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## Views and Opinions.

### Atheism and the Churches.

Among the annual assemblies that have just been held was that of the Church of Scotland. The addresses followed the usual lines of such gatherings, and the rejoicings and lamentations call for no special comment here. But the closing speech by the Moderator, Dr. Thomas Martin, which dealt with the present position of Christianity, deserves a word or two of comment. Dr. Martin asserts that the present position of Christianity gives reason for hope. There are, he says, people who realise that unless religion is secured as an ally "political and legislative methods will fail in reconstructing a disordered world." That such a feeling exists I, for one, can readily believe. But its value and its significance depends entirely upon who it is that cherishes the conviction. I haven't the ghost of a doubt but that the emigrant followers of the late Czar are quite convinced that unless religion can be secured as an ally the reconstruction of Russia is impossible. But as we know what they mean by reconstruction the value of the opinion is discounted considerably. A thing is valuable in relation to the end at which we are aiming, and it is as well to make sure who it is that finds religion of so great a value. Religion is an extremely useful thing—to some folk, but whether it is of use to *all* folk is just where one begins to have doubts. It did not need the Moderator of the Church of Scotland to assure us that many people are convinced of the value of religion as an aid to reducing the world to order. It would have been more to the point had he told us who these people are, and the kind of order they wish to restore.

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### Are There Fewer Atheists?

But the thing that chiefly interested me in the Moderator's address was his reference to the decline in the number of enemies to the Christian religion. He said:—

The bitter feud that existed between science and religion no longer exists. This is partly because the Church has abandoned its alarmist

attitude to science, and no longer screams hysterically against science as a dangerous foe to the faith. And partly because science itself, in spite of two generations of unparalleled discovery and splendid advance, has learned modesty, realises that ultimate reality overflows its categories, and no longer hopes to solve, in its physical and chemical laboratories, the secrets of life and being. As a consequence there are far fewer professed atheists or even agnostics than in Huxley's and Tyndall's day. Science has largely withdrawn its veto on religion.

"Fewer professed atheists or even agnostics"! That "even" is delicious. It is better even than the information that science has learned modesty, presumably at the hands of that theology, which in the absence of all knowledge professed to explain authoritatively the whole universe, and the whole history of which has been an inglorious record of defeat, which is now becoming increasingly discredited with all educated minds. The impertinence of the attitude is colossal. Science has given up hopes of solving the secrets of life, and looks confidently towards these present day medicine men for enlightenment! And there are, presumably, men and women who accept such rubbish as the truth!

\* \* \*

### Are We Behind Other Nations?

One hardly knows which is the more amusing, the cry that the country is given over to Atheists—when the question is quickening the flow of subscriptions or the assertion that there are very few—when there is need to encourage the faithful in their fight. And one wonders whether a man who professes to have his finger on the pulse of public opinion really believes that there are fewer Atheists to-day than there were forty or fifty years ago. Tried by any reasonable standard Atheism is stronger now than it has been at any period of human history. In any honest view of the situation we have Atheists in Parliament—where they are as useful as the rest, Atheists in the Government, Atheist men of letters, Atheist men of science, and legions of Atheists in the ordinary walks of life. And in France no less than a sixth of the adult population openly declared itself to be Atheist. And I for one decline to believe that this country is so hopelessly behind in the line of mental development that while in every other country in the world the intellectual life of man is progressing in this country alone it is going backward. I am not rabidly "patriotic," and have no weakness for that particular form of egotism which declares that because a particular country has had the honour of giving me birth therefore it is the foremost country in the world; but neither do I suffer from that special form

of delusion which places every other country in front of my own. And I protest against the implied insult offered by Dr. Martin. I do not believe that this country has been getting intellectually worse since the days of Huxley and Tyndall. It has not developed as rapidly as it might have done—the existence of the Assembly of the Church of Scotland with a three column report of Dr. Martin's speech is proof of that. Still, we are not discouraged, and we shall alter all that in time.

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#### The Policy of the Ostrich.

Of course, Dr. Martin's statement is all part of a general pretence in which our delightful press joins. The policy is that so far as possible it must never be admitted that an Atheist has an existence outside an asylum or a prison. Atheist meetings must never be reported, Atheist writings must not be reviewed if it is possible to ignore them. If an Atheist dies, and he is so prominent that he cannot be ignored, his opinions on religion are spoken of as "advanced," or in some other way favoured by those who without the courage to tell an honest lie have no hesitation in reaping the profit from a suggested falsehood. The clergy know that to mention Atheism is to advertise it, that it is best to keep the religious man or woman in an atmosphere of carefully cultivated delusion. Underlying all this talk of the non-existence of Atheism is the fear of its presence and its inevitable growth. Atheism *may* be terrible, it is certain that it is inevitable. "God" is, after all, not a discovery, it is only an invention, and all inventions are discarded when better ones are there to take their place. And the number of Atheists—under various aliases, Agnostic, Rationalist, Ethicist, etc., etc., is large because the invention of God is no longer of use. It is as outworn as the fire drill as a means of getting a light. From one department after another the conception God is excluded. Physics, chemistry, astronomy, one branch of science after another separates itself from the idea of God. The only connection with which it has any real connection is the science of anthropology, and it is there only as a curious product of mental evolution, to be analysed and explained. In the whole range of modern life there is no servicable purpose for the conception of God. Wise men "scrap" it as a sensible manufacturer scraps old machinery and installs new ones of a better pattern. The main function of the idea of God is to provide a living for the clergy and to serve as decorations for political appeals to a misguided people. Atheism has triumphed and is triumphing because life itself is fundamentally anti-theistic. The strongest of lies cannot live for ever.

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#### A Vision of the Future.

Man lives as much in the future as he does in the past. And all of us who delight to think ourselves reformers dream of what will be the state of affairs one day. And so I can imagine in those delightful days when Church Assemblies shall be no more and the drone of the parson is not heard in the land, someone picking up a scientific magazine and reading something like the following:—

#### AN INTERESTING DISCOVERY.

At a meeting of the Anthropological section of the British Association yesterday, Professor Blank

gave an interesting account of a small tribe discovered by him on a little-known Island in the Pacific. The tribe numbered about 200 persons, and was found practising certain rites that were believed to be quite extinct. The central belief of these people is that the world is controlled by a being possessed of all the qualities of human nature, and to whom prayers are offered that he will rule things wisely and well. They also believe that this being sacrificed a portion of himself for the benefit of the world, but as they also assert that the sacrifice was to himself, it is possible that the real meaning of the rite has been lost. Belief in the mystical qualities of blood is a part of the creed, and some of the ritual has reference to washing in blood, but this may be only symbolical. There are distinct traces of cannibalistic rites, as disclosed by certain formulas which have reference to eating the God. There is likewise a belief in an underworld to which certain people are consigned, and an over-world designed for the residence of the elect. Their funeral custom clearly point to a belief in a double or "soul" believed to exist after the disintegration of the body. The whole body of beliefs show a very low level of culture.

Among the fragments of a literature preserved by these people are copies of a newspaper, which, though published as late as the first quarter of the 20th century, proves that as late as that date there were large numbers of people in the Western hemisphere who still held the same beliefs as these curious people. This is interesting as showing how a savage culture lingers among an advanced people.

During the discussion of Professor Blank's paper it was said that while the beliefs described were of the same kind as those held by savages of the most remote antiquity, they were probably due, in the place discovered, to the presence of a few medicine men who were sent out by certain western agencies which existed for the dissemination of these views. By some means these men had been cut off from their contact with the civilised world, and had thus failed to keep in touch with the development of thought. This would account for the survival of these beliefs. It was also suggested that in the interests of science these people should be left undisturbed in the practice of their curious rites, and would thus serve as a living link between ourselves and our uncivilised ancestors.

Really one would like to see one of the pious gatherings of to-day preserved, with full phonographic records. It might go with a Red Indian exhibition of scalps, and our new war museum, as samples of savagery in the twentieth century.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

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MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. will have a ramble on Sunday, June 13, to Rivington Pike. Train leaves Victoria Station at 1 o'clock; Pendleton, 1.8 for Bolton, thence train to Dunscar, from there a four-mile walk to Belmont, where a full tea will be provided at 2s. each (or tea only if desired). The return journey will be made *via* Rivington Pike to Horwick, a walking distance of five miles. Total cost for excursion, including full tea, about 5s. It is hoped that a large number of members will bring their friends to ramble through some of the best scenery in Lancashire.—A. C. ROSETTI.

## Kaleidoscopic Theology.

MR. F. H. BRADLEY is generally regarded as the keenest and most powerful philosophic thinker of the present age. His great work, *Appearance and Reality*, which was published in 1893, has been, for many, quite epoch-making. One of its most prominent peculiarities is that it is thoroughly non-Theistic. Its conception of the Universe excludes the idea of a personal God. In many respects Mr. Bradley belongs to the same category as Spinoza, from neither of whom can the orthodox theologian derive any support. And yet, strangely enough, several eminent divines are deeply indebted to the Bradleyan philosophy, chief among whom, perhaps, is Dr. Inge, the Dean of St. Paul's. The Dean is, undoubtedly, one of the strongest and sanest men in today's pulpit, and he has the courage of his convictions. By some he is charged with the rejection of the belief in immortality, and at least with vagueness about the personality of God and of man. According to the editor of the *British Weekly*, he is more or less "remote from Christianity," and recognizes, only "in a kind of grudging way, a certain quasi-personal immortality." Of course, the question naturally arises, What are we to understand by Christianity? the answers to which are practically innumerable. In theology there has never been any permanency. Even the great Creeds had to undergo the fiercest struggle for existence, and the conflict is by no means at an end even now. Painful in the extreme was their birth, their adolescence, and even their primes were passed amid wrathful and ravaging tempests, and now that they have entered upon the last stage of their evolution, that of disintegration, the fight continues. That they are decaying is beyond dispute. No effort to preserve them, or to postpone their dissolution, has the slightest chance of success.

A few Sundays ago Dean Inge delivered a remarkable discourse entitled "The Coming of the Spirit," which was published in the *Christian World Pulpit* for June 2, and in which "spirit" is thus defined:—

Spirit is life at the highest fulness of life. The spiritual man is one whom God has made intensely alive, sending the glow of his own life tingling through his veins, rousing every faculty to higher activity, so that he sees the true meaning and import of life, and feels the deep currents where others see only the ripples on the surface that are driven by the light breezes that ruffle the topmost water.

There is much in that extract which a Freethinker must challenge, but the fault is more in the phraseology than in the thought itself. If Nature were substituted for God, the definition would appeal to all as fundamentally true. All people are not of the same capacity or compass of mind. Some see a great deal more and further than others. Walt Whitman sings of life at its highest and best—

Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power,  
Cheerful, for freest action formed under the laws divine.

In different people life varies both in quantity and in quality, for which variation Nature alone is responsible.

Dean Inge, coming to theology, expresses his contempt for speculations concerning the Deity. His real subject being the Holy Spirit, he advises us not to trouble our minds about his separate personality. The doctrine of the Trinity is not to be found in the Bible. Then follows this statement:—

The Holy Spirit is God himself in action and always in action. The spiritual light is not "the white radiance of eternity" that never changes, but a light that comes into the world and burns and shines more and more unto the perfect day. It is the Light of light. And so the truth in the Gospels is not a body of dogmas; it is the

power that makes us free. And the life in the Gospels is not the deferred reward of goodness, but an inexhaustible spring of Divine energy. And so the Spirit, the source from which faith and knowledge, light and life and love have their being, is a power rather than a substance. The spiritual life is no changeless vision of beauty, truth, and goodness; it is rather a life of will and of energy, of unending upward movement, of faith that demands ever new ventures, and knowledge that dare never cease to learn. The Holy Spirit is the power of God working invisibly in the hearts of men.

Theologically considered, the foregoing passage is extremely heterodox, and it is equally unsatisfactory from Reason's point of view. Whilst the doctrine of the Trinity is virtually repudiated, belief in and reliance upon supernatural power are vigorously expressed, which power emanates from God, who is inferentially treated as a distinct personality.

At this point the preacher passes on to consider how the Holy Spirit "completes the work of Christ." Who Christ was, God, angel, or mere man, or what exactly Christ did for mankind, we are not informed; but it is positively asserted that two supreme cries of humanity are now answered. The first is the cry for pardon, which has been thus answered:—

One has come to us from the throne of the Godhead saying to the most helpless of sinners, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." One has hung upon the Cross of whom it is said that his blood cleanseth from all sin.

The other cry is for goodness. Now, what we maintain is that these two cries are purely religious, that is, unnatural cries. What theory of the Atonement, if any, Dr. Inge affects, we neither know nor care; but we do not hesitate to affirm that the idea of Divine forgiveness, on whatever ground granted, is a hateful and hideously immoral idea. The blotting out in the twinkling of an eye of a wicked past is a natural impossibility; but, if possible, it would mean the acme of injustice. Human forgiveness, prudently administered, is a most admirable and beautiful virtue. Reconciliation, even when it occurs after death, cannot be overpraised. As Whitman well puts it:—

For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead,  
I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin  
—I draw near,  
Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white  
face in the coffin.

In Christian countries forgiveness is as rare as charity, especially now when hymns of hate are being almost universally sung and almost as universally put into practice. It seems as if peace cannot be established in Christendom because the love of war is so deep-rooted in the Christian heart; and possibly this is an indirect result of the belief in the Divine forgiveness through the merits of the Cross.

Yes, the cry for Divine forgiveness is a false and essentially immoral cry, and so is also the cry for goodness. No one can be *made* good by another, and it appears just now that there are those who are powerless to *become* good. Dr. Inge says that "we beg for goodness as we long for pardon"; but that is true only of those who have been religiously educated. All others know that there is no magic by which a tender heart can be substituted for a stoney one. Character, good or bad, is the product of heredity and environment, and any modification of it, if at all possible, must be both difficult and slow. Surely, the Dean must be aware of the fact that goodness is a human, not Christian virtue, and flourished in the world countless ages before Christ was ever heard of, and prevails to-day outside Christendom. And yet he has the audacity to declare that "until Christ sent us the Holy Spirit it seemed out of our reach." Then he paints a wholly imaginary picture of the

primitive Christians, saying: "Such a band of men and women had never been seen before on the earth." "They felt themselves new and better men in a new and better world." We repeat that such a picture is atrociously false. Why, its falsity can be fully demonstrated from the pages of the New Testament alone, and also from the anti-Nicene Christian literature. Has the Dean never read what Tertullian and Cyprian, for example, say of the morals of the Church of their day, or has he forgotten the red-hot fury with which the latter denounces those ecclesiastics who were guilty of practices which were terribly brutal and degrading? As a matter of simple historical fact, Christianity did not make a new and better world, nor have Christians generally ever been noted for the superiority of their character.

Theology is perpetually changing; but of all varieties of it it must be said that they are obstacles in the path of human progress. Dean Inge is an inveterate enemy of the usual dogmatism of the divines, forgetting that he is an obstinate dogmatist himself, as the following shows:—

My friends, that indwelling, that transforming power is still amongst us. It is still with us, visiting us in the loneliness of our private thoughts, and also in those acts of worship in which Christians meet together. This experience is unseen.....The presence is unseen, but very real.

We do not deny that Christian beliefs yield comfort and joy to those in whom they are sufficiently strong and intense, our only contention being that they have completely failed to redeem the world. Indeed, the Dean admits this himself. He has often declared that progress in all the centuries has been conspicuous only by its absence. It is undeniable that under Christianity there has been no moral progress whatever, and that practically all social reforms have been passed in the very teeth of the Christian Church. Consequently, it is our firm conviction that all theology, Old and New alike, all forms of supernaturalism, must be entirely banished before we can have a new and better world.

J. T. LLOYD.

## The Art of Anatole France.

The distance, and as it were the space 'around man, grows with the strength of his intellectual vision and insight; his world becomes profounder; new stars, new dogmas, and notions are ever coming into view.—*Nietzsche*.

MR. JOHN LANE has earned the gratitude of all lovers of literature by his publication of several of M. Anatole France's most popular stories at popular prices. It is good to have *Penguin Island*, *The Red Lily*, and *Thais* within reach of a modest purse; and it is even better to find a publisher who is courageous enough to risk his money in publishing literary masterpieces instead of catchpenny rubbish.

For M. Anatole France is the foremost figure in contemporary literature. None has keener eyes or a prettier wit. For a number of years each succeeding book of his has been awaited with interest and read with enjoyment all over Europe. Not to have read his works is to have missed some of the best writing of our time. He is also the foremost representative of the Freethought tradition in French literature. His forerunners are Rabelais, Moliere, and Voltaire, three names which shine like gold on the page. His immediate predecessor is Ernest Renan, that smiling satirist who sapped a solemn creed with stealthy sneer. And, like Renan, M. France's books are full of a splendid irony, which is never overdone. "Do not forget to put some vinegar on your salad," said Count Mouravieff, when cautioning a writer

against excessive panegyric. "Never forget to put some sugar in your vinegar," is a maxim of which M. France stands in no need of a reminder. If he be the Voltaire of our day, it is a Voltaire into whom has passed the geniality of a Renan. It is a mellowed and transformed Voltaire, with the physique of a Falstaff, looking upon a madder and sterner world with the same laughing eyes that we know so well. As M. France so wittily expressed himself at the banquet given in his honour in London some years ago, he is a symbol, as the Citizen Momero represented the Goddess of Reason at the festivals of the French Revolution.

A septuagenarian, M. France has built up a magnificent reputation, not only as a writer, but as a humanitarian. Like Voltaire, who used the shining sword of his genius on behalf of the unfortunate Jean Calas, La Barre, and others, M. France took his place by the side of the Atheist, Emile Zola, in the terrible days of the Dreyfus struggle, when the heroic Zola championed truth and justice in the hour of real danger. It was an example of supreme courage. Honest to their own injury, brave against the enmity of tens of thousands, these Freethinkers exalted their own cause, and raised the world's opinion of human nature.

*Penguin Island*, which has been so well translated in Mr. Lane's pocket edition, is of unusual interest to Freethinkers, as it is as full of scepticism as an egg is full of meat. With subtle art, M. France has based his book on a Roman Catholic legend. Saint Mael, while sailing in his stone trough, is driven by storms to Penguin Island. Old and half-blind, the saint mistakes the birds for human beings, and blesses and baptizes them. This regrettable incident causes trouble in the Court of Heaven. The Almighty is embarrassed, and a congress is summoned to debate how the birds, not having souls, could be affected by the sacred rite of baptism. The description of the wrangle in the celestial congress is the quintessence of irony. The outcome is, that the rite of baptism, having been correctly carried out, entitles the birds to the privileges of Orthodoxy. Accordingly, the birds are endowed with souls—"very little ones"—and become human beings. The saint then embarks in his stone trough, and taking the island in tow, anchors it off the coast of Brittany.

"All is not sweet, all is not sound," however. This means the end of the simple life for the poor, unhappy, Penguins. They at once begin to act as Christians. They fight, lie, steal, slander each other, and turn their backs on their own teachings hourly. Those who possess goods oppress those who have nothing. Anarchists make war on society, civilization is destroyed by barbarism, and is succeeded by a civilization as corrupt and as futile as of old.

All M. France's wide knowledge and fund of humour is displayed in the portrayal of these changes. The book teems with brilliant episodes, rich burlesques, pungent satires. Nowhere is he so happy as when he describes in carefully calculated language, how religion grew out of the hot-beds of ignorance, fraud and mystification. Yet M. France is never venomous. Although a master of the lash, he uses his whip caressingly. He does not cut his subject to ribbons like Swift, nor, like Voltaire, sting like a thousand wasps. Rather, he is like jolly, old Rabelais, who pities whilst he smiles.

Rabelais was so much more tolerant than Swift. To Swift, writing under the shadow of the Christian superstition, all the world seemed a desert, and man, the most loathsome thing that squatted upon it. But Rabelais, out in the open, with all the winds of the Renaissance blowing upon him, was more than a mere satirist. Under the motley of the buffoon beat as generous and kindly a heart as ever beat in the service of humanity. M.

France possesses no small share of the tolerant humour of Rabelais, and, at a distance of several centuries, carries on the same splendid intellectual tradition.

Like all really great writers, M. France's sympathies are wide and deep. Who but this most tolerant of Freethinkers could have drawn such a character as the lovable old monk in *The Gods Athirst*, whose only outburst of passion is caused by his being mistaken for a Capuchin; or of the old Epicurean, Brotteaux, who makes cardboard puppets for a living, and carries his well-thumbed Lucretius with him to the guillotine? With what sympathy does not M. France depict the revolutionary Gamelin going hungry that a starving mother may be fed, or apologizing to the child for his fanaticism:—

Child, you will grow up free and happy, and you will owe it to the infamous Gamelin. I am ferocious that you may be happy; I am cruel that you may be kind; I am pitiless that to-morrow the whole French people may embrace each other with tears of joy.

So, also, with the aristocrat sheltering the outcast of the street. It is such vignettes as these that show M. France's art at its best, when irony and humanity, tempering one another, lend his works their incomparable charm. No one but a Frenchman could have written his books. The golden fabric of his genius is woven of delicate and suggestive thought. So original, so modern, is the author, who, among other names, has been called the Pope of Freethought. To us Freethinkers, M. France does not appeal solely as a brilliant and witty writer. He has a further claim on our attention in his noble efforts towards the destruction of false ideals and illusions that beset the mind of man.

MIMNERMUS.

### Saint Joan.

So the Pope has at last satisfied himself that Joan of Arc is a Blessed Martyr, and has sanctioned the addition of her name to the illustrious roll of the Church Triumphant! As Joan has been dead 500 years, this Papal recognition of her transcendent excellence appears somewhat belated. How the present Pope knows that the Maid of Domreny is a saint in heaven, and why previous popes were not aware of the fact, has not been explained. Presumably his Holiness receives information on these matters direct from the Holy Ghost. Can it be that something has been wrong with a section of the wireless telegraphy which apparently connects God with his vicegerent on earth, and that it has taken all these centuries for the message to come through? Or has poor Joan, perhaps, been in Purgatory all this time and has only just got out?

However that may be, the affair has now been decided, and devout Roman Catholics may henceforth say their prayers to Saint Joan without any qualms. Thus has another avenue of approach to the Throne of God been opened up—by way of the back stairs. The Roman Catholic suppliant at the throne of grace is so "umble," like Uriah Heep, that he shrinks from appealing to God direct, and must have a go-between. The Roman Church has thoughtfully provided quite a host of such, and Joan is the latest accession to the list. We have no doubt the intercession of Joan will prove as effectual as that of any other saint in the calendar, and we can say no fairer than that. In her new position of celestial honour, however, the erstwhile gallant and warlike Joan seems to merit our commiseration. For a long sequence of years she has been allowed to rest in peace. She is now likely to be pestered daily by the insatiable petitions of the snivelling "faithful," and

very shortly may be heartily wishing that the Pope had refrained from awarding her a halo.

Let it not be thought we are seeking to asperse the memory of a brave woman. Joan of Arc, burned alive in her twentieth year by a priest-ridden generation, is deserving of all the honour we can accord to her name. Only it rouses our ire to see the Roman Catholic Church slobbering over her to-day when we recall that it was the official dignitaries of that Church who were most active in securing her condemnation as a sorceress and a heretic five centuries ago. The Roman Church evidently acts on the assumption that her adherents do not read the history of their Church, and in this she is thoroughly justified. It is true that the condemnation of Joan was afterwards reversed by the Pope. Unfortunately, however, she had by that time been dead about twenty-five years. Consequently, the Pope's verdict resembles what is known in Scotland as Jeddart justice.

The memory of Joan of Arc will, no doubt, be celebrated by hundreds of processions. There will be a wealth of ceremonial and pageantry, and innumerable panegyrics will be delivered in her honour. How many Roman Catholic congregations will be told that she was a victim of religious superstition fomented by priestcraft? We may safely assert—not one. It would, indeed, be something gained if the tardy canonization of Joan could be regarded as an honest and avowed attempt at reparation on the part of the Roman Catholic Church for one of her many crimes against humanity. But, of course, it is nothing of the kind. It is not a case of genuine repentance at all. The Church possesses in large degree one at least of the putative attributes of her deity. She is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. She never admits her crimes, for she is not conscious of having perpetrated any; and the criminal, blandly oblivious of guilt, is truly a very hopeless proposition. As the Roman Church acted at the period of Joan of Arc so she would act to-day. So she *does* act to-day where she has the power. It is not so long since she murdered Ferrer. Probably some generations after this the Vatican will assure the world that although a few Spanish Roman Catholics may have been over hasty, yet the Church had really nothing to do with his death. Thus is the bamboozlement of the race gaily carried on.

Round the name of Joan of Arc have naturally clustered the customary legends that inevitably associate themselves with more or less historic personages. From the age of thirteen she was familiar—so we are told—with the call of heavenly voices. She must have been an early type of "medium." When taken to the Court of Charles Seventh of France, she is said to have immediately identified the monarch, though he allowed someone else to occupy temporarily his royal seat in the reception chamber and stood apart among his courtiers, in order to test her claims to divine guidance. We are asked to believe that she was able to describe accurately a sword which she had never seen, which was preserved in a certain church, and had been such a length of time there that its existence had been forgotten. This sword she bore during her participation in the military campaign. In addition, St. Margaret, St. Catherine, and St. Michael appeared to her, and exhorted her to undertake the task of France's deliverance. The sober student of history will treat stories of this nature with the measure of consideration which seems becoming; to the religious mind they bear all the semblance of Gospel truth.

We have not so far seen any record of miracles having been wrought through the mediation of Joan. Doubtless, however, now that she is an officially recognized saint, these will arrive in due course. It is largely a question of supply and demand, and in this case we

may assume that the demand will produce the supply, as it has done in connection with other saints. The old firm may be trusted to deliver the goods. As regards relics of the French heroine, the ingenuity of the Roman Church will surely be equal to discovering some fragments of the miraculous sword referred to above, which is reputed to have broken in pieces when her mission was accomplished. These would be almost on a level of authenticity with the fragments of the true cross so jealously and piously preserved over a much longer period. Why should the production of this sword be impossible? When one of the Crusades for the relief of the Holy Land began to hang fire, and a new incentive to zeal was requisite, a priest was most opportunely enabled to produce from somewhere the actual head of the lance with which the side of Jesus was pierced on the cross. In face of such a fact, why should we despair of finding anything? Even the miraculous fragments of the celebrated loaves and fishes might turn up—though perhaps somewhat mouldy.

Persiflage apart, it is not difficult to account in a natural way for the seemingly extraordinary success of Joan of Arc. She appeared at the psychological moment, and it was a superstitious age—even more so than the present, though some may doubt it. The French forces at the time were in a state of severe depression as a consequence of continuous defeat. It was necessary to rouse their drooping spirits. Here was an instrument offered to the hands of the leaders. We need not suppose that all the latter accepted the pretensions of Joan at their face value. It was enough that the common people believed in her. Her vehement appeals inspired the soldiery first with hope and then with confidence. She was looked upon as a champion directly furnished by heaven for the uplifting of France. What was of even more importance, she was so regarded by the equally superstitious enemy; and when superstition simultaneously infects one side with confident ardour and the other side with foreboding and terror, the ultimate result of a conflict between the two is a foregone conclusion.

GEORGE SCOTT.

## Sunday.

How should we conduct ourselves on Sunday? Like every other question of social conduct, each generation will give a different answer. Public opinion has changed a good deal within the memory of most of us. The bicycle and the electric tramcar, the Sunday concert, the Sunday Labour-meeting, and the Sunday newspaper are all developments of the past few years, and they have come to stay, in spite of the strenuous opposition of the clergy and their dupes. Sunday excursions are the most crowded, Sunday concerts are the most popular, and Sunday newspapers the most spicy and the most read. In fact, everything "goes" on Sunday but religious service and the worship of God, which have to be dragged along.

If you believe that a man-like God told Moses that the seventh day of every week should be devoted exclusively to absolute bodily rest and the especial worship of God in his temples; if you believe that the seventh day of the week was changed by the bodily resurrection of Christ to the first day of the week; if you believe that work or play upon this sacred day is displeasing to God and renders you liable to eternal torment, you will naturally agree with the Bishop of London, although I am sure his Lordship enjoys a hot dinner on Sunday and his *Times* on Monday without any qualms of conscience. There is not sufficient evidence to convince me

that there is any man-like God who once declared in any way that either the first or the seventh day of the week should be specially set apart for bodily rest and the worship of him. It seems to me more natural to suppose that men fell into the custom of resting from their usual labour every seventh day and worshipping their imaginary God on that day, and that gradually the belief sprang up that it had been divinely consecrated as the Lord's Day.

No doubt it is a good thing to rest and recreate on one day in seven, but this does not make Sunday a sacred day; and if the worship of God involves honest dealing, it is just as important that people should worship him on every day of the week as on Sunday. In fact, I would much rather that my butcher were godly when he is weighing out my meat than on Sunday. And I think that if some of our banking magnates would take some of their Sunday religion with them to Lombard Street on weekdays it would be just as well.

Every man should have a right to do as he likes, provided that he does not thereby infringe the equal right of anyone else. If a man wishes to worship his God, whoever he may be, in any manner whatsoever—in a Protestant or Catholic church, a Jewish synagogue, a Buddhist temple, a Spiritualistic *seance*, or a Chinese joss-house—he should have a perfect right to do so on Sunday or on any other day. That right should never be interfered with by persons whose religious or non-religious beliefs are contrary to any or all of these religious services. If a man wishes to make a saint, dupe, or a fool of himself on Sunday, he has a perfect right to do so. All Sunday legislation is tyrannical and subversive of human rights. If Sunday is God's day, let him take care of its proper observance. If he doesn't wish men to work on Sunday, let him strike the man blind who attempts it, and keep him blind till Monday morning. That man will soon learn what God wants. From the Christian standpoint there is nothing ridiculous in such an idea. If God could tell Moses that one day in the week is holy, he certainly can also compel men to keep it holy if he so wishes. Why should a gang of politicians feel called upon to make laws to maintain the honour and glory of God?

Fancy God delegating his authority to our present dishonest and discredited rulers; yet that is what our Sunday laws mean. How, then, should Sunday be spent? Exactly the same as any other day. Those who wish to go to church should do so. Those who wish to play, or rest, or work, should do so. But nobody should use this rational freedom so as to demoralize himself or his neighbours, and I am free to say that some of our Sunday doings are demoralizing, not, however, because they are done on a Sunday, but because they involve large crowds of idle people who are debarred from nearly every form of enjoyment except what is to be found in the Church, the brothel, and the public-house.

The clergy are lamenting the undoubted fact that the masses will not go to religious services on Sunday, and favour the making of laws to prevent them from going where they prefer to go. The clergy back up the infamous monopolies of banking and land, and welcome with open arms every legalized exploiter of other men's labour; they assert that the accumulation of unearned wealth is ordained by their Omniscient and Omnipotent God, thus helping to work men and to starve them until a day of rest and a gallon of beer become their highest idea of happiness, and then they complain because the Sunday excursion and the public-house are more attractive than the Sunday preaching of fables, and praying to a God who does nothing for the poor. I am glad of this; I hope the Church will be deserted more and more,

because she destroys the character and hope of man by preaching a Devil's gospel, and doing a Devil's work.

She was forced to swing into line with the old abolitionists of chattel slavery, and she will yet have to swing into line with the new emancipationists, or die of plutocratic gangrene, brought on by truckling to the idle rich and the love of orthodoxy instead of truth. Our present dreary Sunday can be improved only by giving the people more freedom on that day, and by allowing them to earn more money during the rest of the week. The working people are now so stupefied by their long hours of monotonous toil that when the week's work is over they want coarse and silly amusements to eke out their day of rest. Think of the silly religious beliefs and observances that are taught and practised in the Churches every Sunday. Why have the people done this sort of thing for so long? Because they have been kept poor and ignorant. And why do the more enlightened clergy not expose and protest against it? Because they are afraid of being poor.

Sunday can only become a useful and happy day when every man and woman can live in comfort by working for a few hours on each other day of the week. Then the Sunday excursion, the Sunday public-house, and the Sunday newspaper, as we know them, will have disappeared, because the public taste and morals will be so much better. Then, too, people will go to church more than they do now, because the pulpits will be filled by men who can afford to preach their honest thoughts, and who, when the people ask for bread, will not give them a stone. Then we shall know that the true service of God is to love and serve our fellow men, and the true worship of God is to learn the laws of Nature, by experiment and observation, and to live in tune with the facts of the universe, moral and intellectual, as well as material.

G. O. WARREN.

### Acid Drops.

The Louth disaster was a horrible affair, and reminds one of what a much greater horror it would be if one believed in an intelligent being presiding over the operation of natural forces, and realized all that is implied in such a belief. It is bad enough to face these disasters as the work of non-conscious forces, but it would be infinitely horrible to believe that presiding over all was an almighty being who might have prevented it, but declined to do so. We blame certain people for not preventing the European War; but the imbecility of religious belief holds services over the graves of those who have been done to death, while one in whom they believe might have prevented it all, but who is praised because of the *mercy* that is over all his works. And man is called a reasoning being!

The *Leeds Mercury*, commenting on the disaster, suggests that things might have been worse—as if the fact that things might have been worse than they are justifies us in praising God because they are as bad as they are. And it points out that Nature is for the most part “wonderfully merciful. When she strikes, she strikes swiftly; she neither threatens nor tortures her victims.” We are afraid our contemporary is losing itself in pious commonplaces. In one case we read that at Louth a woman lost her two babies, while she escaped. Does the editor of the *Mercury* really think that anyone could have contrived a more exquisite torture for that woman than this? We doubt if it be possible. Nature is just as cruel as man; her arrangements are as vile as any invented by man for the torture of his fellows. She, too, has her poison gases and her bombs; and if that were not so, man himself is one of Nature's inventions. All these apologies are more or less stupid. It is far better to face them with courage, and dispense with both the religious “dope” and the naturalistic apology. There are many evil things in life, but let us have fewer absurdities.

The *Daily Dispatch* mentions that five parsons were working among those who were shovelling away the wreckage in the Louth disaster. We are not in the least surprised. Where religion does not enter parsons are much like other men, and this is, indeed, one of the counts in the indictment against religious belief. And we hope that when these parsons next have occasion to talk of the providence of God they will recall their experience in Louth during the flood.

America is to build a battleship that will be larger than our new six million one, the *Hood*, and is determined to have a larger fleet than Britain. Our chief of staff warns soldiers to keep themselves fit for the time that is coming; the Lord Mayor of London advises schoolboys to join the territorials when they are old enough. The Government gives war materials to Poland to make war on Russia, and Sir Henry Wilson says there are now between twenty and thirty wars going on. All this is the result of crushing Prussianism, winning the War that was to end all wars, and making the world safe for democracy. And man calls a donkey one of the *lower* animals!

This is what we wrote in September, 1914:—

An international agreement that would secure peace is a laudable ideal, but how is it to be secured? England, it may be assumed, will still demand the control of the seas. It suits us, and we say it is necessary to our existence. Very good; but can we expect every other country to submit to this ownership of the world's highway for ever and with good feeling? Why this fact alone will drive other nations along the old line of offensive and defensive alliances, the fruits of which we are reaping in the present War. And alliances based upon such considerations as hold the Christian nations of the world together may be broken at any moment. Nor is there any power based upon force too strong to be overthrown. Of course, it may be said that it is to everybody's interest that some international agreement should be reached when this War is concluded, and such outbreaks prevented in future. Quite so; but, on the other hand, it is never to anybody's real interest to go to war. Even to win is to lose. The truth is that nations do not go to war because it really pays them, but because of misdirected ambition and mistaken ideals: in other words, because of lack of intelligence and defective civilization. How wrongly the lessons of this War are being read may be seen in the newspaper talk about blotting Germany out or wiping Germany off the map. These are the greatest follies of all. If by blotting Germany out is meant the destruction of the Germany Army, that may be done, and looks like being done.....But Germany remains, the German people remain, German ambitions remain, and there will also remain the memory of a crushing defeat. And the man is a lunatic, blind alike to the lessons of history and the facts of human nature, who imagines that a nation of seventy millions can be blotted out. All the power of Russia has not been able to crush the sentiment of nationality in Finland. All the power of Russia, Germany, and Austria has not been able to crush out the sentiment of nationality in Poland. After four centuries, in spite of all it could do, England finds the sentiment of Irish nationality as active as ever. Short of an absolute, a complete massacre, a nation of seventy millions cannot be “blotted out.” They remain; their ideals and ambitions, and their way of looking at life must always be reckoned with. Armaments will go on; of that we feel assured, although we should be only too pleased to find ourselves mistaken.

That might have been written as a summing-up of the War rather than as a forecast of what would happen. And yet it required no genius to say as much. All that was needed was to keep a level head, to possess an average intelligence, and not to permit oneself to be overpowered by the clamour of the crowd.

Sunday cinema shows are prohibited by the plous Middlesex County Council, but, fortunately, their clutching hand does not reach over London. The Middlesex cinema proprietors were asked recently by the County Council for money towards the County War-memorial. The proprietors retorted that they will be delighted to give the proceeds of a Sunday show to the cause. The Sabbatarians are now meditating prayerfully.

Dean Inge says that the one hope of the country is to give Christianity a fair trial. He misjudges the situation. Chris-

tianity has had its trial. What it is experiencing now is conviction and sentence.

The *Bolton Evening News* of June 2 reports a discussion on the local Council concerning the appointment of a headmaster to one of the schools that has some bearing on the education question. From a number of applicants a Mr. Smith was selected for the post, although in years of service he was behind the others. The rule of the Council was the sensible one that, where other things were equal, length of service should decide. On the point of ability it was admitted that there was little to choose between the candidates, and Mr. Smith was not the one with the longest record of service. But he received the appointment, and the reason given was that, as the churchpeople were dominant in the town, it was only proper that Churchmen should be dominant among the teachers. We admit that there is a certain logic in the situation, but it is of the kind that would lead one to argue that, if the majority of people in a town were drunkards, the majority of teachers should be drunkards also. The real lesson is that religion ought not to be permitted to appear in the matter at all.

The *Christian World* is very hopeful that some agreement will be reached on the education question, because the Church may forgo the "right of entry." We wonder when some of these Nonconformists will develop a sense of principle in this matter. The root objection to Mr. Fisher's proposals is not that they permit the right of entry, but that they allow the religion of a sect—and Christianity is only a sect in this country—to be taught at the expense of the whole community. That is the only objection that has any principle in it, and the only counter proposal of any weight is that of Secular Education. What the *Christian World* is proposing is another deal between the Churches, and that is, ethically, on all-fours with an arrangement between a couple of burglars to the effect that they will in future agree to pool their plunder instead of each grabbing as much as he can.

Dr. Horton has published an appeal on behalf of the League of Nations—that League which stood in the very forefront of the Treaty of Peace, but which those responsible for the Treaty have agreed to treat as a "scrap of paper." Dr. Horton says that where religious people lead the country will follow. If true that statement is one of the most damning indictments of Christianity that we have read. For it either means that the religious people have not led or that they have led wrongly. And the latter we think is the truth. During the whole of the War the lead of the Churches was in the wrong direction. All that could be done to inflame the War fever they did. When the worst of what Mr. Philip Gibbs called "obscene slanders" against enemy troops were circulated to keep the War fever raging, the Churches either remained silent or actively helped in their circulation. If Germany had engaged a body of men to assist in the demoralization of the British public, they could hardly have hit on a better lot than the Christian clergy during the War.

And the pity is it is true that if Christians could be induced to join in the prosecution of some decent and reasonable policy of social reform, that reform would be easily accomplished. For there are enough professed Christians to ensure that. But there is not enough desire for any decent reform in the whole of the Christian Churches to bring it about. They fight no forlorn hope, they oppose no popular cry whether the cry be justifiable or not. It is when we are concerned with some attempt to perpetuate the control of life by the Churches that we see a real unanimity. When it is a matter of preventing decent methods of Sunday enjoyment then the Churches are ready enough to combine and present an unbroken front to the enemy. The things for which the Churches can combine and those for which they cannot are very illuminating to anyone with a grain of common sense.

The Rev. Studdert Kennedy, better known as "Woodbine Willie," has a refreshing candour which is too rare nowadays. Preaching at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, London, he

said, according to the report in the *Torch*: "Set up Christ as the Teacher, and that cannot be done without money. I am not here to beg, I was told to preach to you, but you cannot do this work without money." It is not often that the clergy permit the cat to get so far out of the bag.

The clerical outcry concerning the "starving" clergy and the awful state of the Church does impress the faithful believer. An anonymous donor has given £10,000 to the Welsh Church Fund. A few more gifts of this magnitude, and the clergy will forget discreetly that Christ was a Labour leader and the twelve disciples devoted Socialists.

Some time ago the Educational Institute of Scotland circularized all the local authorities expressing the opinion that examination of religious instruction in schools was "detrimental to the best interests of religious teaching." The clergy resented this, as one might expect they would, and in Motherwell an attempt was made to carry through the examination on the old lines. The presence of the clergy was found to be so objectionable to the teachers that it was abandoned. The fact is that the only people who really want the clergy in the schools are the clergy themselves. To everyone else they are a downright nuisance, and people are only prevented telling them so because of the cowardice of the average man or woman in facing an ancient superstition.

Ten members of a Hull Branch of the Salvation Army have been suspended for a month for attending a football match, which, together with cinemas, pubs, smoking, theatres, and music-halls, is barred to Salvationists. Evidently, these naughty backsliders must be taught sternly that the religion of the Man of Sorrows is not a beanfeast.

The Archbishop's apology is significant. The massacre, he says, saved India. From whom? From the Indians. Saved India from whom? For the Europeans. There is a whole philosophy in the language used, if one will only see it.

Here is a good "Pussyfoot" story. Some temperance folk persuaded a toper to leave a public-house and go to a mission hall and sign the pledge. When it was all over, the convert became quite pleased and offered to stand drinks all round.

While wandering about in South Bermondsey last week, we came across the following announcement outside a mission hall connected with a Baptist chapel: "On the 8th June the Rev. G. E. Mitchell will lecture on 'Whose Business is it to Make Peace?' If you want to enjoy a great laugh, come!" As though the subject of making peace with nations with whom we had been at war was a matter for laughter for Christians, and great laughter at that! Christ is alleged to be the "Prince of Peace" by Christians of all denominations, yet he does not appear to have considered it any part of his business to have interfered during any stage in the progress of the War. And as for his ministers on earth, they not only acquiesced in the War, but most of them actively supported it. They left it to the statesmen and politicians of the various nations concerned to muddle up the terms of peace. But surely such a subject is matter for tears rather than laughter.

Two hundred Sunday-school workers met at the Wesleyan Institute, Birmingham, and passed a resolution that games on Sunday would not be "in accord with the Divine will." But one wonders what on earth the Divine will has to do with it. It is not a question of whether people shall play games in heaven, but whether they are to be permitted in Birmingham. And there is a long way between heaven and Birmingham. The "Divine will" really has nothing to do with it. If it agrees with what we need, we need not bother about it. And if it does not agree with what we need, we ought not to trouble about it. Either way, "the Divine will" is a superfluity and an impertinence. And the sooner we make these men of the Stone Age realize it the better.



## 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.

SORRY that ill-health prevented your being present at the Birmingham Conference. Hope that you are now better.

H. M.—Pleased to have your congratulations. For more than fifty years the National Secular Society has been the advance guard of Freethought in this country, and we think it will continue to be so. As you say, it "never falters and never compromises." And while we are President we think we may promise that it never will.

A. K. DIVEKAR (Bombay).—We are sending you membership form for the N. S. S. An Atheist is one who is without belief in a God. Freethought consists in the unbiased exercise of the mind upon all subjects. It has now become identical with anti-supernaturalism.

W. H. HICKS.—Thanks for cuttings.

M. LINDSAY.—Thanks; we are quite well, but should feel all the easier in mind if business conditions were a trifle easier. Still, we suppose things will settle down presently. Days of persecution were amusing episodes to what one has had to experience during the past five years.

W. H. BARRATT.—The paper was received safely, for which we thank you. But there is not now the need for its being sent.

D. D.—You are not, we are pleased to say, the only ordained and appreciative reader of the *Freethinker*. But we are glad to have your appreciation of the "one and only." We do not see anything that strikes us as calling for special comment in the article you enclose. Much of it appears quite good advice. The cutting is dealt with in "Acid Drops."

H. BLACK.—Let us know as soon as anything about the meeting-place is decided. We do not know any more about the communication than it says.

A. MILLAR.—Pleased to know that the Earl of Eglinton so much appreciated your *Robes of Pan*. He evidently knows a good thing when he sees it. Trust that you are keeping well.

T. BACKHOUSE.—Let us know when you need more advertising slips, and we will send them on. Paper and printing is rather too costly at the moment for us to adopt your suggestion, but we will bear it in mind for another time.

W. J.—We have received your postal order for 2s. 9d. and the paper will be sent for thirteen weeks to the address given. We are glad to say that our readers are taking advantage of the offer to join in an inexpensive propagandist effort.

H. STONE.—The idea is good and suitable to this paper, but the lines are hardly up to the standard.

W. H. BRIDEN.—We quite sympathize with the protest against "God save the King" being inflicted upon people at all sorts of public gatherings. We see no reason why performances should be brought to a close with a semi-religious ceremony that must be offensive to many present. We have noticed that in many places the custom is already dispensed with, and the sooner the practice is discontinued the better.

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*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 were glad to see in the *Shields Daily Gazette* a couple of well-written letters from Mr. J. Fothergill on the attempt to connect the Trades Unionists of the district with the Churches. Mr. Fothergill is quite correct in warning his brother unionists of the danger of getting their movement mixed up with the various religious organizations that have no real concern in Trades Unionism but are only concerned in advancing their own interests. And it is significant that while the working men are being urged to join the Churches on the ground that it will lead to their betterment, the other classes are being pressed to help the Churches because they represent the one thing that can keep people contented and in "order." The Church has its own game to play, and what that game is its whole history makes clear.

In consequence of the increasing cost of production, several hundreds of papers have raised their price to subscribers this year. Some may go without lament, but we regret to read that the *Positivist Review* stands in danger of suspension "unless some new resources are provided." The review is now in its twenty-seventh year of publication, and we feel sure that there are enough wealthy Positivists in the country to see that its continuance is assured. Probably all they require is to have their attention called to what is needed.

The flow of books against Spiritualism continues, and there is just a possibility of taking this kind of thing too seriously. So long as we have among us the master superstitions of God and a soul there are almost certain to be these outbreaks every now and again. This is not questioning either the need or the utility of meeting each outbreak as it occurs, it is only a plea for the preservation of a certain measure of proportion. At any rate, Messrs. Watts & Co. send us two new "exposures" of the folly of Spiritualism. Mr. McCabe goes over the old ground of the performances of Home and Duguid, and Paladino, and others, in *Is Spiritualism Based on Fraud?* (3s. net) and tells again the story of their various exposures. Some of them seem too transparent to have ever deceived anyone who had not a full measure of that faith which can see mountains moving. The second essay is a pamphlet on *The Unreality of Spiritualistic Phenomena*, by C. M. Beadnell, Surgeon, R.N., and deals specifically with the narrations of Dr. Crawford's experiments, on which Spiritualists appear to place so much reliance. The author has little trouble in making it clear that the experiments of Dr. Crawford, far from eliminated the possibility of fraud, but provided every opportunity for its occurrence. The truth is that the average man of science is a most wretched person to engage for detecting fraud. His whole temperament and experience is against his fitness for the task. There is no question of Dr. Crawford's honesty, but there is certainly question of the *bona fides* of those with whom he has been engaged. The price of the pamphlet is 1s.

From Messrs. Watts also come the first two volumes of a series of *Life-Stories of Famous Men*. These deal with Auguste Comte and Professor Huxley. Each book aims at giving in brief compass a picture of the man in such a way that present-day readers will be able to picture him as a living personality. Mr. F. J. Gould writes the volume on Comte, and Dr. Leonard Huxley writes the life of his father

It may be that a son is not the best person, save in exceptional circumstances, to write a father's life; but somehow Dr. Huxley fails to give one the sense of vitality that there is about Mr. Gould's sketch of Comte. And yet there was no lack of material in the case of Huxley to give one a very attractive portrait. Perhaps the reason is that a son naturally dreads being fulsome in praise of a parent, and refrains from saying many things that a stranger might say with impunity. Nevertheless, the two volumes make an excellent beginning to what should be a useful and attractive series. Each volume is illustrated, and is priced at 3s. 6d.

## The Jesus Myth.

(Concluded from p. 359.)

I have taken the birth-story of Jesus at rather great length, because it is an important question in Christian theology and history; and, also, because it offers a splendid opportunity to point out the way in which Christianity has worked up into itself the mythical ideas of Judaism and Paganism. This also applies to the so-called death and resurrection of Jesus, which we shall discuss before passing to some minor points.

The idea of a god's death and resurrection was not only known to pagan philosophers, it was also popular with the people of Greece, Rome, Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, etc.

In connection with the various sun-gods of the ancient world, there was developed the myth of the resurrection; a myth which also became an essential part of the mythology of the corn and wine duties. The sun's annual passage through the constellations of the Zodiac gave rise to the myth as it was centred in the sun-gods.

As the sun, conceived as Osiris, Ra, Mithra, Horus, Samas, or under a hundred other names, approached the winter solstice, he appeared to decline and then die. Or, perhaps, he was murdered. But he passes through the time of winter darkness and rises to glorious life again. Not only so, the sun is below the equator before the vernal equinox, but at that time it appears to rise above it, as if rising from its tomb. "And so," to quote Mr. P. Vivian, "usually upon a date calculated by the pagan astronomers (and corresponding roughly to our Easter), we find that throughout a considerable portion of the ancient world, after mourning the sun's death (sometimes for a period of three days) the resurrection was celebrated with great rejoicings." ("The Churches and Modern Thought.")

To the ancient mind the corn-goddesses and wine-gods seemed to die every year, and then rise to life again.

Isis, the wife of the Egyptian Osiris, was a corn-goddess who was annually slain, but rising to life brought joy and gladness to the hearts of her people.

In a Grecian myth, the goddess *Dēmêtêr*, known to the Romans as *Ceres*, and signifying the mother-earth, finds that her daughter, *Persephôné*, has been taken to Hades. She sets out to seek her, and at last is successful in getting *Zeus* to bring back *Persephôné*. But the latter has eaten of a pomegranate in the under-world. Consequently she can only be allowed to remain with her mother, *Dēmêtêr*, for two-thirds of the year; the remaining third must be spent in Hades. *Persephôné* in the lower world is the seed-corn buried in the earth; returned to her mother, she is the corn living the resurrection life,

nourishing men and animals, and filling the world with happiness.

In *Dionysus* we have the god of wine, son of a virgin, who gives his blood to gladden the heart of man. He, too, is slain year by year, but inevitably rises again. He dies when the sap of the vine seems to disappear, and the vine ceases to yield its fruit. His resurrection has occurred when the vine is once more in full bloom. In the mysteries of "Orphism," no doubt closely allied with the mysteries of *Dionysus*, we have, to quote Smith's "Smaller Classical Dictionary" (p. 371): "the sense of sin, the need of atonement, the theory of the suffering and death of a god-man, and lastly, the belief in immortality." It is believed that the mysteries of "Orphism" were more moral than those of *Dionysus*, sometimes called *Bacchus*, but a modern writer admits that "what really, in Greece, best prepared the way for Christianity was the popular movement associated with the *Dionisiac* and *Eleusinian* cults." (Rev. J. D. Thompson, on "Immortality," p. 95.)

In another myth the god *Adonis* dies from a wound received from a boar, but he lives on earth again in the form of a flower, the *anemone*, which springs from his blood. Or, to take the myth in another form, the gods of the underworld allowed *Adonis* to live on earth with *Aphrodite*, for six months each year, in compensation for the grief shown by the goddess at the death of *Adonis*.

Why should not Jesus die and, after a short time in the under-world, rise to life and visit the earth again?

The Phœnician myth of *Adonis* gave expression to the idea of the death of nature in winter, and the resurrection of nature in spring; and festivals in honour of *Adonis* spread into Greece and elsewhere. With these festivals, no doubt, some of the early Christians were acquainted, as they were with other mysteries of Greece and Rome. Hence it was almost impossible that Jesus should not rise from the dead, as other gods and messengers of the gods had done in pre-Christian days.

Long before the Christian era there was introduced into the Roman Empire the worship of the Persian sun-god *Mithra*. This worship became very popular with the Romans, and continued in vogue for at least two centuries. Connected with the cult of *Mithra* there was a mystery in which the god was represented as slain, buried in a rock-tomb, as Jesus was, and mourned for. But, after the lamentations of his devotees he rose again, and was greeted with rejoicing. *Mithra*, like Jesus, was able to wash away the sins of his people; and the initiated were, in one of the *Mithraic* ceremonies, placed underneath a metal grating, over which an ox or ram was slain. The blood of the animal dropped on to the initiated, who benefited by its efficacy in salvation. Mr. J. M. Robertson tells us that, in addition to this, the cross was an important symbol with the *Mithraists*, and the cult of *Mithra* was a main factor in establishing Sun-day as the first day of the week. *Mithra*, the sun, was the first of the seven planetary spirits, on whose names the week is based.

Among people like the Babylonians, the Peruvians and Mexicans, who looked upon their kings as gods, or sons of god, there prevailed the habit of annually slaying the king, or a victim who represented him. The idea being, in the one case, that the indwelling spirit may pass into a more able representative; and in the other that a king or god-substitute might be

offered up as sacrifice, in order that his blood might fertilise the earth, or that he might take away the sins of the people. Whenever a victim was selected instead of the king he was treated as a king for a short time before his death. On this point, Grant Allen remarks: "Like all the similar victims, the Christ, after being treated like a monarch, is reviled and spat upon, buffeted and insulted." (Evolution of the Idea of God, p. 188.)

It will be remembered that at the supposed death of Jesus some wonderful phenomena occurred. Darkness came over the earth, an earthquake happened, rocks were rent, the temple veil was torn in two, and many came out of their tombs and went into the city.

Such mythic portents were not unknown to the pagans, as the following from Plutarch will show: "We are told, there were strong signs and presages of the death of Cæsar. As to the lights in the heavens, the strange noises heard in various quarters by night, and the appearance of solitary birds in the forum, perhaps they deserve not our notice in so great an event as this. But some attention should be given to Strabo, the philosopher. According to him, there were seen in the air, men of fire encountering each other; such a flame appeared to issue from the hand of a soldier's servant, that all the spectators thought it must be burned, yet when it was over, he found no harm." (Julius Cæsar; Langhorne's translation.)

Other mythic incidents corresponding to those in the "Gospel Jesus" myth are to be found in pre-Christian mythology.

If Jesus were subject to a special temptation, so were Zoroaster and Buddha. Demons attacked Zoroaster on several occasions, but they were always defeated. Prof. J. E. Carpenter says: "Foiled in the endeavour to get Zoroaster's life into his power, Ahriman seeks to avert the impending overthrow of his own sovereignty of evil by offering his antagonist the glory of imperial sway." (First Three Gospels; p. 124, pop. ed.) The offer was rejected, as was a similar offer made to Buddha in another myth.

The story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus has its counterpart in the mythic life of Buddha.

A disciple who desired to reach Buddha, who was on the opposite side of a stream, began to walk on the water, and was able to do so until his faith wavered. Then he began to sink. But, regaining his faith in Buddha, he was able to continue, and at last reached his master.

If Jesus turned water into wine, did not Moses turn a whole river into blood (Exodus 7: 20); and was not the sap of the vine turned into wine, or the sacred blood of the vine-god in Pagan mythology? While, if Jesus were to become judge of men, after his death and resurrection, was not Minos, son of Zeus and Europa, judge of the shades in Hades; and did not Osiris, in Egyptian myth, weigh in the balance the deeds of men and judge them accordingly?

Incident after incident in the so-called life of Jesus, as related in the Gospels, resolves into myth when examined by the comparative method of mythologists; and we are forced to the conclusion that the New Testament Gospels reveal the same psychological tendencies to have been at work in the composition of the Christian scriptures as were at work in the formation of the myths of other religions.

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.

## Spiritualism.

### XII.

#### SOME HUMOROUS INCIDENTS.

To many English Spiritualists conditions in other countries, and especially in America, are very little known. Ten years ago fraud was so rampant in the United States that fake mediumship became a profession all by itself, with its own jargon, its own literature, and its own stories. Whether American people are *very* credulous, or whether some of them are *very* clever, I do not know; but I am inclined to think, from their behaviour during the War, that the former supposition is the more plausible. America prides herself on her hard-headed business men, and this is, I suppose a boast that can easily be substantiated from the purely material point of view. Whether these same individuals are hard-headed in the sense of being sceptical and inclined to Freethought seems extremely doubtful, as the present wave of intolerance and persecution so abundantly proves. My own observations among hard-headed folk have led me to look upon them as only hard-headed in the sense of being impermeable to new and enlightened ideas, preferring to believe any rubbish rather than using their brains on subjects outside the ordinary run of business. Indeed, it may be generally said that business men are usually extremely credulous in all matters which do not come within the scope of their financial dealings, accepting religious and ethical conventions as if they were permanent parts of the social structure. In certain cases their obstinacy and sentimentalism actually interfere with their own material advantages, although examples of this are somewhat rare. However that may be, the popularity of fake mediumship in the United States is really astonishing. The number of materializing *seances* held every year must be simply enormous, and it is in these performances that an element of humour is occasionally present. On one occasion during a *seance* of this kind the "spirit" was walking about the room, conversing with the sitters. When it was time to return to the cabinet, this unfortunate phantom found that her robe had got hooked on to a corner of a large bookcase which was standing against one of the side walls. She pulled and pulled, but the materialized substance was too strongly woven, and down came the bookcase with a crash upon the top of her. Lights were at once obtained, and they revealed the medium sitting within the cabinet with a terrified expression on her face, whilst her confederate was discovered screaming with pain under the heavy piece of furniture which had caused the accident. Finally, the "spirit" was got out and taken to hospital, where she was forced to remain several weeks recovering from her injuries.

Another case was one in which a "spirit babe" appeared to a lady who had lost her own child some time previously. Advancing to the curtains of the cabinet, she saw a form holding what seemed to be the body of the infant, and, like a good Spiritualist, she recognized the lost one, a touching scene following upon her discovery. After the "spirits" had again withdrawn behind the folds of the thick curtains, a certain time elapsed before another "spirit" appeared. When the curtain again opened, a misty form was seen advancing, this time holding an infant of a larger size than that previously shown. On being told that the babe was for Mrs. S—, the lady in question stepped forward to the cabinet and gazed at "the spirit child." As she had never had a baby herself, she examined the spirit with some interest, and at last, just when the "spirit" was retiring, seized the infant. Both spirit and lady pulled vigorously, when.....Bang! the baby exploded with a

loud report. It was a rubber bag which could be blown up to any required size, and the tussle before the cabinet had caused it to burst. Such was the dear spirit child over which some innocent Spiritualist had been blubbering but a few minutes previously. The credulity of this poor old lady was certainly unfortunate for her subsequent peace of mind, but not quite so expensive as that of a wealthy American manufacturer of agricultural machinery who became a convert to the new revelation. The medium at whose *seance* this gentleman was a constant attendant determined that his client's state of mental idiocy should be turned into profitable channels. The patient was therefore informed in a pompous and grandiose manner that it was his great privilege to have been chosen to be the person to civilize the planet Jupiter. The inhabitants, it appeared, were in a semi-barbarous condition, and their lack of agricultural implements was deplorable. Would it be possible for the sitter to arrange for some machinery to be sent to Jupiter? All that was necessary was that the ploughs and other machines should be brought to the medium who would dematerialize them and then materialize them again when they had arrived on the surface of the giant planet. This proposal was enthusiastically welcomed by the dupe, who proceeded to have the goods delivered as arranged, the medium meanwhile getting rid of them at convenient intervals for large sums of money. After a time the medium's confederate and co-worker began to grow slightly restive. Afraid of being discovered and getting locked up for theft, he determined to inform the manufacturer as to where his ploughs were actually being sent. Accordingly, he approached the sitter and informed him of the tricks that were being played upon him. Like most Spiritualists, he refused to believe stories of this kind, and so definite proof was offered. The day before he had presented the medium with a horse and cart for the benefit of the farmers on Jupiter. The confederate offered to show him exactly where this horse and cart had been taken, and he, accepting the offer, accompanied his informer to some stables where the actual horse and cart were soon discovered. After a few moments of silence the great business-man said: "Yes, it looks like my cart and it is the same number.....but it *isn't* mine: mine's on Jupiter."

Credulity of this character is, fortunately, not so common in England as it is in America, where fraudulent mediums can always find a rich harvest ground. In this country the majority of the Spiritualists have little money to throw away, and the mediums seem to be of a more timid character than their brazen *confreves* in the United States. However, some of them are determined not to be outdone by their friends abroad. I remember that on one occasion I was being shown some photographs of flowers which had been taken in order to demonstrate the auric exhalations which were being given off by these plants. At the top of some of the plates the developing fluid had not acted quite successfully, and, what with a few minor mistakes elsewhere, some blotches had appeared in the form of a small chain of bubble-like marks. To my amazement I was gravely informed that these marks were "spirit garlands," which had not appeared as clearly as they might have done upon the plate! On informing the medium that on some photographs that I had taken very little could be seen except a general blur, I was at once told that evidently I was a great though undeveloped medium, and was urged to continue taking these photographs. The worse the photograph the better the evidence for spirit interference seems to be the general rule adopted by seasoned Spiritualists, and I suppose that when nothing whatever comes out on the plate it is proof positive that a spirit must have been standing in the light.

In relating the above stories of spiritualistic credulity, which were first made public by Mr. Hereward Carrington, it has not been my intention to persuade the readers of this journal that the whole of psychical phenomena is made up of frauds of this description. Putting on one side for the moment the more psychological side of the subject, and confining myself simply to the so-called physical phenomena, I have always maintained that when every allowance is made for fraud of the subtlest description there remains a small residuum of occurrences which at present remain unexplained. I have little sympathy with those materialistic writers who treat the whole realm of psychic research as a field in which fools are continually being duped by knaves. It would scarcely be becoming for a Freethinker to close his eyes to facts simply for fear that those facts might cause him to revise some long-cherished opinions. Yet this is what certain modern writers are doing at the present time, and the volume that they are publishing cannot fail to do harm to those principles for which Freethinkers stand. It is not through the vapourings of the Spiritualists or the dogmatic assertions of the sceptics that the problems of psychical research will ever be solved. Both sides do their share in clearing the way for the real investigator, but the truth will only be arrived at by those who treat the subject with that spirit of impartiality and fearless Freethought which it so sorely needs at the present time.

E. J. D.

## Correspondence.

### THE CASE FOR CHRISTIANS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In the *Freethinker* of May 16, we are told that "the vast majority of Christians cannot be trusted where the interests of their religion are concerned."

It might be argued with some show of reason that Christians can be trusted—to promote their religion. But I take it that what the writer is accentuating is that they use methods which, by our moral standard, would be wrong, for what they conceive to be the advancement of their religious cause. And he calls upon us to deplore with him the moral depravity of the conduct.

I am an Atheist myself, of what, I think, somebody has called "the most objectionable and aggressive type," and yet the tone of that particular "Acid Drop" does seem to me unreasonable. For the writer is apparently under the impression that Christians have a monopoly of judging things by their own moral standard.

In spite of the recent avowal of some prominent Rationalists to the contrary, I think that we may assume that Freethinkers are Utilitarians, more or less, whatever moral goal they have. Human happiness occupies a large part, if not the whole of it. And this moral end dictates their moral standard; an action is wrong in so far as it is likely to prejudice human happiness, or the other accompanying aims.

Now, let us imagine ourselves with a different goal—let us imagine that after our own comfort, or even before it, the only thing we really care for is to promote a belief in the divinity of an individual. It may be argued, of course, that this is only another form of Utilitarianism, as it serves to promote human happiness in the next world. But that does not really affect the point. It is obvious that given this moral goal, a standard totally different to that of Utilitarians, will logically result. It would obviously under this fresh standard be a most moral action to insert passages in histories which would make the belief more reasonable, and it would obviously be most beneficial to insist upon children being instructed in the truth of that belief.

Freethinkers generally seem to adopt the attitude that Secular Education is not a moral education at all: that the Churches and Atheists could agree upon this, to make the

education in schools non-religious. But, indeed, this attitude seems to me to be quite untenable. I have never heard anybody suggest that the teaching in schools should be non-moral. It would be impossible, I think, or ridiculous, to teach a child about the Inquisition without condemning its bigotry, or about the Spaniards in Peru without condemning their cruelty and greed. The least that Secularists desire is to see children trained to be good citizens. Do they not understand that that in itself is a moral goal, and that it necessarily differs from the Christian's moral goal, which is to bring souls to Christ (or something of the sort; I have rather lost touch with that kind of jargon)?

I think that we Freethinkers need to clean up our ideas on this point; we must realize that there is a difference of moral aim between Christians and ourselves, and that, although we may consider that their aims are based on superstitious and non-existent quantities, it is useless for us to deplore the logical moral standards dictated by these superstitions. Let us admit even that to draw a moral standard fearlessly from a moral aim is in itself a good thing; and let us concentrate upon showing, not the unreasonableness of their moral standard, which indeed does not exist, but the unreasonableness of the premises from which it is deduced.

J. C. S.

#### THOMAS PAINE.

SIR,—In his letter to the *Freethinker* of May 30, Mr. Robertson shows us to what depths of infamy a Christian will descend in order to bolster up superstition or to malign a Freethinker. We are told that "after the death of Sir Joshua [Reynolds], Romney had made up his mind to make the best of the few remaining years that were likely to be his to paint some works that would be worthy of remembrance when he was gone." When we learn that Reynolds died in the spring of 1792, and that from ten to fifteen years previous to that date Romney had painted the portraits of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, Countess of Derby, Lady Warwick, Lady Mansfield, Countess of Pembroke, the fair "perdita" Robinson, Lord Thurlow, Sir Hyde Parker, Bishop Porteous, Lady Hamilton, and others, we feel that Romney had no need in 1792 to paint something to build up his fame; that must have been firmly established fully ten years previously.

And the Rev. John Romney, what a contemptible creature he must have been, to degrade his own father so he can but have a fling at Paine. Says the Rev. John of his father: "he saw Thomas Paine whose name as the author of the *Rights of Man* and the *Age of Reason* has been heard from far and near, and was persuaded by a believer from Manchester to paint his portrait." And Allan Cunningham practically informs us that he limned Paine as a study of Satan. All this is blown to the winds when we remember that Paine and Romney were on terms of mutual friendship, and, further, that Paine's portrait was painted two years before the *Age of Reason* was written.

If my memory serves me aright, it was this same Allan Cunningham who, some forty years later, threatened the Rev. Robert Taylor with legal pains and penalties for quoting after the title *The Devil's Pulpit*, "and a bonnie pulpit it is." The article on Romney in the *Dictionary of National Biography* was written by Sir Walter Armstrong. Was it pure forgetfulness that there is no mention of Romney's portrait of Paine? I wonder.

A. G. BARKER.

#### WANTED, A GUIDE!

SIR,—Some twenty years ago a paragraph appeared in the *Freethinker* to the effect that on a particular Sunday afternoon Mr. J. M. Wheeler and Mr. Chilperic Edwards would pay a visit to the British Museum, and anyone wishing to accompany them on the tour of the galleries should meet under the clock at a certain time.

There were, perhaps, a dozen or so readers of this paragraph who accepted the invitation; but we had not proceeded very far before our numbers were considerably increased by other visitors, who were quick to perceive our guides were something different to the usual cicerones on such occasions.

Personally I had never before, nor have I since, spent such an instructive couple of hours in this interesting building, and I have often wished for another such opportunity.

I have always regarded that excursion as a splendid bit of propaganda work by the two gentlemen mentioned, for their audience increased to nearly fifty before the round was completed, probably half of whom had never heard anything of the Freethought view of the history of the world and its inhabitants. As is well known, to students at least, the British Museum is a standing contradiction to the Christian theory of creation, and an absolute negation of Biblical chronology.

Could not an excursion of the same kind be arranged at the present time? It would be extremely interesting, and particularly instructive to the younger members of our Movement. Although I know of no one who could quite fill the places of the two gentlemen I have mentioned, I have no doubt there are some members of our Party who are capable to conduct such a tour, and who, I hope, will be willing to do so now the suggestion has been made. There need be no doubt on the score of getting an audience, and I feel quite certain it would be profitable to the Cause.

FRED COLLINS.

#### THE CHURCH AND THE WORKING CLASSES.

SIR,—The quotation in the issue of May 16 about the desperate effort of the Church to capture the working man tickles me greatly. I claim myself to be a very ordinary kind of person. I cannot make the same claim for the Freethinker. I find this so-called desperate effort to capture me really an attempt on the part of a few right-thinking Christians to practise what they preach, and to make their contribution towards our social and economic difficulties the real cause for sorrow is that they should be so few. Still, they are a select company. The Vicar of Haggerston can rest assured that "the intelligent democracy" who work in the Dalston Garage are delighted to find he has the courage to do what Shaftesbury, Sadler, Kingsley, Hughes, and Barnett have done in their time. The world is full of strange and sinister alliances these days. Surely it is strange that a parson, who, if he takes a prominent part on behalf of the working man, seriously jeopardizes his worldly prospects, should find against him not only the profiteer, the worldling, and the clerical toady, but also some of the very clan he is so unselfishly trying to help. And now, in asserting his freedom, he is opposed by the Freethinker.

Still, take it from me, he does not mind greatly this attack, and, what is more, I do not think all the Freethinkers in the world will alienate the workers here from this disciple of the Carpenter of Galilee, the worker's friend, who is not out to capture but to help us.

DRIVER T. J. GRIFFITHS (Badge 4077),

The man who was permitted to read the Lesson.

As a matter of historical fact, no really considerable body of men either is, ever has been, or ever has professed to be Christian in the sense of taking the philanthropic passages of the four Gospels as the sole, exclusive, and complete guide of their lives. If they did, they would in sober earnest turn the world upside down. They would be a set of passionate Communists breaking down every approved maxim of conduct and every human institution. In one word, if Christianity really is what much of the language which we often hear used implies, it is false and mischievous. Nothing can be more monstrous than a sweeping condemnation of mankind for not conforming their conduct to an ideal which they do not really acknowledge. When, for instance, we are told that it is dreadful to think that a nation pretending to believe the Sermon on the Mount should employ so many millions sterling per annum on military expenditure, the answer is that no sane nation ever did or ever will pretend to believe the Sermon on the Mount in any sense which is inconsistent with the maintenance to the very utmost by the force of arms of the national independence, honour, and interest. If the Sermon on the Mount really means to forbid this, it ought to be disregarded.—"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," by James Fitzjames Stephen, p. 317.

### The Socialist Parson.

I SPEAK no more of the better land  
With its harps and crowns of glory,  
The working man has ceased to heed  
The tale of the old, old story.

Let's talk of wages, hours, and food,  
And the rights and wrongs of labour;  
Of Marx, monopoly, surplus wealth.  
But please don't mention the Saviour.

I'm awfully keen on the housing scheme—  
And this is a word to the wise—  
I promise to get you a villa below,  
As the mansions are "off" in the skies.

Just hear me orate on the Socialist State,  
When life will be leisure and roses.  
I preach without ruth all Socialist truth,  
But not, not the mistakes of Moses.

Then brothers, my brothers, arise and unite  
Around the dear flag which is red,  
And get all you can according to plan,  
For perhaps when we die we are dead. G. P.

### SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

#### LONDON.

##### INDOOR.

**SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY** (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, Joseph McCabe, "The Virtues and Vices of Patriotism."

##### OUTDOOR.

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

**SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S.** (Brockwell Park): 3.15 and 6.30, Mr. H. B. Johnson will lecture.

**WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S.** (Outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford, E.): 7, A Demonstration: Messrs. R. H. Rosetti, H. Spence, B.Sc., H. Thurlow, Jun., M. Warner.

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

#### COUNTRY.

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**BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S.**—Picnic at Rubery. Meeting Place—Selby Oak Tram Terminus, 2.45. Members and friends to provide provisions and utensils. Committee will provide hot water.

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

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