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Views and Opinions.

Christian Unity

Much talk is going on at present in the Christian world with reference to a proposed union of believers. There have been official conferences and unofficial discussions, and quite a considerable number of Christian writers and speakers appear to regard it as evidence of advanced thinking to dwell upon the possibility of uniting all Christians, if not in one sect, at least to bring them to the point of attending each other's churches, and listening to one another's sermons. There is nothing very new in all this, and in view of the growing weakness of Christianity in face of the common enemy, the need for some sort of combination is quite clear. It is not quite so clear as to what the basis of union is to be. Once upon a time it was thought that belief in the Bible might serve as the bond of union. But there is nothing on which Christians are more hopelessly divided than on what it is that the Bible actually teaches. At another time it is a common belief in Jesus that is to serve. But here, again, the name of Jesus stands for a whole galaxy of characters of the most irreconcilable description. Yet again, it is thought that Christians might unite on at least the belief in a God. But when we enquire, What God? we find the same difficulty before us. One body of Christians pin their faith to the God of the Bible, another party denounces this deity as the very essence of savagery, others plead for a purely humanized deity, while yet others are content with some vague abstraction so long as it is spelt with capital letters, and the voice shall be lowered whenever it is referred to. And the underlying conviction is that the more vague and indefinite they are the less the chance of a row.

* * *

And Christian Disunion.

But real union must rest upon a definiteness of conception, not upon indefiniteness of meaning. A thick fog may be a good medium for stopping a row, but it is not a good one for combination. And those Christians who talk about unity neither see clearly nor hold an opinion strongly. Their liberality of speech is due to their haziness of understanding. To use a rough figure, their thinking is like a river that has broken its banks. It acquires width at the expense of depth. The advanced Christian is ready for co-operation for no other reason than that he lacks the strength to stand

in isolation. He is a slave to phrases, lacking either the courage or the ability to look facts in the face. And as a matter of historic fact there is not, nor has there ever been, any such thing as a common Christianity. One need not go farther than the pages of the New Testament to discover traces of discussions and divisions as to what on earth Jesus was, what he said, and what the deuce he meant by it. In the first three or four centuries of Christian history there were scores of different Christian sects formed, all desiring unity, and all resorting to forgery or murder to achieve it. And many of these differences went to the very root of the Christian faith. There were vital differences concerning the divinity of Jesus, whether his resurrection was physical or spiritual, and even whether he ever existed at all. And the longer the discussion lasted the more numerous the divisions, the more disorderly the behaviour of the peace loving Christians. And whatever degree of unity was ultimately secured was due, not to harmony of conviction, but to the Church enlisting the support of the secular power and crushing discussion by the sword. And this, as St. Louis said, is the only effective argument against heresy—at least, it is the only one that Christianity has ever discovered.

* * *

A Genius for Dissension.

At its strongest even the Catholic Church was unable to secure more than a uniformity of expression, and that only for a time. Heresies were constantly springing up and were as constantly suppressed—thanks to such eminently Christian agencies as stake and torture chamber. The Protestant Reformation, with its open Bible, was an even more ghastly failure. Like the older Church it aimed at securing uniformity of belief, and, like the older Church, by the same methods. But as a means of securing uniformity among Christians the infallible Bible was as miserable a failure as the infallible Church. Protestants were quite agreed in their hatred of the Catholics, and they were just as unanimous in their hatred of each other. In spite of all the sloppy sentimentality about Christian love there has been no greater hate maker than Christianity, and nothing has ever been so successful in uniting bodies of Christians as hatred of a common enemy. All Christians have behind them a tradition of eighteen hundred years of quarrelling and hatred, and that is not likely to be overcome in a hurry. Nor will it be neutralized by brotherhood meetings overflowing with pious gush and engineered by chapel politicians. Every Christian regards every other Christian with an eye of suspicion, and he can no more resist the temptation of a row over some point of doctrine than a cat can resist going after a mouse. Making a ladder of moonbeams or a rope of sand is child's play compared to the task of bringing peace and harmony into the Christian camp.

* * *

Agreement Impossible.

In reply to Freethought criticism Christians often reply that their differences have arisen over unimportant things. This is not true, and if it were it would

only aggravate the offence. One could forgive the quarrels of men over what they regard as of supreme importance. But to be told that this eternal sectarian squabbling, with its waste of time and energy and its hindrance of progress, is all about nothing in particular, makes the whole thing more than ever ridiculous. From the Freethinker's point of view the apology does contain a truth. Religious quarrels are truly about things that are of no consequence. Whether Jesus suffered for our sins or because of them, whether one ought to be baptized by total immersion or by sprinkling, whether a clergyman should wear this or that kind of dress or pray in this or that kind of attitude, whether there is a God or not, are all questions which, so far as getting on with the real work of this life is concerned, are not worth bothering about. It is only the distorted imagination of the believer that can think otherwise. And it would really do the Christian good if he could be brought to the point of reflecting why it is there has never been even a tendency to unity in religious belief. In science there are differences of opinion, and these differences are sometimes discussed with heat. But it has never entered into the head of a responsible scientist that his opponent should be burned or imprisoned; and the longer the discussion between scientific men goes on the nearer do they approach to agreement. The reason for this is obvious. In science the teaching rests upon a basis of observed fact, and it has no value apart from the facts. But in religion there are no verifiable and objective facts to be discussed. The mind runs riot, and there is nothing to bid it halt. Personal idiosyncrasy usurps the place of observation, and passion does duty for reason. It is for this reason that while we do get in science a movement towards a great uniformity of principle and opinion, in religion we have a growing diversity and confusion. The body of verifiable fact on which science rests is continually growing larger, and is the common property of all. The fundamental beliefs upon which religion lives are as much subjects of controversy as ever—more than ever, for the more our knowledge of human history grows the more cause do we see to disbelieve in them. Two thousand years of Christian discussion have not brought Christians a step nearer agreement. And if they go on discussing for twice that period they will be no nearer agreement than they are to-day.

* * *

The Future for Freethought.

Christian unity is a mirage. It never has existed and it never will exist. "A common Christianity" is one of those shibboleths with which the Christian mind amuses itself and gulls the casual onlooker. There is really nothing that Christians have in common except the name, and even that is a condition of quarrelling, not of peace. There are only two ways in which unity can be secured—by agreement or by force. But agreement is, as I have said, quite impossible. There is not a gathering of Christians, even when belonging to the same Church, that could hang together for five minutes if they were to once settle down to seriously define what it was that each understands by the formulæ they use. The truth of this is shown by the fact that whenever one of their number does venture upon such a course there are immediately divisions of opinion. And agreement on one side, all that remains as a method of preventing division is force. But that was tried under the most favourable conditions for its success, and the failure was complete and decisive. Where the Roman Church failed with the full power of the State behind, it is scarcely likely that any other Church in these times will succeed. Modern science, modern life, modern Freethought, have together so undermined the ground beneath the believer's

feet that he no longer feels secure of anything. He professes belief, but there is an uncertain note in his affirmation. He is certain of nothing but his own uncertainty, and with each step of mental development that becomes more pronounced. And meanwhile, confronting the Christian stands the menacing figure of Freethought, flushed with a consciousness of past victories, strong in the certainty of its own teachings, and confident in the ultimate triumph of its ideals.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Secularism Misrepresented.

RELIGIOUS writers seem to be hopelessly incapable of doing Secularists the simple justice of accurately stating their views. Even according to the *New Standard Dictionary*, issued only eight years ago, a Secularist is defined as "one who believes in improving the material condition of himself and others rather than in ministering to spiritual wants." Though a Secularist disapproves of the expression "spiritual wants," yet it is not true to say that he confines his attention to material conditions. Curiously enough, the same work supplies a correct definition when it represents a Secularist as "a person who rejects all religious systems and forms of worship, concerning himself with the questions and needs of the present life." The late Mr. Foote, in the debate between him and the Rev. Dr. James McCann, defined Secularism as "the philosophy of this life, without reference to another, which recognizes no providence but science, no saviour but human effort, and regards the public welfare as the criterion of right and wrong." It is a positive, not a negative philosophy; a constructive rather than a destructive system. Specifically it is the system of the Secularists. Mr. Foote, in the course of the debate just alluded to, said:—

Professor Huxley once took this illustration. Suppose a man asserts that in some remote planet there is now going on a discussion on an education bill. I have no means of judging whether the man speaks truly or falsely, although I may have a very decided opinion that he is going very far beyond the bounds of his present knowledge. Well, as I have no information on the subject, I do not positively assert that there is no such discussion going on in that remote planet. But if the man asks me to take that discussion as the basis of my decision on public education, I should at once say to him: "My dear sir, I decline to do anything of the kind. I will not settle the education of this earth with reference to lunar politics."

That is exactly the attitude of Secularism to the supernatural and the Great Beyond. Whatever knowledge or information it may claim to possess is exclusively of the natural and the present world. As Dean Inge well said, in his last Easter sermon, the Secularist is a person who expresses herself or himself thus: "The only world I know is this earth, and I mean to make the most of it while I can, for myself and mates." The Dean by no means blames him or her for so speaking, if the only theology is that of the Church, which he pronounces at once "superstitious and childish."

Dr. Inge is an exceptionally vigorous, bold, and original thinker, and with his estimate of the theology of the Church we are glad to find ourselves in complete agreement. His indictment of popular Christianity is fully as severe and uncompromising as that of Matthew Arnold. He unhesitatingly declares that "organized religion has been a failure ever since the first concordat between Church and State under Constantine the Great." He also says:—

The Church of England in its corporate capacity has never seemed to respect anything but organized force. In the sixteenth century it proclaimed Henry VIII. the supreme Head of the Church; in the

seventeenth century it passionately upheld the "right divine of kings to govern wrong"; in the eighteenth and nineteenth it was the obsequious supporter of the squirearchy and plutocracy, and now it grovels before the working man, and supports every scheme of plundering the minority (*Outspoken Essays*, p. 30).

Does such a writer believe in supernaturalism at all? He is convinced that "miracles must be relegated to the sphere of pious opinion," and that "it can never again be possible to make the truths of religion depend on physical portents having taken place as recorded." Here we have a tacit denial of the Virgin Birth, the raising of the dead, and the physical resurrection. Now comes the admission that "the chief rival to Christianity is Secularism," followed by the wholly enigmatic and illogical observation: "This creed has some bitter disappointments in store for its worshippers" (p. 33). On what ground the Dean indulges in that pessimistic prediction he does not inform us; but we are not in the least surprised at it, coming as it does from one who has the temerity to aver that hitherto the human race has "taken in succession every path except the right one."

We are going to do an exceedingly daring thing, namely, to claim the Dean of St. Paul's as a pessimistic Secularist, a character not altogether desirable; and we do so on the ground of the following passage in the first of the *Outspoken Essays*:—

It is not necessary to remind the reader that in Christianity all the paraphernalia of life are valued very lightly; that all the good and all the evil which exalt or defile a man have their seat within him, in his own character; that we are sent into the world to suffer and to conquer suffering; that it is more blessed to give than to receive; that love is the great revealer of the mysteries of life; that we have here no enduring city, and must, therefore, set our affections and lay up our treasures in heaven; that the things that are seen are temporal, and the things that are not seen are eternal. *This is the Christian religion* (the italics are ours). It is a form of Idealism (p. 21).

There are expressions in that extract which a thorough-going Secularist could not use, such as that about our being sent into the world for a set purpose; but on the lips of an orthodox divine the whole passage would be laughably absurd. The great law of heredity and environment are there in full evidence, and the practical nature and business of human life find beautiful expression. It is a distinctly Secular Gospel the Dean preaches, camouflaged as Mysticism. He predicts the sure advent of a new type of Christianity which will be more Christian than the old, because more moral, and in which the distinction between natural and supernatural will be repudiated. For him the divinity of Christ implies not the dogma formulated and pronounced orthodox by the first General Council at Nicæa, but "the eternal supremacy of those moral qualities which he exhibited in their perfection." We do not hold that the highest moral and social qualities were ever exhibited in their perfection by any man in the whole course of history, but we do firmly maintain that in Secularism they occupy a more natural and effective position than they have hitherto done in Christianity, and than they are ever likely to do in the mystical religion now in favour at St. Paul's.

The misfortune of Dr. Inge is that he is a dignitary in a Church with the main currents of thought in which he is utterly out of touch. Bishop Gore and he are as wide asunder as pole and pole. In the estimation of the former the latter is a deplorably dishonest man, because he desires to serve the Church as one of its ministers "while harbouring doubts about the physical miracle known as the Virgin Birth." Not many years ago one of the clergy of Bishop Gore was induced to resign his living by an aspersion of this kind, to which his lordship gave publicity in the daily press. Dr. Inge, however, not only doubts the

historicity of the Virgin Birth, but disbelieves, or interprets symbolically, the Thirty-Nine Articles, to which he has solemnly sworn allegiance. But that is by no means all. The Dean is in a Church which he confesses has taken the wrong side on almost every conceivable subject of public interest. It is a Church which has been supreme in this country since the end of the sixth century, and yet, according to the Dean, it has produced, directly, but little, if any, real improvement in the conditions of life. As an institution the Church has been a signal failure in the land, though individual members of it have, often in the teeth of its bitterest opposition, succeeded in introducing certain social reforms. Now, the question is, why has such a notoriously useless institution been allowed to cumber the ground for so long a period? The Dean admits that the history of Catholicism is atrociously bad, but has that of the semi-Protestant Church of England been any improvement upon it? The persecution of Dreyfus is alluded to, and it is stated that "if all France had been Catholic the victim of this shocking injustice would certainly have died in prison"; but it is not mentioned that the man who argued most powerfully for his release was the celebrated novelist Emile Zola, an ardent Secularist, and that he had to flee the country in consequence. It is conceded that the Anglican Church and the Nonconformist sects never lifted their voices in denunciation of the abominable combination laws; but no reference is made to the fact that the agitation for their repeal was led by despised Secularists like Place, Robert Owen, Richard Carlile, Cobbett, and Lovett, while the pious Wilberforce defended them, and urged the wronged workers to be diligent, humble, and resigned, faithfully discharging the duties and contently bearing the inconveniences of the "lowly path allotted them by the hand of God."

Why does not Dr. Inge come out of that ancient pile of decadent institutionalism, in which he now abides a forlorn and gloomy stranger, prophesying evil and not good concerning Zion? The Secularism he misrepresents is in reality the Secularism he himself advocates, though in a foreign tongue. He is now living under the shadow of a fetish which he disowns, of a superstition which he forswears; and yet when he says: "The spiritual world includes art and science in all their branches, when these are studied with a genuine devotion to the Good, the True, and the Beautiful for their own sakes," he fails to realize that this is the very world in which the Secularists have their abode, though they employ a different adjective. Secularism is a form of Idealism, as he calls the type of Christianity which he still professes with such glowing eloquence. Shelley was an Atheist, but he genuinely loved science and art and poetry, and passionately pursued the Good, the True, and the Beautiful as he mixed with his fellow beings. George Meredith also was an Atheist, who despised the parsonry, characterizing them as "sappers of our strength"; but his loving communion with Nature led him to joyous optimism, whereas the Dean's mystical experiences have landed him in the ever deepening gloom of pessimism. But we must not despair even of the Dean, as the following quotation shows:—

It is tempting to dream of a new Renaissance, under which the life of reason will at last be the life of mankind. Though there is little sign of improvement in human nature, a favourable conjunction of circumstances may bring about a civilization very much better than ours to-day.....A scientific civilization is not impossible, though we are not likely to live to see it. And if science and humanism can work together, it will be a great age for mankind. Such hopes as these must be allowed to float before our minds; they are not unreasonable, and they will help us to get through the twentieth century, which is not

likely to be a pleasant time to live in (*Outspoken Essays*, p. 27).

If he could but catch "the rapture of the forward view" so beautifully sung in Meredith's *Thrush* in February!

J. T. LLOYD.

Bible Society Bombast.

Christianity has never lost the instinct of universal dominion.
—*Bible Society Report.*

The only hope for the future of society lies in the absolute extermination of Christianity.—*G. W. Foote.*

I HAVE a weakness for works of reference. Even a Kelly's directory, or an A.B.C. Railway Guide will start me on imaginative journeys to alluring towns and delightful villages. A gazeteer opens magic casements to lands anything but forlorn. A dictionary is to me a source of pleasure, especially if it contains illustrative quotations from "the best authors." My favourite work of reference, however, is the annual report of the British and Foreign Bible Society, which has now reached its 116th issue. Although not by any means a centenarian, I have known this publication for more years than I care to remember. When I was a small boy, with the ambition to become a pirate and sail under the Jolly Roger, the thrilling and hair-breadth adventures of the brave colporteurs filled me with envy and despair. It was to me, in those far-off days, what the desperadoes of the Pacific Coast are to the young frequenters of cinema theatres to-day. Now I am middle-aged, and have parted with much of my hair and many of my illusions, my dear old colporteurs are still hard at it, telling the tale, pocketing the pesetas, and other coins, at the peril of their lives and their sacred stock-in-trade.

Such a subject almost compels the artist to dip his brush in crimson-lake. Even the austere accountant who compiles the figures for the huge report of over 200 pages for the year 1920 gets almost romantic in describing the adventures of the colporteurs. This is how he does it in 1921, and he and his pen-pushing predecessors have done it in much the same way for scores of years. I blush with pleasure to transcribe the flamboyant language and the purple passage:—

They (the colporteurs) win their way among Russian immigrants in Canada, among throngs of devotees at idol-festivals in India, among coal-miners and schoolboys in Japan. One man rides with camels across the deserts of Central Asia. Another wades through swamps reeking with miasma in South America. Another ventures in a frail canoe down tropical rivers infested with alligators.

Is it not romantic? No one would pause, churlishly, to ask why Japanese schoolboys should be regarded as being as risky companions as alligators or bug-eaten camels. These colporteurs are as resourceful as they are courageous. In France, for instance, they meet gentlemen with philosophic opinions, and with a distressing habit of allowing their views to influence their action, so unlike the stolid English people. The Report shows that the champions of the Faith do possess something of the wisdom of the serpent:—

To quote the religious faith of a man like President Wilson or Mr. Lloyd George often serves as a decisive argument to disarm the sceptic.

The naughty gentleman who admires the writing of M. Anatole France, and other irreverent writers, is crushed. After this encounter, one fancies he buys a large family Bible for Madame, his spouse, and one cheap one each for the children, while he turns to the *Petit Journal Pour Rire* for consolation in his defeat. Unfortunately, all people are not so polite as our gallant French neighbours. In Burma the people lack Christian culture, and the Report says that the colporteurs are "often reviled with words too coarse for

translation." It is "too deep for tears," but the Saints still have to endure much at the hands of the followers of Satan. Some terrible Italians deserve an immortality of infamy, for they actually describe the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society as "a bottega; a money-making concern."

Doubtless, those infernal eaters of macaroni lacked all religious instinct, or, perhaps, they had seen a copy of a report of the Society's work. The report for 1920 contains columns of figures and pages of statistics calculated to make the sceptic turn pale. For example, the receipts for the year totalled £386,259, despite the drawbacks that the Church of Christ, as the Report states, is recovering from shell-shock. From legacies the Society received £69,810, which is £16,128 above the average. The receipts from sales amounted to £136,202. The brave colporteurs do not work for nothing, and £44,000 went their way, and the translators, printers, and bookbinders netted £202,210. The Report adds defiantly that the Society has never been in debt—and I can well believe it.

Figures such as these should make Freethinkers pause and reflect that Rationalist propaganda has to make headway not only against gross ignorance, but against a most heavily endowed superstition. The British and Foreign Bible Society is but one of many similar institutions which have enormous incomes. Hardly a week passes but one or the other of these organizations receive legacies, and collections are made constantly in the various branches associated with them. In fighting the Christian Superstition Freethinkers are opposing an enemy entrenched behind mountains of money-bags. In money lies the power of the clergy and their fetish Book, and it is well to remember, as Shakespeare reminds us, gold can "knit and break religions."
MIMNERMUS.

Pages From Fontenelle.

AN IMAGINARY CONVERSATION BETWEEN
SOCRATES AND MONTAIGNE.

Montaigne.—Then it is really you, divine Socrates? How delighted I am to meet you! It is only just lately that I came here, and, from the moment of my arrival, I have been looking out for you. Now, at last, after filling your book with my name, and praise, I am able to talk with you, and to learn how you came by so ingenuous a capacity, the expression of which was so natural, and whereof, indeed, there was no other example even in the happy times in which you lived.

Socrates.—I am, indeed, glad to meet a ghost who seems to me to have been a philosopher; but as you are a newcomer to these lower regions, and as it is a long time since I had a conversation with anyone in this place (for they leave me very much alone, and no one seems to be in a hurry to speak with me), I trust you will have no objection to my asking you what news you have brought with you. How is the world getting along? Has it altered very much?

Montaigne.—Very much indeed. You would not know it for the same.

Socrates.—I am delighted to hear you say so. Indeed, I always had a strong suspicion that it must become far better and wiser than it was in my times.

Montaigne.—What do you say? Why, it is madder and more corrupt than ever it was. This is the change I wanted to talk to you about, and I hoped to hear from your own lips an account of the world as you knew it, a world in which honesty of thought and action was the ruling principle.

Socrates.—And I, for my part, expected to hear from you wonderful things concerning the times in which you lived. What, do you tell me that men have not corrected the follies of the classical age?

Montaigne.—I imagine that it is precisely because you are a classic that you speak so lightly of the ancients; but I can assure you that our habits are deplorable, things go from bad to worse every day.

Socrates.—Is it possible? In my time it appeared to me that things were already in a bad way; but I believed that in the long run they would get into a more reasonable groove, and that mankind would be the gainer by so many years of experiment.

Montaigne.—But can you say of men that they ever experiment? They are like birds snared by the very same nets that have caught a hundred thousand of their species. There is no one that does not come into life wholly new, and yet the unwisdom of the fathers is of no profit to the children.

Socrates.—What? No experiments? It was my idea that the world might have an old age wiser and more regulated than its youth.

Montaigne.—In all ages men have the same natural inclinations which reason is powerless over. Indeed, wherever there are men you get stupidities of just the same kind.

Socrates.—In that case why should you make out antiquity to be better than the present time?

Montaigne.—My dear Socrates, I am well aware that you have a peculiar way of reasoning, of cleverly entangling those who discuss with you in arguments the conclusion of which they do not foresee, and that you lead them just where you please. That is why you called yourself the mid-wife of their thoughts; a sort of spiritual accoucheur. I confess that I am brought to bed of a proposition quite opposite to the one I had advanced. Yet I am not going to admit defeat. There is no doubt that we no longer find the firm, energetic minds of antiquity, of Aristides, of Phocion, of Pericles, or, for that matter, of Socrates.

Socrates.—For what reason? Is nature worn out? Has she no longer the power to produce great minds? And why should she be exhausted only to the extent of not being able to produce reasonable men? Not one of her works has degenerated. Why should it be mankind only that degenerates?

Montaigne.—The plain fact is that man *does* degenerate. It seems that in days gone by nature gave us a few patterns of great men in order to prove to us that she could make them if she wished, and then set about making the rest in a careless way.

Socrates.—You must use your scepticism here. Antiquity is the only thing of its kind; distance makes it larger. If you had known Aristides, Phocion, Pericles, and me, since you would put me among them, you would have found men in your own time who resembled them. What usually happens is that we are predisposed toward antiquity because we are prejudiced against our own age. Thus antiquity is the gainer. Indeed, to humble our contemporaries we raise to a great height the men of old times. When we lived we over-valued our ancestors. But now our posterity rates us at more than our real value: but really there is nothing to choose between our ancestors, ourselves, and our posterity; I have a notion that the spectacle of the world would be very tedious if we could see it without any illusions, for, indeed, it is always the same.

Montaigne.—I had an idea that all was in movement, that everything changed, and that different ages, like men, had their various characteristics. Surely we find that different periods are learned or ignorant, ingenious or ingenuous, serious or flippant, civilized or barbarous.

Socrates.—That is perfectly true.

Montaigne.—Then why should we not find that some periods are more virtuous and some more vicious?

Socrates.—It doesn't follow. Clothes change; but that is not to say the shape of the body also changes. Refinement or coarseness, knowledge or ignorance,

a higher or lower degree of ingenuousness, a serious or flippant spirit, these are but the outer part of man, and all these things change; but the heart never changes and the whole of man is in the heart. We are ignorant in one age, but in another age learning may be the fashion; men are self-interested, but disinterestedness will never take the place of selfishness. Out of the immense number of unreasonable men born in a century, it may be that nature has made two or three dozen of them reasonable, and has, of course, to scatter them over the earth. You will agree that in no part of the world are they found in sufficient number to create a fashion in virtue and justice.

Montaigne.—But is this distribution of reasonable human beings made equally? Some ages may have a larger share than others.

Socrates.—At the most there would be an imperceptible inequality. The general order of nature, on the whole, is pretty constant.

Englished by GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

National Secular Society.

Executive's Annual Report.

BY THE PRESIDENT.

THE year covered by this report is not one that on the face of it offers much that is promising to a propaganda such as that carried on by the different Branches of the National Secular Society. The state of affairs prevailing in the country has been, and still is, far from normal, everything connected with propaganda work is very expensive, trade has been very depressed, which affects both the spending and giving capacity of the public, and there has been an abnormal absorption of the public mind in labour troubles. All these things have a distracting influence on an intellectual propaganda, and it says much for the vitality of our movement that in spite of so many unfavourable circumstances, the growth of Freethought in the country should be so steady and so continuous.

Occurrences in the lecture field are reported so fully in the columns of the *Freethinker* that it is quite unnecessary to lengthen this report by describing them over again. It will suffice to say that the Branches everywhere have maintained their propaganda with quite the usual success, and a start has been made in many new places. We may specially note that Barnsley and Huddersfield—in neither place had there been any special lectures for some years—have both made a very successful re-entry into the field. Your President was invited by the local Freethinkers to lecture, and in both places, thanks to the excellent arrangements made, the hall was filled with interested and appreciative audiences. On Tyneside the South Shields Branch arranged for a week's lecturing over the district by Mr. Lloyd, and in spite of the places visited being the scene of a coal dispute, capital meetings were held, and at least one new Branch of the Society was formed. In South Wales also, in places in which there have not hitherto been held public meetings in connection with Freethought, large and enthusiastic gatherings have been addressed by the President and Mr. Lloyd. It is evident that if a suitable man could be stationed in South Wales some striking results might be achieved. In London the Executive tried the experiment of a lengthy course of lectures in the Friars Hall. These were held continuously for three months, to moderate audiences, and were fairly successful. The Executive felt encouraged by the result, and is convinced that what is needed for London is some central hall in which meetings could be held continuously through the winter. Perhaps an opportunity for acquiring a hall may present itself in the future.

During the year new Branches have been formed at Fulham, Greenside, Upper Rhondda, and Huddersfield. The enrolment of new members has also proceeded steadily, and as it must be borne in mind they are secured without any special pressure being brought to bear upon them, the fact of their joining is testimony to the compelling power of Freethought principles on the public at large. It must also be mentioned that the statement of accounts presented refers to headquarters'

revenue only. Each Branch has its own special income, for which it issues its own statement of income and expenditure.

Turning to other matters, the first thing to be noted is that the past year has witnessed yet another prosecution for the Church made crime of "Blasphemy." The stand made by the N. S. S. in the case of the Boulter trial in 1908 was sufficient to deter the authorities from attempting another prosecution in London, but it has been thought advisable to try Birmingham. Mr. J. W. Gott was charged at the Birmingham Assizes in February with "blaspheming" the Christian religion in a publication entitled the *Rib-Tickler*. The publication consisted of nothing but a number of alleged jokes, and altogether there seemed not the slightest justification for invoking the Blasphemy Laws in such a case. It would almost appear as though Christians themselves were anxious to cover the Blasphemy Laws with ridicule. The Executive, following out its policy of doing what it could to defeat a blasphemy charge, no matter what its opinion of the propagandist value or taste of the matter that is made the subject of the prosecution, at once offered Mr. Gott to take charge of the blasphemy count, making itself responsible for the entire cost, on condition that the conduct of the case was left in its hands. Mr. Gott declined to do this, apparently feeling sure of an acquittal. But blasphemy charges are very seldom unsuccessful. Christians have the last word in the matter, and a jury of Christians are not very likely to be reasonable where a Freethinker is concerned. Mr. Gott was sentenced to three months' imprisonment for "blasphemy" and a further three months for sending Malthusian literature and appliances through the post. After the verdict Mr. Gott wrote the Secretary of this Society asking whether anything could be done, and offering to place himself unreservedly in the Society's hands. The Executive did all it could in the circumstances. A consultation was arranged between your President and Counsel to see if there was any possibility of an appeal. But that was hopeless. The case had not been fought on lines with an eye to that contingency, and Mr. Gott's submission came too late to be of use to him or to us.

But the case is of importance in reminding Freethinkers that so long as Blasphemy Laws disgrace the statute books of a civilized country no man's liberty is absolutely secure. And it is foolish to expect Christians to abolish laws so long as public opinion is not educated to the point of forcing them to do so. Every successful prosecution for blasphemy is a new encouragement for the bigots to persevere in their bigotry, and every prosecution should act as a spur to Freethinkers to persist in their propaganda until these last surviving remnants of mediæval intolerance are swept away.

It is gratifying to turn from this topic to record one more advance made along the road of intellectual equality. At the last two Conferences the Executive was authorized to proceed with the task of devising an instrument that should give absolute legal security to the funds of the Society. It will be remembered that in the case of the Nonconformist Churches and other religious bodies their funds are secured to them through the instrumentality of a trust deed. In the case of the N. S. S. what has hitherto stood in the way of their proceeding along the same lines is the fact that the objects of the Society would have been held to be illegal, and the trust therefore invalid. But recent developments, culminating in the House of Lords decision in the case of Bowman versus the Secular Society, Limited, have definitely removed that objection to a trust deed. We have the decision of the highest court in the land that the objects of the N. S. S. are perfectly legal, and that the courts will enforce payment of a legacy left for their promotion. The way was thus clear for placing the financial side of the National Secular Society in exactly the same position, so far as financial security is concerned, as any of the non-established religious bodies in the country. A Deed has accordingly been prepared creating a Trust for the promotion of the principles and objects of the N. S. S. which gives absolute security for the funds of the Society. The money of the Society will hereafter be banked in the name of the Trust, and it will be expended at the order of the Executive, and of the Executive alone. The trustees are five in number, three of whom will consist of the Presi-

dent, Treasurer and Secretary in virtue of their office. The remaining two will be appointed for a term of five years. Every care has been taken in drawing up the Deed to leave the supreme power in the hands of the Annual Conference, and subject to that, the Executive. The duties of the Trustees will be concerned with finance only, and their responsibility will end when they have honoured a resolution duly and properly passed by the Conference or by the Executive.

To have said fifty years ago that a trust of this kind would be possible would have awakened the liveliest incredulity. But events move and times change, and it is for us to take full advantage of the altered conditions. This Trust Deed marks the fact that the National Secular Society is no longer a legal outlaw. It can receive a bequest with the same freedom and the same security of expenditure as any of the Churches. It marks another milestone on the long and thorny road to complete religious equality, and with the strengthening of the financial side of our movement we may well look forward to increased efficiency in our work.

The Executive has to congratulate the Conference upon the extent to which our principles are gaining ground both at home and abroad. In America there appears to be going on a more determined effort to organize Freethinkers in all parts of the States, and a gallant fight is being made to bring Church property under the general principles of taxation. In South America a very active literary propaganda is being pursued, and is meeting with considerable success. Nearer home, in the countries recently at war, operations that were of necessity suspended during the progress of hostilities are being resumed. The International Freethought movement is now fairly at work, and like ourselves, finds that the war has inflicted blows upon the Churches from which they will not easily recover, and from which, if Freethinkers are active enough, they should not recover. In Germany a new Freethought organization has been formed, and appears to be of a more militant character than were the pre-war Freethinking societies.

Among ourselves it is interesting to observe how frequently ideas which not so long ago could only find expression in the pages of Freethought journals are now to be met with in the columns of the ordinary press. This is eloquent testimony to the spread of our ideas, as is also the extent to which there is being realized various social reforms which once found their principal outlets in Freethought speeches and writings. The legal equality of the sexes is now fast becoming an actual fact, and the demand that so important a ceremony as marriage shall rest upon a basis of commonsense and social utility, must result in the ultimate exclusion of religion—save as a private caprice—from what is actually a civic ceremony. The secularization of the day of rest is also making great headway, in spite of bitter opposition from certain sections of the clergy. The claim for the opening of public parks for games on Sunday is becoming insistent, as it is also for the opening of places of amusement. These facilities already exist in many places and there is no valid reason why they should not become general. Sacred days are, after all, as ridiculous as sacred numbers and lucky stones, and the better type of mind is as much ashamed of the one as it is of the other. That this reform cannot be long delayed is shown by the fact that a certain number of the clergy are beginning to advocate it. They are as ready as ever to champion a reform when the reform that has been gained in the teeth of their opposition can no longer be denied.

In many other directions the same movement is to be noted, and that these reforms are not always advocated in the name of Freethought need cause neither surprise nor trouble. There are very few reforms accomplished, or partly realized, during the past hundred years of which Freethinkers have not been the pioneers, and equally few are the occasions on which they have received credit for their labours. But if we do not get the credit we see the results; we have the satisfaction of seeing the progress that has been made, and of knowing that but for the efforts of our predecessors in the army of liberated minds these reforms would never have transpired. It is eternally true that humanity crucifies its greatest benefactors, and the accepted truths of to-day are the heresies for which men and women suffered and sometimes died only yesterday. And even though those who benefit are strangers to

the name of their benefactors, the benefits remain as enduring facts.

But while the advance made is great there is very much more to be done, in fact, from many points of view, what has been done is only clearing the ground for what remains to be accomplished. The question of religious education in the State schools remains still unsettled, and while we permit the children of the nation to be indoctrinated at our expense with Christianity we shall be helping to undo on the one hand some part of what we are doing on the other. Nor is it wise to take the number of those who are willing to accept more rational views of religion as typical of the bulk of Christian believers. When, for example, a few months ago, Canon Barnes definitely rejected the old world legend of the Fall of man, it was hailed in many places as a great victory. So it was, but it was also evidence of a great deal that was yet to be done, and proof that in multitudes of cases we have only scratched the surface of superstition. For it was a sad comment upon the genuineness of our scientific education that the mere pronouncement that a leader in the Church no longer believed in a story which every educated mind ought to have rejected long ago, even if it ever entertained it, should have raised so stormy a controversy. And it was proof that the bulk of believers are practically untouched by the last fifty years of scientific development.

This, as well as other matters, all helps to drive home the lesson that the great need is for Freethinkers in every locality to set themselves seriously to the work of propaganda. All that the Society can do to aid local efforts will be done. But there must be local co-operation if the work is to be effective. In this connection the Executive is arranging to send a lecturer into certain localities during the summer months to carry on an open air campaign. If local friends co-operate as they should that experiment is certain to be successful, and it will become a regular feature of the Society's work.

On this point the Executive is still gravely concerned over the question of an enlarged lecture platform. It is not within the power of the Executive to create lecturers, but it will certainly do all it can to encourage them once they make their appearance. In this connection it suggests to all Branches the desirability of holding regular discussion classes. This is often a means of discovering latent platform talent. There is plenty of work for able speakers if they are forthcoming.

The Executive has also had prepared several new propaganda leaflets, with a pamphlet containing useful information on the laws as relating to Freethinkers, and other matters of consequence concerning civil marriage, secular funerals, etc. These will be ready for distribution directly after the Conference.

Our encouragement lies in the steady conquest of our ideas and in the growing disintegration of the forces of superstition. There was never a period, in the whole history of Christianity, when the influence of the clergy was lower than it is to-day. Superficial observers will tell you that this indicates no decline of belief in religious doctrines. That is, in our opinion, quite a false view. The declining influence of the Churches is symptomatic of the declining belief of the doctrines which they represent and of the beliefs for which they stand. The Christian Church is meeting the same fate that has overtaken other forms of religious belief, but to-day the disintegration is more rapid and more complete in consequence of the better knowledge that is available of the nature and history of religion. The process of attenuation goes on, and it is a process that in its very nature cannot continue for ever.

It is an old religious saying that the weakness of man is God's opportunity. There is a sense in which that is profoundly true, but we may reverse it and say that the weakness of God is man's opportunity. Or shall we say it is the growing strength of man that is the cause of the weakness of God. One is really the reverse of the other. Man was never so strong as he is to-day, and the gods were never so impotent. At any rate the weakness of religion, the discredit under which Christianity universally suffers, is our opportunity. The Executive earnestly pleads for the co-operation of all men and women who believe in our principles in exploiting that opportunity to the full. Without their help we can do but little.

There is a sense in which Freethought is independent of any person or number of persons. But ideas cannot run without feet, and it is to human effort that we come at last for aid in the work. Ours is a voluntary association of men and women animated by the least selfish of motives. It does not offer the bribe of immediate material gain, nor does it dangle the bauble of social prestige as a reward of effort. It makes its appeal to the higher type of character, and that means an appeal to the few instead of to the many. But it is the few that count in the work of the world, and it is the few that have played the chief part in making the world what it is. Ours is a great cause with noble traditions. It has been built up amid struggle and suffering, and brave, intrepid, men and women have trodden with bleeding feet the road that we now walk with comparative ease. We cannot undo their sufferings, we can only honour them for what they have done, and they would have asked for no greater honour and no better thanks than for their successors to carry on to the end the work that they so bravely pursued.

Acid Drops.

The calmness of the clergy in face of the war that is going on in industry at the moment is very striking when contrasted with their fiery zeal during the progress of the war with Germany. And some of those who have ventured to speak would have been better advised to remain silent. Thus, the Bishop of Durham, whose church draws £300,000 annually from the county over which he rules, recently reminded the miners that there are millions of working men getting less wages than the miners. To that Mr. John Graham retorts, that it would take fifty hard working miners to earn the salary which the Bishop of Durham draws. And to that he adds the impertinent comment, "Coal is useful. A bishop does not produce anything but sermons, and what use are these." A neat and a deserved retort.

The surprising thing is that so few people recognize that in a quarrel of this description there is contained one of the most damning indictments of the influence of Christianity conceivable. Richard Jefferies lamented that mankind during the whole of its existence had not yet learned to build itself a home. And it is quite certain that for this failure Christianity, in view of the influence it has wielded, must take a share of the responsibility for this failure. For after all these centuries we still have no better method of settling the differences between classes in the State than the crude one of civil war. We are still on the level of the club. And it makes little difference whether the club is a branch of a tree or the economic club of starvation on the one side or the fear of loss on the other. Considerations of right, of justice, of human dignity are allowed no play. When we get rid of phrases that are used to becloud the issue that is what remains. Neither side can trust the other. Each looks upon the other as an enemy to be defeated or exploited. And in this game the working man is usually the weakest because he is nearer the condition of actual want than is his opponent. And all that this Christian community can tell those who insist that the first consideration is that men and women and children, whether working people or not, should live amid conditions that allow decency and self respect, is to argue whether there will be enough profit left for the overlords if this is done. A civilization that can find no better standard of reference than that stands self-condemned.

In the face of that bald fact one may well ask what influence has Christianity had in establishing really human relations between people? Could any system have failed more miserably? Could it have done more to provide an ethical sanction for the law of the jungle than Christianity has done? And yet these people have the impudence to send missionaries to the Chinese and to the Hindoos and elsewhere to raise them in the scale of civilization! Is it not time that these people sent some missionaries here to teach these western barbarians that there is something more in life than the piling up of wealth under the protection of brute force. The first consideration of a genuine civilization would be, not the extent of territory or the

amount of its wealth, but the kind of men and women it bred. For that is the real wealth of a nation, and the only kind that endures.

There was never less religion. So the clergy tell us. Yet serious crime is decreasing in this country. In 1908 the number of persons accused of indictable offences in England and Wales was 75,544, and in 1919 the number was 57,379. The figures for Scotland for the same years are 35,037 and 19,244; and for Ireland 7,202 and 4,431.

For the first time for many years the accounts of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society show a deficiency of £36,131. Some coffee-coloured Pagans will be pleased at the chance of a respite from the soul-savers. For, too often, the tradesmen follow the theologians so closely that it is difficult to choose between them.

Father Degan, of Coalville, says that "a good Christian is often an amateur comedian." That is true! The man who lolls in his pew on Sunday and confesses that he is a miserable sinner would start a libel action if he were called a backslider on Monday morning.

There are various kinds of liars, but the most persistent and the most hopeless is the religious variety. And he is encouraged in his labours by the religious fool. So we were not at all surprised to find in a Bermondsey parish magazine an account given by Mr. Lipschote, missionary, of the reason why Jerusalem was not bombarded by the British troops. Mr. Lipschote says that, when General Allenby was approaching Jerusalem he saw that it might be necessary to shell it. So he wired to the War Office for instructions. He was told to use his own judgment. Then he wired to the King asking his instructions. The King told him to "Pray about it." The General held a prayer meeting, and that led the city to surrender without further fighting. There is no need to describe the man who could spin that yarn, and who can think that a British General would wire to the King to know what he was to do to take a city, but the silliness of the people who can swallow such a yarn almost beggars description. It marks about the very lowest depths of human imbecility. Christianity is quite safe while that type survives.

Unlike so many of its contemporaries, the refreshingly ingenuous *Challenge* finds no need to ignore the influences that tell against orthodox Christianity at home in Europe. According to the missionary number (May 6) men are asking what sense there is in expending resources upon work overseas, "when England is becoming yearly more irreligious." The reason ought to be fairly obvious. "Our motive in missions is not only to save the world; it is also to save the Church." The mind of what is called Christendom has developed along crooked lines. Contact with heathenism is needed to generate a new supply of life and freedom. Now that attitude is easy to understand, and it ought to appeal to a certain class of readers. It is far better than the theory of a "progressive revelation."

The same issue is full of advertisements of various religious organizations, nearly every one of which announces, "Funds urgently needed." It also contains a paragraph urging world alliance for international friendship through the Churches. The discovery of the Churches for this purpose is a modest claim which even the sceptic can concede in May, 1921. An English resident in Japan once asked a well-known Japanese statesman what prospect there was for the Christian religion in the "land of the chrysanthemum." Almost instantaneously came the reply: "We do not wish to import a religion from a country that needs a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children."

Yet another item in the *Challenge* is really very attractive. "One of the alarming features in Germany at present is the collapse of religious teaching in its schools." As the cause of the war, "German Atheism" has by this time, we fear, put a heavy burden on whatever is left of

the Christian conscience in England. Still, it is gratifying to note that one of the early acts of the new Republican Government, which guarantees to the teachers in the school and to the toiling masses alike some measure of political freedom and social justice, has been to deprive the priest and his remnants of superstition of their control over the children in the national schools.

Alderman Edwards, M.P., is reported to have said recently that amongst the labour population there is a suspicion that the great interest now being displayed in them by leaders of Christian thought is not genuine. He himself does not subscribe to this view. Perhaps not. But the record of the "leaders of Christian thought" and their attitude to other thought is a matter of history. Christianity as the greatest of conservative and revolutionary forces at one and the same time is just the sort of thing that appeals to the British mentality. It is the type of mentality that dreads "Materialism" like the plague, but is quite powerfully attracted to "reverent Agnosticism." Religion itself may be a bad thing, but to carry on an active propaganda against it is not "good form."

Some impertinent scoundrel, who has the decency to hide his name under initials, writes to the *Daily News* of May 12 asking that books ought to be cheaper in the interests of the consumer. The villain! Things will come to something if the consumer is to be considered in the matter. The business of the consumer is to pay, and to keep on yapping. What was the use of going to war if mere readers are to buy books to-day as cheaply as they did in 1914? We advise this man, whoever he is, to do as we do, and when he pays four times the price of a book that he used to pay, thank God, and the government, for having set up a paper control, and so habituated the paper makers to such prices that they are not going to get back, without a very severe struggle, to the miserable profits of pre-war days. And if people can't read books, so much the better. The less they read the less they will know. And the less they know the more they will approach the official standard of the ideal citizen.

We see that the Presbyterian General Assembly have decided in favour of the admission of women to the ministry. Shades of John Knox! We would suggest that someone prints as a tract selected passages from Knox's "First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of women" and circulate it among the members of the Presbyterian Church. It is one of the classics of theological Billingsgate on the subject of women.

We have every sympathy with the delicacy of feeling of our judges. At a time when the feelings of a policeman on hearing a speech are so often taken by magistrates as the basis of a decision as to whether a speaker may be punished or not, it would be unwise to deny that the law, from policeman to a judge in the High Court, develops a delicacy of feeling not characteristic of the ordinary man. But we are still puzzled to understand why Mr. Justice Horridge should have been moved to protest against the use of the word "God" in a letter written by one of the parties in a divorce suit. His lordship said it was disgusting to hear the word God used all over the place by people when speaking of their misconduct. But why? Surely Mr. Justice Horridge must know that no other word is so commonly used in connection with all sorts of rascality as "God." Of course, people never mean anything by it, but it does as a stop-gap, and it gives a feeling of satisfaction. So what else does one want?

One suspects that the protest is just a sample of that highly organized humbug which pretends that there is something sacred and moralizing about the use of "God." And, of course, it may strike a man in the position of Mr. Justice Horridge that it is useless to expect this imposture to endure if people are permitted to drag in the name in a divorce case. It would really have been more to the point if Mr. Justice Horridge had pointed out what an empty word it was to use. But that might have pricked the bubble too suddenly.

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.

A. WEBBE.—We agree with you that the magazine is rubbish. It makes one almost despair of human nature to find there are people who can take such stuff seriously.

ROCHDALE.—Thanks for what you have done. We are always glad to have anything of that kind. We cannot say when a new edition of *Theism or Atheism* will be called for, but we printed a good supply, so that it is not likely to be yet awhile. Of course, we don't mind how soon the present edition is exhausted.

MRS. E. PLUNKETT (Chicago).—Many thanks for cuttings.

A. BEAL.—Glad to hear of the agitation you are keeping up. If the N. S. S. can help it will. It would be quite possible to send a speaker down if necessary.

H. ALSTON.—We intend re-issuing some of Mr. G. W. Foote's writings so soon as we have other things that are on hand out of the way. But publishing requires capital, and we have to go cautiously. With more capital at our command we could do much more than we are doing.

"UNORTHODOX."—Obligated to hold over till next week.

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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Sugar Plums.

There was a fair attendance of delegates and members at the N. S. S. Conference on Sunday last—in the circumstances a very good attendance—but a number who would have been in attendance were prevented by the uncertainty of train accommodation. At the last moment delegates from South Shields, Glasgow, Barnsley, and elsewhere wrote or wired their inability to be present. There were, naturally, a good muster of Freethinkers from different parts of Wales, and their interest in the cause promises well for the future.

Special thanks are due to the ladies who worked so admirably in providing luncheon and tea for members and delegates. We have seen Conference dinners and teas that were far inferior when provided by professional caterers. Altogether, the members of the Swansea Branch worked heartily for the success of the Conference and deserved the result achieved. The discussion over the various items on the Agenda was interesting and to the point. And we were pleased to find that considerable interest was taken in the Executive's proposal to send

round a lecturer during the summer months for open-air work. An informal meeting was held between Miss Vance and the Welsh members in the hopes of hammering out a definite plan of campaign. We would suggest that any who were not at the Conference and would like to see work done in their district should write the Secretary at once.

We have printed this week the Executive's Annual Report, and the account of business meetings will appear in our next issue.

Apropos of the paragraph in this column in last week's issue concerning the arrest of Mr. Guy Aldred, we are asked to state that a fund has been opened for the maintenance of his wife and child during the time that he is awaiting trial, as well as of the dependents of the others who were arrested with him. The secretary of the fund is Mr. J. McGovern, 844 Shottleston Road, Glasgow.

We mentioned a week or two ago that we had an edition of Volney's famous *Ruins of Empires* in the press, and which we hope to have on sale in the course of a week or so. We are glad to see from the *Times Literary Supplement* a cordial recognition of the merits of Volney's work. The writer says that Volney "was sufficiently remarkable to merit attention as a philosopher, traveller, historian, and man of letters in any age, and he was certainly one of the outstanding figures of the eighteenth century." It refers to his "great work" *Les Ruines*, and a great work it undoubtedly was. With that we think that all of our readers who do not know the work will agree. And those who do know it will probably welcome the chance of renewing acquaintance with it in a new edition.

A Child's Thoughts on Baptism.

(A Genuine Incident Retold in Verse.)

HOMEWARD from school the seven-year-old
Came, and his morning's lesson told:
"We've heard to-day such a strange story;
How, from a cloud of light and glory
A dove from heaven was seen to sink
Where Jesus stood on Jordan's brink,
And how God's voice from heaven did call,
This was his son, loved most of all.
I don't believe such things are true,
Whatever teacher says: do you?
But, true or not, I don't much care;
It is a pretty tale to hear."

After a pause, the child begins
More questions: "Mother, what are sins?
Sin just means naughtiness, you say:
Then how can water wash away
Sin by a wet cross on the brow?
That *must* be nonsense, anyhow!
When I am bathed at night, I guess
It won't wash off my naughtiness!
How can it make a difference
To being good? it isn't sense!

"Mother, have other children been
Baptized like this, to make them clean?
Yes? then the story's just pretence:
I *knew* it made no difference!
The other children aren't a bit
Better than I—that settles it!"

CHESTER KEITH.

The Christian religion is derogatory to the Creator in all its articles. It puts the Creator in an inferior point of view, and places the Christian devil above him. It is he, according to the absurd story in Genesis, that outwits the Creator in the Garden of Eden, and steals from him his favourite creature, man, and at last obliges him to beget a son, and put that son to death, to get man back again, and this the priests of the Christian religion call redemption.—Thomas Paine.

Parents and Children.

THE vast majority of parents are unfit to have children. In dealing with their children they proceed on an utterly false principle; hence, all that they do is harmful to the children and also to themselves. They start with the false idea that their children are under a heavy obligation to them for bringing them to life and caring for them while they are not able to take care of themselves, and then they make all sorts of demands on them and preach to them the gospel of the duty of children to parents. This is diametrically opposed to the truth, as I conceive it. A child is under no obligation and owes no duty to his parents. On the contrary, a parent is under the heaviest obligation to his child. Did the child ask to be born, or was it consulted in any way on this subject, so vastly momentous to it? Certainly not. The parents have gone blindly into the realm of unconsciousness and dragged thence a being capable of misery, and by doing so have incurred the most exacting of obligations to that being.

It is often said that a child can never do enough for his parents. If the child values life, if he thinks he is a great gainer by reason of consciousness, he may feel deeply indebted to his parents, but it should never be preached to him that he cannot do enough for them.

On the contrary, it may be said with reason that a parent can never do enough for his child. If you have taken the responsibility of bringing a human being into this highly dangerous and doubtful world, with a deliberate view to your own pleasure, or perhaps without intending to do so, as the result of a merely passionate act, you have no right to claim anything from him, or to find fault with anything he may do or fail to do. He may justly claim any reasonable thing from you, and you may justly be blamed for anything he may do, since you are responsible for his being in existence at all.

This false doctrine of the duty of children to parents is of a piece with the doctrine of duty to God. The crudest mind should be able to understand that if God created us we owe him nothing and he owes us everything; moreover, that he is responsible for all we do and are. The idea that God has a right to create people and then take some to heaven and send others to hell is so absurd and monstrous that the wonder is that anybody ever could have believed it. If God created us, a heavy obligation rests on him to see that we do not suffer either in this world or in the next.

Similarly, the notion that because a man and woman bring a child into being they have a right to make demands of that child, much less to scold or beat it, is so absurd and barbarous that it is an equal wonder that anybody could ever have believed it. Don't you know that all children do things that give their parents disappointment and pain? Of course you do, and knowing it you knew that if you had children they must be such as the rest. It was for you to decide whether you would have children in all essential respects such as others; and having got them you ought not to scold or punish them for anything they do, for they may very reasonably retort on you and say: "If you do not like the way I behave, why did you drag me into this world?" The apostle Paul, who spoiled the religion of Jesus by establishing the Church of Christ, is reported to have said: "Children, obey your parents in all things." He also said: "Wives, be in subjection to your husbands," and "Slaves, obey your masters," and "Submit to the powers that be," and "Honour the King." This is the man who taught that policemen and political and ecclesiastical rulers of all kinds are the ministers of God. A charming social ideal he had! There was God over all, and then came the king, and then the judge, and then the policeman, with a club in his hand and a pistol in his pocket, and then

the master, the husband and the parent. A whole series of tyrants beginning with God, who roasts people in hell, and ending with a parent thrashing a child.

The law of that society is obedience. The king obeys God, the judge obeys the king, the policeman obeys the judge, the master obeys the policeman, the workman obeys the master, the wife obeys the husband, the child obeys the parent. There is nobody to obey the working man or the child. Upon them rests the entire burden of slavery.

You will observe that the most useless of all beings is at the top—God, and the most useful and innocent of all are at the bottom—the working man and the child. I would reverse this order of society. I would put the working man and the child at the top—the one because he is the most useful, and the other because he is the most helpless—and God at the bottom because he is the one without whom we can get along the best. If we could once get the Great Tyrant under foot, all the minor tyrants would fall with him.

I hate religion not altogether because it is false, but because it is a superstition that involves a gigantic system of slavery; because it always shouts, "Obey!" It is the voice of religion that says: "Children, obey your parents." But the voice of reason declares that, for a child to obey its parents is impossible, and that if it were possible it would be most injurious to both.

A child is a separate entity. It must follow the promptings of its own desires and impulses. The moment a parent tries to force his child to conform to his wishes it is as if he were trying to do something in mechanics while utterly ignoring the law of gravitation. And if it were possible it would not be desirable. A thoroughly obedient child would be merely the duplicate of the parent, and the world wants originals and not duplicates.

Nor is there any sound reason why a child should obey a parent. Whence does the parent derive any such authority? From God? If you say so I must decline further argument. The dragging of God into any discussion makes all rational thinking impossible. When God flies in at the window, common sense walks out at the door. But if we eliminate the idea that an Infinite Something or other somehow or other confers authority on a parent to exact obedience from a child, whence comes such authority? Manifestly there is no source whence it could come. Every parent should explain to his child that it should never blindly obey anybody, but that it should understand that certain consequences inevitably result from certain actions and certain thoughts; and that in the light of this knowledge it should follow its own desires and impulses.

I do not mean that, from the moment of birth children should be allowed to do as they please, although in a general way that is true. For example, I would not allow a child to put its hand into the fire unless I had first explained that the fire would hurt it. But if I had explained that, and was sure that the child understood what I meant, I would then allow him to do as he liked, feeling sure that his education on that point would be completed in about one second. Nor would I allow my child to strike another until I had made him understand what are the nature and consequences of violence towards others; if he still persisted in fighting I would arrange that he should hit only some boy who could knock him out in one round, and so teach him what he would not learn from me.

But why go on? Sensible people will understand the difference between the careful training of a child in order to develop its own power of making wise choices of conduct, and the arbitrary forcing of the will of the parent on the child for no reason but the bad and false one that blind obedience is its duty to its parents.

Thoughtful persons can educate their children in

the best way without using any of the horrid methods of physical violence to which most parents now resort to force their children to do what they have not the wisdom or patience to get them to do by kind and rational methods.

There is nothing that makes me more mad than to think of a parent thrashing his child, or shutting him up in a dark closet, or sending him to bed without supper. The idea of a big strong man or woman domineering over a little helpless child by physical violence is as loathsome to me as the killing of a humming bird. Some parents say that they never thrash their children when they are angry. They wait till they are quite cool and passionless. They are the most cruel of the lot. There is some excuse for striking a child when you are angry, for anger is a kind of insanity in which men are hardly responsible for their actions. But to beat a child, in cold blood, because it would not do something you willed it to do is simply infamous.

Some parents say that they never punish their children except from a sense of duty, and for their good, and that the punishment hurts them more than the child. That is what they say about God. "The Lord loveth whom he chastiseth." If you are suffering agony from cancer, and are on the way to the workhouse, you know how much God loves you. And so I suppose you want your child to look at your dead face some day and measure your love by the number of times you thrashed him.

I know there are people who say that their parents never whipped them more than was for their own good. But these people are now whipping their children, and their testimony is worthless. Such people also believe in hell, and prison and the gallows, and have no idea of the facts of the case and how such savagery defeats its own object.

There is no natural connection between offences and arbitrary modes of punishment. This is why the old doctrine of hell broke down. People came to see that there is no connection between bad conduct and fire, and so it became impossible for them to believe that if they sowed sin they would reap brimstone. Now, suppose your child tells a lie, what connection is there between lying and a leather strap? None whatever. Lies bring their own unpleasant consequences, and you can explain this fact to your child and safely leave him to be dealt with by results. It will not be long before his lie, passing for the truth, will get him into such difficulties that he will learn more than you can ever teach him with a leather strap. Moreover, when you whip a child for lying you act a lie yourself. You teach him to believe that the natural consequence of lying is to be whipped, so that he will thus come to think that every time he lies without getting whipped he has got ahead of nature. And has it never occurred to you that the real reason why your child needs so much correction is because your brutal and irrational way of training him is making him as brutal and irrational as you are yourself? G. O. W.

Celibacy is the essence of vulgarity. It tries to put a stain upon motherhood, upon marriage, upon love—that is to say, upon all that is holiest in the human heart. Take love from the world, and there is nothing left worth living for. The church has treated this great, this sublime, this unspeakably holy passion, as though it polluted the heart. They have placed the love of God above the love of woman, above the love of man. Human love is generous and noble. The love of God is selfish, because man does not love God for God's sake, but for his own.

—R. G. Ingersoll.

The pale pathetic peoples still plod on
From hoodwinking to light.

—Hardy.

Found Wanting.

A Study in Catholicism.

To form a right judgment of a system it must be seen in operation under conditions of free play. Those who know Catholicism only as it exists in Protestant lands know very little about it. This is particularly true as regards the ethical side of that religion; we mean its effect upon the conduct of those who profess it, be they of the shepherds or of the flock. For in society it is always the greater number that determines the tone, whether for good or for evil; and minorities, rebelliously or otherwise, undergo the influence of the prevailing party, just as a few bad-mannered, indecorous persons get sobered down in the presence of an orderly multitude. It is impossible to live long in Catholic parts without noticing that Catholicism is a dismal failure from the moral point of view.

Some years ago, at Pompeii, a simple-minded American priest, speaking of the Neapolitans, said to the present writer, "It is very strange, they are all good Catholics yet most of them would murder you for a dollar." This observation puts the matter in a nutshell. America is not Italy. But a religion which makes good people in one country ought to make good people in another. A febrifuge should act as well in Naples as in New York. Otherwise, on the Baconian principle of eliminating it may always be argued that the religion, or the medicine, was not the cause of the improvement in soul or in body. Let us take what may be regarded as a testing point. In the Latin countries the people are, and always have been, under the influence of Catholicism. They are peculiarly imaginative and susceptible, and, therefore, eminently fitted to receive Catholic teaching under the picturesque and sensuous form in which it is submitted to the popular mind. If they have little respect for the priest as a man, they have the greatest reverence for his pontifical power. They accept on trust the instructions he chooses to give, and really tremble when he preaches at Advent about the terrors of the world to come. Yet it is just in these countries, and among these people, that adultery flourishes in its very worst form, namely, in the case of men and women who, though married, and cohabiting with their spouses, have sexual intercourse *habitually* with other persons, often with persons also married. A vast mass of literature proves that this state of affairs has been going on for ages, and is no way imputable to apostasy from Catholicism. Indeed, the chronic complaint of that body seems to be lasciviousness, or the working of all uncleanness with greediness. Watch-night services, which to a Protestant appear the most solemn and the least likely to be abused of any religious instructions, had to be given up in Catholicism owing to the scandalous conduct they occasioned. One of the first to expose the evil was Vigilantius, a Gaul, who flourished in the fifth century, and became famous by his opposition to the celibacy of the clergy, the use of torches at shrines, the making of pilgrimages, the honouring of departed saints, and the offering of prayers for the dead. St. Jerome, who detested him bitterly,¹ supported the watchings, as they were called (*advers. Vigilantium*); yet even he says that at such services young girls should not go a finger's breadth from the side of their mothers (*ad Lactam. de institut. filae*). Cardinal Bellarmine himself confesses that the watchings had to be abandoned, because during them, abuses, or rather crimes, were not seldom committed, "*abusus.....vel potius flagitia non raro committi.*" (*de Eccles. triumph. l. 3. c. ult.*) Matters were no better in the case of pilgrimages. We do not refer to the horrible scenes of de-

¹ He calls Vigilantius "a Samaritan," "a Jew," "a filthy fellow"; and says that he ought to have his tongue cut off, and be bound like a raving lunatic.—(*ad Vig. et ad Riparium.*)

bauchery which occurred among the Crusaders, but to the misconduct of isolated pilgrims, and small pilgrim bands, at the time when pilgrimages were universal. In 745, St. Boniface, writing to the Archbishop of Canterbury, says that there were hardly any towns on the way from England to Rome where English women who had set out as pilgrims could not be found living in shame (Ep. 63). Lourdes, the celebrated place of pilgrimage, where the Virgin is said to have appeared to a peasant girl, and where the Eucharistic Congress was held just before the war, is notorious as a resort for adulterous couples, and has in other respects the sort of reputation which Nottingham had in its worst days. In Catholic lands the illegitimate birth-rate is enormous. The register of the Papal states in 1850, under the pontificate of Pius IX., gave the number of births as one thousand legitimate and two thousand five hundred and sixty illegitimate.²

The manuals for the instruction of Catholic priests bear eloquent testimony to the standard of morals current among the Catholic laity. One of these writers, St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, has the highest possible authority. He was made a doctor of the Church on March 11, 1871, by Pope Pius IX. who, according to his own statement, acted in this matter at the earnest request of almost all the bishops of the whole world. Then, on August 28, 1879, Pope Leo XIII., in a solemn epistle, declared that although the works of his dear son, Alphonsus de Liguori, had already traversed the globe to the great benefit of Christianity, yet it was to be desired they should spread more and more, and reach the hands of all; and that as to Liguori's *Moral Theology*, it offered a safe standard for directors of the conscience.³

The book here in question contains some incredible filth respecting the manners of those who come to the priests for advice and absolution. We fancy no one could publish this pious author in English without the risk of imprisonment for outrage on public decency, but lest we should seem to belie him, we venture to give a few extracts from him in the original tongue. He devotes a lengthy paragraph to the question: "An semper, sit mortale (peccatum), si vir immittat pudenda in os uxoris" (vi. 298). He says elsewhere, "Peccat mortaliter, qui conjugii serio et instanter petenti debitum negat." "Hinc dicunt (certain authorities) non esse mortale, post tertiam, copulam in eadem nocte habitam negare quartam." But according to others, "Non potest autem post copulam habitam in die negare in nocte" (vi. 305-307). Again, "Licet debitum (conjugale) tempore menstrui.....tempore morbi, si morbus non tendet proxime ad mortem, i.e., morbus non solet de brevi et facile mortem inferre; die communionis; in diebus festis vel jejuniis; in ecclesia. s. in loco publico, si copula conjugalis manet occulta" (vi. 269-289). Another classic author of the Catholic Church, Sanchez, a Jesuit father of the sixteenth century, wrote a treatise entitled, *Disputationum de s. Matrimonii Sacramento Libri VI.* In this work, a folio volume, which has gone through various editions, the author describes in detail all the ways of prophaning the nuptial state. A minister of the Reformed Church, one Rivet, observed to a Jesuit of his acquaintance, that he thought Sanchez must have

drawn most of his facts from his own imagination, obviously a very foul source. "I see, sir," replied the other, "that you have never heard confessions, for we who do this, hear things worse than Sanchez ever wrote." Whereupon, came the answer, "Then why do you glory so much in the sanctity of your Church, since by your own admission, things are done in it which the very heathens knew not the name of?" (Rivet in *Decalog. Opera I.*, 1400). To-day, the number of such works is considerable, but they are more discreetly guarded than of old. The chief merit they have is their witness to the failure of Catholicism as a means of purification for the human heart. The priests often compare their methods to those of physicians; but what would be thought of a doctor unable to cure his patients, but just skilful enough to keep their diseased bodies out of the grave? Medicine can boast of effecting hosts of radical cures, and of having all but rooted out some of the most terrible maladies incident to man. Catholicism has no analogous claim at all to make, though it has existed for centuries upon centuries under the most favourable conditions, and once enjoyed uninterrupted activity for a prodigious period. This failure is the more remarkable because the priest has furnished himself with a most powerful instrument of compulsion. He has persuaded the people to believe that they cannot go to heaven without his consent, because, being sinners, they cannot get there unless forgiven, and he alone holds the divine authority to effect, or to refuse their forgiveness. Anyone may see that with a force of this kind in his hands, the priest is able to suppress whatever he will; why then does he not suppress adultery for instance, as he has often suppressed heretical books like the one entitled, *Of the Benefits of the Death of Christ*, which, according to Macaulay (*Essays*, II., 138), after being many times reprinted and eagerly read in every part of Italy, was proscribed by the Inquisition, and "is now as hopelessly lost as the second decade of Livy." The truth is, there are good reasons why the priests are drastic towards heresy, and lenient towards adultery. They know that if a man becomes a "heretic" they lose him altogether, and that the spread of "heresy" would mean the end of their day. Upon the other hand, if he simply violates the marriage bed, and they indulge his weakness, after telling him how sinful he is, he will very naturally feel grateful to them, and regard them as the agents of a kindly providence. This is just the reason why the priests accept a vague intention of amendment, and impose a trumpery penance, in the case of persons who come to them over and over again to confess repetitions of the self same fault. Indeed, the whole system of Catholicism is nothing more or less than a huge exploitation of the sense of sin as inspired and directed by the priests for their own benefit. Besides the general idea that certain actions, unless absolved pontifically, lead straight to hell, Catholicism teaches that a moral law which has to do with these actions is so intricate that only specialists can understand it. The specialists in question are, of course, the priests. They take two distinct courses, one in the pulpit, and one in the confessional. From the pulpit general principles are taught, much as they may be found in the Gospel; but at the confessional these principles are subjected to so many exceptions, that they are apt to lose all their force. This enables the priests to make themselves popular by glossing over the vices of their flock whilst keeping up an appearance of rigour; and also to gain importance by creating the belief that they alone are capable of handling matters of conscience from which depend such awful issues. Here are a few illustrations. "Speak ye truth each one with his neighbour," say the apostle (Eph. iv. 25). This is much too crude for Father Timothée who, in his *Theologia Moralis Universa*, published at Paris in

² *Auszuage aus der Moralthologie*, Dr. A. M. de Liguori, p. 27 (Robert Grassmann, Stettin, 1901).

³ The *Theologia moralis* edited by P. Michael Hartinger and published by Georg Joseph Manz, appeared at Regensburg 1879-1881 in eight volumes and 4780 pages. Price 20 marks. (See Grassmann, pp. 1-5).

⁴ This vile passage reminds us of one of the reminiscences of Abelard in a letter to Heloise long after their separation: "Nosti, inquam, id impudentissime tunc actum esse, in tam reverendo loco et summae Virgini consecrato,.....ut nulla honestior vel Dei reverentia in ipsis etiam diebus Dominicæ passionis vel quantarumcunque solemnitate, ab hujus luto volutabro me revocaret."

1904, authorises lying in the following cases: "adultery" (t. ii. p. 591); "at the customs" (p. 581); "to get rid of a beggar" (p. 581); "when legally but not logically guilty" (p. 580); and "to diminish the value of a succession" (p. 567). He adds that such conduct is "sincere, just, prudent" (p. 580).

St. Alphonsus de Liguori is very lucid and precise in explaining *how* to lie without sin. He teaches, for instance, that if you have promised to marry a young girl, and she loses her fortune before the wedding, you may stoutly deny having given her the promise in question, if the meaning is that you did not give it to be bound by it (*Theologie*, 1834, t. i. p. 155). Again, he says that a wife justly accused by her husband of adultery may deny the charge by saying that she has not broken the marriage bond, because it is obvious that the marriage still subsists. If, however, she has time to run to confession and get absolved, she may boldly declare her innocence, for she is then innocent. But if her fault be safe from discovery, she had better deny it without troubling to find any equivocation (p. 158). "Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted," says the apostle in the letter previously quoted (iv. 32). Busenbaum, a classic in casuistry, evidently thought this injunction much too sweeping, for he cites with approval three of his predecessors who were of opinion that there is no sin in the conduct of a mother "who desires the death of her daughters because owing to their plainness, or their poverty, she cannot hope to marry them advantageously and honestly" (b. ii. tract. 3 c. 2). Pages could be filled with this sort of stuff, but as Albert Bayet, from whom we have taken these instances, happily says, "So much monotony in immorality quickly brings disgust."

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

(To be Continued.)

The N.S.S. Annual Conference.

Evening Public Meeting.

THE public meeting in the evening, attended by about four hundred people, was a striking tribute to the enthusiasm of the Freethinkers in South Wales. Mr. Cohen, who presided, was supported on the platform by Messrs. A. B. Moss, J. T. Lloyd, A. D. McLaren, and T. Thurlow.

In opening the proceedings, Mr. Cohen said that the National Secular Society was the oldest of the Freethought organizations in Great Britain, and the only Society that carried on an aggressive propaganda for the purpose of popularizing the principles of Secularism. Founded over half a century ago by one of the most eminent men of the nineteenth century, and one of the greatest fighters for the people's rights in any century—Charles Bradlaugh—the N. S. S. had never wavered or compromised in the strenuous conflict with superstition.

Mr. A. B. Moss, one of the "Old Guard," congratulated the President on a most successful Conference. Despite the fact that the conditions of travelling and industrial troubles had prevented several delegates from attending the Conference, a remarkable list of items on the Agenda had been discussed, and important resolutions passed. As a Freethinker of forty-six years standing, he might fairly claim to know what the principles of Secularism were. Our fundamental position was nothing more or less than the right of each man and woman to give expression to their honest thought on any matter, including religion, without being subject to any disability before the law. On political, social, and economic questions, a man could express his opinions freely, but in religion, opinion regarded as in any fashion hurtful to Christians, or professing Christians, was liable to bring one under the charge of blasphemy. Yet, even in the Church of England there were, and had long been, men who were really Freethinkers. Bishop Colenso had shown in his work on the Pentateuch that the Bible was false scientifically and historically, and indefensible morally.

To-day, another Anglican clergyman, Canon Barnes, a distinguished man of science, tells us that the fundamental teaching of the Christian religion—the fall of man—is not true, that Darwin is right in declaring that man has gone upward and not downward.

Mr. A. D. McLaren said that all the Churches, faced by industrial unrest on all sides, and the estrangement of the toiling masses, were declaring vehemently that the ideals of Christianity and Labour were the same. He urged them to remember that the Church only appealed when she could no longer command. To those who charged us with being engaged in work of a purely destructive nature he replied that Freethought is the most constructive force in the world, because it derives its inspiration from living men and women and not from dead gods.

Mr. J. T. Lloyd received a hearty welcome from his countrymen. He held a book in his hand which was written eight years ago and published in Swansea. It was entitled *The Red Light*, and its author was the Rev. D. Davis. The reverend author complained of empty churches, but was unable to see the real cause of the conditions of which he complained, namely, religious apathy. Religion is an affair of the emotions, and what is called "the religious sense," once so strong in Wales, has no longer the same hold on the people. The ever growing influence of counter attractions was only the same cause under another name. It meant that religion was compelled to yield ground to something more attractive. Why do the Churches denounce theatres, cinemas, and similar entertainments on Sunday? Because they fear that these will prove more attractive than themselves. He agreed largely that the charges against the Churches of being morally corrupt, and their ministers being worldly-minded was well founded, but the real explanation of the weakening of religion was apathy towards it due to the number of competing values which were, scientifically and morally, superior to Christianity. An influence, strong and irresistible as the tide, had been in existence for hundreds of years, but since Darwin had shown man the real answer to the great questions concerning the origin and development of the human race, this influence had shattered the Christian foundations. (Here Mr. Lloyd favoured the audience with a few Welsh phrases, which were evidently appreciated.) The Churches were emptied not because of inefficiency, or the immorality of ministers, but because of the decay of other-worldliness. Life from the lowest to the highest forms was a struggle, but like the hero in Olive Schreiner's *Dream of the Hunter*, we can all strive, if we will, to dig a few precious coals out of the earth, and win a few of the plumes of the bird of truth. We are engaged in a winning game, hope, not despair, is our guiding and inspiring star. Dean Inge draws a dark picture of the English Church which, he admits, has taken the wrong side on every conceivable subject. Our outlook is clearer and brighter. Supernaturalism is a monster inconceivably cruel, but it grows dim as knowledge creeps over the horizon. It is destined to give way to liberty, justice, fair play, and world-wide brotherhood.

Mr. Cohen reviewed the general outlook for the Freethought cause. Those who, in the past, spoke with the prison door ever open to receive them, might challenge the champions of any movement in the world to show a succession of four names to equal those inscribed on the little hammer which he held in his hand—Richard Carlile, Robert Watson, Charles Bradlaugh, George William Foote. Those men were giants. Once the battle raged round Paine's *Age of Reason*. Richard Carlile opened his shop for the sale of Freethought literature in Fleet Street, he was prosecuted and in his defence read the whole of the *Age of Reason* to the jury—an ordeal which they richly deserved. He was locked up, and then his wife sold the book and also went to prison. Then a relative of the wife, the shopman, and Carlile after his release, all sold the *Age of Reason* in succession and went to gaol. Nor did our movement lack the support of brave and noble women. Freethinkers like Matilda Roalfe were indicted for blasphemy. These men and women, all of them poor, fought one of the most powerful Churches in existence and one of the most unscrupulous social classes. In the long run they won for Freethinkers the right to express their opinions freely, and for Christians the right to be more humane. One of our popular superstitions is that we are educated. Fancy a man being able to gain

notoriety for such an admission as Canon Barnes's concerning the fall of man! It was solemnly demanded that a National Day of Prayer should be proclaimed with a view to ending the coal strike, and Lloyd George in the House of Commons had improved upon "wait and see" by urging us to "watch and pray." If you don't watch they will "prey," for they are little better than "birds of prey." Our religion for centuries had governed Europe and prided itself on its moralizing power, its love, its charity. Yet a social state existed under which the only means of settling our domestic troubles was an effort to starve one side or the other into submission. He was not taking sides in any existing disputes, but he emphasized that Christianity was not strong enough morally to prevent the strife and turmoil. Religion was largely responsible because it had so long chloroformed men and women. You are poor because you are enslaved mentally. All injustice rests upon man's inability to perceive injustice and to demand justice. Freethought had been too modest in the matter of declaring its victories, it had worked up movement after movement, brought them to a successful issue and then handed over the credit to others. Over a hundred years ago our prison system was permeated of brutalizing influences—torture and rack. Beccaria, an Atheist, denounced the system and pointed the way to reform. He influenced Voltaire, who used the powerful weapon of satire to expose abuses. Less than a hundred years ago woman was in a position of gross inequality as compared with the male sex. The Church said that man and woman when married were one, and man was the one. The Church took away all the freedom which woman had before Christianity appeared. The despised Freethinkers came, and at the time of the French Revolution one of them wrote a pamphlet, "Ought Woman to be allowed to learn the alphabet?" Mary Wolstonecraft, Godwin, Shelley, Bentham, and Mill were all Freethinkers, and all pleaded for the equality of the sexes. To-day, even the Presbyterian Church has voted that there should be women preachers. In the struggle for a free press and for popular education, the story is the same. There is not a reform of the past century for which we have not largely to thank the great Freethought pioneers. The crowd only comes in afterwards. The N. S. S. asks for your support, because it stands for the emancipation of the mind, for that greatest of principles—intellectual freedom. That is what the self-conscious lie dreads and opposes. With naturalism in morals, without God, Christians might be as good as Freethinkers. Look at what they are with God! Every generation, from the cave man onwards, had handed over something to the building up of civilization. Our feelings and our knowledge have a history and traditions just as the steam-engine and the ocean liner have, and we pride ourselves that we advocate a principle that has the same progressive humanism and is bearing humanity to a higher goal. Man has yet the latent capacity to make earth a paradise if he will bid good-bye to all the gods and direct his energy to the cause of his fellow man. A. M.

THE SECULAR SOCIETY, Ltd.

Company Limited by Guarantee.

Registered Office: 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

Secretary: Miss E. M. VANCE.

THIS Society was formed in 1898 to afford legal security to the acquisition and application of funds for Secular purposes.

The Memorandum of Association sets forth that the Society's Objects are:—To promote the principle that human conduct should be based upon natural knowledge, and not upon supernatural belief, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end of all thought and action. To promote freedom of inquiry. To promote universal Secular Education. To promote the complete secularization of the State, etc. And to do all such lawful things as are conducive to such objects. Also to have, hold, receive, and retain any sums of money paid, given, devised, or bequeathed by any person, and to employ the same for any of the purposes of the Society.

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