

THE FREETHINKER

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*Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums,
Letters to the Editor, etc.*

Views and Opinions

“Christian” Morality

In the days of my youth “Christian” morality set me wondering. Ordinary morality, that which I saw practised around me, was easily understood. It meant being honest, truthful, kindly, loyal to one’s undertaking, and so forth. I saw also this was what those around me understood by “morality.” When I consulted text-books on the subject there was the same general meaning of the term. Philosophy did no more than place before me the circumstances in which morality had developed, and helped me to understand that “morality” represented the basic conditions of associated life. History furnished the further lesson of the conditions that led to the same actions being called “bad” at one time and “good” at another. But in spite of this ethical game of “change partners” the substantial significance of good and bad remained unaltered. Morality retained the fundamental significance of reference to acts and attitudes that arose out of men and women living together.

But “Christian” morality! What exactly was that? I looked at Christians and found nothing in their behaviour that marked them off as a distinct variety of human beings. I found some Christians very kind and other Christians very brutal. Some Christians were truthful; others were quite colossal liars. Christians were not, by and large, better parents, friends, husbands or wives than others. Christians were not more honest in business than others. Even if Christians had been better than *all* others who were not Christians—a theory so obviously absurd that no one has ever put it forward—that would only have demonstrated that Christians had certain common human qualities to a greater extent than had others. The groundwork of their superiority would not have been Christian. I was puzzled. But I was never able to discover the whereabouts, or the what-abouts, of “Christian” morality. It was something that defied definition and baffled understanding.

Christians on Themselves

A gleam of light came to me by way of a certain theory offered, quite gratuitously, by Christians. They claimed that Christians were so much different from ordinary people, they were, apparently, made of such inferior material, that by themselves they were unable to achieve the standard of decency reached by ordinary men and women. The motives that led ordinary folk to reach certain standards were not strong enough for Christians. They asserted that some supernatural power was necessary to make a Christian honest, truthful and generally companionable. They affirmed that if God did not exist, and if there were no other life than this one, above all if they had not the saving power of Jesus behind them, they would indulge heavily in what they called the “pleasures” of the flesh. At first I was inclined to take this as a sample of Christian humour. But I found Christian philosophers, Christian preachers, and the common ruck of Christians all making the same assertion and getting furiously angry if anyone protested against their self-justification. It was no use pointing out to them that some Christians were quite decent fellows in themselves, and that what some were others might become. That theory was rejected as an impeachment of their religion. They insisted on being so naturally wicked that nothing but the power of God could ever make them normally moral. They insisted that they were different from Freethinkers. No power short of God Almighty could keep a Christian on the straight road of decency. Even the clergy in the pulpit said that without God there was nothing to hold Christians from lying, stealing and worse. He would actually call his congregation to witness that this was the case, and they answered with a loud Hallelujah of assent.

The Christian did not assert the fact merely as something of which he was ashamed. He gloried in it. He announced it with pride, and challenged anyone to prove he was wrong. The converted burglar and wife-beater dwelt with pride on his life of villainy before God saved him, and all the young boys who listened wondered whether if they went through the proper preparation they could be saved in due course. But the saved one was convinced that nothing but the power of God could have enabled him to reach the level attained by those who did not believe in God. Thousands of volumes have been written containing records of Christians who have been made decent only through the miracle of God’s intervention. The Westminster Confession of Faith with its solemn assertion that man is “dead in sin” and is “wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body;” that unconscious indictment of Christianity, Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, with numerous other books, give evidence to the same end. Other men do wrong and right themselves; other men may lead a life of commonplace decency without God’s help. But not so

the Christian. He insists that only a miracle can make him a good parent, a good friend, a good husband and a good citizen. "God help me!" cries the Christian; and, he says to his neighbours, "God help you if he doesn't."

The implied compliment to the Freethinker is very, very gracious, but it strains credulity to breaking point. Who and what is the unbeliever that he shall be counted as a thing apart, so pure by nature, so morally strong, so self-determined in his conduct that he can do with ease what the Christian requires the constant help of God to accomplish? I have seen nothing in Freethinkers that would justify my believing that the Freethinker is the superior being that Christians, by insinuation, say he is. Lord Beaconsfield said all people like flattery, and when one is dealing with royalty one should lay it on with a trowel. My native modesty resents such fulsome flattery as the Christian apologist serves out to the Freethinker. I insist that men and women Christians are essentially as good as Freethinkers. If the latter can live a life of decency without calling upon God to help them, if they can face disaster with calmness and good fortune without intoxication, without the help of God, I see no reason why Christians should not summon up the same fortitude and self-control without troubling God to pay special attention to them. The thing is: Will they try?

* * *

A Religious Grovel

Helplessness is not a manly virtue. It is, still less, a womanly one. Self-reliance, while it may easily develop into conceit, is yet a quality that most people admire. In this, again, I can find nothing very distinctive between Christians and Freethinkers. The Christian has written as much in praise of self-reliance in earthly affairs as the Freethinker has. "Trust in God, but keep your powder dry" was not said by an Atheist, but by a Christian, and the Christian saying "God helps those who help themselves" invites the retort that if a man can help himself there is no need to bother God at all. And I am sure if it was felt that a man could help himself without calling upon God he would be blamed for asking him for his assistance. On the other hand the cases where God is said to have helped man are always in circumstances where man could and did help himself.

And yet the constant cry of the clergy of every denomination is the powerlessness of man, and his need for constant supplications to God for help. It was indeed the prevalence of this religious grovel in a series of Lenten Broadcasts, as published in the Roman Catholic paper, *The Universe*, that set me, writing these notes. There are six columns of these "Lenten Messages from the Hierarchy," and they form a beautiful mixture of grovel, cunning and self-interest. First place must be given to Cardinal Hinsley, who promises us "supernatural strength to face the awful realities of these times," but only of course, if we believe in the Passion of Christ—as presented by the Roman Church. The Archbishop of Birmingham strikes the same note, but adds that "War is a punishment of God for sin." Maybe, but unfortunately it is not only those who have "sinned" who are punished. Children as well as adults, the godly as well as the ungodly, suffer the consequences of war. With all humility we suggest that even though war is sent by God as a punishment for sin, and if we are expected to praise God's justice in the matter, he might at least practise discrimination and leave out the infant who has not lived long enough to sin—unless we count the fact of being born as adequate evidence.

Archbishop Downey, of Liverpool, the representative of God, who said he, and presumably his God, would rather have children bombed in Liverpool than live in safety in North Wales without receiving the administration of the Catholic Church, cheers up his followers by saying that while it would seem that the things which occur militate against the goodness of God, we are not called upon to explain the situation. As we don't know why God made the world, all we need do is to believe that he does everything wisely and well. I should imagine that it takes a Christian to swallow that kind of argument. But if you see that a thing is bad, you need only remember that God is responsible, to believe that it is really good. This reminds us of a cry that has been heard in Germany in connexion with the wholesale murder of Poles: "The Fuehrer can do no wrong." "The Fuehrer is always right." Read Hitler instead of God, and the similarity is striking in its religious character.

The Vicar Capitular of Wales comes back to the old teaching of the belief in the inferiority of Christians by sending the message that "only through prayer" can man become what he ought to be. It reminds us of the man who said to his friend, "I have been defending you against Mr. Blank." "What did he say?" asked the maligned one. "Well, he said that you were not fit to black his boots." "What did you say?" "I told him he was a liar. You were." So the Vicar says that those of his flock who say they can be good men or women without God helping them are liars. They can't be. They are not Freethinkers.

From Shrewsbury comes the Lenten message that all good things come from God. But unless we hark back to the teaching that the non-Christian is wholly bad, this means that whether one believes in God or not doesn't matter a straw. The non-believer has at least as liberal a share of these good things as the believer has. Belief is just so much waste of time that might usefully be applied elsewhere. There is also held out the charming hope that "Out of this present evil of war we shall win the freedom and justice which is due to our Catholic schools." If it is preferable for children to be bombed rather than be exposed to the risk of becoming Protestants, who shall count the war expensive if through it Roman Catholic schools become stronger?

The Bishop of Salford is much concerned with the "evil" of mixed marriages. He warns people that "marriage was not established by God that one might marry the person of one's choice, or that one might make a home or have a family." These aims set aside, one is bound to assume that the aim of marriage is to provide customers for the Roman Catholic Church. Goering and Hitler say that men and women must marry and have children in order that they may die for Germany and that Germany may get stronger. There is a wonderful likeness between these religious people. Cannon fodder, State fodder or Church fodder, it amounts to the same thing in the long run. "If you contemplate marriage, ask yourselves when at prayer, ask yourself at Holy Mass and Communion, ask your confessor if this marriage is for the good of your soul." We fancy we are listening to "German men must marry German women. When you are about to marry ask yourself if this is a marriage of which your Fuehrer would approve. Is it for the good of the German nation? Nothing else matters." Hitler has not forgotten his early religious training. Nor has the Church forgotten its essential Nazism.

There is plenty more of this kind of stuff, not only from the Roman Church, but also from the Church of England. But we still have not discovered what *Christian* morality is, as distinct from that social

morality, which expresses the relationships existing between members of the same group. But if we have not discovered what is Christian morality, we should be at least clear as to what Christians—real Christians—understand by morality. It means carrying out the will of God. But doing as God wills means doing what one thinks God wills, and as no one has yet been able to prove that God exists, and as no two bodies of religionists agree as to what God wills, it means in practice doing anything that the conclusion of the moment, or the teachings of a Church, command. This, as every student of history knows, is actually what has happened. With the result that there is not a crime in the calendar—murder, robbery, torture, the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people for witchcraft, the suppression of freedom, forgery, lying, with a hundred other distortions of man's social sense, all have occurred because certain people, or certain Churches, Synagogues, or other religious institutions, have been assured they were carrying out God's will. The less we have to do with "God's will" the better for all concerned.

CHAPMAN COHEN

Napoleon

"The moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on."—Omar Khayyam.

INTEREST in Napoleon Bonaparte has been heightened by the present European War. He appears to have been the last of the great soldiers who have impressed mankind, and modern warfare has not, since his time, produced so astonishing a personality. Hence the war epoch through which we are passing tempts many to hark back to the greatest military genius of them all.

The trait that first and last impresses is the truly amazing personality of Napoleon. Even after his death this characteristic told in some inexplicable way upon those who came in contact with him. Ensign Duncan, a young English officer, who was on duty at Longwood at the time of Napoleon's death, and on two succeeding days visited the chamber of death, has recorded his impression in memorable words. Writing home to his mother, he said:—

To see a man who had caused Europe and the world at large so much trouble lying in a small room, in his military cloak and camp bed, dressed in full uniform, was an awful sight. It struck me so I could have gazed on him for hours, have taken his hand and kissed it, but I could scarce breathe. What would not thousands of people given to see what I have seen?

Such was the triumph of the Napoleonic legend, which has so captured the imagination of men. It culminated in the second funeral of Napoleon, and the proud tomb in the Invalides. It declined in the downfall of Napoleon the Little amid the ruins of the Third Empire. Since that day it is enshrined in the libraries of the world in a bewildering collection of books in which partisanship reaches its most fatuous pinnacle.

Napoleon's character has baffled so many men. Even his own brother was mesmerised, for after the Emperor's death, he marvelled at the impression his dead brother had produced on men. "He was not so much a great, as a good man," he said, with superb innocence. Their mother was not deceived by this Colossus, who bestrode Europe for a generation, and whose reputation still lives. "It will not last," she declared emphatically, and she saved the money he gave her.

Critics say that Napoleon's conquests were spectacular, rather than useful; they certainly set the world alight and impoverished France. His soldiers dragged cannon over the sands of Egypt, and carried their muskets over the snows of Russia. They toured Europe and added victory to victory, but to what end? Women had to till the fields of France. His mad Imperialism was insatiable, but it was dogged by a fate as pitiless. Even Napoleon himself could scarce have envisaged the melancholy and inglorious close, the lonely rock and the wasted years.

Christians have sought to claim this strange personality as belonging to their faith. They have retailed anecdotes in which Napoleon has been represented as pointing to the sky and talking theological nonsense. Newman, too, in a famous passage, has trotted out a tale that Napoleon compared the fame of Cæsar and Alexander with that of Christ, and is said to have summed up with the words, "Can he be less than divine?" But the real Napoleon was a very different figure from that represented in the sermons and tracts.

As a fact, Napoleon preferred Mohammedanism to Christianity. He objected to the Christian Religion because it would damn Plato and Socrates, and he questioned the justice of eternal punishment for finite offences. He also insisted that Christians who worshipped three deities must, necessarily, be Polytheists if not Pagans. "As for myself," Napoleon breaks out on one occasion, "my opinion is formed that Christ never existed." Furthermore, Napoleon proclaimed himself a Materialist. In all this he was a true son of the Great Revolution, which has changed, and is still changing, the face of the world.

Like the Roman Cæsars, and so many other monarchs, Napoleon patronized Priestcraft. He was entirely cynical in making use of religion in furthering his political schemes, but he frankly admitted the impeachment.

It was by becoming a Catholic that I pacified the Vendee, and a Mussulman that I established myself in Egypt; it was by becoming Ultramontane that I won over public opinion in Italy. If I ruled a people of Jews, I would rebuild the temple of Solomon.

He did better than he said for the unfortunate Jews, for where his armies went they broke down the infamous Ghettos, and justified the teachings of the Revolution of which he was so potent a portent. This patronage of superstition in a ruler of a nation is understandable, for it constantly occurs in history. Plato and Machiavelli had little in common, but they agreed on this point. And did not Henry of Navarre retract his Protestant views, saying that "Paris was well worth a mass?" In quite recent history the "Holy Carpet" of the Mohammedans has been saluted by British warships, and everywhere, during the journey, received with military honours at the hands of Christian soldiers. Napoleon's Romanism was assumed to please his Catholic Subjects, who were in the majority. Yet his treatment of the Roman Pontiff was utterly contemptuous, if not brutal. In forcing the Pope to attend his coronation, he had no other object except that of impressing the people. His tolerance of the Catholic Church was not from any higher motive than of consolidating his rule, for he was sufficiently sagacious to know that priests would be less troublesome in harness than as avowed enemies. Napoleon always used religion to further his own ends, although he was himself as irreligious as Voltaire, though he lacked that passion for humanity which distinguished the greatest sceptic of them all.

Yet Napoleon was not devoid of humanity. Whilst walking at St. Helena with a lady, a heavily loaded peasant approached on the narrow road. "Respect the burden, madam," said the Emperor, as he stood back

to let the man pass. And his order for the reconstitution of the laws of France in conformity with the principles of the Great Revolution was the work of a man who was far more than a soldier of fortune, however splendid and victorious. Indeed, a mere catalogue of Napoleon's actions is far more profitable than a string of epithets. The Code Napoleon by itself would have made the reputation of a lesser man.

Napoleon was a good judge of men, and his test was, "What has he done?" If a man did not answer that question satisfactorily he had no use for him, even though he were his own brother. He picked his marshals from all ranks of life, and he made few mistakes. He had the true measure of the wily Talleyrand, but he could not do without him among the vultures of Diplomacy. As for the Pope, he treated him with all the contempt he deserved.

No man had a more meteoric career than Napoleon. He went up like a rocket, and came down like a stick. Whilst he was fighting for the Republic he could do no wrong; afterwards he could never do right. The mad, overmastering Imperialistic ambition of his later years decimated France. Armies, more armies, still more armies, until Europe was ankle-deep in human blood. To what end? To feed the ambition of an egomaniac. It was a wonder that the Republic itself survived such a nightmare of horrors. The French Revolution was history's greatest upheaval, and has completely changed the face of the world. It was more significant even than the period of the Renaissance, splendid as that was. For the Renaissance was the rebirth of learning, but the Great Revolution was the upheaval of the rights of man. It was the first time in human history that the common people rose against their tyrants and oppressors and actually seized power themselves. Not only that, but it was a successful effort to replace the rule of the arbitrary by a social order based on reason, and justice, and not a system by which an entire nation was exploited for the vanities and excesses of a mere handful of voluptuaries. Such a tremendous event required a man to defend it, and to lead its armies. That man was Napoleon. Happily, the Republic still stands, and Napoleon will always be remembered as the man who broke her earliest enemies. It was a memorable service from the greatest adventure in all history, the D'Artagnan of Democracy.

MIMNERMUS

Voltaire and Theism

II.

ALTHOUGH the two words "Deism" and "Theism" really mean much the same thing, there is actually a distinction which is worth noting. It is put by Mr. Alfred Noyes in his book on Voltaire as follows:—

The simplest definition of "Deism," if we are to distinguish it from "Theism," is belief in a God who has created, but remains completely aloof and careless of his creatures; whereas "Theism" may be defined as a belief in a God who has created, and is in constant relationship with his creatures. Every Christian, therefore, is necessarily a Theist; though every Theist is not necessarily a Christian.

Voltaire was undoubtedly influenced by the great English Deists, not merely by their published works, but by their general conversation, when he lived in England and mixed freely among them. But above all, he was influenced by John Locke, whom he was inclined to consider as the greatest of all philosophers. Locke, however, much as his work and ideas may have contributed to question the truth of Christianity,

always called himself a Christian; perhaps he thoroughly believed he was one as rightly understanding that religion in the way it ought to be understood. But Voltaire tried to stand upon his own feet and, though a thinker here or a writer there may have contributed something to his mental make-up he refused to submit in the ultimate to anything but his own reason.

Voltaire always had a soft corner in his heart for his early Jesuit teachers and the grounding he received from them may account for the fact that he never wholly relinquished his Christianity as apart from Theism. He laughed and mocked at most church ceremonies, but he appears undoubtedly to have taken part in many of them every now and then. And there seems to have been good reasons for his doing so from his own point of view. The treatment meted out to the famous actress, Adrienne Lecouvreur, by the Church scared him for the rest of his life.

At her death, her body, as a "pagan" who had never renounced her profession was denied Christian burial. She was interred on a waste piece of land with quicklime "so that as little trace as possible should be left of the place where she lay." Considering that priests and cardinals had been among those who encouraged her art, and applauded both the actors and the play, even Mr. Noyes is compelled to arraign the way in which theatre folk were treated by the Church as "an infamous perversion and a peculiarly Gallican blend of fanaticism and hypocrisy." Voltaire never forgot what had happened; and he decided then and there that never would his body be treated by the Church in this way. He would sometimes—"confess," or in some way keep in with the religion of his childhood. It is this which must always be borne in mind when faced with one of his typical inconsistencies. In addition, it cannot be too strongly urged that his Theism was a real thing with him—his was not a God who just existed, but a God who really did things for and in this world of ours.

It is not difficult, if one cares to make the effort, to find in the work of Voltaire quite a number of passages in which he thus proves himself a whole-hearted believer in God, and he is even by no means averse to accepting the possibility of a revelation. In truth, his vision was so clear and his mind so logical that he could not help seeing that there were two sides to a question, and he felt this particularly in the problems of religion.

One can see how he deals with these two sides in his famous poem, *For and Against*, the poem about which Mr. Noyes bitterly complains as being cited mostly for the "against."

It is true, nevertheless, that Voltaire does attack religion very strongly in it, and no one can read this part of the poem without being struck by its "bitter strain," as Mr. Noyes has to admit.

In some of these cases he was attacking ideas, or superstitions, that were as heretical from the point of view of Christian philosophy as they were repugnant; but they were all widely held in his day among the Puritans of New England as well as elsewhere, and in every case he asks or implies a perfectly legitimate question. . . . He refuses to believe that the inhabitants of a recently discovered continent are delivered to eternal damnation because they had never heard that the son of a Syrian carpenter had died upon the Cross . . . a tenet so abominable may have been held by individuals, but it forms no part of the Christian philosophy. If Voltaire thought it did he was quite right in basing his repudiation of it on moral law.

Now this is all very well. Strictly to the letter of Christianity it may be the case that this religion does not actually condemn to eternal perdition those people

who have never heard of the scheme of Christian salvation; but it is a fact that this kind of thing *was* taught by Christians and believed. In any case, it is still taught by the Catholic Church, and by Jesus, that if anyone has the Gospel shown him and does not, or cannot, believe, he is damned for eternity—a doctrine quite as foul as the other. But Mr. Noyes takes care not to point this out.

The net result of the arguments "against" is that Voltaire finds that he cannot call himself a Christian; but Mr. Noyes is so pleased with the arguments "for" that he insists that he knows "of no poem more Christian in the character of its unbelief. It is the very voice of the doubting apostle, and if ever a spirit were *naturaliter Christiana* we find it here, doubting, agonizing, and absolutely faithful to the little gleam of light which is all he has to walk by"—the little gleam of light being only, after all, his Theism and his acquiescence to the moral law.

When Bradlaugh became "respectable," that is, when he was found to make a really fine member of Parliament, he was often described as being a Christian "without knowing it." Mr. Noyes finds that after all, in spite of the denunciations of his fellow Catholics, Voltaire was a Theist, and a believer in a moral law. He must therefore be "essentially" Christian. Ingersoll was, and sometimes is, also described as in essentials a true Christian; and I expect the time is not far distant when some fervent believer will discover also that the arch-heretic, G. W. Foote, was a genuine Roman Catholic without knowing it.

We should be grateful to Mr. Noyes for one thing, however. He is under no delusion as to the kind of Christianity rampant in France in Voltaire's day. He says:—

Voltaire was a young man, surrounded by very hateful utterly un-Christian exponents of orthodoxy. He repudiated their terms, and appealed to the spirit, exactly as some of the great semi-agnostic prophets of religion did in the nineteenth century. Carlyle with his *Exodus from Houndsditch* was just as destructive on the one side, and not more religiously in earnest on the other, than Voltaire in this early "impiety."

The "hateful" orthodoxy surrounding Voltaire was Roman Catholicism, the same to-day as yesterday, the same yesterday as in the days of the Apostles and Jesus, the never-changing Church of God Almighty, revealed once for always to man and perpetuated to this day all over the world in precisely the same form. Reading the above quotation must have been a very bitter pill for that erudite prince of the Church, Cardinal Hinsley—for even he must have understood its implications—to swallow. No wonder Mr. Noyes was so scathingly denounced by the *Universe* and other Catholic papers.

Again, in admitting the immense influence Bolingbroke had over Voltaire, Mr. Noyes repeats the statement that "Voltaire was a young man, impressionable, and at war with many unreasonable intellectual restrictions." But was it not Mr. Noyes' own Church which imposed these restrictions and which was the cause, not only of imprisoning writers, and burning their books, but which, in 1757, went a step further? For in that year, as John M. Robertson points out, "the Jesuits obtained a proclamation of the death penalty against all writers who should attack the Christian religion, directly or indirectly." This is not referred to—as far as I have read his book—in Mr. Noyes' *Voltaire*, but it may explain just a little Voltaire's own "inconsistencies" in the matter of attacking the religion. He had had a taste of the Bastille and he very early came to the conclusion that Voltaire alive was a much better man than Voltaire

dead. A number of other people, mostly of precisely the same beliefs and faith as Mr. Noyes, would have dearly liked to make a martyr of the mocking blasphemer; and it was precisely because of this that he finally made Ferney, in Switzerland, his home, and from which in his later days he set out "to crush the Infamous." It is all very well for Mr. Noyes in his noble effort to vindicate Voltaire to claim that by the "Infamous" he did not mean what Mr. Noyes is happy enough to call *his* religion. What Voltaire meant was the power of the Roman Catholic Church in France in the eighteenth century—an "evil thing" which could imprison, burn, and torture, men and women for unbelief or heresy.

That power was crushed once for all; and to no one more than Voltaire is the honour due. His avowal of Theism in the face of that magnificent work is nothing at all.

H. CUTNER

The Sixth Commandment

A CRITICAL STUDY

Exodus XX. 13, and Deuteronomy V. 17 are the places wherein the Old Testament records the above ordinance. In both cases our Authorized Version (A.V.), has "Thou shalt not kill;" and our Revised Version (R.V.), has "Thou shalt do no murder." It is (as I shall prove later on), utterly incredible that any sort of killing other than manslaying was meant by our Authorized Translators; whilst murder, which means intentional and unjustifiable manslaying, is actually specified by their Revisers. The Septuagint Version, when rendering the commandment, employs a form of the Greek verb *phoneo* preceded by a negative particle;¹ and the New Testament for the same purpose uses that same verb no less than six times. Of these, the first four occur in alleged quotations from Jesus Christ made by the evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke; and the other two are found in epistles attributed respectively to the apostles Paul and James.² On five of these occasions, the Vulgate Version has *occido*, as the equivalent of *phoneo*, and on the other occasion it has *Non homicidium facies*. Unfortunately, however, both *phoneo* and *occido* may mean either manslaying in general, or murder in particular, each term of course relating only to voluntary actions. On examining our two Versions with respect to the six passages just mentioned, the reader will find that with one exception both of them agree every time in putting either, "Thou shalt not kill," or, "Do not kill." The variation occurs in *Matthew XIX. 18* where the A.V. has "Thou shalt do no murder," and the R.V. has "Thou shalt not kill." But the word *kill*, like the words *phoneo* and *occido* is used not only in the general sense of manslaying, but also in the particular sense of murder. Thus, it seems that, perceiving the imprecision of the Greek term used in the above passages, our Translators, and their Revisers, wisely decided to render it by an English term of analogous ambiguity.³ At the beginning of my inquiry, I pointed out that on the two occasions when the Old Testament records the Sixth Commandment our Authorized Version renders it, "Thou shalt

¹ Horne's *Introduction to the New Testament*, P.I.C.IX.S.II. London, 1823.

² *Matthew V. 21 XIX. 18. Mark X. 19. Luke XVIII. 20. Romans XIII. 9. James II. 11.* Eberhard Nestle's *Novum Testamentum, Græce et Latine*. Stuttgart, 1912.

³ It is worth mentioning that Luther uses the generic verb *töten* in each of those six cases. Nestle's Edition. Stuttgart, 1910.

not kill," whereas, our Revised Version translates it, "Thou shalt do no murder." Assuredly such learned and judicious men, as our Revisers were, would never have made a change of that tremendous importance unless they had been firmly convinced of its truth. Whether their decision is or is not correct must be left for scholars of the Hebrew tongue to determine; certainly, to have the matter finally settled would be a great advantage in many ways.

The beasts which Moses ordained to be slain as religious sacrifices, and the distinction which he made between beasts fit or unfit to be used as food for his people, prove conclusively that the slaying prohibited by his sixth commandment relates only to human beings. Does the conduct of Moses *after* the enactment of that ordinance show that he had also restricted its extension respectively to mankind? There is abundant evidence that such was the case. Many laws made by him had death as the penalty of their infraction; and some striking examples of this severity occur in the twenty-first chapter of *Exodus*, which immediately follows the one wherein man-slaying of any intentional kind might appear to be absolutely forbidden. Nor did Moses restrict voluntary homicide simply to the punishment of criminals. For towards the end of his career we find him encouraging his troops to fight against Sihon, King of the Amorites, and Og, King of Bashan, over whom they gained victories, long celebrated by the poets of his race (*Numbers XXI, 21-35*).

C. CLAYTON DOVE

Tom, Dick, and Harry

At certain periods of their lives people have a habit of picking up the Bible and saying "I've heard a good deal about this volume. What about having a look at it?" They give, for the most part, the Old Testament a miss; they have a recollection of having dived somewhat particularly into that part of God's Word in their teens. They turn to Part Two. And because of what they find there they become articulate. "Wonderful!" they tell us, "Surpassing Wonderful!"

Then they say to their friends: "I've been re-reading the Bible recently. My God, but it's the goods! If people would only read it and act upon it, what a world this would be."

They have read in their time *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnehard* by Anatole France, the *Window in Thrums* and *Margaret Ogilvie* by J. M. Barrie, *The Prince and the Pauper* by Mark Twain, *The Morals of Marcus Ordeyne* by W. J. Locke. They have gone to the theatre and seen plays like *Milestones* by Arnold Bennett, *Escape or Loyalties* by John Galsworthy, *A Bill of Divorcement* by Clemence Dane. They have been moved by certain human types; moved profoundly. But they do not go about saying, "What a world this would be if people were like MARCUS ORDEYNE or MARGARET OGILVIE!"

You see none of these human achievements was labelled "God's Word." That would have made all the difference. The striking type, the pregnant phrase, the illuminating example, these are to be culled in thousands from the literature of the world. But Man's Work fails to give much of an impetus to men's minds; fails to stir their enthusiasms to a blaze; fails even to send them to mental homes in an attempt to make popular some trite but neglected truth. With God behind it, man can become enthusiastic to the point of fanaticism. He is on the side of God, a comforting thought, particularly when it is known that

great will be his reward. And more than comforting is it to feel that one has a strong and wise big brother!

And so it is that every goose becomes a swan when it is found in the Divine Aviary. What does Tom, Dick or Harry find when he turns to God's Word? Something that Tom, Dick or Harry feels, to be profoundly true. It may be anything. It may be, for instance,

"Love one another" [including Hitler, Franco, and even Stalin].

Or, it may be,

"Judge not, lest ye be judged" [including Hitler, Franco, and even Stalin].

Or, it may be,

"The labourer is worthy of his hire" [leaving out of account the vexed question as to what his hire is worth].

Or it may be (but the chance is remote),

"Take no thought for the morrow [even as do the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field].

Or, if Tom, Dick or Harry should happen to be built in a quaint "mystic" mould, he will browse with profit upon the Revelations of St. John the Divine and will (if allowed to roam at large) become an intolerable bore—or worse.

The next thing that generally happens is that Tom, Dick or Harry comes to the conclusion that there has been for two thousand years a wicked church bent upon keeping from him the simple regenerating facts of "Judge Not Hitler" and "Love General Franco." The world would have been such a pleasant place but for priestly scoundrelism. A quick and comforting conclusion! Comforting, for it leaves as one of its inferences that Tom, Dick and Harry, who are not as this world goes very impressive figures, have been specially selected by God, who, of course, knows a good man when he sees one, to spread True Religion, the Simple Undeified Gospel. Simple indeed! The situation is complicated more than a little by the fact that Tom, Dick and Harry, having espied Simplicity, are unable to describe it in identical terms. Tom has some difficulty in keeping his temper when he explains to Dick how simple indeed everything is. You see Dick has been particularly struck by the story of Jesus and the Lady caught in adultery; in fact Dick is enormously impressed by its import. Tom thinks it is of minor consequence. There is nothing, he thinks, that is going to revolutionize human society in that teaching—in fact, well, no matter—Tom does not care to labour the point. And Tom honestly thinks Harry to have a bee in his bonnet—always talking as he is, of the Number of the Beast, and how Jesus is coming again in 1943—February 3rd, at 8 o'clock in the morning.

Still they try hard to put up with the mental peculiarities of each other and only occasionally do they get really nasty about it. Then they pray a little and think that God in his own time will bring the other two to such a simple belief that Number Three (Tom, as Tom thinks) will be proved right.

That the Simple Gospel has been divulged to Tom, Dick or Harry, in all its complexity, is a highly pleasing idea to each of them and very, very gratifying. All the same, the Church, contrary to T., D., or H.'s belief, has always extracted an ethic of some sort or other from the New Testament and given it the degree of publicity according to its pleasure. And to-day the Christian modernist is going through the Gospels minutely hunting for a respectable moral residuum in order to prove that Christianity has a social significance at all. You see this *must* be done; for rude people are saying that the Church is concerned first and last with Soul-Saving as the time after we are dead is so long, and may be so unpleasant. It is accordingly practically the only thing that matters. So

official Christianity to-day is compelled to be ethical in spots. The Church sees this just as plainly as Tom, Dick and Harry see it and says so just as emphatically. True it is a more difficult job for the Church, for the Church claims to speak with a certain amount of authority and consistency, and the precepts of their Lord and Master have to be chosen ever so carefully with an eye to current events, and explained with dialectical acuteness so as, generally, to leave matters as dark as they were before. It is, for instance, not a bit of good just now (in this blessed isle) preaching that Hitler is to be loved; what Jesus meant when he said Love your Enemies was Hate your Enemies. Tom, Dick and Harry are equally insistent upon that point. And it is sun-clear that Hitler must be judged—just as Jesus judged (O, Blessed Book!) when he flogged the money-changers in the Temple. The Church, as well, will instruct Tom, Dick and Harry which side to pray for in times of Bloody Warfare, in case the Simple Message of Christianity takes on, as it always does, an unexpected obscurity. This Church may guide him, having Divine authority, to pray for that Gallant Christian Gentleman, Franco. What Franco did, they tell Tom, Dick and Harry, is what Jesus would do. Our Archbishop of Canterbury just as recently as last week knows exactly what Jesus would do with Stalin and puts up special prayers for General Mannerheim in St. Paul's Cathedral in promulgation of a Holy War. For our Primate gets his orders from—some source or other—and sees quickly and without a peradventure the correct line of action when Tom, Dick and Harry are perplexing themselves in the extreme. These simple exponents of the Creed Complex are engaged in times like this, prayerfully and intently, in looking for a Simplicity that isn't there. They feel that clear guidance should come from the Light of the World, if at all, precisely at such moments of History as we are now going through. Tom, Dick and Harry feel that, but it is those who lead the Church of England, that Church established by the Grace of God and Henry the Eighth, who provide the only illumination in this intellectual black-out. They say so, and what they say goes. To think otherwise would be to admit their ineptitude.

T. H. ELSTON

Acid Drops

How quickly the purely animal instincts of a crowd operate was illustrated in a case described in the papers for February 8. A young man absconded from a Remand Home in Middlesex. Located by the police in a house in Hammersmith, he ran away from a Sergeant and bolted towards the Thames. A crowd took up the hunt. The youth plunged into the Thames and the crowd followed the hunt down the river. Eventually the youth was captured, one of the civilians hitting him on the side of the head with a lump of wood as he was dragged ashore. It is hardly possible to believe that the crowd had any idea of why they were joining in the hunt, there was nothing more in it than the animal instinct of hunting, and that the hunters were running no risk probably made the chase more attractive. It is a pretty problem in crowd psychology, and may even throw a little light on the European situation.

To paraphrase an old saw, there are lies, damned lies—and religious truths, which consist in tangling up a truth, or a half-truth with a lie in such a way that any attempt to refute the lie sounds like an attack on the half, and unimportant, truth with which it is mixed. Thus, the *Birmingham Post*, in a recent issue, has a special article in which occurs the following:—

Christianity took over an ancient Sabbath Day from the Babylonians and the Hebrews, changed it to the first day of the week, renamed it the Lord's Day and offered to the world a new and a greater thing.

That the "Sabbath" day is much older than Christianity is a "truth" which modern Christians have had to admit against their will; but that truth had to be backed by a falsehood in order to slur over the other truth that the whole body of Christian doctrines and symbols belong to a pre-Christian period. Days sacred to some god or the other are among the commonest of religious phenomena. There were days of sadness in this connexion and also days of rejoicing. The Babylonian Sabbath happened to be a day of gloom, when nothing that could be avoided was to be done, and, above all, gaiety and enjoyment were forbidden. But there was a day devoted to the Sun, and on that day, all rejoicing and happiness was encouraged. The "new and greater thing" of Christianity consisted in taking the gloom from the day devoted to Saturn, and transferring it to the day of the Sun. But the day sacred to a God remained as it had existed for thousands of years.

But the man who can say that to make a day gloomy instead of happy, and write in 1940 that it is a new and great thing, must belong to a type of character that one can call thoroughly Christian. For in all seriousness one may say that no greater disaster ever happened to the British people than its development of Sabbatarianism. When that was in full swing travellers from abroad recoiled from it almost with horror. Those who really believed in it and tried to live up to it represented a development of human nature repugnant in its solemnity. Those who did not believe in it, but pretended to do so, presented a picture that has stamped Puritanism—untrue of all Puritans—as examples of downright hypocrisy. Meanwhile, students and observers of social life dwelt upon the vice, the drunkenness, the degrading life led by masses of the people, and which they attributed, in part, at least to the British Sunday. That judgment has been fully endorsed by chiefs of police and social workers all over the country, for they have reported that side by side with the opportunities for recreation, for clean entertainment and healthy excursions, the general behaviour of the younger generation has improved. Against this are men such as Sir Thomas Inskip, who honestly believe that disasters are due to the decline of the Puritan Sunday, and who, I verily believe, would be religiously happier if the old British Sunday returned at the cost of bringing back the state of things of over a century ago.

The *Liverpool Post* of February 3 says:—

Each month the Rev. J. M. Swift, vicar of Garston, is to re-emphasize in his magazine the fact that the Church of England receives no financial aid whatever from the State. His object is to expose the erroneous impression that appears to prevail in this direction.

What a pity the vicar has not summoned up sufficient honesty to inform his hearers that every year the Church is, by Act of Parliament, relieved of payment of all rates and taxes—a total sum which amounts to millions annually. We hope that some of the vicar's listeners will ask whether a large business house that had its rates and taxes cancelled would regard that as a gift or not.

Mr. G. L. Johnson, by some chance has been made chairman of the Dunster magistrates. He is a very godly man, and when he was made to allow visitors to Minehead to listen to music on Sundays he rose in his righteousness and refused to allow the air of Minehead to be contaminated by listening to jazz and crooning on the day of the Lord. The visitors have not objected to the music, the Town Council saw no objection, since it was applying for the licence. No one objected, apparently, except the godly Johnson who, sitting in his arm-chair, could not bear to think of his "snooze"—in either place—being interfered with by the strains of a band. So Mr. Johnson, who is not forced to listen, but may even go and bury what he is pleased to call his intelligence

in whatever Church or chapel he chooses, says that visitors shall have no music on Sunday—save the melancholy chanting of prayers or hymns.

Christians have claimed God as Lord of Battles, the Great Avenger, the Prince of Peace, A Man of War, and— at the time of Munich—the Great Appeaser. Whatever the currently popular phrase, we can rely on all such words being used as tributes to their God. The Rev. Frank Ballard, in his last published sermon, insists that Jesus and Paul proclaimed a Totalitarian Religion. The Dictatorships which we know are not so highly esteemed that these earthly ones can be greatly praised even in sermons. Mr. Ballard explains that he has no place for a Dictatorial Religion or a Dictatorial Church—on earth of course. But what is God but a Dictator, what is Heaven but a Fascist State? We are content to let the Dictators dominate only the dead. Dead Dictators are in their proper place.

It seems to be pretty easy to obtain a reputation for wisdom, if we can take at face value the following "puff" from one clerical journal about another. This is from the *Church Times*:—

"The object of war is not victory but peace." This assertion of the *Tablet* is the wisest saying of the week. It was in the minds of the Bishops in the discussion in the Canterbury Convocation.

The only proof of wisdom in this case is apparently "the minds of the bishops." We can hardly believe that the average of "wisdom" has sunk quite so low as this. We imagine that Hitler and other invaders want nothing better than a population accepting a "Peace" enforced on them by the conqueror.

The Archbishop of York has decided that in war-time he may be justified in killing men, but he is very anxious not to go too far. It may be a citizen's duty to kill malefactors:—

But of course it is not because he is a Christian that he has this duty, if he has it, it is a duty arising from his citizenship, which his Christianity does not alter or remove. But when he turns to prayer he does so not because he is a citizen—for he would still be that if he turned Atheist—but because he is a Christian.

All this nonsense is worthy of a Pooh-Bah and unworthy of a sometimes wise Archbishop. Dr. Temple is obsessed by the horrible frustration of human effort which consists of an absurdity called "Thy Will Be Done," or as he puts it:—

Christian prayer must always have the form, not "Please do for me what I want," but "Please do with me what you want." It is the prayer of the brave man, not of the coward.

If there is a God, how on earth can anybody say that ANYTHING that happens, however vile, is NOT the "Will of God." We are still without any explanation as to why and how an event takes place which God wants NOT to happen.

Another note from the Roman Catholic side is the notice that the world stands in need of a Catholic press. We fancy we know what that means. It means a press that is under the control of the Catholic Church which can be trusted not to expose the unscrupulous tactics of Roman Catholic propaganda. The statement is significant from another point of view. Everyone who has any understanding of affairs knows that the Roman Church already exercises considerable control over the press. It is, as a matter of fact, easier to get a direct criticism of religion in general in the daily or weekly press than it is to get an attack on the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholics in this country must feel themselves in a fairly strong and safe position when it can throw out a feeler of this description.

We often hear of the eager way in which the least civilized people of the world accept the Bible and the Christian religion. An evidence of this is given by a priest as

related in *Africa*, for January. The priest was struck by the clever way in which the natives made crude but graphic scenes from the Bible "according to native concepts." The reporter goes on to say that one of the most successful "was the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham." The natives gave their version of it by depicting the head of a man who had just been decapitated. We are not surprised at the natives taking so readily to Bible stories and practices. As we have so often pointed out they understand the real nature of most of the stories of "Holy Writ" better than most civilized folk do. They represent a stage of civilization identical with their own.

The following from the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* will be of interest to our readers,

About £1,350,000 for salaries of the Catholic clergy is included in the first instalment of the estimates for 1940—Spain's first Budget since 1936. The Republic disestablished the Church and abolished the payment of priests' salaries by the State. General Franco's Government restored the connexion between Church and State. The clergy's salaries are included in the estimates for the Ministry of Justice.

General Franco's salary as head of the State is given as £15,000 a year, plus £35,000 for expenses. Estimates for the Falange (the only political party now allowed to exist in Spain) amount to about £244,625—the same sum as was voted for Parliament under the Republic.

No one need be surprised at these consequences of the defeat of the late Spanish Government, with the help of Italy and Germany, and of the policy of our own Government's "non-intervention" policy, which meant, in effect, assisting the two Fascist powers. The first thing for Franco, actually part of the price of the help given, was to reinstate, as far as was possible, the Church. And the Church has seen to it that that part of the bargain was kept.

Just a little breeze in the religious dovecote. The *Catholic Herald* says:—

Anglican clergymen, doubtless in the best of faith, have represented themselves to Catholic authorities as members of the Church, and have been permitted to hold services in Catholic churches under this misunderstanding.

To which "Laicus Ignotus," of the *Church Times*, replies:—

I cannot imagine anything more completely caddish (I use the word advisedly) than this paragraph.

The complaint refers to chaplains and the armed forces. It is a striking example of Christianity, and its power to develop good feelings between men. Soldiers can fight side by side and their religious differences mean nothing. People can play together, live together, trade together, join the same club, religion does not count; it does not divide in any of the essential functions of life. But introduce religion and you set up a barrier that nothing can bridge. The new factor makes hatred more bitter, and social cohesion is robbed of much of its value. We must remember that it was leaders of the Catholic Church in this country who announced that it would be *better* for children to be bombed than taken to the homes of Protestants.

There are few wars that have taken place without religious apologies for their existence; many have had religion as a powerful cause for their being, and religious appeals for their continuance. According to the *Christian World* those engaged in the missionary business are now looking forward to gains in Russia as a result of the war. Miss Mildred Cable, of the China Inland Mission, thinks that the Churches should be ready and training missionaries for work in Russia when the war is over. . . . There is nothing new in this hope. There has always been a rather powerful religious party in this country that has been plotting and planning against Russia on the main ground that so Christian a country as this one should have nothing to do with a Government so definitely anti-religious as that of Russia. They have been working hard for a religious crusade against Russia, and would regard it as "the hand of God" if such a crusade could be brought about.

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FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

FOR DISTRIBUTING AND ADVERTISING THE "FREETHINKER."—
D. S. and W. W. Currie, 58.

W. WILLETS (Jaggan, N.Z.).—We should welcome some lady writers, but, unfortunately, we are not able to go into the market and purchase them. Can you introduce some?

J. RICH.—All army chaplains receive officer's pay with family allowances, and are promoted to higher rank after a year's service. The promotion, we think, is automatic. Soldiers must earn promotion.

M. VANSTONE.—We are pleased to hear of the success of the meeting, and of the excellent speech of Mr. Millward. The defence of Freethought is safe in his hands. Sorry to learn of the indisposition of our old friend Mr. Hammond. Hope he has recovered by this time.

W. HARDWICKE.—As you will have seen it was too late to respond to your request.

A. HANSON.—Religious writers are protected by the press from the publication of questions which might be awkward to them—particularly when the question comes from Freethinkers. On the other hand, the lady in question might have received anti-Christian literature which annoyed her. That she receives it six days in a week, may be taken as mere rhetoric. Still, it is something to note that the anti-Christian literature she receives is "very skilfully worded." We cannot say the same of much of the pro-Christian literature we get. But the writers have not in front of them a critical audience.

A. J. GUTBERT.—Thanks for papers which we are glad to have for filing. We note the contents of your letter.

G. TAYLOR.—It is really not worth discussing. The man who can say of G. W. Foote's defence before Lord Chief Justice Coleridge that its main point was the passing illustration of Jesus Christ having been accused of blasphemy, must have a very distorted sense of value. Foote's defence was one of the finest surveys of the whole situation that was ever made. The rest of the criticism is on the same level.

F. HOBDAV.—Your experience is not an uncommon one. Most editors of newspapers have a very wideawake eye to avoiding offending readers. Their main desire appears to be to interest and amuse. That way lies increasing sales—and more advertisements.

B. C. T.—Quite a promising sketch. The main idea is excellent.

R. DODD.—Mr. Cohen is writing you in the course of a few days, but he has had many calls on his time of late, and has many arrears to overcome.

G. PARSONS.—Shall appear so soon as we have space.

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

The offices of the National Secular Society and the Secular Society Limited, are now at 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Telephone: Central 1367.

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

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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.

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—
One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/0.

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

Sugar Plums

We have received the following letter from the Dean of Durham in reply to our comments in last week's issue:—

DEAR SIR.—I have not the least desire to evade the challenge which you offer in your last issue. I entirely agree with you that the language sometimes used by so-called Christians against Atheists has been quite as bad as that used on the other side; and I think it very deplorable. I also agree that a mistaken view of Christianity, for which Christians are largely, though not by any means entirely, responsible, is the cause of this situation.

On the other hand, I think such abuse is wrong from whichever side it comes, and have never consciously indulged in it. I wish everyone to be free to express his views, however mistaken I may think them, provided he does so with reasonable courtesy.

As I gather that we agree that this war is a war for freedom, can we not agree, during its course at least, to treat one another as allies and not as enemies?

Your obedient servant,

C. ALINGTON

We have never disagreed with anyone *because* they have disagreed with us. Our objection has been to the form of the disagreement. And we have never been able to see justification for two people falling out because they did not agree on a particular subject. Abuse is always objectionable in argument. Our specific complaint, apart from the implied assertion that Freethinkers were abusive when discussing with Christians—which Dr. Alington agrees occurs as frequently with Christians as with non-Christians—was that the attacks on Freethinkers and Freethought nearly always took place in circumstances where the Freethinker was denied the right to reply. The remedy for this surely lies with Christians and Christian leaders. But if Dr. Alington, or any other responsible Christian, wishes to complain of the conduct of Freethinkers, or to criticize the Freethought attack, and dislikes doing so in a paper or magazine in which the other side would be refused permission for an adequate reply, space in these columns is always at his disposal.

The National Secular Society's Annual Conference has been fixed—by the votes of the Branches—for Manchester. It will take place as usual on Whit-Sunday. Resolutions for the Agenda, which may be sent in either by Branches or individual members should reach the General Secretary as early as possible.

We have had to hold over a number of letters for which we have not space in this issue. And as usual some have had to be declined because of their length. We must once again ask readers to make their letters as brief as possible. We do not like having to summarise them, because that—however fair one tries to be—lays one open to the charge of having missed what the writer considers his strongest points.

A debate between the Rev. Paul Gliddon, secretary of the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, and Mr. R. H. Rosetti, on "Was Christ a Pacifist?" has been arranged by the Peace Pledge Union, Golders Green Group, for Thursday, February 22, in St. Michael's Hall, The Riding, Golders Green, at 8 p.m. prompt. Questions to both speakers will be invited from the audience. The hall is about one minute's walk from Golders Green Tube Station. We understand admission is free and the general public are invited to attend.

To-day (February 18), Mr. Joseph McCabe will deliver an address to the Manchester N.S.S. Branch on "God and the War," at 3 p.m. Doors open at 2.30. Admission free; reserved seats at 6d. and 1s.

On Sunday next (February 25) Mr. Cohen will speak in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. This will be an afternoon meeting, and the chair will be taken at 3 o'clock. Subject, "Dictators and Democracies." There should be a good attendance.

The Byzantine Scene *

(Concluded from page 91).

THE Gladiatorial shows had been suppressed at the Capital prior to our period, and chariot racing was the chief excitement maintained in the famous Hippodrome—which strongly stirred the populace. Antonina's family were of the professionals devoted to this sport, and her slave, Eugenius, is enabled to give a graphic account of the manoeuvres involved in the effort to win—wherein her father had come to grief. Rival factions known as Greens and Blues supplied a combative element to the contest, further associated with political feeling and religious controversy. He continues:—

Must I repeat what I have already said of the virulence of the hatred between Blues and Greens? Pre-occupied now by increasingly bitter disputes as to the nature of the Son, they were engaged in justifying a Gospel prophecy. For, according to the Evangelist Matthew, Jesus told His twelve Apostles, when he first sent them out preaching Christianity: "Do not think I am come to send peace on earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance with his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's foes shall be the members of his own household. . . ." So it was in many a Christian household in the City. Son and daughter perhaps wore the Blue favour, were Orthodox two-nature people, while father and mother and daughter-in-law wore the Green and maintained the single nature. . . . If the Greens set up a statue of a victorious charioteer and inscribed it: "to the glory of such-and-such, winner of the Foundation Stakes, and the greater glory of Christ single-natured, the Blues would gather together at night and deface the inscription, then behead the statue and paint it blue; however, the Greens would perhaps retaliate by attempting to set fire to some wine-shop or other which the Blues used as their headquarters. It was not safe to be out in the streets after dark, nor for physicians hurrying to attend the sick, nor for priests going at a more leisurely pace to administer the last sacrament to the dying, nor for midnight adulterers, nor even for the poorest sort of outcasts. . . . The war was even waged against the dead. Holes were bored at night in the tombs of departed factionists, and through them were dropped lead tablets of execration: "Sleep unsoundly, vile Blue [or Green] until Judgment Day, dreaming of Green [or Blue] victories, and awake only to be damned to everlasting perdition."

Under a previous reign the Greens had been the stronger faction, had enjoyed the royal favour, the best seats at the Hippodrome. The influence of Theodora reversed the case. Though herself a one-nature heretic, in her childhood her family had suffered from Green injustice—and she never forgave. The Blues were now favoured in every way; and the Greens' monopoly of justice in the lower courts [which apparently could be had for a consideration] was broken. All which led to harsh reaction from the Blues, and bitter resistance from the Greens. The arrest of certain offenders caused a public demand for their release at the Hippodrome; as it was ignored, the crowd attacked and set fire to the portico of the prison; that began general rioting and pillage in the City, wherein all unruly elements joined. The Green partisans openly revolted and set up a rival puppet Emperor. In face of these dangerous events, Justinian acted a cowardly, irresolute role, and even prepared for flight when Theodora stepped forward and took command of the situation. As Belisarius happened to be at the Palace, under her authority he proceeded with the Imperial Guards and availing troops to deal effectively with the crisis:—

* *Count Belisarius*: R. Graves, 1938.

At last Belisarius was able to withdraw some of his men peaceably to the North Gate and send others to guard the remaining gates; and Mundus also called off his Huns. But there was no holding back the Blues, who would now be satisfied only with a total extermination of the Greens. Belisarius and Mundus did not think it wise to interfere: they stood and grimly watched the fratricidal slaughter, as one might watch a battle between cranes and pigmies. . . . when it was clear that the Blues had won a handsome victory—in the names of the double-natured Son and of His Vice-regent, the double-dealing Emperor—Belisarius returned to the Palace for further orders and Mundus with him. Soon my mistress was embracing her dear husband, all bespattered with blood as he was. . . . Thus ended the so-called Victory Riots, and with them, for a time at least, the feud between Greens and Blues. The Greens were utterly broken, and Justinian stabilized this happy state of affairs by putting an end by edict to all chariot-racing in the City. However, it was revived a few years later; so the Green faction was bound to be revived too. . . . Belisarius was always neutral—a White, as in his school-days; but my mistress Antonina was a Blue, because of the wrong done to her father, and because of the clubhouse, and because of Theodora, who was her sworn friend. . . .

The greater part of our romance deals with the campaigns of Belisarius, which would take us beyond the limits of this survey. They exhibit his performance, often with limited means, as fully justifying his great reputation. His shifty Emperor, void of any military quality himself, anxious for vicarious glory and extension of empire, was mistrustful of this "soldier of Genius," among envious colleagues, and rather encouraged their cabals; whilst suffering in his own "inferiority complex" from such overshadowing distinction. Beyond other services, after winning back the African provinces from the Vandals, and Italy from the Goths,³ he was treated with cold neglect; and a few years before his death was recalled from retirement to protect the Capital from menace by a horde of Bulgars at its very gates as the only name that could rally the defence.

One would like to linger on one episode, the capture, and subsequent defence of Rome from an immense Gothic army—an epic in itself. *Inter alia* it illustrates the kind of projectile weapons in use in Roman warfare, beyond cold steel, prior to the modern invention of "villainous salt-petre." To cite a few lines of Eugenius:—

As I looked I could make out a quarter of a mile away, a number of formidable framework structures on wheels, being drawn towards us by teams of oxen. They were like towers, each with an inside stairway mounting to a platform at the top, and seemed to be of an equal height with our wall. . . . There were also four smaller wheeled structures encased in horse-hide, each with an iron-tip beam projecting. These I recognized as a battering-ram; the beam is swung on ropes within the structure and by repeated pounding will eventually knock a hole in even the stoutest wall. . . . Belisarius immediately concentrated on the neighbouring towers all the defensive artillery within reach. This consisted of scorpions, which are small stone-throwing machines worked by the tight twisting and sudden release of a hemp rope; and catapults, which are mechanical bows, worked on the same principle as these other machines from the grooves of which thick bolts with wooden feathers are shot with force sufficient to outrange any ordinary bow. We had a few wolves also, which are machines for hooking the head of a battering-ram as it strikes and hauling it sideways, with a pulley, so that the tower overturns.

In taking leave of this magnanimous spirit and its mean employer (called by Art from the shades), we

³ In a century or so Italy changed masters, to become the centre of the dominating Roman Theocracy.

may pause to glance at the subsequent fortune of the Empire. He died in 565 A.D., followed a few months later by Justinian, and five years prior to the birth of the "prophet Mohammed." Herein lay the germ of a fateful sequence. A fresh militant Theistic faith appears on the horizon, and under its inspiration and fanatical impulse a conquering host was presently invading the southern provinces. During the next century Syria and Egypt passed into their hands, and with that the Holy Places of Christendom. The Byzantine drama then resolves into a prolonged struggle with predatory foes from several quarters illumined by flashes of heroic resistance and leadership; against choice barbarians in the North, and the slow yet steady absorption of its Asiatic domain by the rising Islamic Empire. This, too, was beset by rivalries from kindred forces, until at length the latest conquerors, the Ottoman Turks, under their Sultan Mahomet, battered their way into Constantinople (1453) and here the last of the Roman line fell in its defence and the Eastern Empire ceased to be . . . Islam entered into its heritage. . .

The "cultural" reactions of these curious vicissitudes may well receive attention in a separate study. At this point it can be left to the sciolists who devil in the Philosophy of History to disclose the meaning to be found in an age-long record of recurring homicide, rapine, sadism, superstition, intolerance, autocracy, transient militarist powers, sporadic pestilence, and the pervading presence of *la bête humaine*.

AUSTEN VERNEY

Apologues

Being Modern Fables for the Young and the Old.

I.—POINT OF VIEW

AN observant student of human nature noticed the curious fact that the young are generally precipitate, and the old, slow in action.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" he asked a young man.

"Because time is short," said the young man gazing eagerly into the future.

"Why do you take so much time?" he enquired of an aged person.

"Because time is long," said the grey-beard, gazing mournfully over the past.

Moral: The folly of Youth differs from the folly of age; but both are fools.

2.—BEWARE OF TRUTH

A man walked out with a friend to whom he complained of something which had got into his shoe and was hurting his foot as he walked.

"Take off your shoe," advised the friend. "It is a small stone that has got into your shoe by accident. Take the shoe off and empty it in the gutter."

The man began to take his friend's sensible advice, but being a careful person he inspected the inside of his shoe instead of incontinently tipping out the contents. True enough, there was a small stone which had got into the shoe by accident.

But the small stone was a precious stone—a diamond the man had lost from his ring two days earlier.

Moral: Truth can be as misleading as Falsehood for Falsehood and Truth are twins, and frequently mistaken for each other.

3.—PRIDE OF PLACE

A heathen negress stood in the dock charged with a sex-offence and the Judge, a white man and a

Christian, asked if she were not ashamed of her position.

"Not at all," retorted the negress. "Remember that your God once was the prisoner in the dock; that he bade you 'Judge Not,' and when he was asked to condemn a lady in my position he refused. Also remember that, according to your religion you yourself on the Last Day of Judgment will be in my position."

Hastily the Judge bound the prisoner over.

Moral: Never ask a question without forecasting the answer.

4.—DANGERS OF PRAYER

The Lord Archbishop of Canterbury entered No. 10 Downing Street as the Cabinet met to debate the War.

"May I open the meeting with prayer?" he enquired.

The Premier assented.

"Shall I pray for the Cabinet or the country?" further enquired the Archbishop.

"Both are past praying for," sighed the Premier.

"Then for what shall I pray?"

"I know," said the most Foolish Minister, "Pray for Victory."

"Certainly," assented the Archbishop. "We prayed for that last time in 1914-18. And our prayer was very successful you remember."

"Stop," said the Wisest Minister. "We don't want another success like that. The last victory was no good. It has landed us in our present troubles."

"Surely you don't want me to pray for defeat?" enquired the Archbishop nettled. "Or a draw."

Ultimately it was decided that as the Cabinet didn't really know what it wanted, the Archbishop should just pray—a non-committal prayer according to the formularies of the Anglican Church.

Moral: Prayer is dangerous. You may get what you ask for and not like it, or you may not get it and not like that either.

5.—DISTINCTION WITHOUT DIFFERENCE

A German soldier after his war-death met a British soldier also killed in battle. They compared notes.

"I was aged 22," said the German.

"So was I," replied the Briton.

"I was forced to become a soldier by my Government against my will, and to fight in the trenches," said the German.

"I too," said the Briton.

"And I died in agony from frightful wounds," went on the German.

"So did I," said the Briton.

"While I fought my family had no security. They endured poverty, ate foul rationed food, and were taxed to ruin," said the Briton.

"The same with me," said the German.

Then these two patriots agreed that the joys of life under a Socialist-Totalitarian regime, as in Germany, exactly equalled the joys of a Capitalistic-democratic regime as in England, and agreed that they should have compared notes before. They then went on to Heaven to sit and to watch their British and German politicians burning together in the Inferno prepared for Dives and politicians.

"Which is which?" asked the Briton.

But the German could not tell him for the naked souls of the politicians were exactly alike.

Moral: Compare notes before rather than after.

C. G. L. DU CANN

A Critical Note

MY profound respect for Mr. Cohen, his works, and the deep and lasting sense of gratitude I owe him for having been my mentor for over thirty years, constrained me to protest against his attitude to the Russo-Finnish war.

Ever since the conflict between the New World and the Old, between Socialism and Capitalism, has come more clearly and sharply into the open, I have followed with diligence his reactions to this conflict. I recall the efforts of his contributors to bring the *Freethinker* into the Common Front for the fight against Fascism and reaction. I recall further my keen sense of disappointment at his failure to respond to their call. Although, in my opinion, they made out an overwhelming case for such a line-up, his rejoinders to his contributors persuaded me that he had a modicum of right on his side. And yet I could not escape a feeling that here was something much more than just a difference of opinion as to whether or no the *Freethinker* should depart from its traditional policy of avoiding Party affiliations. Gradually and insistently the depressing thought was being borne in upon me that just as great numbers of people carry round with them the ghost of a dead religion, so equally are large numbers heavily laden with the ghost of a dead and effete Liberalism. Mr. Cohen's attitude to the Russo-Finnish war confirmed my worst suspicions. Granting even the worst interpretation of Russia's invasion, how could he, appreciating, as he says he does, Russia's tremendous achievements within her own borders, have strayed into the den of the decadents who wish to destroy her? Surely, any alliance including such stalwart champions of Peace and Democracy as Mussolini, Franco, Mannerheim, Daladier, Chamberlain, etc., should tell its own story. The very unanimity with which the dregs of a decaying world are rushing to save one of their kind should have deterred him from joining in the strident and vulgar cries of this mob. It is distressingly painful to find Mr. Cohen in such company.

I venture to declare that his criticism of Russia's actions betrays a surprising confusion of thought. There is an hiatus between his theory of materialism so excellently stated in *Materialism Restated* and its application in practice. To take just two of the more glaring contradictions:—

(1) In the concluding paragraph of Mr. Cohen's editorial of December 10 he writes:—

The attack on Finland emphasizes the truth that until we establish some form of international control over the relations between nations the world will never be secure or peacefully progressive.

This is putting the cart before the horse with a vengeance. How can you establish such a control when the conditions requisite for such establishment are non-existent? The League of Nations had the ingredients of such an international control. It failed lamentably because the conditions making for success were lacking. The correctness of this position is fully recognized by you in *Materialism Restated*:—

It is with Emergence solely a question of new qualities following combinations (p. 182).

(2) In his reply to W. Gallacher, M.P. (January 1, 1940), Mr. Cohen writes:—

We are not concerned with the trickery, dishonesty and hidden aims of the British and French Governments. This is another question altogether. The question here is the right of Russia to invade Finland.

The confusion of thought here is truly startling. In support of this charge I quote from *Materialism Restated*:—

The essence of Materialism lies in the simple and single proposition that an explanation of any given phenomenon is to be sought and found in the conditions of its appearance. . . . It is content to deal with all phenomena on the general ground that explanation is to be found by a knowledge of the sum of the conditions on which its appearance depends (p. 60).

Again,

The search for the cause of anything is never more than the search for the conditions under which that thing occurs (p. 156).

Examined in this light, how is it possible to view Russia's actions as something isolated and divorced from trickery, etc., of the British and French Governments? It does not make sense.

I hesitated long before deciding to join issue. I had hoped that someone far more adequately equipped than I am would have gone forth to do battle with Mr. Cohen on the philosophical field.

ESSAI

NOTE TO THE ABOVE

[We appreciate "Essai's" compliments and his thanks for what he says he has learned from us. But there is one other lesson that I should like to put before him, which is that full acknowledgement of what has been done, or even what is being done, in Russia must not include approval of everything that the Stalin Government is doing either at home or abroad. I think that even our own Government is not incapable of a right action, even while committing blunders, and worse than blunders. It is wrong for the British Government to attack another government without just cause, but that is a rule which should apply to all governments—even to the Russian one.

Finland has a right to ask the world why its independence should be threatened, and its towns bombed and burned, merely because Russia says it must protect itself against some other country. The question of whether Finland would be better off under the Soviet system has really nothing to do with the matter. The freedom of a country as a unit has nothing whatever to do with the kind of government that exists *inside* that country. It exists only in relation to other countries. In the early stages of the revolution we claimed for Russia the right to determine its own destiny. But we have never claimed for Russia the right to settle the destinies of other countries. And that rule applies to countries all round.

So I remain obstinately attached to that position. I am a "decadent" who claims the right to air my decadence—at least in thought. I am afraid my right to do this, if it meant opposition to the Government, would not be permitted in Russia.

Meanwhile, I am waiting for someone to answer the simple question: "Why should the national independence of Finland be destroyed by an outside power, merely because that said power finds it to its own advantage to do so?" All I have are statements of how bad our own Government is, and how simple and straightforward are the intentions of Russia. I freely admit the dishonesty of our own Government in many directions. But I am equally suspicious of the purity of all governments. That, of course, leads me to commit the unforgivable sin with regard to Russia.—C. C.]

Correspondence

LOURDES

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—Mr. Whitehouse's letter in your issue of February 4 interested me. About 30 years ago I visited Lourdes as an enquiring medico—leaning perhaps towards scepticism—but with no more animus to Roman Catholicism than to the Free Church of Scotland in which I had been reared.

I stayed there three days and spent practically all the time at the Grotto. I took notes of each case and passed down the aisle to the healing waters.

Twenty years of my professional life had been spent among neurotic and psychasthenic men and women prior to that visit and much time since then. I came to the conclusion that the cases I saw throw their crutches and other appliances down, raising their eyes in gratitude to Heaven and to Bernadette were typical hysterics or neurasthenics. The obviously chronic rheumatic arthritics showed no jubilation—and retained their crutches.

A few days before it was alleged a blind man had had his sight miraculously restored by the waters. He was in hospital, and, handing in my professional card I asked to see him. I was told that no visitors, not even doctors, were allowed to interview him.

The whole thing is a gigantic fraud, financed by ignorant people—for the benefit of the priests who batten on the public's superstition. It is just one more cog in the wheel of humbug.

If only some astute *hotelier* down here would induce a mentally deficient maid to have a vision, and start a grotto in his back garden, a fortune would be his. There is great scope for it here in Bournemouth.

As a vicarious subscriber let me congratulate you on your consistent battle for intellectual freedom and your fight against superstition.

FRANK COLLIE, M.D.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE U.S.S.R.

SIR,—Mr. Kerr's letter in a recent issue of the *Freethinker* does not take into account all the factors which contribute to the sharing of the foodstuffs grown and the goods produced in a country. He makes a comparison between the acreage sown in the U.S.S.R. in 1913 and 1927-1928, but fails to say what share of the harvest the population got—in short, how much was exported in those years. Mr. Kerr implies that the greater the harvest and the output of goods in capitalist countries the greater the wages received by the workers. Has he heard of the depression in the U.S.A. when Roosevelt gave the farmers millions of pounds to plough and the owners of industrial plant threw thousands unemployed because too much was produced while millions of people were depending upon public relief funds to get the wherewithal to buy a meal?

For the sake of argument I am quite willing to admit that the harvests in the U.S.S.R. were not what liberal-minded people would have liked the output to have been. The question now is: Have not great improvements been made since 1937 by knowledge gained by greater experience and the introduction of Labour Laws and—not negligible—the liquidation of a number of saboteurs?

It is amazing to find so many people who find a relish in describing the alleged shortcomings of a country where an heroic effort is being made by breaking with all tradition, especially religious tradition, to run the country in the interests of the people themselves.

The inhabitants of this island have little room to criticize another country which may be on short rations because the inhabitants of that country fail to make the most of the means at their disposal, while Britain has, and has had, an army of unemployed living on the dole because too much, according to the economic interests of the owning class, is produced.

H. S.

SIR,—Mr. R. B. Kerr's letter in your issue of February 4 is remarkable for quoting no data later than 1933—a year in which, immediately following the stress and strain of the first Five-Year Plan, Russia was admittedly in severe difficulties. He would have done well to turn his attention to the years succeeding 1933. I have never come across an authority who did not admit that between 1933 and 1937 the life of the people of the U.S.S.R. had improved out of all recognition. In addition, the Soviet Régime has abolished racial barriers, liquidated illiteracy, and given hope to millions in Europe and Asia, who never had it before.

To cite Trotsky as an authority is ridiculous. At the date of writing *The Revolution Betrayed* Trotsky had been for many years cut off from direct contact with Russia, except through the conspiratorial activities of his agents.

It is perfectly ludicrous for Mr. Kerr to say that the only tributes to the U.S.S.R. come from "globe-trotters who do not know a word of Russian." Hindus, from whom Mr. Kerr quotes an isolated passage, is a case to the contrary. I may further instance Peter Francis' *I Worked in a Soviet Factory*, Littlepage's *In Search of Soviet Gold*, Pat Sloan's *Russia Without Illusions*, and T. L. Harris's *Unholy Pilgrimage*—to mention no others—as the testimony of men who know the Russian language, stayed in the country a considerable time, and come to conclusions which would startle Mr. Kerr very considerably.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

VOLTAIRE AND GOD

SIR.—In reply to Mr. S. G. Hogg, the quotation "If there were no God it would be necessary to invent him," will be found in *Épître à l'auteur du Livre des Trois Imposteurs* (1769). This is a poetical attack on the author whose book seems to have offended Voltaire for its plain Atheistic standpoint. He describes it as "a very bad work, full of blatant Atheism, devoid of anything intellectual, and without philosophy." From the Theistic standpoint, Voltaire, rather in an angry mood, attacks Atheism, using to the full the Design Argument. In the opening verse, he sarcastically asks the author, as he was pretending to sketch the portraits of three imposters—namely,—Moses, Jesus, and Mahommed—why he did not add himself as the fourth? Here are the lines containing the world-famous epigram:—

Si les cieux, dépourvus de son empreinte auguste,
Pouvaient cesser jamais de le manifester,
Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer.

—which means that even if the Heavens were despoiled of God's august imprint, and were to cease manifesting him, you would still have to invent a God if he did not exist, to account for them.

A valuable and most interesting article on *The Three Imposters* appeared in these columns about a year or so ago, written by Mr. C. Clayton Dove. It is a pity that no English translation of such a singular work is available. Perhaps Mr. Hogg will now give us his authority for attributing the epigram to Robespierre?

H. CUTNER

(The reference has also been kindly sent to us by Mr. E. Wall.—ED.).

BUDDHISM AND FREETHOUGHT

SIR,—An article and a letter on the above subject, have appeared in the two previous issues of the *Freethinker*, to me they are misleading and present Buddhism in a rather "glorified" light.

Mr. Du Cann asserts that: "Buddhism as perhaps the purest and noblest form of religion (if religion be the right word), deserves very serious and careful study." Freethinkers will agree that we must study religions—however, the words "very serious and careful," seem to suggest that we become Buddhist students. My examination of Buddhism provided me with the fact, that the majority of Buddhists were the users of the Buddhist Temples and Tibetan Prayer-wheels mentioned by Mr. Du Cann, and that minorities (as in Christianity) asserted that they distilled the "Pure Buddhism." The Buddhist Lodge of London seem to me to be in that category. "Pure" Buddhism like "Pure" Christianity is a fiction dependent upon the individual, and is of no use as scientific data.

Mr. Du Cann, like many other other "enthusiasts," seems to be carried away by the few Philosophical and Ethical Aphorisms which are part of Buddhism and is prepared to forget Karma and Nirvana and the other mystical tenets of this religion. The doctrine that: "The extinction of individuality is the highest good," is a doctrine divorced from life and which will deter rather than help humanity's progress.

Buddhism like all other religions should be approached from a purely materialist standpoint—it is easy to be enthusiastic and often difficult to be logical, when you come across a few points with which you are in agreement.

GEORGE PRESCOTT

WAR AS GOD'S INSTRUMENT

SIR,—An Acid Drop in your issue of February 4 asks the question: "Who was it said that war was God's instrument?" adding, "It must have been a parson."

It certainly used to be frankly avowed as a Christian sentiment in days when Bishop Winnington Ingram might have been taken for an average parson. It is not so to-day. Parsons have followed in the wake of "refined" Christians, who still believe that God is the author of all existence, but not of anything the Christian himself doesn't think quite the thing, don't you know.

William Wordsworth, one of England's greatest poets, described by his successor to the Laureateship as:—

him who uttered nothing base,

was the author of the lines:—

[God's] "most dreaded instrument
In working out a pure intent
Is Man—arrayed for mutual slaughter
—Yea, Carnage is Thy daughter."

Wordsworth was honest enough to say and mean that God was responsible equally for war and peace, love and hate, locusts and volcanoes, earthquakes and tornadoes.

We have left days of Christian honesty behind. Nowadays our Christians never preach from texts such as "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos III.6); "I am the Lord . . . I make peace and create evil, I the Lord do all these things" (Isaiah, XLV.,7).

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH

[We regret to have to hold over a number of letters till next week.—ED.]

Obituary

MARY JANE WERHLE

The cremation of Mary Jane Werhle took place at the City of London Crematorium on Saturday, February 10. There was a gathering of friends and members of the West Ham Branch who were able to pay by their presence a tribute to one who through a long life had been loyal to the Freethought Cause. For some years ill-health had prevented Mrs. Werhle from taking an active part in the work of the movement, but in her earlier years she was active, not only in the Freethought movement, but in many others of a then unpopular character, and a participation in which indicated an unusual strength of character. A brief address was delivered by Mr. Cohen.

National Secular Society

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD, FEBRUARY, 11, 1940

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen in the chair.

Also present, Messrs. Clifton, Bryant, Wood, Preece, Silvester, Horowitz, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Quinton, and the Secretary.

Minutes of the previous meeting read and accepted. Monthly financial statement presented.

New members were admitted to Chester-le-Street, Southend, Liverpool, Greenock, Cardiff, and the Parent Society. Permission was given for the formation of a Branch at Cardiff, to be known as the Cardiff Branch of the N.S.S.

The position to date on the matter of selling literature at meetings of the Southend Branch was noted. Reference to the Jersey blasphemy case was made by the President. Correspondence from Chester-le-Street, Bury, Blackburn, Reading, and North London was dealt with, and the question of open-air work discussed.

Invitations for the annual conference, 1940, were received from Liverpool and Manchester and on the votes from Branches, Manchester was selected.

The next meeting of the Executive was ordered to be held on March 10 next and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,
General Secretary.

All sanitary purification begins by opening the windows wide. Let us open wide all intellects; let us supply souls with air—*Victor Hugo.*

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON

OUTDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.30, Mr. L. Ebury. Parliament Hill Fields, 3.30, Mr. L. Lewis

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12 noon until 6 p.m. Various Speakers.

INDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Cricketers' Arms, Inverness Street, near Camden Town Underground Station): 7.30. Debate: "Does God Exist?" *Affirm.*:—Mr. A. W. Martin (Protestant Truth Society). *Neg.*:—Mr. L. Ebury.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Alexandra Hotel opposite Clapham Common Underground Station): 7.30. A Lecture on "Federal Union."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, John Katz, B.A.—"Nihilism To-day."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Lamb and Flag, James Street, Oxford Street, opposite Bond Street Station): 7.0. Debate: "Is There Divine Revelation?" *Affirm.*:—B. Fuller *Neg.*:—Mrs. N. B. Buxton.

COUNTRY

INDOOR

ACCRINGTON (King's Hall Cinema): 6.30, Mr. J. Clayton—"Fascism and Flight from Reason."

BIRKENHEAD (WIRRAL) BRANCH, N.S.S. (Beechcroft Settlement, Whetstone Lane): 7.0, Mr. J. W. Wood—"Some Aspects of Freethought."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 3.0, Mr. C. A. Smith—"The Case against Britain declaring War."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Street Picture House): 3.0, Mr. Joseph McCabe—"God and the War." Doors open 2.30. Admission free. Reserved seats 6d. and 1s.

WATERFOOT (Liberal Club): 7.30, Wednesday, February 21, Mr. Clayton—A lecture.

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