carlyle said, with an eye on Ireland, that the lists of "executions" were very bad, but he asked:—

What if history somewhere on this planet were to hear of a Nation, the third soul of whom had not for thirty weeks of each year as many third-rate potatoes as would sustain him? History in that case, feels bound to consider that starvation is starvation; that starvation from age to age presupposes much; History ventures to assert that the French Sabsculotte of Ninety-three, who roused from long death sleep, could rush at once to the frontiers, and die fighting for an immortal Hope and Faith of Deliverance for him and his, was but the *second* miserablest of men.

And that same history, looking back through the ages, is bound to confess that it is to the great rebels, from Satan onward, that the world mainly owes whatever of greatness or happiness it has achieved.

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#### The Sheep and the Goats.

Fed as we are with mental food prepared by Church and State, the significance of the rebel is overlooked, and we permit our children to grow up with the pernicious teaching that the good citizen is the one who obeys all laws, who submits to authority, and who accedes to the demands of governments. And that is not true; far from being true, stated as it is usually stated, it is the most monstrous of lies. Whether in

religion, or science, or sociology, it is to the men who have had independence enough to set orders at defiance that we owe most. The crowd is always the crowd—always ready to seize hold of a number of parrot-like cries and repeat them, thus becoming the slaves of their own phrases. The cry of patriotism played a great part during the late War, but to the majority it was a mere cry; and how little they appreciated patriotism as such is seen by the fact that when the Irish or the Indians began to act in a manner unpleasant to this country, but in response to what they consider the call of patriotism, instead of dealing with them with ordinary decency, they become traitors, scoundrels, etc. The Christian, quite ready to appreciate the revolt of a member of another religion, sees nothing admirable in the revolt of a member of his own creed. It is left for the philosophy of Freethought, comprehensive here as elsewhere, to find a place for the rebel, and to recognize the part he plays in the evolution of the race. For rebellion roots itself ultimately in the spirit of mental independence, and whether a particular act of rebellion be justifiable or not, the temper of mind from which it results can only be suppressed at the cost of sacrificing the higher and more permanent interests of the race.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### "The Improvement of Preaching."

IT is frankly admitted by the *Church Times* that the average sermon to-day is woefully ineffective, and in its issue of May 21 a leading article is devoted to a discussion of the reasons of that acknowledged fact. Of course there are still popular preachers, but even their popularity, it is claimed, as a rule "illustrates rather than disproves the degeneracy of modern preaching." Some attract a crowd by saying "outrageous things," and others "because they take pains to supply what a large section of the public likes to receive." The latter never rise above platitudes which "they roll forth with theatrical vehemence." Of these our contemporary says:—

They find their themes in topics of the day rather than in truths of eternity. They repeat on Sunday what the newspapers have said from Monday to Saturday. They grow eloquent or denunciatory over the perils of Bolshevism, the latest labour crisis, the address of a leading man, or the undress of a leading lady. And they seem to feel no unfitness in prefacing such discourses with the Invocation. Of such sermons we need say no more than that they are a shameful degradation of the pulpit.

There are other types of faulty preaching which the *Church Times* regards as equally ineffective in their results, such as "that which concerns itself with details of ecclesiastical organization." However useful the Enabling Acts and Parochial Church Councils may be, there are congregations, we are told, which begin to wish they had never been invented, "simply because their vicars preach of nothing else." Controversial preaching is another type to be deprecated, although it is the one most commonly resorted to. There are preachers whose supreme delight consists in attacking those who differ from them. Forty years ago in America the orthodox churches resounded with virulent denunciation of that arch heretic, Henry Ward Beecher; and there was scarcely a clergyman in this country who did not hurl his anathemas at Mr. R. J. Campbell during his New Theology aberration in the City Temple. Church-goers often hear and are bored by sermons which assail in detail books which they have never read and heresies of which they have never heard.

Another type of faulty preaching the *Church Times* describes thus:—

More frequent still are the sermons intended to expound a spiritual theme, which merely repeat the most commonplace of ideas in the most hackneyed of language.....They roam at large over life, conduct, and theology. The preacher himself might be puzzled to name the subject of his discourse, or to show any connection betwixt his text and the twenty minutes of meandering that follow it. Congregations sit through such sermons with bored inattention. To trace any sequence of ideas is impossible. Each sentence is complete in itself—indeed, the expert hearer can often anticipate the over-worked phrase that will round it off—but the connection between them is of the slightest.

Our contemporary was led to expose the blunders made by preachers by its deep-seated sense of the immense need of effective preaching at the present time, and I have been moved to review the article by the strong conviction that Christian preaching, however effective or ineffective it may be, is an anachronism, and can be improved only by being discontinued. The writer of the article attributes much of the blame for poor preaching to the Theological Colleges, which is true enough, for preaching is an art that can be acquired by anyone in possession of the gift of oratory. In the Church, as in politics, the born orator will never lack an audience. Men like Dr. Jowett and Dr. Campbell Morgan always have crowded congregations; but their popularity is a convincing evidence that preaching is a human art that can be learned, and for efficiency in which certain natural qualifications must be possessed. But our contention is that the more effective preaching is, the greater is its power for evil. For example, the initial religious experience used to be known as conviction of sin, and a most painful experience it generally was. It is the first thing that a preacher, especially an evangelist or revivalist, endeavours to produce in his hearers. Until a man realizes that he is a sinner doomed to die and burn in hell, he is not likely to believe in and give his heart to the Saviour; and such a realization comes only as the result of lurid pictures drawn by the evangelist of the infinite sinfulness of sin and the tragic doom awaiting the impenitent sinner in the next world. But sin, in the religious sense, is merely a theological invention, just like the Saviour and his salvation. In short, the whole Christian Gospel is a congeries of lies. Even its so called moral code rests on a lying foundation. As Mr. Belfort Bax puts it, under supernaturalism the basis of morality is not "social, but individualistic on the one side and mystical on the other." Under Christianity, in particular, "so far as practical relations are concerned, the sanction and goal of conduct are alike frankly individualistic." Mr. Bax says:—

The individual is now conscious of himself as a self-centred personality. The ethical value of conduct is no longer gauged by a crude and half unconscious feeling for social utility, but by a more or less conscious theory of personal happiness, either in this life or one after death. The individual thus becomes the centre of ethical conduct. Of course all morality, however conceived, is concerned either directly or indirectly with social obligations. Such is the case, therefore, even in the stage of ethical consciousness in question. But here the moral relation of the individual to society becomes indirect, and is conceived of from a totally different point of view from that of the ethics of primitive kinship or tribal society (*Problems of Men, Mind, and Morals*, pp. 12, 13).

The all-important point in this connection, however, is that the supernaturalism, in which both the sanction and goal of morality are placed, exists solely in imagination. God's existence, omnipotence, love, self-sacrifice; his only begotten Son who, by a mighty

miracle, became flesh, suffered, died, and rose again for the world's redemption; and the Holy Ghost, whose temple man becomes the moment he puts his trust in the Son—these three in one exist alone to those who believe in them. To millions of human beings they do not exist at all, and even the most ardent believers often lose sight of them. They are in constant danger of forgetting that they have a loving Heavenly Father, a merciful Redeemer who laid down his life for them, and a Sanctifier and Comforter who never leaves them. The main business of the clergy is to help them to remember and solemnly to warn them against the sin of forgetting. As the *Church Times* tells us, "what the ordinary man and woman desire in a sermon is something that will make God more real to them," and they desire it because their prevailing tendency is to lose the sense of God's reality. As no one *knows* God, the belief in him would soon die out were it not for the Church and her ministers. In reality, the divines are fully aware of this. Do they not assure us that if the policy of secular education were adopted in State-supported schools, the children would grow up Atheists? The ministrations of the pulpit, the work carried on in the Sunday-schools, the special missions conducted every now and then by people specially qualified, all these things furnish an irrefutable argument for the non-existence of the supernatural.

The only rational conclusion to which we can come is that the Christian Gospel, in so far as its central message is concerned, is absolutely false, and that if it were really as well as nominally believed it would have a seriously deteriorating effect upon character. Consequently, what we desire is not the improvement of preaching, but its abrogation; or, in other words, the disappearance of the Christian Gospel.

J. T. LLOYD.

### The Fun of Finlay Dunne.

"Which would you rather be, famous or rich?" asked Mr. Hennessy.

"I'd like to be famous," said Mr. Dooley, "and have money enough to buy off all threatening biographers."

—Mr. Finlay Dunne, "Mr. Dooley Says."

SINCE the death of Mark Twain, the mantle of the great humourist has been worn by Mr. Finlay Dunne, the creator of Mr. Martin Dooley and his friend Hennessy. Why his books are not as popular as those by Jerome K. Jerome, and other favourites, is a mystery. That he is as funny as any of his rivals is evident. If his humour is not appreciated by the British reading public to the extent of those others, it may be that his books are issued in a somewhat expensive form. Mr. Dooley, his chief creation, is portrayed as a saloon-keeper in Chicago, and this may be a drawback to those who know not the great Porkopolis of the West, and the nicety of the American language as spoken in bar-rooms.

The proper study of mankind is man, and the only burlesque that causes the mouth of the general public to expand from ear to ear must concern the human animal. Yet people should read of Mr. Dooley and his friend Hennessy, for in their delightful dialogues life becomes a comedy.

An American journalist, who knows the book of the world and the world of books, Mr. Finlay Dunne has so many qualifications for popularity. He never bores his auditors, like the man who tells everybody how he and his brother Bill won the Great War whilst guarding the marmalade. And his fellow-journalists are so grateful that one of them has compared Mr. Dunne to Charles Dickens. It is very nice of him, but, except that

Dickens created two thousand characters, and Mr. Dunne has made two, there is little resemblance. Mr. Dooley, it must be admitted, is a character worth knowing, and Mr. Heinemann has earned our thanks for introducing him to the British public.

The gems of humour scattered in Mr. Dunne's writings scintillate. Some of the most delightful are to be found in the volume, *Mr. Dooley Says*. One of the most amusing conversations concerns "*Things Spiritual*," and discusses Psychical Research with a freedom that should make any self-respecting "bogey" revisit "the glimpses of the moon." The final shafts are the best:—

"My aunt seen a ghost once," said Mr. Hennessy.

"Everybody's aunt has seen a ghost," commented Mr. Dooley.

Mr. Dooley's reflections on a forgotten Peace Conference are as fresh as when they were written. The Conference, according to Mr. Dooley, considered the time-honoured question of how future wars should be conducted in the best interests of peace. Here is Mr. Dooley's version of a part of the proceedings:—

The Conference considered the possibility of abolishing the mushroom bullet, which, entering the interior of the enemy not much larger than a marble, soon opens its dainty petals and goes whirling through the allymentary canal like a pin-wheel. The Chinese dillygate said he regarded this here instrument of peace as highly painful. He had an aunt in Peking, an estimable lady, unmarried, two hundred and fifty years of age, who received one without warning during the gallant rescue of Peking from the foreign Legations a few years ago. He could speak with feeling on the subject, as the Chinese army did not use these projectiles, but were armed with peashooters.

There is more good-humoured satire in the following:—

Some excitement was created during the talk by the dillygate from the Cannibal Islands, who proposed that prisoners of war be eaten. The German dillygate thought this was carrying a special gift of one Power too far. It would give the Cannibal Islands a distinct advantage in case of war, as European soldiers were accustomed to horses. The English dillygate said that while much could be said against a practice which personally seemed to him rather unsportsmanlike, still he felt he must reserve the right of the cannibal allies of Britannia to go as far as they liked.

Another amusing passage occurs in a conversation on *The Call of the Wild*:—

"Well," said Mr. Hennessy, "a fellow that writes books for children ought to write the truth."

"The little preciouss wouldn't read them," said Mr. Dooley. "Anyhow, the truth is a tough boss in literature. He don't even pay board-wages, and if you go to work for him, ye want to have a job on the side."

In his latest collection of conversations, *Mr. Dooley on Making a Will*, the genial saloon-keeper has not lost his gift of sarcasm. The discourse on golf is excellent:—

With the exception maybe of the theory of infant damnation, Scotland has given nothing more cheerful to the world than the game of golf.

He is just as sarcastic with regard to cards:—

A man's idea in a card game is war—cruel, devastating, and pitiless. A lady's idea of it is a combination of larceny, embezzlement, and burglary. In auction-bridge the fair sex has every opportunity to show the qualities that endeared them as card-players to the sex that is stronger but is cursed with the fear of the handcuffs.

Whatever subject he treats, Mr. Dooley's satire is as pungent and as mordant as ever. Speaking of religion, he says: "Sprinkle a little politics into it and dynamite is bran-flour compared to it." Indeed, there is often a

serious thought lurking behind the wit, as when Mr. Dooley declares that scientists usually write "a language that only a drug-clerk can understand." How good is the joke concerning the Descent of Man: "I never could understand why, if mankind come down from the monkey, we weren't genial."

To pick out passages at random is not doing justice to a delightful humourist. Not only does a jest's prosperity lie in the ear of him who hears it, but it has its life in an atmosphere of its own—a soil of its own; and there are few plants so tender in transplanting. As *Punch* says: "For every Dooley book we are all Dooley thankful."

MIMNERMUS.

## Got 'Em Again!

SMALLPOX has broken out in Glasgow, and Bigpox has broken out in Edinburgh. The latter seems to be a suitable name for the spiritist trouble that has at length infected even parts of Scotland. Scotsmen used to pride themselves on their freedom from superstition, but that pride is likely to have a fall—unless the spook craze that has been receiving such a vogue even in modern Athens can be explained away by some Scottish metaphysician as being confined to foreign or cosmopolitan immigrants.

No ordinary person is surprised when he is informed that a dipsomaniac has recurring visions of blue devils. It is a normal, usual, and expected pathological phenomenon. But when that staid Presbyterian journal, the *Scotsman*, succumbs and prints on May 15 two-thirds of a column of eerie experiences of Edinburgh residents, ascribed to the influential presence of a string of beads said to have been taken from an ancient tomb in Egypt and sent—whether with *malice prepense* on the part of the sender we are not told—from Cairo to Edinburgh, we feel inclined to pinch ourselves to see whether we are still on this side. When the dipsomaniac shakes a trembling fist at the vicious imps that torment him, the spectators merely observe: "Ah, poor chap, he's got 'em again." But the *Scotsman* has acquired such a reputation for sobriety that this orgy over the beads is out of all keeping with its past, and is not to be passed over as by any means a normal occurrence.

These beads formed a necklace that might have been profitably traded in Nigeria; but the lady who came to possess them decided after returning from France, where she had been during the War, that they were practically valueless. This is to be noted in the course of the narrative, namely, that during the War, this string of beads had lain quiescent in the owner's jewel-box. But hey presto! when the owner consigned it to the W.P.B., it began to waken up and protest! Let us take up the *Scotsman's* tale:—

That night she retired to her room about 10.30, and on placing her hand on a chair when bending down to get her slippers, which were placed beside the waste-paper basket, she was startled by the distinct feeling of a hand suddenly clutching her wrist.

One would certainly think so, even without the "distinct" or the "suddenly"! It takes us back to one of H. G. Wells' earlier works, *The Invisible Man*! And observe how these beads have so quickly found a champion of their aristocratic claims. The jewel-box formed a congenial place of repose, but the waste-paper basket! The lady didn't, however, restore the beads to the jewel-box. No, she temerarily—and maybe Scots-like—left them in the W.P.B., and sat herself down to read at her reading-table. Sounds became louder and louder from the waste-paper basket—we are not informed

whether there were thuds or cries. It seems, however, as if the beads had been getting a hustle on, and as, at first, the lady got the idea that a mouse was the bother, we may assume that there was considerable rustling, particularly if the W.P.B. contained an old copy of the *Scotsman*. The sounds persisting, the lady ultimately locked up the W.P.B. and beads in a box-room during the night.

At this stage we may appropriately inquire: Was the conduct of this lady after this experience what one would naturally expect? The answer seems to be in the negative. The normal thing for a lady to do who is alone in her room at night, and whose wrist is gripped by an invisible hand, is to scream and rush from the room, or to faint right away. We must be pardoned entertaining grave doubts as to the normality of this Scots lassie—or laddie.

You may omit thuds, and cries, and clanking, but no spiritistic show is now complete without tapping. The lady's brother next night elected to sleep beside the beads:—

About twelve o'clock his attention was suddenly arrested by a movement as if a hand had made a sudden grasp at the beads lying on the pillow. He remained silent and very wideawake. Tapping sounds were heard on the walls near the ceiling—sometimes single knocks and sometimes two or three in quick succession.....The necklace seemed from time to time to be moved somehow on the pillow by some unseen agency. Being unable to sleep and getting rather wearied he eventually took the beads and threw them over the staircase; and thereafter he was able to sleep soundly until the morning.

Amazing! And what a man and a brother have we here, by the way! In the words of Mr. Peter Magnus, "Sir, in the circumstances, you carry yourself with considerable composure, sir!" If my favourite pipe danced out of my pipe-rack, and cakewalked over to the window and unfastened the snily, I should certainly not be thinking of sleep; I should not be "wearied" though I had been working on a stretch for twenty-four hours before! Yet this gentleman seriously avers that after all this—the grasp at the beads, the continuous tapping, the necklace moving on the pillow—he calmly gets up, lifts the beads, and throws them over the staircase! Mark Twain could only do justice in a case like this, and he is not (unhappily) available. One wishes he were. Some of us would give a great deal to be able to believe that the beloved American were still alive! Give us the evidence and we will believe all right.

Surely this is about the most solemn farce that was ever played on a credulous public. Wrist-gripping and leg-pulling go well together. This composed and leisurely brother of the lady who owned the beads takes plenty of time before "pursuing his investigations." We rather fear the *Scotsman* meant "observations." But let it pass—'twill serve. "A night or two later" this gentleman has the beads on his bed again. Their activity has increased during his unaccountable indifference! They have been bringing up reinforcements while he slept. The bed this time is actively moved from side to side. Then the beads make a rustling movement. He takes them in his right hand and feels them "at one time" moving. But he never says a word to nobody, not he; he never even dreams of getting a chum to share his room to be a fellow-witness to these marvellous happenings! "On the following night he slept soundly with the necklace in the room till 4 a.m., when he was awakened by the bed shaking." Also there was a sound near the window like sobbing. "On the following two nights he was wakened by tapping and similar manifestations."

It is only at this late stage that this very wise and observant brother thinks of consulting one or two friends

But they do not appear to have been persuaded to take any direct share in the "investigations." The net result of this consultation was that the beads were handed over to a lady, who reported nothing unusual. But repress your reassurance, friends and readers!—

Still there's more to follow!

Another lady receives the necklace, "who placed it on a chair at her bedside. In the room there was also sleeping her little girl." She is awakened by tapping on the chair. So is the little girl, "who became so afraid that she ran out of the room." The child is mother of the woman! "The beads were thrown towards the bottom of the bed on the eiderdown quilt"; but their wrath was not to be appeased by a soft resting-place; "and the lady distinctly felt a persistent and repeated movement where they lay, as if someone were groping for them."

Two young men successively have the necklace in their bedroom overnight, and each of them wakens up in the night suffering from extreme palpitation, in a cold sweat, and with a general feeling of fear.

It may be writ ironical; but the *Scotsman* says that the investigation of the mystery of the beads is continuing (under a convenient anonymity), and a careful record is being made with a view to its future elucidation (by spooks?). Unfortunately for the whole story, the incredibly foolish conduct of the various parties said to have been concerned has destroyed the possibility of public proof. We ask it with bated breath, but we ask it anxiously and with deep concern—Can it be that the *Scotsman* has been a secret imbiber at a spiritual fount that we wot not of?

IGNOTUS.

## The Jesus Myth.

The problem of the historicity of the "Gospel Jesus" is not one which resolves itself into the question as to whether an actual Jesus did exist at the beginning of the Christian Era. It is a problem which stands very largely on its own basis; that is, those who assert the historic reality of the "Gospel Jesus" must prove that it was possible for such a person as the Jesus (if we may speak of one personality) described in the Gospels to have lived.

While, on the other hand the critic has the right to point out that the chief characteristics of the "Gospel Jesus" are mythical, just as much as they are admitted to be when met with under the names of Krishna, Osiris, or Adonis, etc.

All the evidence that could possibly be brought together in support of the thesis that someone, named Jesus, actually lived at the time ascribed to the "Gospel Jesus," would be of no use to historic Christianity while the possibility of the existence of the "Gospel Jesus" is only acceptable on the grounds of sheer faith.

If it cannot be rationally shown by the Christians that the Jesus described in the Gospels is conceivable as an historic reality, then *that* Jesus is myth to all except those who "will to believe" against all critical analysis of possible personality. To seek a nucleus of biographical detail, by rejecting this and accepting that, according to a preconception of what Jesus ought to have been, is to do away with the "Gospel Jesus," of whom J. M. Robertson says: "He is a heterogeneous product of a hundred mutually frustrative hands, a medley of voices that never was and could not be in one personality. Through his supernatural mask there speak the warring sects

and ideals of three centuries: wisdom and delusion, lenity and bitterness, ventriloquist in turns in his name." ("A Short History of Christianity," p. 47.)

In the New Testament Gospels we have ample justification of Mr. Robertson's statement. The Gospels are full of myths, and have the air of untrustworthy narratives; while they are totally devoid of anything in the nature of a consistent portraiture of an ideal Jesus. The appearance of the star and the angels at the birth of Jesus; the miracles, devoid of evidence in their support; the scene of transfiguration; and the walking of the streets on the part of men who have been in their graves, but have got up to celebrate the death of Jesus, are myths which detract from the value of the Gospels as historical documents. In fact the Gospels are so full of supernaturalism, that they must be considered worthless from a biographical standpoint. And the Jesus of the New Testament Gospels must be looked upon as a mythical character of a composite nature.

Let us see whether there existed in the Roman Empire, either originally or brought in from elsewhere, a sufficient body of ideas which would make possible the formation of a heterogeneous mythical Jesus, such as we have in the New Testament Gospels. We shall find that Greeks, Romans, Hindus, Parsees, Buddhists, Jews, Babylonians, and Egyptians had many a religious idea in common with the early Christians, especially with regard to their gods. This may not make it possible to trace the mythical Jesus to the exact sources of his origin, but it will show how possible it was, in the days of the Empire, to exalt a mythical being to a pinnacle of religious veneration. What could be accomplished by pagans, in the way of myth-making, was possible to the credulous Christians.

To quote J. B. Hannay's "Symbolism in Relation to Religion": "The Gospels are not, in any sense, history, like the Old Testament."

"The New Testament . . . has no relation to real life nor to true history; it is, from beginning to end, a skeleton created to form the frame of a dogma, written to establish a reformed religion, and it creates only such facts as are wanted" (p. 315).

The idea that it was possible for the son of God to be born among men was quite familiar among non-Christian people. Hercules, Romulus, Alexander, Plato, and Pythagoras were all supposed by legend to have had a divine father (Strauss). There was nothing extraordinary in the mythic appearance of Jesus as a divine son. Christianity was too late in the field to justly claim priority on that score.

Ultimately the birthday of Jesus came to be fixed at the Winter Solstice, the very time when the birthday of many sun-gods was celebrated. And, doubtless, Jesus figured, at some time or other, as a sun-god in the mystery-cults of the early Christians, many of whom were no doubt acquainted with the cults of Mithra, Osiris, and D  m  ter, as celebrated by the pagans.

Mother-goddesses, frequently conceived of as virgins, such as Isis, Rhea, D  m  ter, Persephon  , etc., with their supernaturally born sons, were well known to the pagans.

In the Eleusinian mysteries, as J. M. Robertson says, Dionysus, sometimes called Iacchos, son of Zeus and the virgin Goddess Persephon  , was "carried in effigy as a new-born babe in a manger-basket on the eve of the winter solstice" ("Short History of Christianity," pp. 67-68). This is sup-

ported by a Christian writer who says, when speaking of the Eleusinian mysteries, "the ministers and the initiated bear from Athens to Eleusis the statue of Iacchos, who is represented as a child at the breast." ("History of Christianity," by Bouzique, p. 64, Vol. 1.)

Here, as I need hardly remark, we have the prototype of the Roman Catholic representations of the Virgin Mary and the child Jesus in her arms.

In the mythology of Greece the god Hermes, called by the Romans, Mercurius, is born in a cave, and a few hours after his birth he escapes from his cradle and drives away a number of oxen belonging to Apollo. Jesus also was born in a cave, if we are to believe the legend of an apocryphal book, "The Infancy of Jesus Christ." At the time Joseph and Mary entered the cave, the sun was about to go down. But when Jesus was born it was after sunset; yet, in spite of this, the cave "was all filled with lights, greater than the light of lamps and candles, and greater than the light of the sun itself." Very soon after this an old woman had only to lay her hands upon the infant Jesus to be cured of an infirmity. Then came some shepherds, who began to praise God, and while they were doing so the voices of angels joined in the singing.

This brings to mind one of the Eleusinian mysteries in which, to quote a Christian writer, "a low noise is heard; the temple shakes, the earth groans; the thunder and lightning show phantoms and spectres wandering in the darkness; howlings and groanings terrify and freeze. They (the initiated) advance into a cave by the light of a feeble lamp; a picture of the infernal regions unrolls before their eyes; then they re-enter into the sacred enclosure; the doors of the Sanctuary open, the statue of Ceres appears covered with silver and gold, and clad in magnificent vestments. Reflections of light, artistically managed, make the statue shine with divine brilliancy." (Bouzique, "History of Christianity," p. 65, Vol. 1.)

In a mystery like the one concerning which I have just quoted, the ministers and people took part in a dramatic representation of the birth, life, death and resurrection of sun-gods, wine-gods, and corn-gods; might it not have been that the legend of the birth of Jesus, in a cave, had its origin in a mystery-play, similar to those in the mysteries of Hellenism? Or, perhaps, the Christians turned some such legend into actual drama, and thus continued a religious ceremony which had long been held sacred by the pagans.

In the Gospels we find there are many Jewish ideas, and consequently the life of Jesus has many points of contact with Old Testament incidents. As Jesus was taken into Egypt so that he might escape those who sought his life, in a massacre of children, so Moses had been hidden that he might escape a similar event. And Jesus had to remain in Egypt until the death of Herod, just as legend had made Moses, late in life, escape to Midian and remain there until the death of Pharaoh, whose anger was against him. In Exodus 4, 19, we read: "The Lord said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life." So, also, in Matthew 2, 19-20, an angel appears to Joseph in a dream and says: "Arise and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life."

Fortunately for the memory of Herod, the massacre of the children is a myth. Prof. J. E. Carpenter says: "History has, in truth, crimes enough to lay at Herod's door; but of the slaughter of the Innocents it says not one word. In this, at least, his memory is clear." (First Three Gospels, p. 98.)

According to legend, the birth of Gotama Buddha was a time of signs and wonders. He was born miraculously, and the songs of angels were heard; while a great light was seen. Speech was given to the dumb, hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind, and the lame were made to walk. And along with this, the fires of hell were put out; but the earth took on newness of life. It was refreshed by cooling springs, gentle breezes, and the most exquisite of flowers, which gave forth their beautiful perfumes and made the earth into a paradise. But all this, which is related in connection with the birth of Buddha, is rejected by Christians as mythical. Why, then, should we not reject the similar stories told of the birth of Jesus? Why should we believe that he was born miraculously; that at his birth a bright star appeared and outshone all other stars; that angels sang their praises to God; and that peace and goodwill came to all men? There is no more evidence for the miraculous birth of Jesus than there is for that of Buddha.

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.

(To be concluded.)

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## The Fourth Age.

### VIII.

#### THE DOWN GOING.

WE had advanced with difficulty to a new position. It was reported that the enemy on our right had surrounded the village of Ecoust, so that we had to retire to a place called Mory. I did not like the name, and at this place we received considerable damage. Two of our guns were put out of action, five of our gunners were badly wounded, and a battery near to us had many killed. Engraved on my mind as long as memory lasts is the picture of men falling—killed by shrapnel. Like corn before the sickle they fell; and whether you like it or not, you wonder if it is your turn next. I remember reading in Schopenhauer that the privilege of drawing breath was too high a price to pay for life—in some grades of society. Birth is pain, growth and experience are pain, death in this form is pain; folly on folly, that the mother of any man should go to the edge of the grave—for an end to their children like this. It is not even fighting. Many readers will remember the famous scene in Shakespeare's play where Coriolanus' meets Aufidius, and they fight—foot to foot. That were indeed a fight. Kingship in modern days would be creditable if a few kings had been "over the top." Witness modern cunning and weep.

Well-paid scientists devise weapons, invent explosives, and the human factor is obtained as cheaply as possible to work these instruments of war. The scientist is honoured—his coat of arms should be a hangman's rope; but we must not complain if workmen can *only* see high wages in return for the manufacture of munitions. It is only in Christian countries that the muck of Materialism is seen at its best; given another five hundred years of intensified Materialism of this kind, if man be not exterminated, he may see that his possessions possess him. He cannot look to archbishops and bishops for guidance to the recognition of this fact. A man who makes a fortune out of rags and bones, or cat-meat, is on a higher plane than ecclesiastics whose prayers cannot bring a spot of rain, or could not prevent a war. Take away their salaries, and we should find that the impregnable rock of holy Scripture would be as concrete as a celluloid cat in hell.

From Mory we departed to Bapaume, Peronne, and finally in action again at Heudicourt. Walking near the road, lost in thoughts of home and to the narrowed view of life that falls to one who had begun to despair of the end, I had a shock. In the grass lay one of our dead; his left hand pointed over his shoulder. It was a most beautiful hand, the colour of grey marble—it was a hand that Van Dyck painted; it was the hand of an artist. It may at one time have clasped the hand of a child, or smoothed the hair of a loved one from a troubled brow—it never drew an archbishop's salary.

We pulled into an open field—six guns in a line, and then searched for shelter. The best that four of us could find was a shallow trench lately used by the enemy as a latrine. The ground was hard, we were tired, and there was no time to dig. Four hours duty for myself, commencing from ten o'clock, and I lay down exhausted in this place, and, during the usual morning barrage, I had a dream, lovely beyond description. The mind is a tyrant that will not be denied. Hopes, wishes, desires, when wakefulness comes off guard, crowd to express themselves. I slept through the barrage and woke at last. That day I developed dysentery; the water we drank even smelled and tasted in the tea. It was that or nothing. At this point I think I began to lose touch with my real self. It would not be so bad to die after all—a long sleep and forgetting and an end to terror, an end to being bitten by lice, a transport from the place like a vast lunatic asylum. Everywhere destruction and desolation; barrages making the sky appear as though there was a thunderstorm, high velocity shells coming over that seemed to burst as soon as the report of the gun was heard. I was on my last reserve of nerve, of patience, of endurance. A miserable-looking dog entered the rough shed where we had our telephone; I made friends with it; I envied its ignorance. Some day, I mused, you lay on a rug in front of a fire, you had good food to eat and clean water to drink. Perhaps you had a kind master—now, neither you nor I have either. If reincarnation be true as a theory, will *your* spirit ascend to inhabit the form of a man? Progression! I doubt it. That night the dog slept next to me; I was grateful for the warmth from its body. A "come down" in the world you may say; will anyone tell me why as a result from that down-going that I feel a peculiar joy when I read the following in Henry de Man's book, entitled *The Re-Making of a Mind?*—"I can still feel modest when I look up to a star-lit sky, or for that matter, when I lie down on the grass and stare at the flowers and insects—but I find it very hard to bow my head to any living human beings or to any of their works. *That kind of modesty has been shelled out of me.*"

When I came home I found it very difficult to restrain my desire to kick all the flimsy tea-tables sky high in a popular London tea-shop. The "Jazz" music may have incited me; or it may have been a rebellion, or reaction against the trappings of civilization, and the consequences would have been prison. But prison—a clean cell, no lice, somewhere to sleep with a real roof over my head, and no danger. The extreme right becomes the extreme left, and, *presto*, your cell is the very height of luxury, and prison is a palace. Thus do tyrannical devils overreach themselves. If the sub-conscious thoughts of the returned soldier could be put on a plate my lady over there toying with a finger of brown toast would be shocked to see them, and think that she was part of a world where men were cheaper than bread. A speculation; how many centuries must elapse before mankind must feel before it begins to think?

WILLIAM REPTON.

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MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S.—Will members of the Manchester Branch please note that Mrs. Wilcocks has arranged to hold "An American Tea" on Saturday, June 5, from 3 o'clock, at 8 Light Oaks Road, Pendleton. It is hoped that a large number of members and friends will avail themselves of the opportunity of spending a pleasant afternoon's outing and also help the Branch to raise funds for a vigorous campaign through the lecture season. Gifts from those unable to attend will be appreciated. Take cars from Deansgate for Eccles, Peel Green, Monton Worsley *via* Eccles Old Road, alight at Stott Lane for Lancaster Road.—A. C. ROSETTI.

## Acid Drops.

Father Bernard Vaughan is protesting against the people being duped by Spiritualists. We fail to see more in the protest than that of a rival trader who wishes to monopolize the market. Is there anything more absurd in the Spiritualist's claim to communicate with the dead, or more fraudulent, than in the claims of Father Vaughan's own Church to help the spirits of the dead so long as people will pay for Masses? Is the fortune-telling of the professional medium more fraudulent than the forecasting of the future of the priest? Is the levitation of tables more absurd than the miracles of the Catholic Church? Really, Father Vaughan is too discriminatory. The man who can believe in Father Vaughan's Church should be able to swallow anything.

In the Home Rule debate in the House of Commons, a suggestion was made that the proposed senate should include Bishops and Moderators. Sir Edward Carson treated the suggestion with scorn, and asked pointedly: "Could anything be worse than introducing the clergy into politics, especially in Ireland?" Sir Edward ought to know, for he has been fighting the gentlemen in petticoats for many years, and not always with success.

Writing of Joan of Arc's sanctification, the *Catholic Society Circular* says that "Materialism and frustrated ambition of 1431 combined in making a martyr." Here is a fine specimen of Catholic truth! Joan of Arc was burnt to death for heresy and sorcery, which are no more associated with Materialism than truth and honour with Roman Catholic propaganda.

Two years' imprisonment has been awarded to a Christian and a Mohanmedan in Jerusalem on account of making inflammatory speeches. Honours are equal so far as religion is concerned. Perhaps the authorities will appreciate the beautifully peaceful character of religious belief. They usually do—when they are away from home. Then some of them return home, and at missionary meetings orate as to the need for more religion. And they seldom seem aware of what asses they are making of themselves.

It has been left for an archbishop to offer a justification of the Amritsar massacre—which, had it occurred in territory occupied by Germans during the War, would have been utilized by our Propaganist Bureau as an example of enemy savagery. Our own commission of enquiry reports that about 1,000 men, women, and children, unarmed, were shot down by the soldiers, and under circumstances which admitted of little or no excuse, save the fear that seems inseparable from the minds of most military commanders. Now, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Simla justifies the massacre by saying that only the promptitude of the military saved the Europeans in India. So did the Germans argue that only their conduct in Belgium saved the troops from attack by the natives. It evidently depends upon the side of the hedge from which one contemplates these things, and we suppose that the Archbishop of Simla, like the clergy everywhere must earn his salt. And there was never yet a brutality that lacked a religious apologist.

The following entry in a diary kept by Sir Ian Hamilton and cited in his *Gallipoli Diary* (pp. 18-19) contains a world of meaning to those who read it aright: "17th of March, 1915.....Thought of my mother.....of her refusal as she lay dying—gasping in mortal pain—her refusal to touch an opiate because her minister, Norman Macleod, had told her she so might dim the clearness of her spiritual insight—of her thoughts ascending heavenwards." The picture of a preacher keeping a woman stretched on the rack for fear she should weaken her chance of heaven by seeking relief at the hands of science is a commentary on the alleged comforts of religious belief. And it is a fair picture of the comparative value and methods of religion and science. The one brings knowledge and ultimate happiness, the other stereotypes pain and ultimate misery.

The Treasurer of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts acknowledges the receipt of a cheque for £5,000. With a similar cheque for use at home, we promise to make the Church more dependent than ever upon the export trade. New markets are very essential to the Gospel business; the old ones are getting rapidly played out.

Bishop Welldon is quite certain that "the Church cannot accept her law of marriage from the State." The Bishop is talking rubbish. The Church does take its law of marriage from the State, since it is only the State that gives it any legal standing whatever. It is for the State to say what marriage is legal or illegal, and the Church is bound to accept. All that the Church can do is to try to get the State to accept its views of what marriage should be, and it is precisely that spirit against which the modern mind is in revolt. For sensible people are beginning to see that the marriage law is to be settled by present-day men and women, not by the ghosts of dead fanatics or by the teachings of a pack of ascetics whose asceticism was for the most part the expression of an overwhelming obscenity.

The National Bible Society of Scotland laments that it has circulated 644,918 copies of the Bible less this last year than in previous periods. So it calls on all Scotsmen to subscribe more liberally in order to restore the circulation. We should like to know what kind of a benefit the circulation of the Bible conferred upon the people that they are asked to feel distressed at the thought of less copies being distributed. The appeal that lies before us speaks of the "glorious days" of the War period, and laments that "the drag of the world is on us again." Perhaps the cause of this special lament is that the glorious days led many to examine the claims of the Bible and Christianity, and the outcome is not very pleasing—to the National Bible Society.

A. N. Cooper, the walking parson, writes of his tramp through Spain: "One of the villages I passed through bore the terrifying name of Torquemada, and one of the pictures in this year's exhibition is that of a young woman about to be put on the rack under the eyes of Torquemada himself. This much must be said for the Spanish Inquisition, that it was successful, and so stamped out heresy that practically there is none." That may have been true of Spain for a time, but there is a great deal of heresy at present in all parts of Spain. And Mr. Cooper, to have made his picture complete, should have pointed out that Spain owed its ruin to the triumph of Christianity. Mr. Cohen has devoted a chapter on this topic in his *Creed and Character*, and the decline of Spain from being the most civilized country in Europe, so long as it was under non-Christian influences, to the most backward one when it came under Christian control, is one of the clearest and most damning indictments of Christianity that exists.

There has been a shortage of rain in Capetown, and the Mayor has been silly enough to ask the Churches to pray for it. Many have done so, but at least one parson, the Rev. R. Balmforth, Unitarian, has declined. He said in a recent sermon:—

The Mayor's request had made him feel that we still lived in the age of the incantations of rainmakers, and believed in a God who held a mighty reservoir of water above the skies, which He withheld when he pleased or allowed to flow in superabundance when He was graciously pleased to change His mind. If this were so, what would be the use of the study of irrigation system, reservoirs, and scientific systems of supplies?

That is quite sensible, but the next thing we should like Mr. Balmforth to explain is what on earth, or in heaven, he thinks God does or for what purpose he thinks God exists. God ought to be doing something, and generally the weather has been left to him. But, if even that is taken away, then we fail to see what is the use of him at all. The logical outcome of Mr. Balmforth's position is Atheism, and we hope to see him get there soon. All the same, the deliverance marks a great change in public opinion in Capetown.



**SPECIAL.**

Until the end of June, and in order to bring the "Freethinker" into contact with a larger number of people, we are prepared to send this paper for thirteen weeks, post free, for 2s. 9d., on receiving names and addresses from any of our present subscribers. Subscribers are not limited to sending one address; they may send as many as they please. This offer applies only to those who are already subscribers, and is part of a general advertising scheme, having for its object the creation of a larger circulation and a more extended sphere of service. New readers who receive the paper for thirteen weeks are not likely to drop it afterwards.

**To Correspondents.**

- R. J. CLERK.—Thanks for getting two new subscribers. Every little helps. If a thousand of our readers did likewise, we should sleep easier. The missionary mind is, to say the least of it, peculiar. That you have doubtless noted.
- E. ANDERSON.—It is just Christian humbug. In 1776, when George Washington sent to the Senate the treaty with Tripoli, the opening sentence ran as follows: "As the Government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion," etc. Like other Governments where Christians are in a majority, the laws have been made to favour Christianity; but it is quite evident that the founders of the Republic were in no doubt as to the desirability of keeping religion, and particularly Christianity, outside the sphere of government.
- In reply to a recent note in this column, Mr. G. Grove writes to point out that there is an Esperanto Circle held at South Place Institute weekly. An inquiry of the Secretary would bring full particulars.
- D. MACCONNELL.—Thanks for information, but we do not know what we can do in the matter.
- A. PHILLIPS (Natal).—Thanks for good wishes. Common sense does spread, even though slowly. The number of our South African readers seem on the increase, but there is room for more.
- "FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—T. Collier, 1s.; H. Bramsden, 5s.; E. Long, 5s.; N. Moore, £1.
- A. G. BARKER.—Next week.
- J. T. L.—Thanks for new subscriber. The firm you name has had the *Freethinker* supplied it for some time. Glad they are giving it so good a show.
- W. J.—The paper was sent to the address given, but we cannot send indefinitely. Your query as to guarantee, you should see on reflection, contains an implied insult, and is best left unanswered.
- J. BREESE.—We are glad to see the correspondence going on in the Birmingham papers concerning the day of rest. The more the impudent claims of the Churches are discussed, the nearer we shall be to setting the matter right. The Bishop of Birmingham is politic in saying that he has no objection to people playing games on Sunday provided they go to church first. The proviso shows the purely trade nature of the opposition. And who is the Bishop that he should say how people are to spend their day of rest? The impertinence of the attitude is colossal.
- W. H. HEPWORTH (Johannesburg).—Thanks. There is at present no prospect of Mr. Cohen visiting S. Africa. He has had several invitations, but must decline for some months at least.
- J. GARRETT.—There is a Theistic oath connected with a Freemason's initiation. This is avoided with the Continental orders.
- N. MOORE.—Advertising slips sent. Thanks for promise to distribute them.
- The Secular Society, Limited, office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.*
- The National Secular Society's office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.*
- When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, giving as long notice as possible*
- Lecture Notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.*

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

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

*Letters for the Editor of the "Freethinker" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.*

*Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.*

*The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 15s.; half year, 7s. 6d.; three months, 3s. 9d.*

**Sugar Plums.**

We are glad to learn that some of our friends are raising the question of Secular Education in the various organizations to which they belong. This is a policy that might profitably be adopted on a very large scale, and we suggest that resolutions on the following general plan should be adopted:—

That bearing in mind the trend of the modern State in the direction of separating the Secular from the religious functions, bearing in mind also the manifest injustice of paying from the public purse for the teaching of a religion in which only a section of the public believe, seeing also the obstruction to the progress of education caused by the quarrels of the sects, this meeting is of opinion that the only way to settle the education question is for the State to restrict all schools wholly or partly subsidized by public funds to such subjects defined as secular in the official code, leaving religious instruction as the business of the Churches and of such parents as desire it.

In all cases where the resolution is passed, a copy of it should be forwarded to the Minister of Education.

"Philosophy would not be so very obscure if it were not for the philosophers," remarks Mr. Chapman Cohen at the beginning of the new and revised edition of his well-known book on *Determinism or Free-Will?* Mr. Cohen is editor of the *Freethinker*, and is accustomed to expound philosophy in a non-technical manner. His discussion of the knotty problem of determinism is written for the plain man, and will help readers to think for themselves about the workings of their own mind.—*John o' London's Weekly.*

We very much regret to learn of the death of Mr. Martin Weatherburn, whose name will be well known to all Tyne-side Freethinkers, and to many in other parts of England. Mr. Weatherburn was a type of the sturdy Freethinker of the old Bradlaugh days, and one who never hid his opinions nor minced matters when it came to expressing them. It is all the more regrettable, and we are quite sure that it was very much against his wishes, that those responsible should have held a religious service over his grave. It is pitiable that people should so insult the memory of a brave man; but where religion is concerned, experience forbids surprise. It should be a lesson to Freethinkers to take whatever precaution is possible in such matters, and it would lead to their wishes being respected if they would acquaint headquarters with any instructions they have given in the matter. We cannot promise that their wishes will be carried out absolutely, but we would do our best to see that they are respected.

We see from the *Western Daily Mercury* that the following resolution was passed by the Plymouth Branch of the N. S. S., and duly forwarded to the Minister of Education:—

That this meeting strongly protests against the continuance of religious instruction in State supported schools, and demands its abolition in all schools wholly or partly subsidized by the State.

This is an example that might well be followed by all Branches of the N. S. S. all over the country. Mr. Fisher has asked for an expression of opinion from the public; we should see that he gets it.

Mr. J. Collier, Secretary, Rambling Section, 181 Frederick Road, Aston, writes:—"The Birmingham Branch are arranging a picnic for Sunday, June 13, to Rubery. Members and friends are cordially invited to join. All to bring provisions. Hot water will be provided. Meeting place: Selby Oak Terminus, 2.45 p.m."

## Boggy Country.

IN the days of my youth I used to get light on Bible difficulties by reading huge commentaries, in many calf-bound volumes, by English and Scottish "divines." The piety and learning of these "divines" were enormous, but not strong enough to prevent my final abandonment of belief in the heavenly origin of the Old and New Testaments. I apologize to the venerable commentators, but the hard truth must be told.

Recently I have found light of a singular sort on certain problems of the Books of Moses; and, this time, it came from a celebrated engineer, whose name is honourably known world-wide in connection with irrigation works in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Some of this illumination I venture to pass on to readers of the *Freethinker*, most of whom will, probably, not have seen the 100-pages book from which I quote.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible (*Exodus* iii.) tells us that Moses beheld a bush afire yet not consumed, and, on drawing near, he heard the divine voice issue from the bush and proclaim God's new name of Yahweh (Jehovah). But Sir William Willcocks, who is not only a fine engineer, but an expert at correcting the correctness of the Bible, tells the tale another way. He states that Moses travelled to Babylonia where he learned the laws of Khammurabi (afterwards somewhat imitated in his own "Mosaic" Law), and admired the religion of the God *Yeh-hua* (sometimes written *Ea*). This *Yeh-hua* conception he carried with him to the West, and presented to the Hebrew tribes in the shape of Yahweh. On the side of romance I much prefer the Bible account. On the side of probability one must reluctantly vote for Willcocks.

We open the story of the Ten Plagues which harassed the Egyptians but spared the Jewish race, who were kept out of harm's way in the province of Goshen. If the Bible would have us believe their safety was due to the protecting hand of Yahweh, Sir W. Willcocks coolly informs us that Goshen was a long uncultivated valley—"the only part of the low-lying eastern Delta which is everywhere blessed with sweet subsoil water." When the Egyptians wish to spread water over their land, in preparation for ploughing and for cotton-planting, they throw dams of earth across the small streams into which the Nile breaks up as it nears the Mediterranean Sea. The Nile water is coloured red by its mud, and the cotton lands have a blood-like sheet covering them. But, on the other side of the dams, the sea-water advances up the reduced and shallow streams and kills the fresh-water fish. Thus, at the same time that the country seems sheeted with blood, the fish die off in heaps. There is no miracle in all this, of course, but if you turn to the book of *Exodus* you find the miracle in this form:—

Moses lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. And the fish that was in the river died, and the river stank.

The Israelites, dwelling in the happy corner known as Goshen, could afford to look on at this awful scene unmoved.

Our engineer explains the rest of the Ten Plagues. Let us follow him in his delightful path of illumination.

The second plague was that of frogs, which, at the elevation of Moses' rod, swarmed into houses, ovens, tubs, and every nook and cranny. Sir William says that when the sea-water invaded the lower reaches of the Nile streams the fish died, but the frogs, fortunately endowed with power to breathe on land, leaped from the death-trap, and, finding no pools to swim in, jumped into the shadiest and coolest places available. You can call this movement miraculous or natural, as you please.

The third plague introduced sand-flies, named "lice" in the English text. Here, again, the Bible traces the insect pest to the rod. Sir W. Willcocks informs us that, in the month of September, sand-flies feast on the decaying bodies of the frogs, and continue till the cold nights of October and November put an end to them. The fourth plague of "flies," or midges, was of a similar character.

The fifth plague killed off oxen, sheep, camels, asses, and horses, the hand of Yahweh being laid upon them. According to Sir W. Willcocks, Egyptian cattle die when they drink stagnant, or nearly stagnant water, and this filthy drink is sometimes all they can obtain in the closing months of the year. He adds the somewhat confusing fact that "buffaloes and oxen alone are attacked, while horses, mules, donkeys, camels and sheep are immune." Those who are so inclined may, therefore, attribute the death of the oxen to the bad water, and the death of the horses, etc., to the hand of Yahweh—science accounting for the cattle and theology for the remainder.

The journalist who reported affairs in *Exodus* tells us that Moses threw dust into the air, and it floated through the atmosphere, and created boils on man and beast. Sir William, alert as ever, steps in with the simple observation that the absence of green food and pure water resulted in a kind of blotch or scurvy.

The very serviceable rod which Moses wielded played its part again in the seventh plague, when Yahweh caused a tremendous hailstorm accompanied by lightning, the land of Goshen escaping. On this point the engineer does not help us beyond remarking that local hail-storms occur in modern times with stones as large as "tennis and cricket balls," and that they ravage the district near Port Said without touching spots further south. It would appear, therefore, that hailstones, full cricket-ball size, may crack a modern Egyptian's head without the intervention of the divine rod.

The locusts constituted the eighth plague. They came up from the east when Moses' rod commanded, and ate the green crops; and from the east, in modern times, they are still (so Sir William says) in the habit of coming. The Bible relates that Pharaoh implored relief, and Yahweh blew the devouring insects into the Red Sea. Sir W. Willcocks corrects the correct Scripture, and remarks that the Red Sea was too far off for the purpose, and the locusts were drowned in the Serbonian bog, or Yam Suf, near the Mediterranean coast. We must let the obstinate engineer have his way.

The ninth plague was that of darkness, which followed on the usual manipulation of the sacred rod. But Sir William asserts that much the same species of darkness occurs nowadays, once in a generation or so, with no sign of rod at all:—

In the thirty years I have been in Egypt I have only on one occasion seen a dust-storm which lasted three days, and on the last day produced real darkness. As the field of Zoan lay to the north of the land of Goshen, with a hard pebbly desert between them, while north-west of Goshen lay the last basins which had been irri-

<sup>1</sup> From the *Garden of Eden to the Crossing of the Jordan*, by Sir William Willcocks, K.C.M.G. (Spon; New Edition, 1919).

gated, the dust-storms which swept over the field of Zoan were scarcely felt in the land of Goshen. The children of Israel consequently had light on their dwellings, while the Egyptians were enveloped in the darkness which could be felt.

Thus the value and need of the rod lessens at every step we take. We arrive at the tenth and last plague—the death of the Egyptian first-born—and, whereas the book of *Exodus* ascribes the tragedy to a midnight visit of Yahweh to the Egyptian households, Sir W. Willcocks merely concludes that the severe infant mortality was due to drinking polluted water. What the engineer says is reasonable enough, but he makes no attempt to explain why only the first-born children felt the ill effects of insanitary conditions.

The Jewish tribes, prudently annexing the Egyptian jewellery by way of compulsory war-loan, began their emigration from Egypt towards Canaan, the Promised Land and Zionist settlement. After what we have already experienced of Sir William's critical methods, we are not at all surprized to learn that *Exodus* is mistaken in marching the Israelites across the bed of the Red Sea. They journeyed along the Mediterranean coast, and across the Serbonian bog. When fairly dry, it could be traversed; but, if water were let in upon it, it would become fatal to travellers. The poet Milton had read of armies engulfed in its mud:—

A gulf profound as that Serbonian bog,  
Twixt Damiatra and Mount Casius old,  
Where armies whole have sunk.

Yahweh's pillar of fire led the Hebrew caravan; and Sir William drops in a note to the effect that caravans from Cairo to Mecca are still led by men burning torches, the smoke of which by day, and the flame by night, act as indicators to the long straggling line of pilgrims.

The Jews crossed the boggy country in safety. Then Moses cut the river-dams already mentioned in our story, and the bog became a ghastly sea of mud, in which the army of Pharaoh was hopelessly stuck. You can imagine the feelings of the Egyptians if you listen to our engineer's personal narrative:—

I remember in 1885 walking across Lake Borollos opposite Beltim while it was dried by an east wind, and sinking so deep in the mud that I could only cross by throwing away all my clothes, and rolling round, and floundering for hours. The distance was only four miles, but it took me nearly the whole day to get across. During my struggles I often thought of Pharaoh's host in similar ground.

The destruction of Pharaoh's host was celebrated in a Hebrew national anthem,—

Yahweh is a man of war; Yahweh is his name.  
Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea;  
his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.  
The depths have covered them, they sank into the bottom as a stone (*Exodus xv.*).

The question whether we ought to accept the Serbonian bog theory or the Red Sea theory is painful. For the Red Sea theory you have the Bible authority, which is usually regarded as first-class evidence. On the other hand, Sir William Willcocks is a baronet, a K.C.M.G., late Director-General of Reservoir Studies in Egypt, and Consulting Engineer to the (ex) Turkish Government in Mesopotamia. I must leave the decision to the reader's conscience.

F. J. GOULD.

Every reform, however necessary, will by weak minds be carried to an excess, that itself will need reforming.

—Coleridge.

## N. S. S. Annual Conference.

HELD IN THE REPERTORY THEATRE, STATION STREET,  
BIRMINGHAM.

Whit-Sunday, May 23, 1920.

MORNING SESSION.

BRANCHES were represented by the following delegates:—H. Irving (Barnsley); J. Neate (Bethnal Green); J. G. Dobson, E. Clifford Williams (Birmingham); H. C. Mellor (Glasgow); A. E. Rosetti, F. E. Monks, H. Black (Manchester); Miss K. B. Kough (North London); J. Fothergill (South Shields); J. T. Lloyd (Swansea); Miss M. Pitcher (West Ham).

Amongst the visitors were noticed:—Messrs. E. Aldridge, J. Collier, R. Davies, Miss Dobson, Miss S. Dobson, Messrs. E. Glasscott, J. Hall, J. Heritage, Jas. Partridge, W. J. Pitt, A. Roberts, Mrs. E. Rogers, E. A. Sandys, Mrs. E. M. Sandys, W. Simpson, jun., E. Starling, Miss L. Underwood, Mrs. E. Clifford Williams and Mr. A. Whitwell (Birmingham); Mrs. Janet Irving (Barnsley); Mr. A. Millar (Glasgow); Mr. A. B. Moss, Mr. T. J. Thurlow, Mrs. Neate and Miss Pankhurst (London); Mr. S. Cohen and Miss Elizabeth Williams (Manchester); Messrs. Blakey, Clarke, and Stringer (Sheffield); Mr. W. Mann (Wolverhampton).

After a few words of welcome to the members and delegates by the President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, the Agenda was at once proceeded with.

On the motion of Mr. A. B. Moss, seconded by Mr. J. C. Dobson, the minutes of the last Conference were taken as read.

The Executive's Annual Report, having been read by the President, was adopted unanimously.

The Financial Report was then presented and various questions answered, the most pleasing features of the report being the announcement of the legacy from the late Mr. G. Antonini and that the arrears of salary due to the Secretary had been discharged since the year's accounts were closed.

The advisability of raising the capitation fee was suggested by Mr. Irving (Barnsley), but it was decided to take no action.

Miss E. M. Vance called upon the representatives of the three Branches nominating Mr. Cohen to propose his re-election.

Mr. Monks (Manchester), in moving Mr. Cohen's re-election, paid a glowing tribute of esteem and confidence.

Mr. Neate (Bethnal Green), in seconding, referred to the number of years he had known Mr. Cohen personally. He felt it would be futile to attempt any eulogy.

Mr. Thurlow, supporting on behalf of the West Ham Branch, though opposed to a permanent President, thought the time was not ripe for an election from the general body, and that a fighting President such as Mr. Cohen would be necessary for many years to come.

Mr. Fothergill (South Shields), and Mr. Mellor (Glasgow) also supported in eulogistic terms.

The motion was then put and carried unanimously.

The Secretary, having declared Mr. Cohen "well and truly elected," handed him the hammer, and he resumed the chair amid prolonged applause.

Mr. Cohen said he could make a long speech, but would simply say, "Thank you." The post of President was one which, as he had said to the late G. W. Foote, a man would be a fool to run after and a coward to run away from. He had promised to do his best. He had done, and would continue to do so.

The motion that Miss E. M. Vance be re-elected General Secretary was moved by the President on behalf of the Executive.

Mr. Cohen said that work done behind the scenes, which did not bulk in the public eye, should be recognized. The position was assured to Miss Vance while she continued to be able to act.

Mr. Williams (Birmingham) seconded.

Mr. Dobson and Mr. Thurlow supported. The motion was carried unanimously.

Miss Vance, in simply saying "Thank you," assured the Conference that her interest in the Society would cease only when she herself ceased.

When the motion that Mr. C. G. Quinton be elected Treasurer was put, a letter was read from that gentleman apologizing for his absence on the score of indisposition. He was unanimously elected, with many references to the esteem in which he was held.

Messrs. H. Theobald & Co. were appointed auditors.

The following nominations for the Executive were carried *en bloc*: Scotland—Mr. James Neate, nominated by Glasgow Branch; Wales—Mr. J. T. Lloyd, nominated by Swansea Branch; N.E. Group—Mr. C. H. Kelf, nominated by Newcastle Branch; Mr. A. B. Moss, nominated by South Shields Branch; N.W. Group—Miss Pitcher and Mr. R. H. Rosetti, nominated by Liverpool and Manchester Branches; Midland Group—Mr. F. E. Willis and Mr. T. G. Dobson, nominated by Birmingham Branch; South London—Mr. S. Samuels, nominated by South London Branch; North London—Miss K. B. Kough, nominated by North London Branch; East London—Mr. H. Silverstein, nominated by Bethnal Green and West Ham Branches.

Motion (a) by Manchester Branch protesting against the continuance of religious instruction in State-supported schools and demanding its abolition was moved by Mr. H. Black. The apathy of Freethinkers as to the withdrawal of their own children he felt was responsible for the assertion from the Minister of Education that there was no general demand for such abolition. Parents overestimated the martyrization of their children. As a matter of fact, there was very little. He suggested a large issue of Mr. Cohen's excellent article in the current *Freethinker*, and would himself be responsible for the distribution of 5,000. He was disappointed by the attitude of the trade unions on this matter, and strongly urged that the Secular Education League should be supported by our members.

Mr. Moss, in seconding, said: Religious instruction was most easily assimilated, and Freethinkers must, therefore, take a more strenuous part in this most important question, and fight not only for the child but for the teacher also, and quoted notable instances of Freethinking teachers being placed in most ignominious positions when their views became known.

Mr. Mellor (Glasgow) referred to the preponderance of the Catholic interest in the recent elections in Glasgow. Only one Freethinker having been elected.

Mr. Thurlow, though bringing up his family as Freethinkers, had been compelled to bow to home authority in consequence of the martyrization of his son, and, therefore, advocated liberty at home.

Mr. Williams supported the Manchester resolution wholeheartedly, and opposed any religious instruction. Would any Roman authority allow Secularists the right of entry to their schools?

Miss Pitcher was in favour of Freethinking teachers giving religious instruction. The Freethought moral could always be adduced.

Miss Vance was strongly in favour of withdrawal. Children not withdrawn grew up nothingarians, rarely, if ever, fighting Freethinkers in the spirit of the old fighters. It was for the parents to make up to the child for any small persecution inflicted upon it.

Mr. Fothergill, Mr. Neate, and others contributed to the discussion.

The President, in summing up, said there was such a thing as being too careful of children's feelings. They might pay the price for it in after life. Withdrawal nowadays did not attract so much attention. All Jews were withdrawn. Freethinkers were apt to accept persecution as a fact. While they do this they will always get it. The withdrawal of his own son had induced other children to request withdrawal. All Freethinkers, Socialists, and such as objected to the State teaching religion should be induced to withdraw their children and local campaigns started.

On the motion being put it was carried unanimously.

In moving Section (b) of the Manchester resolution, that steps should be taken to acquire or maintain suitable schools for the Secular training of children. Mr. Monks emphasized the necessity of the early training of children on Secular lines, and suggested it might be possible to acquire the school Mr. Bellamy Lowerison was giving up.

Mr. A. B. Moss and Mr. A. C. Rosetti supported the previous speaker.

Mr. Black commended the suggestion of acquiring the school by the Executive.

The President thought the discussion had raised two points. All Secularists' children could not be sent to boarding-schools, and whereas the children under Church influence were practically at the doors of their schools, the difficulty of transporting our children to Secular schools at a great distance was a very real one.

It was finally agreed to remit the matter to the sympathetic consideration of the Executive.

In the absence of Mr. F. E. Willis, the motion in his name, warning Labour bodies of the danger of closing their eyes to the tactics of the various Christian Churches in the frantic attempt to exert an influence over Labour, was moved by Mr. E. Clifford Williams. He wished to warn Labour against allowing the Churches to get their tentacles into the Labour pudding. The Rev. R. J. Campbell, that quick change artist of Nonconformity, had been foremost in realising the possibilities the Labour Party presented.

Mr. Blakey (Sheffield) seconded.

Mr. Thurlow thought Labour men were sufficiently intelligent not to require warning.

Mr. Mellor did not take that view of Labour men. Had Mr. Thurlow ever heard of Christian Socialists or Mr. Henderson and his Lamb of God?

The President feared Mr. Thurlow over-estimated the keenness of Labour men. The Churches meant capturing Labour, and were circulating a tremendous amount of literature. He related how a Socialist newsagent's shop, where Freethought literature was sold under protest, had, by a Secularist backing, been converted into one for the sale of Freethought literature, together with that of the Socialist and Labour Party, without protest. The Churches had forgotten more about capturing and selling movements than Secularists would ever learn.

The resolution was carried unanimously.

The Conference then adjourned for luncheon, the President announcing that the Birmingham Branch had tendered an invitation to tea to all the delegates.

#### AFTERNOON SESSION.

On reassembling at 2.30, the South Shields resolution, protesting against the Poor Law regulation making religious instruction a condition of granting outdoor relief to children, and demanding that the regulation be limited to securing the moral and physical welfare of the child, was moved by Mr. Fothergill, who instanced a particularly hard case in his town, where a majority of Catholic Guardians had penalized a Freethinking grandfather by refusing greatly needed outdoor relief to two children on the ground that the children, having been christened, must continue to receive religious instruction. The grandfather refused to permit this, seeing that the parents of the children had for many years prior to their deaths become Secularists, and read a letter from the Minister of Health practically supporting the action of the Guardians.

Mr. Moss seconded, insisting that equal justice should be meted out to Freethinkers.

Miss Vance, as a Poor Law Guardian, contended that the South Shields Guardians were acting illegally. The grandfather, being legally responsible for their support so far as his means permitted, was entitled to bring up the children in accordance with his views and those of the deceased parents. She was willing to reopen the matter with the Minister of Health and the Guardians.

The President pointed out that the matter was complicated by the children having been christened. The whole point would turn upon the meaning given to the word "creed."

The resolution was carried unanimously.

The motion of the Glasgow Branch, that an organizer be appointed at an early date, was moved by Mr. Mellor. Large numbers of Freethinkers, in Glasgow particularly, could be drawn into the Movement by the services of a paid organizer. He suggested that a certain sum should be set aside for that purpose.

Mr. Fothergill seconded.

Messrs. Dobson, Collins, Black, and the Secretary having spoken in support, the President said the difficulty was not the

money but the man. An organizer for the N. S. S. was not so easily found as one for a Trade Union. He acquiesced in the necessity, and advised Branches to be on the lookout in each locality for a suitable man.

Agreed unanimously.

Section (a) of the Birmingham resolution:—"That future Annual Conferences of the N. S. S. be held at a sea-side town was discussed, and certain difficulties pointed out." Finally the words "when possible" were inserted and the Motion carried.

Section (b) by the same Branch:—"That a literature propaganda be instituted, and that the Executive have printed for free distribution leaflets and pamphlets consisting of suitable extracts from the works of well-known Freethinker writers" was generally approved and carried.

The Executive's resolution:—"That the time has arrived when churches and chapels should no longer be exempt from taxation, and calling upon Freethinkers to induce their representatives on public bodies to protest against the continuance of this injustice" was moved by the President, seconded by Mr. A. B. Moss, and heartily supported and carried.

Motion by Mr. R. H. Rosetti:—"Emphasizing the breakdown of Christianity as evidenced in the European War, and regretting that the various Powers had not agreed upon a measure of national disarmament," was moved in his absence by Mr. A. C. Rosetti (Manchester) who pointed out "that only through the breakdown of Christianity could Militarism be broken down." On putting the Motion, which was carried unanimously, the President remarked that we appeared to have lost more by gaining the War than Germany had by losing it—the anti-militarist movement was in its essence a Freethought movement. Unreasoning obedience to authority was common to Militarism or to Christianity alike.

The next item was a Motion by Mr. A. B. Moss demanding "The abolition of all religious oaths in courts of law and other institutions, and the substitution of a simple form of affirmation. "Courts of law said the mover are civil not religious institutions, and he referred to the fact that he was the only public official who persistently made affirmation instead of taking the oath. Many officials considered they would be unable to hold their position if it were known they were Freethinkers. Mr. Williams seconded. Mr. Irving, Barnsley, "desired to see all oaths and affirmations abolished, they simply wasted time." After further discussion the resolution was carried.

In the absence of Mr. Heaford, the Motion standing in his name (a):—"That the N. S. S. should be represented at the forthcoming International Freethought Congress at Prague; (b) that the Executive draw up from time to time an official statement of the Society's attitude towards the more important developments of public policy, and that steps be taken to obtain publicity in the press and in kindred and sympathetic organizations; (c) that a report of the proceedings of the Conference and of the formal decisions on the several items in the Agenda be published in the *Freethinker*, or communicated by circular to the several Branches within three weeks of the meeting" were taken next. The Conference being in entire agreement, it was formally moved that they be taken *en bloc*, and they were carried *nem. con.*

The final Motion on the Agenda urging the necessity of an active Freethought propaganda amongst women in view of the strenuous efforts of the Churches to retain their services was moved by Mr. Dobson, seconded by Mr. Hieland, and supported by the President, who desired to see greater numbers of women in the Freethought movement—the more the better. Carried unanimously.

Before closing the meeting the President and Secretary expressed the thanks of the Conference to the Birmingham Branch for their hospitality, and for the well-organized manner in which the arrangements had been carried out, and particularly to the Secretary, Mr. J. Partridge, whose steady, untiring devotion to Freethought never altered.

This ended the 1920 Conference which, though not large, was remarkable for the good spirit prevailing, and left each member imbued with fresh vigour and determination to play their part in the strenuous work that yet remains to be done.

## Correspondence.

### SUNDAY GAMES OR "SUNDAY OBSERVANCE"?

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—At a meeting of the Birmingham Public Parks Cricket Association recently, a resolution was unanimously passed that the playing of games in the parks on Sunday was "undesirable." The Chairman condemned the original proposal of the Parks Committee on the subject, and spoke strongly against any kind of Sunday games.

Such are the "ideals" underlying the conventions of "Sunday observance." Although the resolution of the Birmingham P.P.C.A. is perhaps of little importance in itself, I submit that it is typical of that national decadence which has closed nearly everything from public use except our public-houses, and at the same time emptied the churches and chapels.

This oppressive killjoy spirit, so interwoven with modern Puritanism, is responsible for the stagnation of the English Sunday, and threatens to settle upon every form of exercise or activity, mental or physical, and the apathy of the mass of the people smooths the path of the Puritans. There is, indeed, no heart in our modern conception of religion, and small wonder is it that our more intellectual clergy feel the emptiness and hopelessness of their mission.

The Sabbatarian hermit hates material things. He hates the light, the air, the sunshine, music, and the drama. He shuns social life and fears broad thought and all kinds of physical and intellectual freedom. He opposes attempts to obtain healthy pleasure on Sunday, and substitutes the "ideal" of salvation by self-torture; and it is this which has turned the English Sunday into a day for idle self-indulgence.

I submit that the best religion is one which admits of the opening of all developing and recreative agencies on the one day of the week when the majority can enjoy them.

There would be more heart in our religion and a little less humbug in our morality, and both religion—real religion—and true morality would be the gainers.

S. HOWARD WITHEY.

### KINDNESS OR FORCE?

SIR,—Mr. A. J. Marriott asserts that "everything related to social, political, and religious freedom depends on actual or potential physical force." Now, like all the rest of us, Mr. Marriott has a circle of friends whose society he enjoys, and whose good opinion he values. In his daily life, therefore, he often finds himself in a position where he could steal something without any risk of being judicially punished or even suspected. And yet, somehow, he does not take advantage of those opportunities because he is an honest man. His friends trust him, because they know him to be honest, and unless they were able to trust him, and he them, and they other people, society in London would be dissolved, and not all the politicians and policemen in the universe could bring it together again.

Mr. Marriott voluntarily restrains his cupidity as regards certain valuables, because he knows that he has no right to them. Just in the same way, I think, that landlords and usurers can be brought to see that they have no right to the unearned wealth they now enjoy at the expense of the workers. But if they can't, then we must simply give up the hope of any higher civilization than the present sordid and unhappy scramble. Until men are fit for freedom they cannot be free—that's all. The people who pretend to earn their living by determining whether men are doing right or wrong—the kings, and presidents, and judges, and policemen, and parsons, and hangmen—are all enemies of civilization, because, instead of allowing men to follow their own consciences, they set up absurd standards of right or wrong, and fine, imprison, or kill everybody who refuses to accept them.

The abolitionists of chattel slavery in the United States did not believe in force, and they would not vote or take any part in a Government that upheld slavery. They persuaded men to set their slaves free, and created public opinion against slavery, and if the Civil War had not come they

would have swept it away by a simple appeal to conscience, which is the strongest motive power in human conduct. And if negro liberty had thus been achieved the American people would not have been usury-ridden by a criminal war debt and disgraced by the savage lynchings that are as bad as anything done by the officials of the Czar.

G. O. WARREN.

#### THE CORRECTOR CORRECTED.

SIR,—Mr. Wells suggested that I garbled his writing. I did but exhibit some beautiful strands of his artistic tapestry. Anyone wishing to see the complete work of art can view it in Part 12 of the *Outline of History* (Newnes; 1s. 2d.). At the present time, when fiction takes forms so exotic and so ingenious, I have pleasure in calling attention to a religious romance which exhibits the pathetic features of a decaying Orthodoxy.

MIMNERMUS.

#### "MIMNERMUS" AND MR. WELLS.

SIR,—I have read with considerable regret the article "Mr. Facing-Both-Ways," by "Mimnermus," and having carefully gone over the facts with reference to the excerpt from the *Outline of History*, by H. G. Wells, can but admire the reticence of Mr. Wells' reply.

May I quote from the *Outline*, ch. xxx., p. 356: "But just as the personality of Gautama Buddha has been distorted and obscured by the stiff squatting figure, the gilded idol of later Buddhism, so one feels that the lean and strenuous personality of Jesus is much wronged by the unreality and conventionality that a mistaken reverence had imposed upon his figure in modern Christian art."

Mr. Wells expressly shows that his purpose is to "write not theology but history," and in stripping the accretions from the god, Jesus, to show the Man beneath, he is showing the road to Freethought to the mass of Christians. By demonstrating that the subject of Christ is capable of being dealt with in a rational scientific manner (as Mr. Cohen deals psychologically with Spiritualism) he is benefiting our cause. I have found the already published parts of the *Outline* of great value in discussions on the subject of Christ, and can vouch for their appeal where the *Freethinker* never finds its way. May I suggest, with modest humour, that "Mimnermus" procure himself a copy of the *Text-Book of Zoology*, by Wells (H. G.) and Davies, and from it learn the art of the scientific statement of facts before writing again in so dogmatic a manner. Supernaturalism is an enemy powerful enough to occupy all our forces without squandering energy on "Mimnermus'" "neutrals."

Lest there be any doubt as to my motives in writing the above, may I state that I am a freelance Freethinker, an old subscriber to your paper, and a sincere well-wisher. By leaving copies of the *Freethinker* in reading-rooms, etc., here, I have discovered that there is a demand for such literature which is surprising for "Welsh Wales." Wishing you every success.

F. G. GRAHAM.

University College of Wales, Aberystwyth.

[We are obliged to hold over several letters till next week.]

#### Obituary.

Blyth, Cramlington, and Tyneside friends will learn with regret of the death of Mr. Martin Weatherburn, who died at Newcastle-on-Tyne on May 21, and was interred at St. Andrew's Cemetery on May 24. For over thirty years deceased was a well-known figure in Freethought circles in the above districts. Residing latterly in Newcastle, he became President of the local Branch of the N. S. S. Being of a quiet and unassuming nature, he was held in high esteem by all who knew him. Owing to some unexplicable reasons of relatives, a clergyman officiated at the grave, with his "sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection," much to the surprise of the Secularist friends, several of whom had travelled from Blyth district to pay their last respects to their old comrade.—J. G. B.

#### 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, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., "The Breakdown of Authority."

###### OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 6.15, Mr. W. H. Thresh, A Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): Mr. Howell Smith, B.A., 3.15, "Did Christianity Abolish Slavery?" 6.30, "Christianity, Women, and Marriage."

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

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

PLYMOUTH AND DISTRICT BRANCH N. S. S. (Room No. 7, Plymouth Chambers, Drake Circus): Thursday, June 10, at 8, A General Discussion on Freethought. Plymouth Freethinkers please note.

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (3 Thompson Street): 6.30, Mr. J. Fothergill, Report of National Conference; Lecture Arrangements.

**PROPAGANDIST LEAFLETS.** New Issue. 1. *Christianity a Stupendous Failure*, J. T. Lloyd; 2. *Bible and Tectotalism*, J. M. Wheeler; 3. *Principles of Secularism*, C. Watts; 4. *Where Are Your Hospitals?* R. Ingersoll; 5. *Because the Bible Tells Me So*, W. P. Ball; 6. *Why Be Good?* G. W. Foote. *The Parson's Creed*. Often the means of arresting attention and making new members. Price 1s. per hundred, post free 1s. 2d. Samples on receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—N. S. S. SECRETARY, 62 FARRINGDON STREET, E.C. 4.

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