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Views and Opinions.

Will Religion Revive?

It is pretty generally admitted that the Churches are in a bad way. Indeed, the fact is too obvious for denial. There was never a time when the clergy as a whole were thought less of, or exercised less real and open influence in the life of the nation. The stupid ones are inclined to deny this, and like the Bishop of London, think that by spinning fantastic yarns of the power of religion here and there they will persuade the world to return to its old allegiance. The more astute ones try to overcome the trouble by candidly admitting its existence. Thus Canon Peter Green, of Manchester, said some time ago that there was no encouragement for the religious man in the present outlook. Dean Inge says that the clergyman represents a decaying institution, and that the country will soon tell him so in words as it is at present telling him in act. And the other day Dr. Clifford told a Free Church gathering that during his recent illness he was saddened by "the prevailing despondency, and almost the despair, that was affecting Church life to-day, while outside the Churches apathy and indifference were universally prevalent." And as a way out, Dr. Clifford suggests that the Free Churches should undertake a crusade of "personal evangelism" for the conversion of each other, and then they should proceed to convert the rest of the world. This sounds like an elaborate piece of sarcasm, but it is put forward quite seriously, and the Free Churches intend taking up the suggestion. If they do, we shall know what to expect. All those pathologic specimens who look forward to an emotional debauch at an evangelistic meeting with the same eagerness that a drunkard does to his next "burst" will turn up in full force, and report on the good time they have had. The rest of the world will look on with its usual curiosity, and when it is all over, things will be as they were. Mrs. Partington and her mop are always in evidence.

* * *

The Church and the World.

The *Church Times* in its issue for February 25 also deals with the religious situation, but finds the outlook more hopeful than does Dr. Clifford. But the grounds on which it does so are rather curious. First of all, it admits that the much talked of revival of

religion during the war never occurred. So one may take it that that particular lie is now done with, although what one would like is some word of apology from those who worked so hard at its dissemination. That, however, is not the way of the religious liar. His plan is to tell a lie so long as it pays to tell it, and when it is quite worn out, drop it and tell a new one. That is quite on all fours with religious conversions in general, where the change is from doing wrong in one direction without religion to doing wrong in another direction with it. And after all, the religious world has both scriptural and traditional authority for telling lies when it is to the interest of Christianity that they should be told. But in one respect the *Church Times* is not quite just to the Church. It says that during the war the Church "was criticized for her ineffectiveness and her lack of power." That does not put the situation quite fairly. The Church was not ineffective and it was not without power. No single organization did more than the Church to help the process of brutalization to which the nation was subjected, and from the effects of which we are now suffering. There was not a lie told during the war, no matter how indecent, that the Church did not father. There was not an incitement to international hatred, or to the barbarous doctrine that brute force was the deciding element in national life in which the Church did not share. No one complained that the Church was ineffective in some directions. The complaint was that she was ineffective in the very direction in which many hoped she would have made her influence felt. She was powerless and careless in the direction of encouraging kindlier feelings between people. She did nothing to keep aloft those ideals of honour, of honesty, of truthfulness, and of humanitarianism that during a time of war of necessity suffer depreciation. If it talked of duty it had nothing else in mind than the narrowest of nationalisms. If it preached ideals, of greatness, they were those embodied in huge armies and overpowering numbers. The Church was out to make all it could from the war. It was the worst of war profiteers; and there is small wonder that, as the *Church Times* laments, she sank into "disgrace and contempt." The world, after all, has some regard for honesty and consistency.

* * *

A Chance for Religion.

But the main reason for the expectation of better times is derived from the fact that the peace has lost the world more than the war. Had the world been rightly led when the war came to an end, had it resolved to tread the path of peace, instead of getting ready for new wars, and thus making "scraps of paper" of many things we solemnly declared to be our aim while the war was on, the Church would still be an object of "disgrace and contempt." But that has not occurred. For most vital issues, as General Sir Ian Hamilton declared the other day, the war was fought in vain. Thoughtful men and women, when they reflect upon the millions of young lives that have been offered up, and the gay manner in which the living old men who govern the world are

treading the old paths, are gloomy and depressed. And that, according to the *Church Times* gives religion its chance. For "when man is unhappy he turns to God. The arguments against the existence of God seem then incredibly poor and thin." Now for certain types of character we are not inclined to seriously dispute this. Indeed, we have said more than once that, in the main, the condemnation of religion may be found in the conditions amid which it flourishes most vigorously. In the very beginnings it is ignorance, and the helplessness and fear that ignorance breeds which give to religion its being and its strength. Had the birthright of man been knowledge the gods would never have been born. But knowledge was something that had to be acquired, much as man slowly acquires immunity against particular diseases. Meanwhile, both in gaining physical immunity against disease, and mental immunity from the plague of ignorance, man pays the price. And the price he pays here is the presence of the religions of the world with their armies of priests and parasites, parasites not alone on the industrial strength of a community, but, what is much worse, parasites that sap both its mental and moral strength.

* * *

The Soil in which Religion Grows.

It is the same story all along. Not without significance is the fact that Christianity came to power during a time of social and national demoralization. Christian writers repudiate the suggestion that it was the adoption of Christianity which brought the old Roman Empire to ruin, and they are justified in the repudiation. But it was the decay of the Roman civilization that gave Christianity its chance, and it rose to power, not as a regenerative force, but as one of those organisms that fatten and thrive upon the decay of nobler structures. And it is quite as significant, it is really part of the same story, that religious teachers should always look to seasons of national, social, and individual weakness as offering them the best opportunities for exploitation. Death beds, disease, a sudden affliction, an overwhelming sorrow, a national calamity, there are the things they tell us that bring men to their knees. When men are strong and healthy, when the sun shines, when things are going smoothly and life proceeds happily, men, we are told, forget God. And what is all this but saying that the strong, clear brain sees no proof of God's existence, the healthy, self-reliant nature experiences no call for religion. But when disaster comes and man is thrown, temporarily or permanently off his balance, then he is apt to turn to religion. That, we repeat, may be perfectly true of certain half liberated intellects, but it is certainly not true of all, and to-day, of not even the majority. And if the religious leader feels delighted at the picture, one need not grudge him his pleasure. For a man who can take delight in the thought that his belief is the accompaniment of admittedly pathologic conditions is himself a standing proof of the poverty of his creed. And the phenomenon is only what a scientific Freethinker would expect. In disease it is the latest acquisitions that man loses first. And behind our recently acquired knowledge of the nature of things there are the unnumbered generations during which man was a slave to those fears that lie at the root of all the religions of the world. "When man is unhappy he turns to God" thus becomes, "When man loses the mental balance and moral poise that civilization has given him, he slips back to the uncivilized stage out of which he has only just emerged, and he becomes again a child whimpering in the dark, seeking consolation in the childish things that he had placed on one side during his short-lived period of maturity." The revival of religion is the recrudescence of the savage. When that is said, all is said.

Religion and Civilization.

Paradoxical as it may sound, every revival of religion is a proof of its decay. A religion that is real, one that springs from the life and thought and knowledge of the people in whose midst it exists, does not need a national evangelistic service, or a colossal war to make it a reality. It is that already. It is only when religion is among us for the same reason that we have a tailed spinal column, or a rudimentary hair covering, as reminders of a lower state of life, that it requires constant stimulation to activity. For the time being we must do artificially what the conditions of life once did naturally. And if we can make permanent such conditions as those from which religion sprang, then Dr. Clifford and the *Church Times* may hope for the re-establishment of religion. But can we? Is it possible for anyone nowadays to permanently arrest the development of knowledge and to reduce man once more to the level of the savage cowering before the creatures of his own imagination? Is it possible for religionists to wipe out the Copernican astronomy, the Newtonian physics, the Darwinian biology? Can they prevent mankind developing a society in which the prevailing note shall not be weakness and suffering but strength and happiness? If they can, then they may indeed hope for a genuine restoration of religion. For it is not a man, or a society that destroys religion. That is the work of civilization. Civilized man never discovers gods, he forgets them. It is the savage that plays the part of a midwife to the gods, the function of civilized man is that of their undertaker. You may have a progressive civilization and a decline of religion, or you may have a declining civilization and a growth of religion. But you cannot have both.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Passing of Christianity.

CHRISTIANITY was nigh a "thousand years in the making," and for several hundred years it has been undergoing a process of decline. It was made by the Theologians, and it is the Theologians who are now unmaking it. What they call reconstruction is in reality destruction. Many doctrines that used to be regarded as fundamental are now being abandoned as useless and injurious. The infallibility of the Bible, everlasting punishment, the Fall, the Atonement, even forty years ago these were tenets firmly held and zealously proclaimed by nearly all the divines, and if a professor or preacher ventured to express disbelief in a single one of them, he was tried for heresy, and generally deprived of his chair or his pulpit. To-day, however, the overwhelming majority of divines either reject them altogether, or explain them away. The Right Rev. Charles Gore, D.D., formerly Bishop of Oxford, preaching in St. Paul's Cathedral on a recent Sunday, said:—

In the first half of the nineteenth century there existed in this country an accepted standard of religious orthodoxy. No doubt within the Church there were High Churchmen and Evangelicals, and within the nation a large number of Christian denominations, but all were, more or less, agreed on certain fundamentals, and on these fundamentals all pulpits spoke alike. And this popular orthodoxy had two chief pillars of support.

Those pillars of support were the belief in God resting on the argument from design, and the revelation of God through the prophets and through Jesus Christ, made to rest on the inerrancy of Scripture. Now, Dr. Gore declares that, "about the middle of last century both these pillars of orthodoxy were destroyed," the one by Darwinism and the other by historical criticism. Science traces no design in Nature, and historical criticism discovers no infallibility in the Bible. Speak-

ing of the repudiation of the story of the Fall, Dr. Gore observes:—

If it means that as we read the great story of the Garden of Eden and the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve in the third chapter of Genesis we are to recognize that this, and, indeed, all the early chapters of Genesis, is not history, then I would wholly agree. I can never imagine how people so long supposed that these earlier chapters gave an historical account of actual events as they occurred. They are plainly folk-lore, such as mostly lies behind human history. There was no Garden in Mesopotamia at a particular date, with a particular man and woman and a serpent and certain wonderful trees.

That is certainly a marvellous admission made by a Bishop of the Anglican Church, who is at once a great scholar and a deep thinker.

Now, we must consider the theological significance of the repudiation of the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis. If there were no Garden of Eden at a particular date, with a particular man and woman, and a serpent and certain wonderful trees, how do we know that there was a Christ, born of a Virgin, who died a sacrificial death and rose from the dead on the third day, thereby becoming the Saviour of the world? Why deny the historicity of Genesis and accept that of the Gospels? Strangely enough, the Bishop, having rejected the historicity of the Genesis account of the Fall, proceeds to treat it as true, saying: "If you read this third chapter of Genesis as being not history, but what the early Christian Church called it, moral teaching in the form of a story, you will be amazed at its truth." To us it is utterly immaterial whether the third chapter of Genesis is read as history, or as moral teaching in the form of a story. In either case, it is wholly untrue of life. Genesis represents man as having been made in the image and after the likeness of God, and as almost immediately doing wrong, or as a perfect being who consciously went astray. If God there is, he is directly responsible for man's sinfulness, but if there is no God, the very idea of sinfulness is a delusion. Dr. Gore seems to accept Darwinism as a true hypothesis, but if Darwinism is true, theology is a farce. Darwin himself became an Atheist under the influence of his theory.

But what does Dr. Gore mean by sin? He says: "If, for instance, yesterday I lost my temper, I did what need not have been and ought not to have been, and because I did this I so far lost my true heritage and perverted the order of human life." But loss of temper does not prove that we have inherited a depraved nature from our ancestors. Dr. Gore's temper may be generally well under control. Indeed, he attributes the loss of it yesterday to a momentary loss of his "true heritage." A dog occasionally loses his temper, but nobody would dream of calling him a fallen and sinful creature on that account. The right reverend gentleman falls into the error, so common among divines, of assuming that there is a fundamental or constitutional difference between man and the animals below him, whereas there is only a difference of degrees, not of kind. Dr. Gore says that if he knows anything in the world he knows in his own experience what sin is. He quotes an old Greek philosopher who said, "There are certain truths which seize us by the hair of our head and drag us to assent," adding, "and this is one of them." We beg to remind him that he is speaking as a Theologian rather than as a man prepared to face all the facts of life in the light thrown upon them by modern science. He says that it is "idle, aye, worse than idle, it is contrary to all our experience, to talk about sin as if it were something which belonged, in its full force, to the prehuman stage of our development, to the tiger and the ape in man, or to the barbarian and uncivilized stage of our civilization." It is neither idle nor contrary to experience, but the very truth to deny the

existence of any unbridgeable gulf between man and the higher animals, and to hold the view that evil means nothing but non-adaptation of organisms to their conditions. This is true of all living things, from the lowest to the highest. There is no Divine law as distinguished from natural law, and all evil is lack of conformity to this. As Professor Bury well puts it:—

In the present state of the world men suffer many evils, and this shows that their characters are not yet adjusted to the social state. Now the qualification requisite for the social state is that each individual shall have such desires only as may fully be satisfied without trenching upon the ability of others to obtain similar satisfaction. This qualification is not yet fulfilled, because civilized man retains some of the characteristics which were suitable for the conditions of his earlier predatory life (*The Idea of Progress*, pp. 337-8).

Bishop Gore admits that mankind did not begin at the top, in a state of perfection, and fall to the bottom. He even goes further and declares that man was not created perfect, but "with a capacity to acquire virtue and to move toward perfection." Very probably, being a Darwinian, his lordship would concede that man was never created at all, but has slowly developed from simpler forms. If so, does it not follow that the evils from which we suffer are due to the fact that we have not yet attained to a perfect state, and that sin, in the theological sense, is a figment of the imagination?

The conclusion from which there is no intelligible escape is that Christianity, as now interpreted by one of the ablest leaders of the Catholic Party in the Anglican Church, is alarmingly emasculated as compared with what it was as taught by the Schoolmen. Secular knowledge and scientific discoveries are gradually undermining supernatural beliefs. Darwin and Spencer, Huxley and Tyndall, and their successors, have exerted a marvellously liberalizing influence even upon the masses of the people, with the result that the clergy are practically compelled to do their utmost to rationalize the Christian religion, which they can only do by dropping dogma after dogma, and putting their supreme emphasis upon the moral teaching found in the Gospels. By and bye, judging by the signs of the times, they will be obliged to renounce even Theism, and concentrate upon earthly things, which St. Paul condemns so severely. Bishop Gore advises his hearers to "listen to the deepest exponents of human experience, to a Dante and a Milton, to a Shakespeare and a Shelley," and a better advice was never given. We venture to predict that the earnest study of Dante, Shakespeare and Shelley for a couple of years would not fail to convince most of the students of the utter absurdity as well as futility of putting their trust in supernatural beings. The Bishop refers to Shakespeare's cxxix. sonnet, the subject of which is lust. How profoundly true it is all know. For example:—

A bliss in proof, and prov'd, a very woe;
Before, a joy propos'd: behind, a dream:
All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

But this has no bearing whatever on the theological doctrine of sin, nor on any aspect of supernaturalism.

J. T. LLOYD.

The wretch that would a Tyrant own,
And the wretch, his true-born brother,
Who would set the Mob aboon the Throne,
May they be damned together!
Who will not sing "God save the King,"
Shall hang as high's the steeple;
But while we sing "God save the King"
We'll ne'er forget THE PEOPLE!

—Burns.

From a Persian Garden.

There is delight in singing, though none hear
Beside the singer, and there is delight
In praising, though the praiser sit alone
And see the praised far off him, far above.

—Landor.

FROM that dreamy East, whence come tales of houris and scented gardens, langorous dances and witching music, the Orient of luxuriance and barbaric splendour, Omar Khayyam, the Voltaire of Persia, deigned to sing to us. It is eight centuries since Omar went down to the dust, but time moves with silent feet in the slow-changing East. The world of the Persia of to-day recalls the world of bygone ages. The caravan tracks, the jingling bells of the laden camels moving leisurely over the dusty plains, the fierce warriors armed to the teeth, the caravanserais, the manners and customs of the towns, are not greatly changed from those of the Persia of ages long past.

Omar was born in the latter half of the eleventh century, about the time of the Norman conquest of Britain. A great scholar, he was one of the eight men who reformed the calendar. He was the author of astronomical tables, of a treatise on cubic roots, and another on algebra, and in his leisure he amused himself by writing poems. These verses consisted simply of little epigrams of four lines apiece, arranged in alphabetical order. Their subject-matter includes praise of love and wine and speculations on religion. That is practically what all Oriental poetry is.

This Persian scholar was a Freethinker, and the way he enforces his views is by praising wine, for he was supposed to be a Mohammedan, to whom wine was a forbidden thing. Wine, with Omar, is a type of the enjoyment of the world. This old Persian singer remained more or less forgotten for some centuries, maybe because of his Freethought, and his having written in Persian, never a popular language with literary men. Then his writings fell into the hands of Edward FitzGerald, a shy genius, who did a wondrous thing. He turned the quatrains of old Omar into one of the masterpieces of English literature, and made Omar's name resound through the world.

Few translations have ever achieved such popularity. Tennyson, an artist to the finger tips, said that nothing else of the kind had been done "so divinely well." At first, the book made its way slowly, for FitzGerald took as great pains to forgo fame as most men do to ensure it. Even then, FitzGerald was supposed to have invented Omar, as Defoe invented Robinson Crusoe, or as the artist, Bruce Bairnsfather, invented Old Bill. As a fact, the translation is finer than the original, "A planet larger than the sun which cast it," said Tennyson.

The evergreen merit of this great poem is that it voices the scepticism in all thoughtful men's minds, and makes magnificent music of it. Omar is revealed as a Secularist, who fails to find any Providence but Destiny, and any certain world but this, which he advises us to make the best of:—

I came like water, and like wind I go
Into this universe, and why not knowing,
Nor whence, like water willy-nilly flowing,
And out of it, as wind along the waste,
I know not whither, willy-nilly blowing.
What, without asking, hither hurried whence?
And, without asking, whither hurried hence?
Oh! many a cup of this forbidden wine
Must drown the memory of that insolence.

Omar says there is no life hereafter in verse of passionate bitterness:—

Oh, threats of Hell and hopes of Paradise!
One thing at least is certain—this life flies.
One thing is certain, and the rest is lies.
The flower that once has blown for ever dies.

Lamentation, just as in Æschylus, Shelley, or Herrick, is exquisitely expressed:—

Yet, ah! that spring should vanish with the rose,
That youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close;
The nightingale that in the branches sang,
Ah whence and whither flown again—who knows?

This far Orient which Omar knew is a land of dreams to the Western world, but it was far otherwise to the poet. To him it was a stern reality, and the "King of Kings" was a live monarch, whose scimitar was sharp, and whose caprices had to be respected. To Omar the—

Shrines of fretted gold,
High-walled gardens, green and old.

had not the charm that we find in them. The poet who rested beneath the citron shadows, who saw—

The costly doors flung open wide,
Cold glittering through the lamplight dim,
And brodered sofas on each side.

did not enjoy the scene as we may now. Under the witchery of the poet's genius we scent, across centuries of time and thousands of miles of space, in our Western winds the aroma from those far-off Eastern gardens. We gaze on the roses, the perfect flame of the tulips, we drink the Persian wine, and wind our fingers in the tresses of the beloved. And we are not dogged by "murder, with his silent, bloody feet."

Oh, Immortals of literature! The old Persian poet sees his vision, and writes it, and eight centuries after the tired worker, forgetting for a little space his labours, lives a freer life in the wonderland of the poet's genius. Here are nymphs, and roses, grotesque imaginings and human memories. This is immortality indeed! Under the poet's opiate wand he dreams the same dream for one little hour—and is refreshed.

MIMNERMUS.

The Origin of Christianity.

VII.

(Continued from page 133.)

While criticism of the Gospel documents is advancing more boldly and always leaving in existence less of an historical Jesus, the number of works in popular religious literature intended to glorify Jesus the man grows enormously. These endeavour to make up for the deficiency in certain historical material, by sentimental phrases and the deep tone of conviction; indeed, the rhetoric which is disseminated with this design seems to find more sympathy in proportion as it works with less historical restraint. And yet learning as such has long come to the point when the historical Jesus threatens to disappear from under its hands.—*Professor Arthur Drews, "The Christ Myth," p. 11.*

THE Rev. Dr. Geikie, in his *Life of Christ*, dealing with the time of Christ's birth, says:—

The whole subject is very uncertain. It would appear to fix the date of the birth at five years earlier than our era. Petavius and Usher fix it on the 25th of December, five years before our era. Bengel on the 25th of December, four years before our era; Anger and Winer, four years before our era, in the Spring; Scaliger, three years before our era, in October; St. Jerome, three years before our era, on December 25; Eusebius, two years before our era, on January 6; and Ideler, seven years before our era, in December.¹

The Jewish Life of Christ—the *Sepher Toldoth Jeshu*—places his birth one hundred years before our era. According to the learned German, W. D. Block, who devoted a treatise to the subject, Christ was born 19 B.C.; Bunsen, in his *Bible Chronology*, 15 B.C.; other authorities have placed it as follows: Munter, 7 B.C.; Kepler, Pagi, Dodwell, 6 B.C.; Chrysostom,

¹ Geikie, *Life of Christ*, Vol. I., p. 559.

Hales, Blair, Clinton, 5 B.C.; Sulpicius, Lempriere, Wieseler, Renan, 4 B.C.; Clement of Alexandria, Irenæus, Cassiodorus, 3 B.C.; Epiphanius, Orosius, 2 B.C.; Chronicle Alexandria, Tertullian, Dionysus, Luther, Norisus and Herwart, Paul of Middelburg, A.D. 2; Lydiat, A.D. 3. And this list is by no means exhaustive.

The Rev. Albert Barnes, in his *Notes on the Gospels*, a work of much authority among the Protestant Churches, after observing that the Jews sent out their flocks during the summer months, and took them in at the end of October, continues:—

It is clear from this that our Saviour was born before the 25th of December, or before what we call Christmas. At that time it is cold, and especially in the high mountainous regions about Bethlehem. God has concealed the time of his birth. There is no way to ascertain it. By different learned men it has been fixed at each month in the year.²

The birthday of Christ was as unknown to the early Christians as it is to us, and as a matter of fact it was not fixed upon until nearly 400 years after the time it is said to have taken place. In a sermon delivered, it is believed, on Christmas Day of the year A.D. 386,³ St. Chrysostom, referring to the pagan celebrations on the 25th of December, says: "On this day, also, the birth of Christ was *lately fixed at Rome* in order that whilst the heathen were busy with their profane ceremonies, the Christians might perform their holy rites undisturbed."⁴ Mr. C. W. King, who cites the foregoing, adds:—

The old festival held on the 25th day of December in honour of the "Birthday of the Invincible One" [Mithra] and celebrated by the Great Games of the Circus, was afterwards transferred to the commemoration of the Birth of Christ, of which the real day was, as the Fathers confess, totally unknown.⁵

Professor J. H. Worman, in his articles "Mithras" in that orthodox work McClintock and Strong's *Biblical Cyclopædia*, says: "The most important of his [Mithra's] many festivals was his birthday, celebrated on the 25th of December, the day subsequently fixed, against all evidence, as the birthday of Christ."

The 25th of December was the birthday of the ancient pagan Sun-gods. Upon this point the testimony of Professor Françoise Lenormant, the eminent French Archæologist—who was no sceptic, but a Roman Catholic—is final. He says:—

The rites of the festival in honour of the new birth of the young sun, as celebrated by the Sarraceni, according to St. Epiphanius, when at midnight they entered the subterranean sanctuary, whence the priest presently came forth, crying: "The Virgin hath brought forth; the light is about to begin to grow again." This ceremony took place each year on the 25th of December, the day of the *Natalis Solis Invicta* [Birthday of the Victorious Sun], in the Oriental worship of the sun, engrafted at Rome in the third century; the day of the festival of the Awakening of Melkarth, at Tyre; the day, likewise, for celebrating the great Persian festival of Mithra, when he was born of a stone in the depth of a dark grotto. We know that it was felt to be expedient to uproot these essentially popular festivals by substituting for them a festival applicable to the new religion; and, therefore, the heads of the Church in the West fixed upon the 25th day of December, in the beginning of the fourth century, for the celebration of the birth of Christ, the exact anniversary being unknown.⁶

Long before Rome was built, or thought of, the ancient Egyptians celebrated the birth of the divine child Horus by the goddess Isis on the 25th of

December.⁷ According to Godfrey Higgins, the birthday of Osiris, the principal god of the Egyptians, was ascribed to the same day.⁸ The same writer also says that Bacchus "was born of a virgin on the 25th of December, and was always called the Saviour. In his Mysteries, he was shown to the people, as an infant is by the Christians at this day, on Christmas day morning, in Rome."⁹

EASTER A PAGAN FESTIVAL.

As the early Christians did not know the date of the birthday of Christ, so they did not know the date of his death and resurrection; and as they borrowed the birthday of the pagan gods, so they borrowed the time of his death and resurrection from the same source. Sir James Frazer observes:—

the death and resurrection of Attis were officially celebrated at Rome on the 24th and 25th of March, the latter being regarded as the spring equinox, and, therefore, as the most appropriate day for the revival of a god of vegetation who had been dead or sleeping throughout the winter.

Therefore, he proceeds:—

The inference appears to be inevitable that the passion of Christ must have been arbitrarily referred to that date in order to harmonize with an older festival of the spring equinox. This is the view of the learned ecclesiastical historian, Mgr Duchesne, who points out that the death of the Saviour was thus made to fall upon the very day on which, according to a widespread belief, the world had been created. But the resurrection of Attis, who combined in himself the characters of the divine Father and the divine Son, was officially celebrated at Rome on the same day. When we remember that the festival of St. George in April has replaced the ancient pagan festival of the Parilia; that the festival of St. John the Baptist in June has succeeded to a heathen Midsummer festival of water; that the festival of the Assumption of the Virgin in August has ousted the festival of Diana; that the feast of All Souls in November is a continuation of an old heathen feast of the dead; and that the Nativity of Christ himself was assigned to the winter solstice in December because that day was deemed the Nativity of the Sun, we can hardly be thought rash or unreasonable in conjecturing that the other cardinal festival of the Christian Church, the solemnization of Easter, may have been in like manner, and from like motives of edification, adapted to a similar celebration of the Phrygian god Attis at the vernal equinox.¹⁰

As this distinguished scientist further remarks:—

Taken altogether, the coincidence of the Christian with the heathen festivals are too close and numerous to be accidental. They mark the compromise which the Church in the hour of its triumph was compelled to make with its vanquished yet still dangerous rivals.¹¹

(To be Continued.) W. MANN.

Nature rejects the monarch, not the man;
The subject, not the citizen: for kings
And subjects, mutual foes, for ever play
A losing game into each other's hands,
Whose stakes are vice and misery. The man
Of virtuous soul commands not, nor obeys.
Power, like a desolating pestilence,
Pollutes whate'er it touches; and obedience,
Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth,
Makes slaves of men, and, of the human frame,
A mechanized automaton.

—Shelley (*Queen Mab*).

² Barnes, *Notes*, Vol. 2, p. 402.

³ Herzogs, *Religious Encyclopædia*. Article, Christmas.

⁴ Quoted in King's *Gnostics and their Remains*, p. 109.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 119.

⁶ Lenormant, *Beginnings of History*, p. 263.

⁷ Gerald Massey, *Natural Genesis*, Vol. 2, p. 402; M. I. e Clerk Septchenes, *Religion of the Ancient Greeks*, p. 214.

⁸ *Anacalypsis*, Vol. II., p. 99.

⁹ *Ibid*, Vol. II., p. 102.

¹⁰ Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, p. 200.

¹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 201-202.

God and the Church.

Most people think that it is a good thing to believe in the existence of a god, provided that he is the right kind of a god. But so long as any idea of a god remains the priest and the politician will have plenty to work upon, and this world will never be free and happy and generally wealthy until the priest and the politician are gone.

Moreover, most people think that it is not the Church itself that is bad, but the bad things about the Church that are bad, and that by certain reforms it may be converted into a useful institution. But the Church, organized and maintained as it is for the purpose of keeping the people in ignorance in order that they may the more easily be kept in poverty, is so essentially bad as to be incapable of reform. The Church has always been the faithful ally of the ruling classes in their schemes of wholesale plunder, and so long as she exists in any form the people will inevitably remain in poverty and servitude.

When the great majority of the race are as free from the dominion of God and the Church as I am, and as many others are, they will be free in body as well as in mind, and, therefore, generally wealthy, happy and good. Now these are the two things that most people find so difficult to comprehend. They cannot understand why the Church may not be made good, and why we may not be brought to believe in a really good God. And yet if they will read history they will find that the Church never was good, and that there never was a single person who had a conception of a God that was rational and at the same time good.

The very best of men have bad gods. I greatly admire Jesus of Nazareth, as a Freethinker and social reformer, and he certainly had a conception of a Heavenly Father who was very amiable in certain respects. But even the Heavenly Father of Jesus was one who could and would destroy both our bodies and souls in hell; he was one who could allow a rich man to burn for ever, hearing him cry for a drop of water to cool his parched tongue, and deliberately refuse this small alleviation of his misery. I doubt if there is a man on earth to-day who could be guilty of such fiendish cruelty and malice. But the Heavenly Father of Jesus, good and tender-hearted a man as he was, was so ineffably wicked and cruel that he could see a man suffer exquisite and everlasting torture merely because he had not used his riches in this world quite rightly. No doubt many rich people have a good deal to answer for in the way they treat the poor; but if I knew that the nigger-drivers and sweaters, the man-starving landlords and usurers were to be punished by being burned in hell for ever, I would say: "Not that, for pity's sake not that. They have, indeed, been cruel and pitiless, but they do not deserve so horrible a fate as that!"

Well, if the God of Jesus was a bad God, it is almost useless to hope that anybody's god can be a good one, and such is the case. Men are always sure to invent a god who agrees with them in opinion and who will do what they want done.

For example: The late Henry George believed in the Single Tax. He also believed in some kind of a god. Not a very definite kind of a god, but still a god of some kind. That is why he was allowed to preach his Single Tax from the pulpits of many of our churches. The Church people are not now so particular as they used to be. Time was when you had to believe in a very particular kind of god to get into a church pulpit, but the gods are receding so rapidly from view now that all that is necessary is for you to believe in some kind of a god, definite or indefinite; you need not explain what kind of a god, but say simply that you believe in God. Well, Henry George

believed in the Single Tax and he also believed in some kind of a god. It is, therefore, no surprise to discover that Mr. George's very indefinite god was also a believer in the Single Tax. When describing the Single Tax system of taxation Mr. George used to say that it was the system "intended by the Intelligence which is behind natural laws."

Now observe this point. Mr. George was a man of very considerable thinking power. He did not believe in a man-like god. He had no crude nor savage idea of God. His idea of God was that of the most advanced of the Theistic school of thinkers. But see the harmfulness of even such an idea of God. Mr. George had a theory of taxation, and instead of allowing that theory to be fairly discussed on its own merits he declared that God believes in it. If that be so, of course all debate is stifled. If the Intelligence which is behind natural laws intended that the Single Tax should go into operation that settles the question and puts a stop to further thinking on the subject. And that is always the trouble with any kind of a god, if you can get people to believe that this, that, or the other is the will of God then they stop thinking upon the subject.

What I am saying is not to be construed as anything in the nature of an attack on Henry George or the Single Tax. That is not my point. My point is that if anybody would be a believer in a harmless god, a man of Mr. George's mental power would be that man. He had freed himself from all the grosser superstitions about God, but you see that even his very indefinite God, whom he describes only as "the Intelligence which is behind natural laws," is one who unfairly interferes in a discussion that is going on in this world, and decides in favour of the Single Tax. Many good men and advanced thinkers believe that the government of man by violence is according to the plans of God for this world; that is, that policemen and soldiers, to say nothing of kings, presidents, and tax collectors, are God's agents on earth for carrying out his will. All that I have to say about such a God is that I know men who are far wiser and better than he. If there is a God and he cannot run this world without the use of clubs and bayonets, battleships and poison gas, I would suggest that he stand aside and let somebody else take up the task.

To my mind nothing is more positive than that it cannot be shown that there is any power or personality in this universe unassociated with matter. And when a man uses the word god he uses a word that describes nothing, and when he asserts that there is any intelligence behind the laws of nature he asserts something that he cannot prove. For every indication of intelligence in nature I can produce as strong evidence of lunacy. If a lot of banking magnates and leading politicians bring about a European war there is no sense whatever in killing millions of innocent men, women and children as a penalty for their pitiless wickedness. If a man jumps into the sea to save another's life there is no sense in drowning him for his heroism. And when some good farmer's cattle are killed by lightning there does not seem to me to be much sense in such a performance. But I am not now discussing the abstract question of whether there is a God or not; all I now want to show is that the idea of a God is a great hindrance to our progress towards general goodness, happiness and wealth. So long as men stop to inquire what is the will of God, or the plan of God, they will get nowhere. One man will tell you that God is a Roman Catholic, another that he is a Presbyterian, another that he is a Baptist, and so on. One man will tell you that he is a Republican, another that he is a State Socialist, another that he is a Single Taxer, and so on.

What we must come to see is that nothing is ever done in human society that is not done by men; that

what is for the general wealth is right, and that what is for the general poverty of men is wrong. There is but one great social virtue, and that is general wealth. Every other social virtue will come from that. There is but one great social crime, and that is general poverty. Every vice is included in that. And this remains true whether there is a God or not. Poverty must be destroyed, not because it is God's will that it should be, but because it is best for the human race. And general wealth must be achieved, not because it is God's will, but because it is best for us all that it should be achieved.

It is well, then, to be on your guard against all those who tell you what is, and what is not the will or plan of God. In every such case you will find a person who is intellectually asleep, or half asleep, or mentally dishonest, or else you will find—and this is more likely—a priest or a politician; a person who wants you not to think for yourself. Beware of these men. We have been dragged through enough blood and mire and darkness doing things according to the will of God. It is now time that we began to think things out for ourselves.

G. O. W.

Acid Drops.

That dare-devil body, the Convocation of Canterbury, has just decided to elect a committee to draw up rules for appointing an order of deaconesses. This is restoring an ancient custom of the Church, for which women have not to thank Christians. The truth is that in the Roman Pagan religion women played a part, and it was not possible for Christianity to commence by excluding women from the service of the Church, as was the case with the Jewish religion and other eastern cults. But the line was drawn at prohibiting women being regular preachers, and as soon as was possible the real character of Christianity showed itself by the relegation of women to the background. In the background she remained until the growth of modern movements outside the Church began to demand that women should be treated as something other than an "unclean" thing and an ever ready agent of the Devil. Against this tendency the Church stood as long as it dare. Now it finds it politic to give way a little. Hence the order of deaconesses.

But the liberty granted to women in the Church is not without its qualifying conditions. She is not to be allowed to act as a fully fledged preacher, that is, she may only speak at other than regular services, and no woman under thirty is to be allowed to address a mixed assembly. Then that relic of the tenth century, the Bishop of London, succeeded in getting an amendment passed to the effect that women should speak "primarily to their own sex." Finally, there was a strong feeling, said the Bishop of Winchester, that deaconesses should not marry. What we are wondering is, how long women will continue to serve a religion that more than anything in European history has made for their subjection and degradation. A religion with a celibate figurehead, which traces the evil in the world to women, and took from her all the freedom she enjoyed in the ancient world, should be no religion for a self-respecting woman.

The Bishop of Chelmsford tells a story of a boy who, seeing a bishop during the war, said to a companion: "Go on, it ain't a bishop; it's a Gordon Highlander going to a funeral." But Highlanders are not usually flat-chested, and do not have legs like lead-pencils.

Dean Inge says "If there is still a dean of St. Paul's Cathedral a hundred years hence, he will be invited to dine on champagne and turtle soup with the Worshipful Company of Bricklayers or of Railwaymen." The prophecy seems a likely one, especially as the clergy and the fleshpots are always so closely associated. A dean would hardly dine off a bun and a glass of milk.

The clergy are shouting that they are starving, but very few finish up in workhouses. The late-lamented Rev. H. F. Bull, of Worthing, left £22,927; the late Rev. S. Johnson, of Ealing, left £2,289. At Westcliff-on-Sea, the Rev. A. D. Belden, who is a bit of a Socialist, has been presented with £125 and a leather chair, whilst his wife received a gold pendant. The Rev. O. S. Smith, of Southampton, left £27,114.

According to the Rev. James Gray, of Chicago, no less than 25,000 Protestant clergymen abandoned the pulpit in the United States last year. We hope that the figures are quite accurate. It raises one's estimate of human nature to believe that they are. And it helps to drive home the lesson that the calibre of the clergy sinks steadily with the advance of culture. Life, ultimately, is too strong for religion. And as the clergy sink in ability and character so they naturally have less influence over the affairs of life. Which is quite as it should be.

Meanwhile, we note that the Chicago City Council is to be opened with prayer. But the programme is to be a very comprehensive one. The official praying machine may be either a Protestant, a Roman Catholic, or a Jewish Rabbi. It is a case of "Let 'em all come." The Chicago city fathers evidently don't care what sort of prayers they have so long as they get a prayer. But it seems to be adding fresh work for the recording angel. He will be at times a bit puzzled as to who it is that it is praying and be in doubt as to whether he ought to pay attention or not. All we would venture to advise the Council is that they should keep some sort of an official record, and note which prayers have the best results. And we wonder what effect it will have, anyway, on the meat canning industry?

There is, it appears, no law in the State of Utah to prohibit the teaching of religion in the schools. But the *Salt Lake Telegram* very properly thinks that the sooner such a law is passed the better. In a leading article it points out that if people want religion there are the churches and the parents, and is of opinion that until the child has reached mature years its religious education is best in the hands of its parents. We congratulate the *Salt Lake Telegram* on its fairness and courage. We don't know a single one of our newspapers that would have the honesty to say as much. They probably think the same, but what they think and what they say are often different things.

If Mrs. Cleo Clegg has her way the desire of the *Telegram* will soon be realized. She has introduced a Bill into the State legislature which enacts thus:—

Section 1. It shall be unlawful to teach in any of the district schools of this state, any atheistic, infidel, sectarian, religious or denominational doctrine and all such schools shall be free from sectarian control.

Section 2. Nothing in this act shall be deemed to prohibit the giving of any moral instruction tending to impress upon the minds of the pupils the importance and necessity of good manners, truthfulness, temperance, purity, patriotism and industry, but such instruction shall be given in connection with the regular school work.

Section 3. Any person who shall violate any of the provisions of this act shall be guilty of a misdemeanour. Short and sweet, but effective.

A London daily paper has published correspondence on the subject "Should Clerical Dress be Reformed?" There is plenty of room for reform, but most probably the clergy will keep to their dog collars and petticoats. If they dress as do other people, some may begin to wonder why we have clergymen at all.

To induce mothers to attend his services, the Rev. J. H. Brooksbank, a Baptist minister at Leighton Buzzard, has started a nursery at the chapel, and is himself taking a hand.

The Wharfedale Guardians recently had before them a suggestion from the Yorkshire Vagrancy Committee that "spiritual instruction" should be given to the tramps in the casual wards. It was admitted that the

request had not come from the tramps themselves, and one of the speakers, who had had forty years experience of tramps, said that he found they liked best to be left alone. "When conducting services at model lodging houses, he often found that the audience knew more of the matter than the preacher did, and on one occasion a deputation waited on the preacher to tell him so." We are neither surprised that that should be so, or that the poor unfortunate devils should desire to be let alone. It is a crowning indignity that when men have come to the condition of seeking a night's shelter a preacher should be let loose on them to tell them about the love of God. We don't wonder that intelligent, but unfortunate men, resent it. We are hoping that one day the whole of the working class will have developed enough self respect to openly resent the intrusion upon them of a mob of patronizing clerics to teach them things they can very well do without. Now, if the clergy would confine their attention to those who were responsible for the conditions that fill the workhouses, etc., some good might be done. But they are not likely to do that. When they can no longer keep the "lower classes" in order the Black Army will be disbanded.

A painting in the Royal Exchange, London, depicting the Armistice Thanksgiving Service at St. Paul's Cathedral, shows the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London in all the glories of twelfth century costumes. Rather an advanced costume considering the antiquity of the doctrines preached by these gentlemen.

England used to be called a free country. If some people had their way there would be precious little freedom left, except freedom for the authorities to do just as they please. We have advanced to the point where people may be locked up, not for circulating certain literature, but for merely having it in their possession, and that is a crime hitherto quite unknown to English law. We have also established the right of the Government to arrest and deport men without any statement of offence or public trial. But even this does not suit some of the members of our present House of Commons. So the other day, Mr. Higham, the member for Islington South, moved for the suppression of a paper, unnamed, that had been publishing articles "detrimental to the best interests of the State," and the reply of the Home Secretary was, not that he had any objection to doing so, but solely that it would advertise the paper in question. Now, that kind of thing opens up endless possibilities. Presumably, Christians would agree that the articles appearing in the *Freethinker* were detrimental to the best interests of the State. The same would apply to almost any article with a strongly marked opinion on almost any subject whatever. It would also justify the suppression of free speech by the Bolsheviks in Russia, and of free opinion anywhere. We suggest that the best and the most comprehensive plan would be for the House of Commons to make it a criminal offence for anyone to publish anything for which the local police superintendent disapproves. We feel sure that the present House of Commons would agree. The only risk run would be opposition from the House of Lords, where there appears to still linger some respect for what we used to pride ourselves on as English liberties.

What has been said above receives point from the recent decision of the Lord Chief Justice of Ireland that, the Civil Courts have no jurisdiction over the sentences of a Military Court. So far as soldiers are concerned that may be correct, but we have always been under the impression that in the case of civilians they were under the protection of the Civil Courts, and that even when Military Law is proclaimed they may still demand an account from the military for the lives of civilians. If the Lord Chief Justice of Ireland is correct, it means that the government may, at any time it deems necessary, proclaim a state of military law, and the lives and property of all civilians will be at the mercy of a military officer, without there being the possibility of appeal from its decision. If that really is sound constitutional law, and of that we have grave doubts, it is well that it should be altered at once. It reduces freedom to a farce, and government to anarchy.

Luton is at present suffering under a bad attack of Sundayitis. The other day a number of tradesmen were summoned under the old Act of 1677 for selling on Sunday and fines inflicted. Most of those summoned said that they intended to open all the same, and, we trust they will keep to their promise. The real persons to decide the matter here are the public. If Sunday opening is offensive to the public it will not buy, and in that case the shops will soon close. In the case of the Sheffield prosecutions of some few years back, the people summoned, acting on the advice of Mr. Clem. Edwards, took out summonses against the local authorities and others for Sunday trading, and the whole matter was dropped. We suggest that something of the same kind might be tried at Luton.

Of course, the real cure for this kind of thing is to make more people Freethinkers. Christians can no more help interfering with the freedom of other people than garlic can help infecting the atmosphere. The only guarantee of freedom is to knock the religious element out of folk. Probably a good dose of the *Freethinker* in the town might have a very beneficial effect. If any of our friends there would see to their distribution, we would send down a supply of back numbers for that purpose.

The world is in trouble, but thank goodness we have an Archbishop of Canterbury who is always ready to help. He has just suggested that during the sitting of the Peace Conference in London—and it looks as though these Conferences will spend in entertainments and travelling expenses more than they are likely to get in the shape of an indemnity—there shall be an hour's prayer daily. Now we can look forward quite hopefully to the result of the meetings. The Archbishop reminds us that during the war that plan was adopted by thousands. But if we had been in the Archbishop's place we should not have mentioned that fact. It may serve to discourage the present effort. It was so helpful during the war.

It was rather a feeble joke of Justice Darling's the other day to ask from the Bench "Who is Old Nick?" Had he asked *where* is Old Nick? there might have been more point in it. For it is curious how completely the Churches have come to ignore one who for generations was their best friend. It was always fear of the Devil rather than love of God that filled the Churches, and ever since they have ceased to boom him the Churches have been steadily emptying. Fear lies at the root of Christianity, as of other religions, and when that element is eliminated there is little left to hold the average man or woman. And one can hardly imagine anyone ever finding the Christian heaven very attractive. The only reason that one can see for anyone ever wanting to get into the Christian heaven is that there is the Christian hell to keep out of, and if that goes heaven may well be advertised as to let, with vacant possession.

We have for long been urging members of local bodies to raise some sort of a protest against the intrusion of religion and religious services into their business. One of our readers, we have just discovered, received some time ago a special invitation, as an important member of a Council, to attend a church service with the Mayor and the rest of the members. His reply to the clerical dignity was as follows:—

While I thank you very much for your kind wishes I cannot bring myself to accept your invitation. Looking around me I see a Christian world whose ideal of perfection is the Prince of Peace. I see it swollen with hatred and malice, and hurrying on as fast as it can to racial suicide. I see the untold misery of the widow and the fatherless. I see calamity following calamity, each greater than the last. And when I am told that there is above us a good and all powerful Being who is able to prevent all this misery and yet does not, I sympathize with the wife of Job when her husband was visited with tribulation upon tribulation, and I am inclined to echo her exclamation.

That was a capital reply, and we should like to see all Freethinkers on local bodies imitate so excellent an example.

O Cohen's Lecture Engagements

March 6, Swansea; March 13, Leicester; March 20, Stratford Town Hall; March 27, Leeds.

To Correspondents.

Those Subscribers who receive their copy of the "Freethinker" in a GREEN WRAPPER will please take it that the renewal of their subscription is due. They will also oblige, if they do not want us to continue sending the paper, by notifying us to that effect.

We regret that, by a printer's error, the letter to which Mrs. Bradlaugh-Bonner replied in our last issue should have been ascribed to Mr. instead of Mrs. Holyoake Marsh.

J. G. FINLAY.—Sorry to hear of your indisposition. Hope it will be very temporary.

A. CLARKE.—The Christian Evidence speaker was quite evidently living up to the character that organization made for itself many years ago. (1) The influence of the Freethought party has never, we think, as a Freethought party greater than it is to-day. (2) The statement that Mark Twain threatened Mr. Foote with a libel action and caused him to apologize is a sheer invention. (3) Darwin expressed his regret for having used the term "creator," which he said did not express what he meant. (4) Certainly, some people have entered the party and then left it again. As Freethought work gives little and demands much that is only to be expected. (5) The best way to treat Christian Evidence speakers is with contempt.

C. HARPUR.—We never said that all stories that are old must be pure myth. But the Christian story is plainly that. And some stories are so absurd that they hardly need elaborate evidence to establish their mythical character. They furnish their own proof.

H. FORSTER.—The publishers of Bergson's works are Macmillan and Swan Sonnenschein. The principal ones were published at 10s. 6d. each before the war. They will probably be more now. We wrote on him when his works were being discussed some years ago. Then we ventured the opinion that he was more of a fashion than a philosopher, and we have seen no reason to alter our opinion.

W. J.—We are not at all worried. Always glad to hear from you, although we may not always reply. But that is one of the risks that all must take.

R. LEWIS.—Thanks, it will be useful.

The "Freethinker" is supplied to the trade on sale or return. Any difficulty in securing copies should be at once reported to the office.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—

The United Kingdom.—One year, 17s. 6.; half year, 8s. 9d.; three months, 4s. 6d.

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Since the evils of society flow from ignorance and inordinate desire, men will never cease to be tormented till they shall become intelligent and wise; till they shall practise the art of justice, founded on a knowledge of the various relations in which they stand, and the laws of their own organization.—Volney, "Ruins" (1791).

Sugar Plums.

To-day (March 6) Mr. Cohen lectures in the Elysium, Swansea. On this occasion the meeting is to be quite free, and it will be an excellent chance for Freethinkers to induce a Christian friend or two to come with them. We hear that a large meeting is expected, and we hope that expectations will not be unrealized. There are many thousands in Swansea that ought to be converted. They will be sooner or later, and the sooner the better.

The Executive of the National Secular Society has taken the Friars Hall for another course of lectures extending through March, and the lecturer this evening (March 6) is Mr. George Whitehead. Mr. Whitehead is a newcomer on our platform, but he is one of whom we are hoping to hear more in the near future. We should, therefore, take it as a special favour if all our London friends will do their best to see that the hall is well filled. There is nothing like giving a new speaker a good send off. There is also on hand a plentiful supply of the usual lecture slips advertising the course, and we should like all who can to assist in their distribution. These can be had either by writing Miss Vance at the N. S. S. office, or by calling for a supply at the office of this paper. Some good work can be done in distributing them at a very moderate expenditure of time and energy.

At its meeting on Thursday last the Executive had before it the question of the coming trial for Blasphemy of Mr. J. W. Gott. As was stated in these columns the Executive had offered to undertake the defence and to pay the whole of the costs of the blasphemy case. Mr. Gott had declined to permit the separation of the charge of circulating obscene literature from that of blasphemy, and in face of that refusal the Executive was obliged to let the matter rest where it is for the present. Mr. Gott's decision is to be regretted as the case offered a chance for a straight fight on the question of blasphemy, and that is what Freethinkers who are aiming at the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws are always ready to undertake. We think it is within the power of the judge who tries the case to order the separate hearing of the two charges, and if he does so he will show a keener sense of the logic of the position than does Mr. Gott. It must be added that the Executive's offer to undertake the defence of the charge of blasphemy remains open.

The trial will probably be over by the time this issue of the *Freethinker* is in the hands of its readers, and the Executive considered the advisability of engaging a Counsel to hold a watching brief on behalf of the Society. But as he would be without the right to speak, it was finally decided that the interests of the Society would be equally well served by asking Mr. Cohen to attend the trial, and authorizing him to take whatever steps he considered necessary in the circumstances. That is all we can say on the case, for the moment.

Quite unwittingly the *Literary Guide* does the N. S. S. an injustice. In commenting on the cessation of Freethought meetings in Hyde Park, owing to the rowdiness of certain Christians, and the partiality of the magistrates for punishing Freethinkers and discharging Christians, it refers to the meetings as having been held under the auspices of the N. S. S. This is not the case. The meetings were held under the auspices of another body. Had they been N. S. S. meetings they would not have been discontinued on the grounds alleged. The N. S. S. does not pay Christians the compliment of yielding to their bigotry to the extent of abandoning its meetings. Its plan is to beat bigotry by demonstrating its ineffectiveness.

The Annual Dinner of the Birmingham Branch was held at the Crown Hotel on Saturday last. During the evening the toasts "The N. S. S. and its President" and "The Old Brigade, Officers and Lecturers of the N. S. S., Past and Present" gave opportunity to Messrs. F. E. Willis and E. Clifford Williams to speak highly of the

work those named had done in our movement. An excellent programme of music and song, arranged by Mr. Simpson, Jr., filled up the evening to the enjoyment of all.

Birmingham friends will please note that Mr. F. E. Willis, J.P., will lecture in the Repertory Theatre to-day (March 6) on "Some Curiosities of Christian Belief." How curious some of the articles Christians are the last to realize. That makes it the more necessary for Freethinkers to enlighten them, and we hope there will be a goodly number of them to receive the information. The lecture commences at 7 o'clock.

On Sunday (March 20) Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Town Hall, Stratford. This will be Mr. Cohen's last lecture in London this season, and we hope that East London Freethinkers will see that the hall is quite filled. Valuable help can be given by those who are willing to see to the distribution of slips advertising the meeting, and supplies of these can be obtained from either the N. S. S. or the *Freethinker*. A card to the Secretary stating requirements will ensure a supply being sent on. We should like to hear of a good representation from the local clergy being present.

We hope soon to be able to announce where the Annual Conference of the N. S. S. will be held this year. Meanwhile, we trust that all Branches and members of the Society who wish to place resolutions on the Agenda paper of the Conference will send them in as early as possible. Branches should also be considering other matters in connection with the Conference. It is the one opportunity of the year when Freethinkers all over the country may meet each other, and they should avail themselves of it to the full. The Conference is held on Whit-Sunday, so there is ample time for all to make the necessary arrangements.

We are asked to again call attention of East London Freethinkers to the fact that the West Ham Branch is holding a "Social Evening" on Saturday, March 5, at the Metropolitan Music Academy, Earham Grove, Forest Gate. The function is quite free, and all Freethinkers and their friends are welcome. The proceedings commence at 7 o'clock.

The Leicester Secular Society holds its Anniversary Service to-day (March 6), and we know from experience that it is a very enjoyable function. Mr. Lloyd will be one of the speakers. We are unable to give the names of the others, but there will be, as usual, more than one.

Mind: A Hieroglyph Explained by Human Reason.

HAVING now considered how Nature herself deciphers her psychic hieroglyph *prospectively*, from cause to effect, as impulses, guides, or checks to movements with purposive ends, we will next exemplify how man has superimposed upon this decipherment an explanation, *i.e.*, a *retrospective* interpretation which traces the effect backwards to its physical source.

But first let us see how he came to do it.

As the cell consciousness of the protozoa awoke to the sense consciousness in the corporate life of the compound animal organism, so the sense-conscious animal awoke, in the extra development of the human brain, into self-conscious man.

These psychic unfoldings, the *cell-conscious*, the *sense-conscious*, and the *self-conscious*, are the three successive awakenings of sentient life, life itself being the first of the series.

Now in virtue of this last awakening man is a being who is *conscious* that he is conscious, who *knows* that he knows. And in this new light he became aware of

causal relation, *qua* relation, and it enabled him to abstract the relation from the related terms as an idea or mental entity. And thus began the building of that "construct," that "ideal universe" of man, whose "substance is human thought," not in metaphor, but in reality.

This mental universe the idealist blows off as a boy does his soap-bubbles. And then with his characteristic contempt for all decipherment based upon the data of experience, the metaphysician declares oracularly that "boy, pipe, and soap-suds" are inside the bubble, and presto, the material universe vanishes from existence!

Having thus conceived the idea of causal relation in the forward order of "from cause to effect," in the meaning of his own impulses and the gratification of his own desires, he conceived the new passion of inquisitive curiosity for similarly knowing causal relations in the reverse directions. *i.e.*, from sense-impressions—objects and events—to their physical origins. That is to say, he conceived an irresistible desire to super-impose upon the organic meanings of his sensations and sense-impressions, a genetic interpretation, an *explanation* of things. It is the most characteristic result of being self-conscious.

It has been, however, a racial calamity of the most colossal magnitude that man ever developed this capacity and desire for "explanations" so many æons before he was in possession of any sort of key for the task of decipherment, that is, before he had resolved his own sensations and sense-impressions to their causal factors: or before he had the faintest glimmer as to the nature of physical substance and energy.

This tragic anachronism enfolded the earth with the fogs of religious superstitions and the mists of metaphysics, with the result that man has been ever groping for a path for his feet. It was a case of "making bricks without straw"; and sad to relate the art is practised by the metaphysical Gnostic even at the present day.

We will now exemplify this genetic explanation which man has superimposed upon organic meanings by a more or less detailed reference to one sense, the sense of sight. And what will be said of sight will be true, *mutatis mutandis*, of all the rest.

Sight is the premier sense evolved by Nature for the purpose of *recognition and location* of objects in space. It is pre-eminently a spatial or a tele-sense.

The eye was not evolved merely to awaken a sensation, like hunger or thirst, but as a psychic instrument or device—a past marvel of ingenious complexity for enabling the organism to recognize and locate physical objects at a distance—especially those which vitally concerned its own life; and science teaches us how this miracle of recognition and location is effected. It will be seen as we proceed that in fact it is a double sense—that of light and of colour—and that one of them is doubly symbolic. Thus in the light of self-consciousness man discovers not only the meaning and purpose of sight, but with the aid of the illuminating lamp of science, he also discovers its causal antecedents and its genetic history. Let us, therefore, see how Nature made it a sense of recognition and location.

The first thing taught us by science is that there is such a thing as radiant energy of various forms eternally undulating through the interstellar ether of space.

The second fact is that Nature evolved a nervous tissue at the back of the eye-ball, called retina, containing a pigmental substance capable of absorbing a certain order of this radiant energy, and thereby of exciting the optic nerve.

Thirdly, that this energy, when transmitted to the optic centre of the brain, is "translated" into the

sensation of sight or vision to form an elemental character in the hieroglyphic of consciousness.

But these provisions would only enable the mind to become aware of light as distinguished from darkness. As an instrument to see terrestrial objects it would be quite worthless, let alone to recognize and locate them.

So Nature evolved the eye, a camera obscura for the formation of optical images. Now an optical image is usually formed by the radiation reflected and re-emitted by the object, and though the image is only a projection of a solid on a flat surface, and is, moreover, immensely reduced in size, nevertheless it bears a resemblance in shape and relative size to the object, which experience, in time, learns to decipher as factors in recognition and location.

Yet, as an instrument for full recognition, the sense would be still most inadequate.

When radiant energy meets a material object it is liable to a triple partition. If the object be more or less transparent, a portion of the radiant beam passes right through it: this will not affect the image. Another portion will be reflected from the surface depending upon its degree of smoothness and upon the slant of the rays which fall upon it. A third portion will penetrate its substance and will be partly or wholly absorbed. But what is not absorbed will be re-emitted and this will join with the reflected portion and greatly affect the image, for it consists of only fragments, which always vary, of the entire beam.

Now Nature's triumphant skill in the evolution of sense-organs is seen in the way it utilized this fragmentary nature of re-emitted radiation as a means for recognition. *It evolved a sense of colour in addition to the sense of light*, the colour or shade being the psychic equivalent of the portion that is not absorbed and therefore re-emitted by the object. And as this portion is generally different for different classes of objects and fairly constant for individuals of the same class, it becomes the distinctive mark or clue in the act or process of recognition and detection.

The eye was now a recognizing or detecting sense sufficiently accurate for the ordinary purposes of animal life.

In the camouflage of mimicry, however, Nature has gone far to undo or nullify her own handiwork, by making it often nigh impossible for a creature to detect the very objects it is to its highest interests to see.

It will now be seen that sight is, in more than metaphor, a photographic sense for taking "instantaneous coloured pictures" of distant objects.

It is a doubly symbolic sense: for the final picture is only a psychic symbol of the retinal image, while the retinal image itself is only a microscopic symbol of the physical object. This fact makes decipherment difficult and tedious and liable to errors and illusion.

Similarly, to make hearing a recognizing and locating sense, Nature has evolved or adopted such ingenious devices in "tuning" that not only do we never confound the cries, songs, or twitterings of different species, but often recognize the bark of a particular dog. So discriminating is it that we recognize different individuals by their voices, and the county of one's birth by his local accent.

In this way man has satisfied his inquisitive passion for tracing things back to their causal origins by adding a genetic explanation to an organic meaning. A sense-organ is, therefore, now known, both "fore and aft," forward to its purpose and backward to its physical source.

He has, moreover, traced the phenomena themselves to their genetic forces; and then, as a coping triumph to his achievements, he utilizes this gained knowledge in a purposive manner (as Nature does with the elemental contents of consciousness) to produce these phenomena and sensations at will: he cultivates the

soil and makes the earth increase her bounties and then proceeds to prepare his feasts; he has invented tens of thousands of industrial and decorative arts wherewith to satisfy his needs or gratify his desires.

Now, as a final word, I wish to draw attention to the strange use made of these revelations of science in respect to the causal dependence of our elemental sensations upon physical energy, even by so sane an author as the Hon. Bertrand Russell, who in his delightfully lucid manual, entitled *The Problems of Philosophy*, bases his whole disquisition upon the possible inference that the table in his room does not exist at all, because it varies in shape, in size, in shade or colour as you look at it from different positions and distances, or in different lights.

In this admission, he either completely ignores the revelations of science in respect to the meaning, genesis, and *modus operandi* of the senses, or he deliberately flings the canons of inductive logic to the winds.

These variations, instead of casting doubt upon the real existence of the table, only bear evidence that the law of physical causation is absolutely immutable in all its operations, that effect follows cause with a uniformity that knows no variation or shadow of turning.

This article, I trust, conclusively shows that the radiation forming the optical image has only a *tangential* relation to the table it portrays. It is not the table that forms the image, either the physical or the psychic, but the radiant energy that happens to impinge upon it. All that the table does is to deflect the beam from its course and bid it to convey a message to any eye that it may chance to meet.

The amount of radiation that reaches the eye is, as we saw, most variable in kind and in quantity and so, of necessity, should the picture resulting from it be likewise variable.

Were we living in a primitive age, when nothing was known of physical substance and energy, such an inference would be rational, as it was rational to conclude, prior to the teachings of chemical science, that when a body was burnt it was annihilated; but it would be bordering upon insanity to draw such an inference nowadays from its disappearance; so it is to doubt the existence of the table because the mental picture which the rays of light make of it varies as we change our position. If it did not vary it would be quite logical to deny the uniformity of Nature and the law of causation.

Had Mr. B. Russell consulted the sense nearest to physical substance—the *sense of effort*—and not the one most remote from it, he would have been left in no doubt as to the permanent existence of the table, even if he burnt it, provided he used the sense of sight as a recording instrument.

Mr. Russell, consequently, devotes considerable space to enquire into the meaning of certain words and phrases such as "mental," "in the mind," etc. This is perfectly in accord with all precedent and custom. The metaphysician's raw material consists not of "things," but of "words." He, therefore, never troubles to enquire whether he is building on a metaphysical cloud-bank or on the bed-rock of fact. He is wholly engrossed in his all-absorbing task of "word-splitting" and "phrase-chopping."

Is it, then, any wonder that philosophers are ever engaged in pricking each other's bubbles or in blowing new ones. Still less surprising is it, that their arduous and life-long labours are as notoriously barren of result as the Sahara Desert is of vegetation.

Berkeley realized the fact that the contents of consciousness were mere symbols or signs; but he utterly failed to notice the equally palpable fact that their *meaning* was to be found in the proximate and ultimate ends of the organism, and were deciphered

for him by Nature herself in animal instinct. And he equally failed to appreciate or realize the significance of the *explanation* given by science of its elemental contents by showing that each of them is a psychic equivalent or "translation" of some form of physical energy first transmuted into nervous energy by the sense-organ specially evolved to do it.

Consequently, in his eagerness to find some plausible "philosophic" support for his Christian Creed, he conceived the preposterous notion of identifying object with subject—body with mind—as equally mental in essence.

Had he attempted to find, on such an assumption, a meaning for the evolution of the physical body and a reason for the necessity of its composite and complex organization; or show *how* and *why* *mind-stuff* should so disguise itself to the *mind* (and in so deceptive a manner, as that assumed by a solid or liquid—a stone or water—in brief, had he realized that it was, at least, as impossible to conceive how the mental materializes as it was to see how the material became mental, he might have saved himself from making public his "famous insanities."

He stands much in the same relation to the modern Gnostic as Plato did to his ancient forerunner.

If ever the human mind gets out the "woods," these notorious pioneers of obscurantism will one day be duly de-canonized and relegated to the museum of "mental disharmonies."

KERIDON.

Suffer Little Children.

THE words attributed to Jesus Christ contain a reproach to those who would turn the children away. They suggest, also, a line of conduct which the followers of the meek and mild might, with advantage, adopt.

The records in the daily press show that Christians have not yet succeeded in translating the message correctly. In this most civilized of civilized countries they still persist in rendering it "Let little children suffer."

Tender solicitude for the little ones is made manifest by the distribution of tracts and the institution of the R.S.P.C.C., a body which, although doing great work, owes its existence to the failure of Christianity. I question whether so many un-wanted, un-loved neglected children can be seen in any one country as in Godly England.

The "saving grace" of Christianity is powerless to prevent the barbarous cruelty to helpless childhood of almost daily occurrence.

The cases of neglect and starvation dealt with by the Society since its formation is well over *two and a half millions*.

The little sufferer who was described a short time ago as being tied to a gas stove so tightly that the cords cut to the bone is an example.

Another was a wee mite of four years, beaten to death by her father! This, too, in Ireland, the land of Priests. And the good God is everywhere! Good God!

The average Christian sorrows for people over whom Christ does not reign, where congregations do not gather and P.S.A.'s are not.

Truly are they forlorn, for neither do they know the R.S.P.C.C.

Yet they manage very well without.

The Rev. C. Lea-Wilson told an interesting story of his work in a district of the White Nile, a thousand miles to the south of Khartoum.

"In the neighbourhood are about 8,000 people known as Jieng who are among the tallest tribes in the world. They are jet-black typical negroes, and do not practise

either cannibalism or human sacrifice. They have admirable qualities and I have never seen among them a case of cruelty to women or children."

In *Where three Empires meet*, E. T. Knight presents a picture of some Boat-dwellers on the Jhelam in Kashmir.

"One nice trait of these people is their keen affection for their children. These half-naked boat urchins lead happy lives, and I think many English children would like to exchange places with them."

The uncultured savage may be cruel to his fellow savage, male or female, from a notion of the valour bestowed and received by such conduct, but callous torture to and abandonment of helpless little lives, just because they are helpless, seems peculiar to the parent brought up in a Christian environment.

The mute appeal in baby eyes, the fairy touch of baby fingers possess no force to rouse compassion in the hearts of civilized brutes.

Nor can they move God to display the benevolence and love which reign in his kingdom.

Indeed, the sanction of religion and government is given to the milder forms of cruelty. (Perhaps in some cases they are the more keenly felt.)

Do not the Bible and the cane occupy the same desk in school? And are not both used often by incompetent teachers?

The cane is used, not so much to punish misbehaviour, as to endeavour to drive in knowledge. Children are chastised for not knowing and then God is introduced to them by those who do not know.

Surely it is difficult to label Christianity.

Is it Comic Opera or Tragedy? J. DRISCOLL.

Book Chat.

THE *Bodleian* is an artistic trade journal issued by Mr. John Lane, the London publisher (Bodley Head, Vigo Street, W.), who specializes in *belles lettres*, and who is himself a writer of taste and discrimination. The January number should be of no little interest to Freethinkers. It is a hymn of praise to M. Anatole France, of whose works—novels, short stories, fantasies, literary criticism, historical studies—Mr. Lane has given and is still giving us excellent English versions. Like many of his countrymen M. France has suffered dreadful things at the hands of people who imagine that they know French and can write literary English. A little while ago I found one of my friends reading *Thais* in a version which, I believe, was included in the *Lotus*, or some such series. "Look here," he exclaimed, "I'm hanged if I am able to see what there is in France if this is anything what the French is like in sense and style. What does your wonderful student of history mean by a 'tainted Aryan Sec.' Just listen to this: 'She believed that a woman could inspire love by pouring a philtre into a cup containing a sheep's bleeding fleece.' Surely it must have been a gigantic drinking cup if you could stuff a whole sheep's fleece into it. Then again, when M. France is describing a Greek pantomimic play *Polyxena* we are told the soldiers violated the damsel. They would never had dared to do it on the Greek stage at any time. Your Judas of a translator, has, no doubt, stupidly confused two French verbs." When I compared the French with the translation I found that all the soldiers did was to cover *Polyxena* with a veil. I was also rewarded by the discovery of another instance of betrayal. M. France remarks that "love is a disease of the liver," whereupon his English admirer jumps up with a correction: "love is a malady of faith."

Translation of this sort is a gross libel on a fine and scrupulous artist. It is also a fraud on readers who have no French, and who are, therefore, distressed rather than amused. I hasten to assure my readers that Mr. Lane's translations will never let them down. If they want to see what *Thais* is really like in French they cannot do better than buy Mr. R. B. Boswell's version, of which Mr. Lane published a cheap edition at 2s. net. The finer and larger editions, I may say, are 7s. 6d. net.

The *Bodleian* tribute to M. France contains notes on the French Freethinker's fame in England. It has been growing steadily from the appearance of Mr. Maurice Baring's article in the *Yellow Book* for April, 1895. It would seem that M. France captured the imagination of Mr. Robert Blatchford whose article on "My debt to Anatole France" has never been reprinted. Here there must have been an attraction of opposing temperaments, for it is difficult to find a connecting link between the veiled irony of the aristocratic Frenchman and the Cobbet-like directness and vigour of our British proletarian. Anyhow, it is no pumped-up enthusiasm that prompted Mr. Blatchford to pay his debt of culture to M. France. There are other articles by Mr. W. L. Courtney, Lafcadio Hearn, Mr. Edward Garnett and others on various aspects of M. France's genius. The number ends with a biographical note which English admirers will find useful.

The late Editor of this paper would have been delighted with the new critical edition of Shakespeare (one volume for each play, 7s. 6d. net), which the Cambridge University Press has commenced with *The Tempest*, following, I presume, the order of the plays in the first folio (1623). It was Foote's conviction, and I am inclined to agree with him, that Shakespeare is his own interpreter. All you need to bring to him is a love of poetry, an instinct for dramatic action and an alert mind. The bulk of aesthetic criticism between the time (shall I say?) of Coleridge and that of Swinburne is so much weariness and vexation of spirit. We are glad to get back to the breezy commonsense of the eighteenth century, to Johnson, for instance, whose preface is one of the soundest pieces of criticism ever written. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch is wisely intolerant of aesthetic twaddle, and the foolish cackling of anti-Stratfordian cranks and other wild fowl. He sticks to Shakespeare as we know him, or think we know him, and makes what he has to say short and pointed. The editing of the text is the work of Mr. H. D. Wilson, who brings to his study of the printed plays the new critical material brought to light in the last forty years. He uses the specimen of what is held, on good authority, to be Shakespeare's handwriting to straighten out confused passages. The poet wrote in a cramped English hand, and if a passage which is obviously wrong is written in this hand it is possible to conjecture what the copy may have been. There is less of guess work here. The basis is a sound knowledge of Elizabethian handwriting and the condition of setting up type. Another help comes from the modern science of bibliography. Then further, help is given by the discovery of a system of punctuation which was intended by the poet to fix the duration of pauses for the actor; in fact, it was a guide to the dramatic phrasing and emphasis. It seems to have been well thought out and could not have been the mere vagrant punctuation of a compositor. The new edition is a welcome departure from the cumbrous wordy method of editing which culminated in the *Variorum* edition of Howard Furness, a monument of misplaced enthusiasm and erudition. I trust it will be the prelude to a healthier and more critical study of Elizabethian writers.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

Correspondence.

CAN WE FOLLOW JESUS?

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—One gathers from Mr. Worsnop's writings that he has no faith in faith-saving men. He is evidently a believer in "works." Freethinkers will shake hands with him on that. My experience, however, is that Christians preach but leave the practising to others. Here is proof which even friend Worsnop cannot impugn. On pp. 154-5 of *The Bible: Its Meaning and Supremacy*, by the late Dean Farrar, we read:—

Which of us does not remember the burst of scorn and hatred with which the theory of evolution was first received? Mr. Darwin endured the fury of pulpits and Church Congresses with quiet dignity. Not one angry or contemptuous word escaped him. The high example of patient magnanimity and Christian forbearance was set by him; the savage denunciations and fierce insolence

came from those who should have set a better example Seeing how noble was his example, how gentle and pure his character, how simple his devotion to truth.....

Here, then, we have the very flower of Christianity, its teachers, expounders and high priests convicted of "scorn, hatred, fury, savage denunciations and fierce insolence" by one of themselves, while the unbeliever gives an answering example of steadfast nobility. Yet Mr. Worsnop suggests we should leave the Darwins and join his enemies! Nay, rather if Mr. Worsnop really wishes to live the high moral life should he not rather join us? One cannot help noting the inherent snobbery of a religion which can compel a man like Dean Farrar to call Darwin's forbearance CHRISTIAN!

J. G. F.

OUR PRISONS.

SIR,—In "Views and Opinions," February 27, occur the words "One of the greatest faults of our prison system is that of not seeing that the whole of a prisoner's time is fully occupied." As an annual occupant of a prison cell for thirty years I beg to dissent. To have nothing to do is demoralizing, but to have one's whole time taken up with compulsory labour is nearly as bad, and it may be worse. As it is, Sunday labour in prison is optional, and so is labour after the daily task is done, and this is as it should be. A prisoner may study in his spare time or he may read or work in the garden in country prisons for recreation. More conversation should be allowed and more opportunities for mutual help, those greatest of all moralizers, and there should be more opportunities for writing. But more compulsory labour and exploitation of it, oh no! Read Matthew Arnold's description of life in prison:—

Most men in a brazen prison live,
Where in the sun's hot eye
They listlessly their minds to some unmeaning task-
work give:
Dreaming of nought beyond their prison wall.
And as year after year
Fresh products of their barren labour fall
From their tired hands, and rest never yet comes
fiore near,
Gloom settles slowly down upon their breast.
And as they try to stem
The waves of anxious thought by which they are prest,
Death in their prison reaches them,
Unfreed, having seen nothing, still unblest.

W. W. KENSETT.

IN DEFENCE OF THE SCHOOLS.

SIR,—Having published a defence of the Public Schools (which contains remarks about Freethought which I withdraw), I feel I ought to protest against the lurid picture of O. V. T.'s in your last issue. For just as England in *theory*, with its monarchy, nobility, Church, etc., is almost Mediæval, so doubtless in *theory* are the Public Schools, yet in practice they are very different. On this subject I have two points to raise: (1) During my last term at a Public School run by the most narrow of Church Councils, out of seven masters whom I knew well, one was a puritan of the Cromwell stock, two were Christians, who stifled their doubts, one was a stop-watch authority on psalm-records, another a very clever cynical Atheist, another a dreamy Agnostic, the seventh a sceptic. The views of most of these were, of course, not known to the authorities. (2) If you listen to school debates, or if you examine *Public School Verse*, 1919-29 (Heinemann), you will find that modern Public Schoolmen are modern, and have a striking sense of the freedom of thought.

JACK HOOD.

(Author of *The Heart of a Schoolboy*.)

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.

SIR,—Mr. Jameson says he did not want another instance of the conviction (about the existence of God), but the trouble is that he cannot get anything better. Supposing some one asked him why he is convinced, as I assume he is, that he himself exists: he certainly would not have any reply to give which could convince a purely scientific sceptic who refused to take another's experience as a fact. Indeed, I agree with that brilliant writer, Samuel Butler, when, on purely scientific grounds, he asserts that the better we know anything the less adequate the reason we can give for knowing it. E. LYTTELTON.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON FEBRUARY 24.

The President, Mr. C. Cohen, in the chair. Also present: Messrs. Moss, Neate, Quinton and Samuels; Miss Kough and the Secretary.

Minutes of Special Meeting held on February 3 read and confirmed.

Minutes of Ordinary Meeting held also on that date read and confirmed.

New members were received for Barnsley, Leeds, and West Ham Branches and for the Parent Society.. Eleven in all.

A letter was read from Mr. J. W. Gott declining the Executive's offer to provide legal assistance for his forthcoming trial at the Birmingham Assizes, as conveyed to him by their resolution of February 3, on the ground that the offer was made only in regard to the charge of Blasphemy. Consultations with the Society's solicitor were reported, and two letters from him setting forth the position of the Society in regard to the case were read.

After an exhaustive discussion, the following resolution was moved:—

That this Executive regrets the decision of Mr. J. W. Gott not to accept its offer to undertake his defence against the charge of Blasphemy—which offer still remains open—and in the face of the Society being thus prevented from challenging the legal issue, it must content itself with requesting its President, Mr. C. Cohen, to attend the trial on behalf of the Executive, and authorizes him to take whatever steps he deems necessary in the circumstances.

The full time for replies to the Conference Invitation circular not having expired, action on those already received was adjourned.

It was reported that Friars Hall had been engaged for March, and the meeting closed.

E. M. VANCE.

General Secretary.

Obituary.

On Tuesday, February 22, the valiant Freethinker and Socialist, Mr. Arthur Brookes, died at the City of London Institution, in the eightieth year of his age, and the following Thursday morning he was buried in the City of London Cemetery. Owing to ignorance of the rules, the Master of the Institution was not approached for an order authorizing the Superintendent of the Cemetery to make arrangement for a Secular funeral, with the result that a thoroughgoing unbeliever was interred, along with a dozen other "paupers" in "consecrated" ground. And yet Mr. Brookes was, in his day, a well-known and highly respected worker in the cause of humanity. Born and brought up in India, his father being in the Indian Civil Service, he early became a school teacher. *The Leaguer* for March, 1914, says that he "was in the 'Old' International, 1867; Madras Matric, 1869; Principal of Secular School, Madras, in the seventies." He became Hon. Secretary of the Soho Branch of the *Daily Herald* League. In this latter capacity he proved himself a good and faithful servant of the cause he had so much at heart. It is a sad reflection upon the existing order of society that such a man had to end his days in a public institution and be buried as a "pauper." Mrs. Ellis, of Queen's Park, deserves great credit for the noble manner in which she comforted and cheered him till the final darkness closed in upon him.—J. T. I.

At Crook, Co. of Durham, on Monday, February 21, we paid our last tribute and rendered our last service to the late Michael Stitt, who had reached the goodly age of eighty years. At the age of twenty he had given up religious beliefs, then for sixty years he had adhered to Freethought principles. His expressed desire was that he should be buried in accordance with his convictions. The members of his family loyally carried out his wishes, and on being instructed by them the South Shields Branch of the N. S. S. saw to the carrying out of the last sad duties. The impressive service of Austin Holyoake was read by Mr. J. Fothergill, and was respectfully

listened to by a very large number of people assembled at the grave. Pioneer is a term which exactly describes our late friend. He dared to stand alone, and we can only surmise what his temerity may have sometimes cost him. But who can estimate the amount of possible good that will result from the example of his insistence on being free. We thus leave him, and with a few words, borrowed from the Master, say: "He sleeps well."

RALPH CHAPMAN.

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 post card.

LONDON.

INDOOR.

FRIARS HALL (236 Blackfriars Road, four doors south of Blackfriars Bridge): Mr. G. Whitehead, "Why Man Made God."

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Johnson's Dancing Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, near Edgware Road): 7.30, Mr. Baker, "Intellect and Emotion—Part and Counterpart."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, off Kentish Town Road, N. W.): 7.30, Debate; "Is Socialism Progressive?" Affirmative, Mr. E. P. Corrigan; Negative, Mr. A. Eagar.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W. 9): 7, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, "Christianity and the Growth of Militarism."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, John A. Hobson, M.A., "The Rational Good."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Stratford Engineers' Institute, 167 Romford Road, Stratford, E): 7, Mr. A. D. McLaren, "The Resurrection."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

ASSOCIATION OF ENGINEERING AND SHIPBUILDING DRAUGHTSMEN (Merseyside Branch): Tuesday, March 8, G. E. F. Burgess, Esq., "Diesel Engines."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Repertory Theatre, Station Street) 7, Mr. F. R. Willis, J.P., "Some Curiosities of Christian Belief."

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (Shop Assistants' Hall, 297 Argyle Street): 12 noon, Mr. H. Lancaster, "Some Aspects of Shakespeare's Plays." (Silver Collection.)

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Youngman's Rooms, 19 Lowerhead Row, Leeds): 6.30, Mr. Warner, "Industrial Depression."

SWANSEA BRANCH N. S. S. (Elysium, High Street): 7, Mr. C. Cohen, "What is the Use of Christianity?" Admission free.

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