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Views and Opinions

A Christian Country

PRIOR to 1870 the Radicals, the Freethinkers, the Reformers, with the assistance of many prominent Nonconformists, were fighting a battle for Education, "Free, Compulsory and Secular." It was a logical programme. We have secured universal education; it is free, so far as the elementary schools are concerned, but it is not compulsorily secular. The story of why it is not so is a sad one, bristling with carelessness on the part of parents, compromises on the part of politicians, and an absolute betrayal of their fundamental principles on the part of Nonconformists. For the principle on which English Nonconformity is based is that of the non-interference of the State in religious beliefs. And in England there is, I fancy, only one religion that is legally recognizable. That is the religion of the Church of England. And while the 1870 Education Bill was in the air Nonconformists took it for granted that if any religion was taught in the schools it would be that of the Church. Sectarianism forced Nonconformists into a logical position. They advocated the policy of Secular Education, because it would keep Church of Englandism out, and they could see no chance of getting themselves in.

But the chance came. Meetings of the two religious groups were held, and the famous "compromise" was introduced. It was suggested that a form of religious teaching suitable to Churchmen and Nonconformists would give both something of what they wanted, and when the religious stamp was put on the child a detailed branding could be done later. The Church of England accepted a teaching of religion in the schools, which it has professed over and again is not "true" Christianity. The Nonconformists sold themselves for a sectarian advantage. And ever since the leaders of the English Church and the heads of the Nonconformist ministry have, with back-stair agreements between themselves and Cabinet Ministers, secured a much stronger position, to say nothing of decided monetary advantages. There has never been so excellent a chance of establishing the principle of

Secular Education in State Schools as there was in 1870. There never was a position sold in a meaner or more contemptible manner.

* * *

Kite-Flying

Since the *Times* has recovered from the glorified *Daily Mail* it became under Lord Northcliffe, it has become, particularly of late years, a very good organ for Cabinet Ministers and heads of the Church for "Kite-flying." The famous forecast which led the Government to proceed to "Munich" will be remembered as a good sample of this; and a recent article in the *Times* is an indication that the Churches are hoping to gain some more lost ground during the war. That hope is not unreasonable. War, whether justifiable or not, always involves a step down in the scale of civilization, and there is a curious co-ordination between war conditions and the strengthening of certain phases of social life. (There is a good chance here for one of our scientific sociologists to write a book on this topic). The *Times* article is professedly based upon a shocking discovery by a country parson of the religious state of a number of refugee (British) children. The local parson is unnamed, and there has been no attempt to verify the statements. But the alleged facts are these. Of thirty-one children, the average age being twelve (so none of them could have been very young) it was found that 19 did not know (neither, we suspect, did the parson) why we kept Christmas Day, or who was born on the "first Christmas." They knew absolutely nothing of the Bible, and had never been taught to pray.

I do not know what is meant by knowing nothing of the Bible, but strongly suspect that what it means is they did not know it as the believing Christian knows it, that is they did not believe it was an inspired book. Considering, alas, the manner in which all children do take an interest in Christmas—at least from a present-receiving and party-keeping point of view—one would want more evidence than the word of an unnamed parson to believe it. One would like to know where these children lived that they managed completely to miss associating Jesus with Christmas? If they did then the age of miracles is not dead. If they did not, then the age of Christian unconcern with truth is not yet ended. I would travel far to meet such a proportion of children—casually brought together—who did not know something about the Christian fairy story of Christmas.

Now not to know, never to have heard, the name of Jesus in connexion with Christmas is, of course, a miracle, to meet 19 out of 31 children with an average of 12 years in that state is an experience that could have been arranged only by "Providence." But for the country parson and the Astor "Gazette" being guarantors for the miracle I would not have believed it. But I do object to the implication that the education of the 19 had been bad because they had never

been taught to pray. Why should they be so taught? There are large numbers of children in this country who were never taught to pray, who have never prayed. The parson assumes two things. The children ought to have been taught to pray, and they would have been better had they been. I deny it. Our Reform schools are full of children who have been taught to pray, and ninety per cent of the inmates of prisons have been taught to pray. The prison chaplain can give them points on that head. I would like either the leader writer of the *Times*, or the parson of the article—or any other—to tell us how many ill-behaved children do they know who have been brought up with prayer, and in what respect are those who have not been taught to pray worse than those who have? I have no hope that either will reply. The only way to give a lie a chance to live is to keep on saying it.

* * *

Christian England

Now the *Times* discovers, or invents, this parson with the wonderful experience in order to help the movement for giving a larger dose of dogmatic religious teaching than is at present given in State schools. It leads off by calling attention to the

grim fact that in a country professedly Christian, and in a country which is at the moment sinking its all in defence of Christian principles, there is a system of national education which allows the citizens of the future to have a purely pagan upbringing.

In passing I may note that the world which is in so fearful a state to-day is filled with citizens who have had an altogether religious education, mainly a Christian education, and that in this country until about three generations ago the Churches had education in their own hands. The present state of the world is surely a comment on that education. Would it have been worse if Jesus Christ, in association with Christmas, had never been heard of, and no one had ever taught children to pray? Prayer is a miserable mental attitude at its best, and of all forms of delusion self-deception is the most objectionable.

But what I particularly wish to deal with in the *Times* is two thumping lies told in a few lines. While these do not establish a record, yet the fact deserves a honoured place in the history of lying. If Goebbels had been leader-writer to the *Times*, he might have told a more brutal lie, and with greater exaggerations; but for mere output of lies per length of writing the *Times* deserves commendation.

Where does the *Times* secure the evidence that this is, even professedly, a Christian country? The statement is undiluted nonsense. Some years ago as a consequence of a census taken in France, it was found out (a newspaper would say it was "revealed") that eight and a half millions of people had signed themselves Atheists. Of course this would have included those, who in this country would have called themselves Agnostics or Rationalists, or some other name to hide the fact that they were Atheists. But I decline to believe that the French people are so far above the British people in intellectual ability, that there are fewer Atheists in this country than in France. Then we have Jews, Buddhists, scores of other sects, and those who explain that when they call themselves Christians they mean that Jesus would have made a very good Sunday School teacher or a suitable lecturer for an Ethical Society. One must allow at least a fifth of the population to be non-Christian. How then is it possible to claim that this is a Christian country?

It is like Christian impudence to count out all non-Christians, and then claim that looking at the remainder we are a professedly Christian country. It reminds one of those who talk about Russia going to

the help of the Finnish people. But who are the Finnish people? The ordinary answer would be the people who are born and live in Finland. But all the people who were born and who live in Finland do not want Russia to come to Finland. The reply to this would be equal to that of the parson—if they do not want Russia, then they are not the Finnish people. The Finnish people are the people in Finland who want Russia to come to that country. Those who do not want Russia—honestly, who the deuce are they?

There is a similar state of things in Germany. A German has been defined by the Minister of Culture as one who gives unquestioning obedience to the commands of Hitler. If it is said there are millions of people in Germany who do not want Hitler's rule, the reply is that it is a lie, these people are not Germans, because they do not follow Hitler. I feel sure this is the kind of reasoning that lies at the root of "a professedly Christian country." Even legally England is not a professedly Christian country. There is no law in this country that compels a man to be a Christian. A man need not be a Christian to vote, he need not be a Christian to enter Parliament, and being one has never prevented his election. He may become Prime Minister without being a Christian. There are many Christian Churches in the country but so are there hundreds of other Churches and Mosques and Synagogues, and if anyone wishes to open a Church for the worship of the devil, there is no law to prevent it.

In what way then are we a professedly Christian country. Only in the sense that Christians have the impudence to call it so, and uninformed *Times* leader-writers to take up the cry.

* * *

The Fight for Faith

Are we waging a war in defence of Christian principles? It is part of Christian principles, laid down in the New Testament in the clearest language, that the powers that be are ordained of God, and whoso resists them will be damned. Is it in order to get this teaching carried into Germany that we scatter leaflets over the country inviting the German people to rise in revolt? As good Christians how dare they? It is a Christian principle to resist not evil, to trust in the Lord ("but keep your powder dry," was added by one whose orthodoxy was open to suspicion). Is it in defence of these teachings that we have placed about three millions of men under arms, imposed conscription, and never even insisted upon the conscripts making a profession of Christianity. Mr. Churchill counts with glee the number of fighting ships we have, and the number of German boats we have sunk, he praises the officers and men of the Navy and Merchant Service, but never says we depend upon Christian principles. Mr. Chamberlain does say he will conquer with God's help, but others are inclined, after due consideration, to murmur "God help us." What are we fighting for, with these alleged Christian principles to defend, that we should not be fighting for if "essential Christian principles" were dead and buried.

These things are not blunders, they are the deliberate lies often told by professional politicians and journalists working hand and glove with a professional clergy who hope to make capital out of the country's agony. The *Times* agrees that Christian teaching should be given in the schools, the religion of Christianity taught at the public expense, whether the people who pray for it believe in Christianity or not. It wants the teachers who teach this religion to be professing Christians, which means greater hypocrisy among the teachers than exists at present. It means tests for the teacher, open or avowed, which means the most dangerous attack on the quality of

education that can be made. The *Times* admits that 60 per cent of the youth between 14 and 18 have no connexion with any Christian community. But somehow we are a Christian country. I repeat, the statement is not a blunder, it is a deliberate lie.

I admit that we have a great deal of Christianity in this country, just enough to take a large part of the benefit from reforms that are achieved. But we are not a Christian people. To-day we are a people bearing the incubus of centuries of Christian influence that through the ages has worked for ill.

If all parents who have outgrown the Christian religion would insist on the withdrawal of children from religious instruction, it would be a great educational step forward. It is within the legal right of every parent and guardian to do this. And a legal right that is not exercised may easily become a right that once existed.

CHAPMAN COHEN

The Sunday Question

Concentration is the secret of strength in politics, and in all management of human affairs.—*Emerson*.

Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?—*Shakespeare*.

A FEW generations ago the normal working-day in this country was twelve hours and over. Bus drivers and conductors often worked sixteen hours at a stretch. So severe, indeed, were the general working conditions that it is surprising that the national health was not permanently impaired. Now, owing largely to the Trade Unions, conditions are much improved, and the lives of the workers made more comfortable. Yet there is a fly in this ointment. Just as the problem of our forefathers was how to obtain leisure; to-day the question is the free use of that leisure.

It is true that there are palliatives to mass production such as Bank Holidays and early closing days, but the latter are but partial remedies for shop-assistants. And, of course, there are Sundays, fifty-two in the course of the year. What more is wanted? Sunday, it is maintained, is "a day of rest." But it is not everyone who is attracted by this present-day Sabbath calm. It may suit religiously-minded people, but it makes small appeal to the vast multitudes who work hard for a living and feel that they are entitled to some small happiness in their hard lives.

Sooner or later, the problem will have to be faced as to whether Sunday is to be the preserve of the purely religious-minded, or whether it is to be a day of innocent recreation for the masses of the people. The right of Sunday recreation is a long-overdue reform, and there is no logical reason why the matter should not be brought to the bar of public opinion as speedily as possible. Such a reform is no new thing for a hundred years ago Charles Dickens, who was one of the pioneers in this struggle, pleaded eloquently for a brighter Sunday, and was supported by the National Sunday League which has kept the flag flying for freedom during four generations in the face of a "uniformity in mischief" on the part of the devout Die-hards.

It cannot be too often emphasized that Sunday is the weekly holiday, the one day in the week on which men and women are free from the daily (and often onerous) task. Yet, owing to the continued opposition of purely vested interests this particular day is so hedged about with ridiculous restrictions that people are limited in their choice of purely innocent amusement. And mark you, all these laws and by-laws affect the working-classes. They have no meaning or application to the aristocrats and plutocrats, who can

hire music-hall artists or even produce plays and ballets, in their own palatial residences. Should these pleasures pall, the wealthy can in normal times fly to the Continent in an hour or two, and enjoy all the fun of the fair denied them in this Puritanically-governed country. And only those who have visited other countries realize how zealously these wealthy travellers do play at pleasure, without a thought for the workers who are the means whereby they live their lives of luxury. And this condemnation includes the Bishops, who always regard themselves as aristocrats, except for those brief half-hours when they remind their congregations that they are miserable sinners, and seek to keep them ever more miserable. For their own sacred part, they prefer four-figure salaries, town and country houses, and an annual and lengthy vacation on the Riviera.

The workers have no such solaces. On Sundays they may slake their thirst only at strictly limited hours, and theatres, music-halls, circuses, even libraries, are all closed to them. In some towns cinemas are permitted in the evening with truncated programmes, and a few museums and art galleries may be open for an hour or two. If this be the fruits of Democracy, many must sigh for the days of Feudalism, when a man might laugh, and even dance, on Sunday. Our ancestors really enjoyed themselves on the "Sabbath." Theatres and taverns were open, and all the fun of the fair was available. As on the Continent, people who wished to go to church did so, and joined the fun later in the day. If it be objected that some of the amusements were coarse, it was but the fashion of a coarse period of history. And the Puritan objections were based on purely theological grounds, and had nothing whatever to do with culture or humanism. As Macaulay points out these unco-guid folk did not object to bear-gardens because they caused pain to the animals, but because they gave pleasure to the beholders.

That lets the cat out of the bag. Restriction of pleasure for the many, but freedom for the wealthy few. The present position is based on the Sunday Observance Act of King Charles the Second, a voluptuary who has become a by-word for pleasurable indulgence. Is it not high time that the members of the Labour Party took a hand at freeing their fellow-men from clerical control of Sunday, instead of leaving the Freethinkers and Radicals to do all the spade-work? What sort of Socialism do these men expect in our time, where they simply cannot stand up for a simple piece of reform that would bring happiness to millions of quiet folk?

The Theatre-Managers' Journal, in a New Year note, stated that the theatres are to press for Sunday opening in the coming year. It is a welcome sign of the times. The stage has held a most honourable position in society from the twilight of human history and many of the greatest names in literature and art are associated with it, and it has probably radiated more happiness than any other human institution. That it should have been abandoned on Sundays in favour of the cinema, a mere mushroom of yesterday, is bewildering. That a man should be forbidden to see *Hamlet* or *Othello* or *The School for Scandal* performed on Sunday is still more astonishing. This country is alleged to be fighting for freedom against dictatorships. Yet in this England of ours we are subjected to a social dictatorship of the Die Hards which beggars description. Has the working-man no friends left in this present turmoil of politics that he can be so treated as an Untouchable and an Outcast? Is he not a man and a brother?

The London County Council can help in a matter of this kind. It has nobly assisted in transforming hovels into houses, can it not help in catering

for the cultural needs of the same workers? Other local councils have proved themselves worthy of honour, notably West Ham and Poplar. But, above all, the Labour Party should really try to put the sun into Sunday. By so doing they will earn the undying gratitude of millions, and they will justify Democracy and its Apostles. Working-men are exploited in their labour, and they are even swindled in their poor relaxations. Let the weekly holiday be a real holiday, free from boredom, and people will be happier and more comfortable in their lives, and all the better workers as a consequence. There is such a thing as common sense, although some of our pastors and masters seem unaware of it. For singing "Rule Britannia" loudly is but a sorry substitute for Freedom itself.

MIMNERMUS

Blessed be Ye Poor!

A FRIENDLY communication informs me that I have been unjust to Jesus in my recent article criticizing that man or/and God's complacency when he had Three-Hundred-Pounds-worth of sweet-smelling ointment rubbed into his hair. I am forgetting, I am told, all the many very out-spoken sympathetic utterances of Jesus on the subject of the poor in other portions of Part Two. One admits cheerfully that a *foolish consistency may be the hobgoblin of little minds*. Man is right to revise his ideas and his expression of them should change—as he develops. None should twit Mr. Gladstone because what he said in 1892 was different from what he said in 1885. Human beings are fallible, and admissions of development are even accepted as an indication of honesty by all save fools. But Gods, surely, are not fallible. A God with only a few decades to spend on getting over his meaning should call a little upon his resources. His omnipotence and his omniscience should serve him in good stead. They are convenient attributes to carry in one's pouch.

Criticism of the Gospel Jesus that takes the line that we mortals are adjured to see beauty in something on Monday and ugliness in the same features on Tuesday is damaging criticism. For we are assured by theologians that Gods are not made that way. Then, if we can show that *they are made that way*, it follows that they are not Gods.

Jesus, we are informed, consigned Dives to Hell for the crime of being rich, and Lazarus to Heaven for the misfortune of being poor. Both of these verdicts were ludicrously inexcusable—they do not "fit the crime"—but, I am told, they show plainly enough where the sympathies of Jesus lay. Also when Jesus opened his mouth on another much advertised occasion he said: Blessed be ye Poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. And, on another occasion (or was it the same occasion?) he said: Blessed are the poor *in spirit* for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Let theologians wrangle in their unseemly way, I am told, as to this much-disputed point in exegesis. What Jesus *really* meant when he said "the poor"—there is ample evidence to show—was the poor who were hungry, the poor who were ill-clad, those who struggled and struggled—often ineffectually—to make ends meet. With that kind of poor, the heart of Jesus was.

A Freethinker can, of course, without wriggling, admit all this. He knows that one of the peculiarities of the Gods is the way they wobble. The Freethinker is logically at liberty to criticize the Gospel figure when it accepted the lady's gift of such expensive hair-oil. He can point out that promising her human

immortality for so doing is consistent with what we characterize as inordinate human vanity. And, after doing this, the Freethinker can go on to show (even in the same article) that Jesus at times extolled poverty as a virtue and promised those who underwent it in this world an eternity of bliss. The Freethinker does not expect to find consistency in the Gods, and rather enjoys pointing out their inconsistencies to those who are by their own premises logically embarrassed. He is able to accept, for instance, that in certain other passages the "heart" of Jesus was shown to be all right, and that he "meant well," two thread-bare methods of damning with faint praise that one would expect even amateur theologians to fight shy of. At the same time a God with such magnificent equipment might as well be consistent, and those who pretend that there are magical qualities about the utterances of Jesus, enabling them if practised to regenerate Society, are *fatally* wounded. It is good work, therefore, to show that in A.D. 28 Jesus thought three-hundred pounds spent on his hair-decoration was well spent (and better spent than in relieving distress) and in A.D. 29 that he showed sympathy with the poor very much indeed. If the picturing of the Jesus who was sympathetic to the poor and critical of those who accumulate that wealth which the moth corrupts and the thieves break in and steal makes the gentlemen of to-day thus occupied feel uncomfortable, it is good and useful *argumentum ad homines*. For those who deal in Gods must be prepared to stand by them, and not pretend insincerely that Jesus was the world's regenerator and at the same time a most fierce, uncompromising, defender of the *status quo*.

It should strike any ordinary man not bemused and bewildered with theological trifling, that it is not a very high compliment to pay the Man Jesus to say that in the presence of human suffering and want he showed sympathy and a desire to help. There are quite a large number of people whose responses to poverty when they meet it are automatic and admirable. It seems to be quite usual, and there is at any rate little reason for terming it Godlike. If Jesus had been consistent throughout on this point it would not have been very remarkable.

But there is an element—an important element—in the teachings of Jesus as laid down in the Beatitude—"Blessed be ye Poor"—which is entirely in harmony with his attitude regarding the Woman and the spikenard box of ointment. It is harmonious in fact in its main point, the point contained in the heading of the article: Ye have the Poor with you *Always*, which the letterpress following was an attempt to emphasize.

Jesus dealt with the "spikenard" incident in this fashion: Yes, I admit the money could have been spent upon the poor, but I am here for a short while only, and the poor you have with you always. [Not the same poor, mark you; their lives *also* were fleeting; but one must not digress.] The point that one dealt with was that this doctrine of the poor being with us always, was a complacent piece of clap-trap, which had had as a result, as far as it had affected Christians, the stabilizing of the state of Rich and Poor as being divinely ordained, and thus discouraging human attempts to abolish or even mitigate the Holy if Horrible Institution.

Now, turn to the Beatitudes:—

Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the Kingdom of God.

Blessed are ye that hunger now for ye shall be filled. . . .

Great indeed will be their reward—in Heaven.

Could harmony be more complete? Here on earth the poor will always be with us. But in Heaven, when the poor are dead, special joys will be reserved

for them. They will have the pleasure even of observing the rich in Hell. But all that is on the other side of death. Here we have the poor, here the poor will always be. Let them accept their lot. Let them comport themselves with proper respect to the powers that be, which are ordained of God. This Life is fleeting; it will soon be over. And when it is over, the poor will come into their own. Not only a good time for them, but a deuce of a good time. Not for an allotted span, but for ever and ever. And just for being Poor. You, dear Poor, are the lucky ones. They who laugh last laugh most. Draw the correct moral, those who have ears to hear. Not only thank your stars you are poor, but keep poor. To try and bring about topsy-turveydom in this world will perchance rob you of your eternal reward. Remember Dives, and have a care! There is a virtue in poor food and patched pantaloons. Time is on your side. Wait and see. Your Heavenly Father is looking after you, and as soon as you shuffle off this mortal coil there are potatoes and pantaloons (of a sort) for you in perpetuity.

In spite of pious politicians, in spite of alarmed theologians, in spite of our athletes in the arena of Accommodation, the Kingdom of Jesus was not of this world.

T. H. ELSTOB

Prison Life in the Good Old Times

THE sorrows and sufferings of prisoners confined in penal institutions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries now command pity and indignation. But at that time the average Christian citizen remained more or less unconcerned with the agonies endured by those convicted of crime, or even those who were arrested and immured for debt. Still, there were a few humanitarians, and so shameful were the exposures that the very authorities themselves were moved to action. Prisoners and their custodians alike were guilty of the most atrocious conduct. Governors and warders fleeced, tortured and sometimes murdered their unfortunate charges. So, at long last, the unreformed Parliament itself was persuaded to institute an inquiry concerning a penal system which was a dire disgrace to a country calling itself Christian and civilized. Not that the horrors of our penal procedure were absent in other lands, for the sufferings of the miserable wretches in captivity on the Continent were equally severe.

In 1728 the Legislature in London appointed a Committee to inquire into "the state of the gaols in this Kingdom." This inquiry, however, was conducted in the most dilatory manner and was never completed. As Hepworth Dixon intimates in his excellent biography of the noble prison reformer, John Howard: "The earliest stage of the investigation brought to the knowledge of the Committee such a mass of corruption in the management of prisons—such flagrant instances of illegality on the part of their officers—such a wholesale and organized system of plunder, speculation and deceit—cases of such daring violation of rule or justice in the infliction of punishments, in some of which the thumbscrew and other instruments of torture, quite unknown to the genius and practice of English law had been used." Indeed, even in the opening stages of the inquiry the revelations were so startling that the Commons ordered the immediate arrest of the implicated prison officials and prayed the Crown to prosecute them for their crimes and misdemeanours.

The mass of the public apparently paid little heed

to this exposure, and very few were those who realized that society has duties to perform even for those immured as criminals, in addition to the thousands who languished in debtors' prisons with no prospect of release save at the hands of death. Every prison was the scene of dread and despair. The Fleet and Marshalsea, as they persisted till the nineteenth century have been depicted with consummate skill by the pen of Charles Dickens in *Pickwick* and *Little Dorrit*. But in this earlier era the conditions of these debtor's prisons were far more dreadful and degrading. So utterly revolting were the atrocities perpetrated in both prisons in the Georgian period that, were it not for the sworn testimony of witnesses at the trials, as well as the Reports of the Parliamentary Committee, many of the disclosures would seem more like a nightmare than sober truth.

The horrors of the debtors' prisons were in some respects more appalling than those reserved for convicts. In those good old times, felonies that would now be considered as comparatively venial, were subject to the death penalty. As Dixon notes: "Almost every offence in the calendar was capital. A Draconic spirit presided over the conceptions of the legislature, and the decisions of the judge. It was found much easier to kill than to cure, and cheaper; or at least so it seemed to the spurious economy of an age that looked only to the present moment and the individual culprit." So the authorities sent to the gallows the, in many instances, starving wretches who had been driven by dire necessity to steal a shirt or a piece of linen of trifling value, instead of confining them in prison dungeons at the public expense. But such drastic methods were not available where debtors were concerned, so more monetary defaulters filled the prisons than those convicted of crime.

Debtors and pirates were incarcerated in the Marshalsea. The former were usually members of a permanently impecunious class and included many seamen. A Deputy-Marshal presided over this prison, who contemptuously disregarded the terms of his governorship and fleeced and maltreated the defenceless prisoners without compunction. Naturally, the subordinate officials emulated his evil example, and when a newcomer arrived who had just been arrested for some paltry debt, sometimes so low as a shilling, "increased to forty by legal expenses," it was customary to call upon him to furnish garnish for a bowl of punch. When the poor man was penniless he was in danger of being deprived of his scanty garments, which were pawned or sold to provide the money for the carouse. If, on the other hand, debtors possessed the needful, the most extortionate charges were made for such amenities as the Marshalsea provided. When prisoners proved refractory and resisted the rapacity of the officials, the most devilish devices were employed to rob them of their money or to plunder their friends.

Those unhappy inmates who were unable to purchase the freedom of the prison were driven to herd together in diminutive and densely-crowded wards, where they were locked up for the night in vilely verminous and insanitary surroundings, in which the air was so polluted by the foul breath and excremental discharges of the prisoners, that the Report states that several died during the summer for lack of air. Details even more repulsive have been preserved in the State Papers of the period, which are almost unprintable, and their revolting nature may be left to the imagination.

Destitute prisoners suffered from semi-starvation, and some attempted to escape. Such attempts, however, were punished in the most brutal manner, including imprisonment in irons. The assistants of a ruffianly butcher named Acton, the lessee of the

prison, shamefully maltreated a poor carpenter by forcing his skull into an iron cap, screwed so tightly "that it forced the blood out of his ears and nose." This victim was later released, but only to succumb to his injuries shortly afterwards in St. Thomas' Hospital.

The barbarous keepers found other means of torture, when disliked or utterly friendless prisoners incurred their hatred and vindictiveness. They even confined the living with the decomposing dead. "One particular instance of this sort of inhumanity," runs the Report, "was of a person whom the keepers confined . . . whilst there were there two dead bodies that had lain there for days; yet was he kept there six days longer, in which time the vermin devoured the flesh from their faces, eat the eyes out of the heads of the carcases which were bloated, putrified and turned green during the poor debtor's dismal confinement with them!"

The Fleet was an ancient institution dating back to Plantagenet times, and during the reign of the Star Chamber it was a place of punishments unauthorized by English law. With the abolition of the Star Chamber the Fleet reverted to its earlier use as a debtor's prison. There the scandals of the Marshalsea were repeated on a more extensive scale, as the detainees were less impecunious and had fuller access to outside assistance.

The wardenship of this abode of wickedness was private property and was conducted as a lucrative business concern and, at the time of the Parliamentary inquiry, it was in the hands of a rascal named Bambridge, who in partnership with an unscrupulous speculator had purchased the position for the then substantial sum of £5,000. Enormous profits accrued from the sale of liquor, the rents of lodgings and other forms of trading, and so extortionate were the charges that its victims were in many cases, as the records prove, reduced to starvation and death. In one instance where the Courts had been petitioned and the officials involved had been reprimanded by the Judges, the insolence of office and the law's delays were illustrated by the plea that "being out of term they [the judges] could not give the prisoner any relief or satisfaction." As Dixon observes, this infamous state of affairs prevailed "in the very heart of the capital under the eyes of the Legislature and the public press." So, for all practical purposes such infamies remained until at a later generation Howard's revelations of prison life aroused indignation and pity in the minds of all who possessed a tincture of compassion.

When Howard inspected the Marshalsea in 1774 the Parliamentary Inquiry of 1728 had led to minor reforms. The ill-treatment of former days had ceased, but the other malpractices were as bad as ever. There was no regular allowance of food for the prisoners and the promiscuous intercourse of inmates of all ages, debtors and felons, male and female, persisted.

The High Gaol in Durham at the time of Howard's visit was in a deplorable condition. In the filthy rooms where the debtors were strictly confined, the dust and ashes had accumulated for many months. During the night the felons were confined in dungeons, and in one of these Howard saw six prisoners chained to the floor. "Common-side debtors in the Low Gaol," avers Howard, "whom I saw eating boiled bread and water, told me that this was the only nourishment some had lived upon for nearly twelve months. At several of my visits there were boys between thirteen and fifteen years of age confined with the most profligate and abandoned." And this was in an episcopal establishment, the property of the Bishop of Durham provided with a permanent chaplaincy!

There was a bridewell in Tothill Fields, Westminster, far better conducted than most places of detention,

which received Howard's praise. The Fleet, however, although its more repulsive features of wickedness and cruelty were less in evidence, still revelled in riot, dissipation and official rapacity. Idlers and gamblers from outside were admitted and wine parties, the saturnalia of the beer club, and other convivial gatherings were encouraged in order to sustain the very considerable profits from the sale of intoxicants. This den of iniquity was burnt down during the Gordon Riots of 1780, but was rebuilt and the old evils continued until its later demolition in the nineteenth century.

Imprisonment for debt is no longer legal, but those debtors who cannot or will not pay when ordered by the Court are committed for short terms for contempt. Brixton Prison houses hundreds of such defaulters in the course of the year. Non-payment of rates and inability or refusal to meet maintenance orders account for the greater number of those confined. But the conditions of contemporary imprisonment are widely different to those that appalled the humane Howard. The prisons are sanitary and scrupulously clean, and the plain food is said to be nourishing and wholesome, if not too abundant. Nevertheless, immense as the improvements of the past century have been, there is still wide scope for further reform in all our penal institutions.

T. F. PALMER

A Whale on "Facts of Faith"

In the issue of the *Listener* for February 22, appears the re-print of a sermon, under the above title, delivered over the air by the Rev. Dr. J. S. Whale, M.A. The Doctor (of Divinity) is quite a big fellow, as his name implies (he is the President of Cheshunt College, Cambridge), but logical reasoning does not appear to be his long suit. Perhaps this is not necessary with sermons, as pulpit utterances seem to rely on the dictum of the old countryman in the village pub: "I'm not arguing with yer; I'm telling yer." Congregations, as we know, are not allowed to answer back, perhaps that is why so many go to sleep during the sermon. It may all make for peace; it is hardly conducive to wisdom.

Sermons appear to be of several kinds. There is the extempore (very rare), the one delivered from notes, and the third read out from script. There may be a fourth. I understand there are clerical agencies which supply "made-to-measure" sermons, for a fee, to otherwise inarticulate "incumbents"; a species of ecclesiastical haberdasher, in fact. That the same sermon may be "preached" in several churches on the same day, by this practice, matters very little; very few pay much attention, anyway, and the Almighty does not worry unduly, it is to be hoped—or feared.

With the B.B.C. any "talk" is really a reading, as the "speaker" has to submit a manuscript in advance, so that the officials can judge of its quality, and also gauge its length, to prevent over-running of the next item in the programme. It is obvious, with clergymen, the B.B.C. judges of quality are not too severe, otherwise much of the religious "clotted bosh" which one hears on the radio, would be cut out.

The important point here is that speeches written out beforehand can be critically examined by the speakers before coming to the "mike." Perhaps, in the case of sermons, this is "not done"; one loses the "spontaneity," or possibly, if the speaker be intellectually honest, the script would be put on the fire.

The following, from Dr. Whale's address appears to be a "brand snatched from the burning"—

HUMANITY RECONCILED TO GOD

First, in spite of the abiding mystery of iniquity, faith affirms that God's Will is to be done on earth. It refuses to believe that man's history is a mere ploughing of the sand, since history is God's own instrument for the fulfilment of His redeeming purpose. Goodness matters, because God is God [Good?] and only in this time process can His Will be done by the human wills which He Himself has fashioned.

[I have copied this out from the *Listener*, and I trust I have got the capital letters right.]

One wonders if the Reverent Doctor knew anything about the permanence given to his utterances in the *Listener*, when he put together this rubbish. Let us take it as a text, pulpit fashion, and see what results:

(1) The implication that the Doctor knows all about the working of the Almighty Mind is irresistible; he must be a Heavenly Lodger, at least, if not the Trinity's Confidential Secretary.

(2) The "abiding mystery of iniquity"—in plain language the existence of evil in the world—is delicious, when coupled with faith in a Beneficent Almighty. The Income Tax collector is no "abiding mystery"; how we succeed in paying him may be. There is no "mystery" about evil; it is patent to everyone who is not blind. The puzzle is why does God tolerate it when he, being Almighty, could abolish it in a moment. Here is an analogous "mystery" for the Reverent Doctor. Smith is a good man; I have every faith in him. True he commits a weekly burglary, and a couple of robberies with violence in the same period, but he is still good, especially when "faith affirms that God's Will is to be done on earth," is cited to confound the doubter in Smith's integrity as a citizen. That may do for a pulpit as an example of strength in faith, but not for a magistrate's court.

(3) If "God's Will is to be done on earth," then Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia are both part of that Will, and Hitler and Stalin must be regarded as God's Instruments. Then why go to war? Also if a German pastor and Dr. Whale pray to God, they are both appealing to the same Deity? And is one or the other trying to get the Omniscient Almighty to change His Mind? Will the Reverent Doctor explain this in his next talk?

(4) If "history is God's own Instrument for the Fulfilment of His Redeeming Purpose" (I am doing my best with these capital letters) is there any time limit? The Anglican Church has had about a thousand years of life, and has accumulated some thirteen millions of annual income (much of it drawn from the rents of slum property), but it seems to have done little else. Many quack medicines will cure a common cold—if one only takes them long enough.

(5) The Christian religion, according to its accredited teachers, is all such a "heads I win; tails you lose" kind of business. Good fortune is God's Goodness; evil is God's Will. What is Hitler, I wonder?

(6) The Doctor continues thus:—

But, in the second place, faith has all the promises of God behind it in asserting something else. It looks beyond history to something which history can never contain—the perfect reconciliation of the whole of humanity with the Eternal God, when His Kingdom shall be the final and only reality.*

The man-in-the-street may ask two questions here. Who backs this promissory note, and when is it due for payment? When we are all dead? Surely it is time

* Something like the schoolboy's definition of a Parable, as a Heavenly story with no Earthly meaning.

that these "promises of God," about which the Reverend Divine has such positive information, were implemented by a little performance, say a small payment on account?

One suggestion; how would it be if the Rev. Dr. Whale were to pray to the Almighty, with Whom he appears to have such a close acquaintance, to smite with His Heavenly Wrath all makers of armaments, as these are among the root causes of wars? Try this as a start. Even then there will be plenty for the smiting of dictators, politicians, and even warriors and profiteers. Perhaps if the Almighty does not respond, the Prince of Peace may listen.

Last of all—dealing with Dr. Whales's title. How can faith be a FACT? We were always taught that faith implied belief without actual knowledge. One ceases to have faith in a fact; one KNOWS. That is elementary sense, but far removed, apparently from "pulpit sense." Perhaps that is why clerical training is so severe.

HERBERT CESCINSKY

Acid Drops

Because dictatorships of both Russia and Germany are not favourable to "Mother Church" the Pope is opposed to both. Concerning the Italian dictatorship the Pope says "nuffin," and his own liberality is expressed in the following rule:—

The Catholic Church permits the reading of anti-Christian literature only to those who have a sound reason for doing so, such as the refutation of error. She does not permit this to the rank and file of her members but forbids it under pain of sin.

Which, being put into plain English, means that a Roman Catholic, provided he is careful enough not to be converted by anti-Catholic works, may be permitted to read what would not be allowed to Catholics with keener brains or of more independent character. What a fine contempt the heads of the Church must have for large numbers of their followers.

The cat has a nasty way of escaping out of the bag every now and then—in religious matters, of course, we mean. The latest example is from a letter written by a French Catholic priest in France on the attitude of the French soldier to religion:—

I was called to the colours on August 25. . . . It is a terrible thing that we are once more plunged into war. . . . May God allow us to conquer the "gangster of Europe." . . . For the moment it seems as if everywhere the religious sense has gone under. I can say that is the case in France and probably is the same in England. We have prayed so much for peace during these last years that we are struck down as if by a catastrophe. [Our italics.]

This priest, writing some time later, found out that "the French are very tolerant in the matter of religion," but though some have "faith," "they do not wish to make the effort to practise their religion." Yet he is quite sure that "there is a religious revival in France!" About as much as there is in England, we suppose.

Mr. Chamberlain has again been asked whether he has approached the leaders of the Churches to beseech God to end the war. And Mr. Chamberlain with solemn absurdity fitting the question has replied that the time for this has not yet arrived. We should like to know what Mr. Chamberlain would consider a suitable time? Surely if God is to do anything this is the time, before the real bloodshed has commenced, certainly while the present Government is in office. Oliver Stanley, Sir Samuel

Hoare, the Lord Chancellor (late Sir Thomas Inskip), to say nothing of the Prime Minister himself, might well cause God to open his eyes. He will not often find another such deputation.

We deal elsewhere with the *Times* article on religion in the schools. It would be interesting to know how many of the members of the Government are hand and glove with the "kite-flying" of what was once Britain's chief newspaper. But the Roman Church must be very sure of its friends, when the *Catholic Times* can say in its issue for February 23, that the article might "fitly stand as a statement of our case." But it is a statement of the Roman Catholic case, and as the parties are in power that engineered Munich, we may count upon their attempting the same kind of trick in the matter of religious education. And if the Nonconformists and English Churchmen receive their share of the human plunder, what has been done before may be done again.

The *Catholic Times* says the merit of the article is that it comes from a non-Catholic pen. How do we know? That may be all part of the plot. The Church is an old hand at offering false evidence and working under cover. The only thing we can be sure of in the article is that it is written by one who cares very little for either truth or justice.

The Sabbatarians are always ridiculous figures, and never more laughable than when they are most serious. The Secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society writes in one of the Sunday papers protesting against the opening of Cinemas for soldiers on Sunday. He does not object to fighting on Sunday or drilling on Sunday, but he does object to enjoyment on Sunday. In this he has the backing of the Inskip Family, which includes the present Lord Chancellor. Mr. Martin, the Secretary, says that if we continue these Sunday entertainments England will go the same way as Greece, Rome, and Carthage. We had no idea that these peoples "fell" because of their desecration of Sunday. It reminds one of Swift's judgment of Homer. He said he found Homer very ignorant, for right through the *Iliad* he showed not the slightest acquaintance with the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England.

The neighbour of a family of four named Bridge, injured through the crash of an aeroplane on their house in Wallington, Surrey, is reported to have said to a pressman:—

Divine providence must have looked after us to-night. My husband and I wanted to call on the Bridges, but a young soldier friend begged us to go to a cinema with him.

So we started for the pictures, but a hundred yards down the road my husband turned round and cried, "My God! That plane has hit our house!"

At that distance it looked very much like it, too; but when we ran back to the fire we saw it was the Bridges' home."

How this reflects the ambiguity of religious ideas with complete absence of thought in their expression. It would be too cruel to place an emphasis on the "us" in the first sentence, although that emphasis is perfectly natural to the sense. We feel sure the neighbour did not mean to commend "Providence" for saving her, her husband and home, by discrimination against the Bridges.

A letter in one of our illustrated weeklies calls attention to the fact that in the film representation of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* now being shown in London the unsavoury figure of Dom Claude Frolo, the Roman priest, is represented as a layman. This is a colossal piece of impudence, for Victor Hugo's intention, that of showing one of the dangers run from the unnatural teaching of the Church as regards celibacy, is entirely missed, and an injustice to his memory of an inexcusable character is thus perpetrated. The same correspondent also points out that a like theory is taken in the film *Jamaica Inn*, where the villainous cleric is substituted by a squire,

and thus another help is hoped to be given to the revival of religion. We cannot understand Miss Daphne Du Maurier, a writer of conscientious character with an honourable ancestry, allowing such a crude impertinence.

It is pointed out that in the silent version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* brought out many years ago no such liberty was taken. It is easy to make mistakes after such a passage of time, but we seem to remember that Dom Claude was removed also from that film and his place taken by an over-sexed layman. Also, it should be added, in the version "over the air" of *Jamaica Inn*, given a month or two ago, the same liberty was taken. But then this is what we expect of the B.B.C. with its fine democratic traditions and its enthusiasm for truth should the heavens fall. This is a Christian country, they say, and if it lies in our power to stick up for Jesus we are going to do so. And so it came about that according to Mr. R. S. Lambert, at one time editor of the *Listener*, those who looked for employment in the B.B.C. were—and perhaps are—asked by way of preliminary question—"Do you believe in Jesus?"

We are surprised, so great at the moment seems the necessity of lying for the Glory of God, to find in the *Sunday Times* this week a paragraph pointing out that Dr. William Dodd, Canon of Brecon, and Chaplain to George III., was executed in 1777 for forging the name of Lord Chesterfield. It would have been just as easy, and much more helpful to the cause of True Religion, if the designation of Dr. Dodd as Canon of Brecon and Chaplain to George III. had been omitted, and something like "Printer and Publisher" substituted. The *Sunday Times* is not yet evidently in perfect alignment with the demands made by the faith once delivered to the Saints.

Another *Commentary on St. John*, this time by Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, has been published. The Dean of St. Paul's in reviewing the book tells us that Hoskyns had the noblest qualification for a commentator on Scripture

a conviction of the inexhaustible power and richness of the text which he interpreted.

We hesitate to say that we share with the Dean this handsome commendation. But there is certainly a sense in which his words can be construed with which we heartily agree.

M. Herriot in his *The Wellsprings of Liberty* has, we learn in his appreciation of England's efforts on behalf of "liberty," made a handsome reference to Thomas Paine, who stirred France with his *Rights of Man*, and counteracted the work of Burke, "who said it was impossible to indict a nation and did."

The Bishop of Norwich tells us that where the Jews failed, Christ succeeded.

He draws all men unto Himself, and by doing so enfranchises them into an interdependent community and "heavenly citizenship." To its fullness every nation, with its distinct individuality, contributes of its best; but always in the unity, peace and concord of mutual service.

We hadn't noticed it.

Father Woodlock, whose statement that "Christ is less a reality to children than Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck," we recently commented on, has defended his utterance. In doing so he says:—

"English people are religious people, but without a religion." They are not linking-up this war with Christ as they should.

Father Woodlock evidently wants the war to be a Holy War. A Holy War means a war so merciless and unrelenting in its ferocity that even Christian men blanch at the thought of it.

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THE FREETHINKER

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TO CORRESPONDENTS.

FOR Circulating and Advertising the *Freethinker*.—Denis C. Phelps (Rangoon), £3 10s.; A. L. Jones (S. Rhodesia), £2 10s.

H. W. LAWRENCE.—Mr Middleton Murry was never converted from Atheism to the Roman Church. He was never an Atheist at any time of his life. His own confessions prove that. What he may have mistaken for Atheism was a state of mental confusion and intellectual haziness concerning certain mental states that required a quality of understanding that Mr. Murry never possessed. This was made quite clear to those who read his book on "God" published a few years back.

J. BRIMLOW.—Thanks for addresses of likely new readers; paper being sent for four weeks.

G. WASHBURN.—Pleased to hear from you. We agree we are in for a hard struggle whatever be the end.

B. & A. POWELL.—Your good wishes to hand. We note your suggestion, but experience has shown that the plan we adopt works out best in the end. Paper has been sent to the addresses given.

C. BRUNEL.—We do not see that the discussion can profitably be carried further. To quietly assume that because "Russia has struck a blow for Socialism," therefore we ought not to see wrong in her invasion of Finland, is to apply a standard of reasoning that would, except at the point of a revolver, make human intercourse impossible. There is such a thing as an obligation to keep one's word even though the fulfilment is not so profitable to us as one hoped it would be. We evidently live in different worlds. No faith with heretics, does not, by the way, belong to Russian Communism. It was the practice of the Roman Church. The maxim is a religious one.

G. WASHBURN (Arkansas, U.S.A.).—We agree that if the war ends in the commencement of a Federation that would definitely rule out war, and leave the internal matters of a country free to the decision of its own people, even this conflict will have been worth while. Pleased to know that you still enjoy the *Freethinker*.

G. A. HEADE.—We have read your letter with interest, and note what you say of the relative value of certain features. But you must bear in mind that the *Freethinker* has to consider the interest of all its readers, and probably a greater variety of tastes than any other journal in this country. It is taken by all sorts and conditions of men—and women—and the general devotion to it is proof of the interest shown by its readers.

S. SNAITH.—Thanks for letter. Quite interesting reading.

R. W. FLINT.—We will see if what you suggest can be arranged.

A. H. PASTON.—We agree. Man is both the creator and the executioner of gods. And his chief apology for making gods is that, in the end, he always destroys them.

A. HANSON.—Letter has been forwarded. We hope it will do the recipient good.

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. Roselli, giving as long notice as possible.

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One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/0.

Sugar Plums

On Sunday next, March 17, Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Picture House, Piccadilly, Manchester, at 3 o'clock. His subject will be "Dictators and Democracies." It should be a provocative subject in the present situation, and a Freethinker's view of it ought to prove of interest.

We crowded too soon and too loudly last week in this column. Our visit to Leicester was got over with such apparent ease that we decided we were out of the wood. But we were not. Perhaps it was the double journey, but on Tuesday it was as much as we could do to just get to the office, do what was absolutely necessary and then get home at once—where we remained for the rest of the week—a nuisance to ourself and everybody else. Everything that could be put off was put off, and we are very much behind with correspondence, and several other things. However we are feeling better now, and perhaps the week's enforced idleness was nature's method of informing us that when "seventy" belongs to the past, one cannot be so imprudent with regard to conduct as one can when "fifty" is yet ahead.

All our readers will be glad to learn that Mr. R. S. Standfast, our ever-welcome contributor, but who has been in ill-health for some time, is now well on the way to recovery. Mr. Standfast is a young man yet; he is genuinely devoted to the Freethought cause, and one whom we hope to see at work in the movement for many years to come.

Another cheery note reaches us from Dr. R. K. Noyes, of Boston (U.S.A.), who writes us that he is now in his 87th year, and that his appreciation of the *Freethinker* is as high as ever. As Dr. Noyes appears to be in good health and to enjoy life we hope to hear from him for some time yet.

The Secretary (L.D.O.S.) claims that he has 491 members of Parliament behind him in his campaign against Sunday enlightenment. That, if true, is one of the most serious indictments of the mentality of the House of Commons we have yet heard. Let us hope that, like so many of his kind, Mr. Martin can lie like a Nazi. Mr. Martin also says that the Bishop of Bristol in upholding Sunday Cinemas is "unworthy of the name of Bishop." When the Bishop of Bristol looks at Mr. Martin as a product of Christian training, it should be enough to make him leave the Church altogether.

Sir Barry Jackson, in a speech to the Birmingham Repertory Playgoers Society, raised a very strong protest against the opposition to the Sunday opening of theatres and cinemas:—

We are a strange people. Why should the cinemas be allowed to open on Sundays and not the theatres? And why should cinemas be allowed to open because they subscribe something to charity? That seems to me to be the most dreadful excuse for doing it. I am the most charitable person living, and I am very glad that someone benefits from such a proceeding, but I do think it is dreadful.

Why should not we be allowed to do a good play here on a Sunday night, a play that will make you think? It is the one evening in the week when your mind will be fresh and receptive, when you won't come in perhaps jaded after a tiresome day in a city office. You could come in and listen to "King Lear" or "Macbeth," and yet that is the one occasion when we are debarred.

It is a crusade which, if I had the time, I should like to take up and fight to its bitter end. It is so illogical a situation. We are the only country that closes down the theatre. We can hear opera, matinee or evening, on the wireless from any other country, and it is the one day when, I am sure, you would all come fresh and receptive to listen to a good play.

Perhaps in years to come we may see the light on these points and we shall be free to do as we like; but at present the situation seems so paradoxical that it simply leaves me bewildered. It seems so stupid and senseless

that we can get no help from the Government in the theatres. Places like the Old Vic struggle and struggle; yet think of the joy that theatre has given to people who, I know, save up pennies to get a sixpenny seat. Still, one mustn't talk about the Government these days.

There is only one thing against places of entertainment being open on Sunday, and that is sheer superstition in its most primitive and most ignorant form. A "sacred" day is not a bit more intellectually respectable than a sacred stone or a sacred hat.

Mr. J. V. Shortt of Liverpool asks us to announce that after March 9, all communications to him and the Secretary of the Liverpool Branch N.S.S. should be directed to his new address, 67 Dunluce Street, Walton, Liverpool 4.

The West London Branch N.S.S. hold lectures every Sunday evening in "The Lamb and Flag," James Street, opposite Bond Street Tube Station, and to-day (March 10) Mr. R. H. Rosetti will lecture on "Spiritualism and Commonsense." We understand the accommodation is warm and comfortable, and all Freethinkers and their friends within range are invited. Doors open at 7 o'clock and admission is free.

An Adolescence Course in Freethought

"WHAT shall I read?" The question, as coming from a beginner, is a fascinating one to the Freethought propagandist, and the answer to it will be a matter of importance. And the attempt to answer it lays one open to the charge of embarking on a dangerous project.

Some years ago J. M. Robertson set out some elaborate courses for study relating to Freethought culture over a wide field. Such is, of course, wholly inapplicable where the purpose is to make converts. For the latter aim a course can be set down in one *Freethinker* article, though I do not claim by any means that the suggestions I shall offer cannot be bettered.

It is even arguable that, starting with *Pamphlets for the People*, the subject of our attentions could be taken through a more or less complete course, with few or no gaps, without departing from the works of Mr. Cohen. But even granting its possibility it is hardly desirable. A variety of authors is a good thing, and to concentrate on one might have an opposite effect to that which we intended. It would be fair neither to the reader nor the author, who is often better appreciated in contrast. Assuming the author chosen to be intellectually satisfying, the reader might be taken on at a rate with which his emotional responses cannot keep pace. Psychology has shown that intellectual acceptance and emotional revulsion can go hand in hand. This apart, however, the reader who is reared, say, on an author who characteristically hits the nail on the head and hammers it home, may later, on turning to other writers, expect to have all his problems hammered out in the same manner, and become impatient when they fail. He will have had too much of a good thing.

Moreover, tastes differ, and the selected course will depend primarily on the type of person for whom it is conceived. Different people—different approaches. The way of approaching say, a Catholic lady of middle age who has slackened in her observances, will obviously require methods very different from those employed with a youth of 16 totally uninterested in religion, yet who would answer Yes to the inquiry, "Do you think there is a God?" and who may be destined to pass through life without doing a single thing to challenge the Church's attempted stranglehold on education, and in whatever other sphere it finds it

possible. The apathetic "nothingarian," who is not definitely "for us," can in many respects be unwittingly against us. It is therefore, open to the Freethinker to argue, that because he pays taxes while the Church goes free, and because he pays a wireless fee for the support of religious propaganda to which no reply is permitted, anomalies which would not exist if there were sufficient Freethinkers in the country, therefore this gives him a moral right to "button-hole" his acquaintances. Nevertheless, on psychological grounds, it is of more value that the casting-off of religion should come from within, as far as possible. The more a youth works out his own salvation the better. But at the same time, he is certainly born into a society which has inherited much learning, and which has much to offer. He has already been dosed with the elements of Christian belief, God, Jesus, a holy book, prayer, an after life and so forth. It is the Freethinker's task to present the other side, this without appearing unduly solicitous for the direction of another person's interests.

And so, if the impulse towards scepticism cannot be manifested without the direct intervention of conversation (I am not lapsing into the psychological error of assuming an impulse can arise "from within" independent of any reference to the external world), then the Freethinker should, at least, as far as possible let the conversation of his subject determine the general lines of approach. Rather than attempt to drive him along a set path, without warning, he might do better to lead his friend a little further along a line in which some interest has been evinced. To make a caricature, it is better to sympathize with his regret that cinemas are closed on Sunday, than to hurl Cassell's *Supernatural Religion* at his head. I am thinking of the case of the youth aged 16-18, who is not interested in religious controversy; though the suggestions I have to make might conceivably be applicable over a wider field. Practical suggestions follow, and I do not claim them to be the best anthology possible.

Step 1:—To show that religion is a social nuisance, and not a harmless pursuit inside cathedrals.

Some time ago the R.P.A. published two pamphlets on Sunday Entertainments and Sunday Games, appearing as the work of two Rationalist politicians (E. Thurtle and Lord Snell respectively). The presentation is excellent and they carry most persuasive argument. If not obtainable conversation could at this simple stage suffice for I am following the old rule about starting with the most likely points of agreement.

2. *To show that this social nuisance, far from being just an unfortunate temporary feature, is characteristic of the Christian Churches throughout their history.*

Mr. McCabe's *Social Record of Christianity*, Mr. Cohen's *Christianity, Slavery and Labour*; and *Religion as a Bar to Progress* (C. T. Gorham), largely taken from A. D. White's *Warfare*, would, I think, suffice. At a much later stage, Bury's *History of the Freedom of Thought*, Draper's *Conflict* and, or, Russell's *Religion and Science*, could be introduced if interest in this branch were sustained. I am omitting Winwood Reade, not only because he will be reduplicated in essentials, but because his samples of muddle-headed dogmatism cannot wholly be explained away by pointing to the year at which he wrote.

3. *To show that this persecution is sanctioned in an altogether untrustworthy Bible.*

It may be that a so far enlightened youth will be prepared to take this stage in his stride. Biblical absurdities, however, can profitably be consulted in Ingersoll's *What is it Worth?* the *Bible Handbook* (Footo and Ball), and *The Age of Reason*.

4. *To show that the New Testament is no more*

trustworthy than the old; that Jesus is no improvement as a guide to action.

I would not immediately take steps to disprove the historical existence of Jesus. Some Freethinkers prefer to take the line of assuming his existence and then discrediting him out of his own mouth. To the opponent who declares, "I maintain there was a Jesus," they will reply, "So much the better to beat you with, my friend." Though portions of the book will be irrelevant to our present purpose, Mr. G. Whitehead's *Jesus Christ; Man, God or Myth?* deals popularly with the question of Christ's ethical standing as judged by his acts and sayings.

5. To show "Christ," at least, to be mythical, with pre-Christian parallels, with Christian rites and doctrines anticipated in earlier religions.

I select Mr. H. Cutner's *Pagan Elements in Christianity*, the pamphlet *Did Jesus Christ Exist* (Cohen) and the short treatise *Did Jesus Ever Live?* by Dr. L. G. Rylands. The position elucidated in the pamphlet is logically irrefutable, while Rylands' book exemplifies the modern trend towards discrediting a definable Jesus background to the narratives.

6. To show, in case of refuge being taken in Theism or Deism, that the belief in God is unwarranted. *Theism or Atheism* (Cohen) would probably meet the demand, and to clinch the matter we proceed:—

7. To show how religious beliefs started.

This can be done from two sources. First, anthropology. Frazer's *Golden Bough* should not be missed even if only used at this stage for reference. Grant Allen's *Evolution of the Idea of God* would repay some study, and Mr. Cohen's *Foundations of Religion* would serve an extra purpose of opening up wider fields later on with its Appendix. But here we are passing to the second source, psychology.

8. To show the psychological origin of religious beliefs. Psycho-Analysis has its opponents, but there is certain material which it has established in such a way that any future scheme of psychology purporting to be comprehensive cannot but incorporate it. At any rate this is admitted by its most eminent opponent, the late Prof. Wm. McDougall.

Freud's *Future of an Illusion* is a classic, and the reason Dr. D. Forsyth's *Psychology and Religion* drew such vindictive outbursts from religious leaders was perhaps because it was couched in such terms as to make easy reading for the million. An article on its later edition may not be untimely. Westermarck's concise *Goodness of Gods* will display the projection of human passions into a gorgeous variety of deities. At a later stage James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* and Mr. Cohen's *Religion and Sex* might come into demand. We pass,

9. To show there is no utility in retaining "God" for any purpose such as autosuggestion in regard to prayer and faith-healing. Prof. James Leuba is not an Atheist, but, like Ralph Cudworth of old, he admirably serves Atheistic purposes. His *God or Man?* shows that if we have no need of God, neither have we any need of Cod.

10. To solve the "free-will" problem, Prof. Levy's *Thinking* and Mr. Cohen's *Determinism or Free Will?* would probably dispose of this issue while, again drawing on the latter,

11. The question of survival could be met by his *The Other Side of Death*.

In case of complications setting in due to Spiritualism there are Edward Clodd's *The Question*, and, more recently, Mr. G. Whitehead's *Inquiry*, as well as the Doyle-McCabe and Cohen-Leaf debates.

12. To show that Christianity is at variance with modern ideas, the Vivian Phelips books, *Churches and*

* Psycho-Analysis and Social Psychology.

Modern Thought and Modern Knowledge and Old Beliefs would be most useful, and the painstaking subject of our attentions would have a refreshing dip into L. Powys' *Pathetic Fallacy*, where he would learn that propaganda can be put over in colourful language and with literary artistry.

13. A taste for science study might be inculcated by the perusal of Dr. Beadnell's *Picture Book of Evolution*. There is not the slightest need to go to Darwin's works: Keith's little books, of which *Darwinism and its Critics* is the most recent, preserve the essentials. Similarly, Haeckel might be omitted in virtue of having begotten McCabe's *Riddle of the Universe To-Day*.

14. If the effect of arousing militancy has not been achieved the journey has not been altogether in vain. Whether intellectual support can crystallize into practical enthusiasm depends on outside interests and on character. It may be as well to keep certain pressing issues and practical discontents before him. How best to capture the tradition and spirit of the Free-thought movement itself I shall not discuss. To some the life of Bradlaugh and the trials of Foote will come down as mere history on paper; to others they will stand out as a message to 1940, challenging us to defend the principles for which they suffered. To some, they will appear as mere eruptions from a ruck of economic forces, to others they will represent manhood at its highest, making a definite human contribution towards the intellectual emancipation of their kind.

G. H. TAYLOR

The Significance of Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde: A Summing Up, by Lord Alfred Douglas. Published by Duckworth, London, 6s.

LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS, one of the finest living poets in England, and a sensitive literary critic, has written a new book that cannot fail to interest anyone desiring to know about Oscar Wilde at first-hand. It is true that Lord Alfred gives us no more new facts and not even a new Wilde epigram. But it is, after all, not usual to do so in a summing-up of the evidence. And, as English judges sometimes do, Lord Alfred calls himself as a witness for the defence, not of Wilde's vice, but of Wilde himself, and a very convincing witness he is.

The Wilde tragedy is well-known. Celebrated as a wit, a scholar, a poet, an apostle of beauty, an essayist, a brilliantly successful dramatist and as probably the most-discussed figure of his day, Oscar Wilde in the noonday of his career was attacked by the father of his dearest friend, Lord Alfred Douglas, the then Marquess of Queensbury, a well-known Freethinker, who accused him of "posing as a Sodomite." Wilde retorted by a libel action which crashed. In the result he was arrested, tried at the Old Bailey for homosexual offences, convicted and sentenced to the maximum of two years' hard labour. On leaving prison he lived abroad and ruined in body, mind, and estate, died in a poor hotel in the Latin Quarter in Paris. Since then some of his writings have become a genuine part of English literature; they have been translated into Japanese, Russian, Roumanian and other unlikely languages, and made colossal sums of money. He is one of the very few English writers whose fame is world-wide.

It was "an outspoken Freethinker," and a notorious one, who ruined Wilde. But no Freethinker will be proud of that fact. Lord Alfred, a Catholic, rebuking Bernard Shaw, justly says on this point, that "a Freethinker to be really entitled to respect should be a Freethinker all through." "What right," enquires

Lord Alfred, "has a Freethinker to confine his free-thinking only to the sphere of his own prejudices and predilections?" Freethinkers surely must agree. Some of them may well take Lord Alfred's enquiry to heart. How many Freethinkers have the courage to think freely on all subjects—not merely on religion or politics? The Marquis, although a Freethinker upon the subject of Christianity (which he denounced in the crudest and most insulting fashion), was hide-bound in every other line of thought. He was an unpleasant person who had a sensitive poet for a son and a master of letters for that son's friend. Maliciously he ruined the worldly lives of both. It is not given to many men to ruin a genius: Lord Queensbury ruined two. Freethought cannot admire him or his achievement.

For it was Oscar Wilde (who died a Catholic) who was the real Freethinker engaged in challenging all kinds of accepted canons in Christian, and conventional, morality and his epoch's standard of values. If Lord Queensberry had not been a stupid man he would have seen that. Wilde's homosexuality was in itself a challenge as Lord Alfred clearly sees. In fact homosexuality is still a challenge to-day when sensible folk and many judges regard some of its manifestations as illness of body or mind fitter for the doctor or psychologist than the prison-warder or as private vice rather than public crime.

But apart from this, Wilde challenged the cult of ugliness, the cult of sordid livelihood, the cult of over-seriousness. He preached and practised a gospel of living for pleasure; of living for life; of cultivating the beautiful; a gospel of art, music, sculpture and literature. He believed intensely in gaiety, in wit, in spirit, in intelligence, in kindness, in good manners, in taste—and he communicated his radiant incarnations of all these things incomparably well both by voice and pen.

This is his real importance—his breaking-down of the barriers curbing the free spirit in modern times. Not his homosexuality nor his *debacle*, heart-searing as these two things became! He had something to say and he said it supremely well. This is the true secret of his fame. You recall that it was Lucifer, Son of the Morning, fabled to be the brightest of the Angels in Heaven, that became Satan, the blackest of devils. It was the very superiority of Oscar Wilde that made his name and fame a byword for their obscenities amongst the base.

It has been my good fortune to know personally two of Oscar Wilde's greatest friends—Lord Alfred and Robert Harborough Sherard his biographer. Both of them in their very different ways are exceptional men. Both of them are destined to be famous, but they must—of course—die first. And both of them agree that Wilde was the best conversationalist, the most enchanting companion, the most fascinating friend they ever knew. He had a hundred endearing qualities: he was kind, generous, courageous, exquisitely sensitive and considerate—a great gentleman in every sense of that much-degraded word. The chivalrous Sherard has spent half a lifetime and broken himself in the defence of his dear friend. And Lord Alfred's eloquent last prose-word in this book cuts to the heart: "I followed his hearse to the grave . . . and it certainly seemed to me then and for many a long day afterwards that the sun had gone down." Could any friend say more?

As to Sherard—he has suffered much for his consistent and chivalrous friendship, and England is unlikely to recognize his merit until he is dead, although France has made him (appropriately enough) a Chevalier of her Legion of Honour. But then Paris marks Wilde's deathplace by a plaque, while London will not mark the Chelsea house where he lived.

Since Wilde's personal tragedy—largely because it

did happen—we have grown more analytic and less cruel towards homosexuals. To-day if he were tried at the Old Bailey, it is probable that he would not be sent to prison at all, but delivered to the doctors and his friends for treatment and care. He was neither a corruptor of youth nor a violator of childhood, and distinctions are drawn nowadays between such scoundrels, and the homosexual whose indecencies affect only himself and his like-minded friends. If the late Mr. Justice Wills thought it right to give Wilde the maximum sentence, one wonders what he would have given a wholesale corruptor of immature innocent boys. The question illustrates the iniquity of Wilde's sentence even by the standards of his day. But Christian England as a whole approved it.

To-day it is not his tragedy but the writings of Wilde that count. Lord Alfred justly puts *The Importance of Being Earnest* (now being played again by John Gielgud and his company at the Queen's Theatre in London) above Sheridan. Certainly that brilliant comedy is likely to out-last *The School for Scandal*. Douglas praises too highly perhaps *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, good as it is, when on the strength of it he puts Wilde into the category of major poets. The only novel Wilde wrote, *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, is fine work and superior to the work of Huysmans which inspired it. Those who wish to make themselves acquainted with Wilde's work might well try these books beginning with the last.

There will be general satisfaction that Douglas gives no quarter to the mendacious book of Frank Harris, although that was sponsored in a bowdlerized form by no less a person than Bernard Shaw. I wish he had also dealt faithfully with the fiction of my poor friend Edward Majoribanks about Carson encountering a painted Wilde in the gutters of Paris in after-years. Lies and legends however are bound to gather round Wilde.

I have said that Wilde (although living an irreligious life, nominally being an Irish Protestant with æsthetic appreciations of Roman Catholicism and dying a Catholic) was a real Freethinker. In the best sense of that word he was. He could, and did, think new and original thoughts. His mind was free as Ariel's. His favourite mode of thought was paradoxical, and by its means he created genuinely original ideas often perfectly expressed. He dared to be different. The dangerous and delightful distinction of possessing distinction was his; and his inferiors hated him for it. He was a true Greek in a world of Hebrews, Goths, and Vandals.

How badly we need an Oscar Wilde to-day! Someone who will gaily express the importance of triviality and the vulgarity of over-seriousness. Someone who will deflect us from our dull and sordid preoccupations with squabbling nations at war and with sordid individuals at money-making. Someone who will talk to us of youth and gaiety and love and laughter instead of foreign affairs, economic problems and the deadly dull khaki-coloured atmosphere of intellectual fog in which we stifle to-day. We should probably crucify such a gift from the gods. But before our tragic comedian died he would at least have lightened our darkness as Wilde dispelled the miasma of his generation.

Bernard Shaw claims that it was of him that Wilde said: "He hasn't an enemy in the world; and none of his friends likes him." Lord Alfred dissents. But it is enough that this was said and a thousand things equally good or better. Those who want to know something of the personality that created such *mots* may well begin with Lord Alfred's book. It will make them want to get Mr. Sherard's biography and read Wilde's own works.

C. G. L. DU CANN

In Face of all Reason

(Concluded from page 140)

MANY would find little to choose between animism and the "lofty" twentieth century Christianity. But Zoroaster gave a really good choice, says the author:—

So the god of righteousness and the god of evil divided the universe between them, each equally powerful and each having had his part in the original creation of the world. . . . The good was to conquer and the evil would be finally overthrown. Men were to choose which side they would take in the conflict, and so the ethical note was retained intact. (p. 145, italics mine.)

If a "choice" like that represents to Professor Soper the retaining of intact ethics, we can understand his probably unintentional representation of Christians as hypocrites unwilling to make a choice, but continually grovelling for forgiveness for oft-repeated sins; for writing on the Parsis he says:—

Their religion at best lacks completeness: there is no adequate doctrine of salvation. (p. 151).

In other words the Parsis are a strait-laced lot of prudes, because they make no provision for those who would have their cake and eat it like the Christians.

"No bondage," he indignantly declades in the chapter on Hinduism "can compare with that in which the people of India are held by their spiritual leaders." (p. 157).

Eleven pages later, on the caste system he refers to the Brahmin priest who "looks upon himself as inherently superior to all the others." This prig is "rightfully recognized as the gifted leader in the higher life of the community." (p. 168).

This "rightfully recognized" leader is one of those who holds the people of India in incomparable bondage!

There is more to come on the caste system. Let the Professor speak again, this time on the 50,000,000 untouchables:—

Centuries of such disdain and abuse have created a race of cringing creatures who, scorned by their own proud superiors have lost all the self-respect they might have developed, and are to-day among the most pitiable people in the world. (p. 168).

So far so good, a crushing repudiation of Hinduism as an advanced factor in the world. But he continues immediately:—

They constitute one of the greatest challenges to social and religious service to be found anywhere.

Social and religious, forsooth! Haven't the 50,000,000 "cringing creatures" had about enough of "religious service"? In spite of the above quotation and the inevitable concluding recommendation of his universal panacea of Christianity, the Professor seems to think so himself, for he admits on p. 174 that "India has run the gamut of religious experience and doctrine." And to cap the lot, he concludes with a final defiant contradiction: "India will remain religious . . . that cannot be doubted." (p. 179).

Buddhism comes in for his gentle condemnation because:

The new religion did not succeed in driving out the old fears, and they have persisted through the centuries despite the superior teaching which should have supplanted them. (p. 205).

He concludes right royally: "Have we not the right to expect this of one of the higher religions?"

One can only compile a short list of "the old fears" on the spur of the moment: opening umbrellas in the

house, throwing spilt salt over the shoulder, walking under ladders, sitting 13 at a table, etc., etc. *Have we not the right. . . .?*

Indignation shines forth from every word of this protest:—

In Burma the religion has penetrated more deeply into the life of the people than in any other of the Hinayana countries. This is doubtless due to the fact that education has been in the hands of the monks, who thus are able to instill Buddhist ideas into the minds of the people while they are young and impressionable. (p. 205).

A pretty terrible picture, is it not? Cunning play upon child fears, plausible little fantasies, lies and threats, all in the interests of the Buddhistic priesthood. Leave the children alone! would seem to be the worthy moral.

Yet nothing could be clearer than this *diktat* of Professor Soper to the ordinary man.

Is he a Christian? Then his family must be Christian. (p. 329).

Almost a free hand given, it seems. "Must be Christian." By any means.

The whole lesson is, "Don't educate the children too much," or, at least, blunt their minds sufficiently to render education harmless. Professor Soper records the "deep concern" of the Japanese authorities on discovering that 4,500 out of 5,000 students at the Imperial University of Tokio were Atheists or Agnostics. Ignorance is the last-ditch stand of religion: Professor Soper states that "the old myths, legends, cosmologies, and traditions, both Shinto and Buddhist, are doomed." p. 254). He is apparently ignorant of the Bible: at least he maintains a thoughtful silence about its "myths and legends."

An admission which would be valuable in a more coherent work is made on p. 288 in the Chapter on Mohammed:—

There are scarcely any limits to the possibility of transformation when a religion, brought to bay, attempts to fit itself to new conditions.

"Brought to bay," "Scarcely any limits." Perhaps the "gifted seer" will turn out to be Judge Rutherford after all!

The Virgin Birth of Jesus is not referred to at all by the Professor in his culminating and concluding chapter on Christianity. This is one surprising fact about a survey (by a believer) of the Nazarene superman and his influence. Yet the omission is nothing compared with the poppycock which follows.

Jesus, we learn, did not "explicitly condemn slavery" (p. 307), but "men have only been made free where his example and his teaching have been made known," and "all tyrannies and autocracies have had reason to fear when oppression and disregard of the rights of man have been seen in the light of his teaching."

I will only mention the "oppressions" and "disregard of the rights of man" practised by the Roman Catholic Church: the real point here is, what, anyway, are these nebulous rights of man as "seen in the light of his teaching"? The right to self-abasement, to hypocrisy, to negation?

The author who has assured the "myths, legends, and cosmologies" of other religions that they are doomed, presents the resurrection of Christ as an undisputed material historical fact. He states unequivocally that "our religion" is the "only unbreakable bond of brotherhood," a remark which would have sounded pretty thin during the wars of the Roses, the war between the Roundheads and the Cavaliers and the Irish Civil War of recent memory.

Such is Professor Soper's view of "The Religions of Mankind." Do such men believe what they write? Or do they simply pour out their "guileless" propaganda by the yard? It is difficult to credit men of academic training and attainment with such errors, such contradictions and patched-up, adorned superstitions.

When will man submit every doctrine, every claim, every story, to reason?

SIMON FORD

Correspondence

PRAYER AND GOD

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—My attention has been drawn to a paragraph in your journal in which reference is made to a speech of mine at the Annual Meeting of the Church Literature Association. The latter quotations are not, I think, actual reproductions of what I said there, but of some deductions drawn from my speech by the editor of the *Church Times*. However, I do not differ in any important way from those verdicts, so I won't quarrel about that.

Your contention that Christians everywhere pray for victory to the same "God," and that the only response to all their prayers is silence, raises so many points of Christian doctrine—constantly trusted, of course, by many Christian writers—that no letter could possibly furnish an adequate reply. Moreover, however freely the *Freethinker* may allow those who differ from its standpoint to think and write, it is published for the purpose of criticizing Christianity, and those who believe in it, not as a vehicle for Christian apologetics. It would not be fair of me to ask you to publish a lengthy refutation of your point, and I should not blame you for refusing to do so.

Nevertheless, since you have picked out these words of mine on which to hang so large an argument, I should be grateful if you allowed me to make one small point in reply. Christian theology does not expound prayer as a method of calling in God to "do the trick" for man. If it did, prayer would be taught as nothing more than what the *Freethinker* doubtless regards it as being—a particularly cheap and contemptible form of magic. Man is a weak and fallible being, whether he professes to be a Christian or not, and no doubt some of what passes for prayer is no more than this. But Christian orthodoxy is not to be blamed for this, any more than "Free Thought" ought to be blamed for things said and done in its name, which your journal would sincerely regret. We must attack each other for what our tenets really profess; nothing less would be worthy of the argument. The Christian, when he is acting truly as such, prays not that God should "do the trick" for him, but that he should do the purpose of God. He may—he must—ask for God's blessing on an enterprise to which he feels truly called as God's servant, since if he did not feel so called he should not have embarked on it. What he is asking for is, in effect, for help to be on God's side; not that God should be on his.

I shall hope for your generosity and courtesy in publishing this letter.

MAURICE B. RECKITT

"OLD FITZ"

SIR,—There are errors in my letter about "Old Fitz," of which I did not receive a proof, which I hasten to correct. Tiresias is credited with an "H" which does not belong to him, and the penultimate line should read: "At the "guiltless feasts" of a vegetarian Olympus." I have found a note of the sale of a copy of the first issue of "Omar" in *New Youth*; it fetched £1,700.

EDGAR SYERS

[Several letters are held over until next week.—ED.]

Obituary

THOMAS GRIFFITHS

THE Freethought movement has lost a very loyal worker and supporter by the passing of Thomas Griffiths of Tooting Bec Road, London, who died on February 27 in his 71st year. He was a member of the N.S.S., and reader of the *Freethinker* of very long standing, retaining his keen interest in both until his death. Kindly, dignified, but determined in his service to Freethought, he was ever ready by conversations, discussion, or work in connexion with pending lectures to help the cause he loved truly and well. Many of the older Freethinkers in South London will remember his quiet useful work in that area.

The remains were cremated at the South London Crematorium, Streatham Vale, London, on Thursday, February 29, where before members and relatives of the family a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary of the N.S.S., in accordance with a promise given a few days before the death of our member.

To the widow and surviving members of the family we offer our sincere condolence in their loss. One of the sons, Mr. W. Griffiths is a useful and esteemed member of the N.S.S. Executive.—R.H.R.

WILLIAM ARTHUR CASWELL

WE regret to announce the death of Mr. William Arthur Caswell of Portsmouth. His death occurred very suddenly on February 2. Mr. Caswell was a convinced Secularist, and was appreciated by man as a wise counsellor and a true friend. He was sixty-five years of age, and left behind him one daughter. A secular Service was conducted at Milton Cemetery on February 28 by Mr. Harvey.

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

KINGSTON BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Place) : 6.30, A Lecture.

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

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, Mr. F. A. Ridley—"The Jesuits."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) : 11.0, W. B. Curry, M.A., B.Sc. "Federal Union : Some Objections Answered."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Lamb and Flag, James Street, Oxford Street, opposite Bond Street Station) : 7.0, R. H. Rosetti—"Spiritualism and Common-sense."

COUNTRY

OUTDOOR

BLYTH (The Fountain) : 6.30, Monday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

NORTH SHIELDS (Harbour View) 6.30, Tuesday, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

INDOOR

BIKENHEAD (WIRRAL) BRANCH, N.S.S. (Beechcroft Settlement, Whetstone Lane) : 7.0, Miss Parry—"How do We Know?"

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate) : 30, Mr. Henry Sara—"Liberties and Rights."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Transport Hall, corner of Islington) : 7.0, A debate : "Is Christianity Worth While?"

NELSON LEFT BOOK CLUB (Twisters' and Drawers' Club Room) : 7.30, Mr. J. Clayton—"Politics and Religion."

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