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## PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

	Page.
<i>Blasphemy—The Modern Era.—The Editor</i> - - - - -	17
<i>Baseless Optimism.—J. T. Lloyd</i> - - - - -	18
<i>Pioneers in Prison.—Mimnermus</i> - - - - -	20
<i>The Meaning and Significance of Freethought.—E. Belfort Bax</i> - - - - -	20
<i>Immortality.—W. Mann</i> - - - - -	22
<i>The Blasphemy Case</i> - - - - -	25
<i>Prosecution for "Blasphemy"</i> - - - - -	27
<i>The Labour Press and Blasphemy</i> - - - - -	29
<i>Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, Letters to the Editor, etc.</i>	

## Views and Opinions.

*(Continued from page 2.)*

### Blasphemy—The Modern Era.

In the transition from the time when blasphemy fell within the province of the ecclesiastical courts to the period when it was definitely taken over by the civil courts, it would seem that the gap was partly bridged by the case of James Naylor (1656). Naylor was a Quaker, of Bristol, and appears to have suffered from various delusions. He was charged with claiming equality with God, and allowing himself to be worshipped as God. He was tried before the High Court of Parliament, and after several days debate it was decreed that he be repeatedly set in the pillory and scourged; that he be branded on the forehead with the letter "B"; to have his tongue bored with a red hot iron; to be confined afterwards in prison, and to be set at hard labour. There was a vote of 82 that he should be put to death, but a vote of 96 decided otherwise. Naylor was repeatedly placed in the pillory and scourged, and at one of these whippings it was said that "there was no skin left between his shoulders and his hips." In pronouncing sentence Lord Commissioner Whitelocke drew a clear distinction between heresy and blasphemy, defining the former as consisting in erroneous opinion and the latter in reviling the name and honour of God. This trial, at the hands of Parliament, does serve to a considerable extent in bringing the offence of blasphemy from an ecclesiastical to a civil misdemeanour.

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### Enter, A New Ruling.

Naylor's case was the first clear instance in which the offence of blasphemy was decided by other than an ecclesiastical court. Blasphemy came clearly into the common law in the case of a man named Taylor (1675), whose language showed him to be partly demented. Taylor was tried before the Lord Chief Justice, Sir Matthew Hale, and it was during this trial the rule was first laid down that Christianity was a part of the law of England. Hale's actual words were:—

That such kind of wicked and blasphemous words were not only an offence against God and religion but a crime against the laws, States, and Government .....and therefore punishable in this court, that to say religion is a cheat, is to dissolve all those obligations

whereby civil societies are preserved; and Christianity being parcel of the laws of England, therefore to reproach the Christian religion is to speak in subversion of the law.

No one has ever been quite clear as to what Hale meant by this extraordinary statement; it is quite possible that he meant nothing in particular, and subsequent judges just fastened on it as one of those quasi-magical formulæ the chief potency of which lies in their obscurity. But since Taylor's time our judges have wobbled between the two opinions that Christianity must not be attacked in any form, and that one may attack Christianity provided it is done in a becoming manner. At present the common law takes the latter view; but it lies in the nature of common law that it might as easily revert to the former view as keep to the latter one.

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### Blasphemy Everywhere.

One may take it that the conclusion that criticism and denial of Christian beliefs might be permitted provided it were done in a "reverent" or becoming manner was forced upon the authorities by the growth of differences of opinion among Christians themselves. With Christians split up into numerous and conflicting bodies the difficulty of maintaining the foolish dictum of Hale's in all its literalness became apparent. But before that decision was finally reached hundreds of people were punished by more or less brutal sentences under the common law of blasphemy. These were not always enemies of Christianity; often they were those who called themselves "true" Christians, often deists, their legal offence being that they had offended against the doctrines and teachings of the Church by law established.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in the seventeenth century members of the Muggletonian sect were charged and condemned for blasphemy because they denied the doctrine of the Trinity. Members of the Society of Love, or Ranters, were also imprisoned for the same offence. In his notable work on *Constitutional Free Speech* Mr. Theodore Schroeder, of New York, has compiled a very useful list of cases, usually omitted in historical works, in which he shows that there is hardly a new or heretical view of Christianity that has not been prosecuted at law as blasphemous, and that, too, in the short space of time between the trying of Taylor's case in 1675 and the end of the seventeenth century. A great many of these cases are quite unknown to the ordinary reader of history for the reason that established opinions have always exerted a very real power over the publication of standard text books, with the result that in a very

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact it is only the established religion of the country that is protected at law, and against which the offence of blasphemy may be committed. That is the only form of Christianity known to the law, and other Christian sects are only protected so far as they hold doctrines in common with the Established Church. One cannot, for instance, blaspheme the Mass, nor can one blaspheme any doctrine peculiar to any of the non-Christian religions in this country. Thus the law which says to the non-Christian that he must not blaspheme the Christian religion says at the same time to the Christian that he may please himself how, or when, or where he blasphemes the religion of other people.



little time these cases, so unpleasantly reminiscent of the intolerance of Church and State, become buried and forgotten.

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#### The Reign of Intolerance.

The tale of persecution for "blasphemy" continued right through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Tindall, Mandeville, Woolston (for claiming that the Bible miracles must be taken in an allegorical sense) Peter Annet (at seventy years of age for criticizing the Pentateuch), with many others, were condemned to more or less brutal punishments for this purely law-made crime. Towards the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth there occurred the series of prosecutions which gathered round the *Age of Reason*, a book the substantial truth of which is now admitted by most preachers of religion with any pretence to scholarship or ability. The titanic figure here is Richard Carlile. Carlile spent no less than nine years and seven months in Christian gaols for the offence of selling the *Age of Reason*, and his arrest led to that of his wife, with a number of others who persisted in selling the work in spite of all that the authorities could do to prevent them. At one time it is calculated that eight of Carlile's men were in prison for selling this work. Then followed the imprisonment of men and women such as Henry Hetherington, Thomas Paterson, James Finlay, Matilda Roalfe, George Jacob Holyoake, Davison, Waddington, Mrs. Wright, Watson, Southwell and many others. It was by sheer persistence that these brave men and women broke down the bigotry of the authorities. Then for some years there came a lull, until in 1883 the editor, publisher, and printer of the *Freethinker*, Messrs. Foote, Ramsey, and Kemp, were arrested on a charge of blasphemy and sentenced to twelve, nine, and six months, respectively. This case is of importance because on G. W. Foote being brought from prison to plead before Lord Chief Justice Coleridge, on another and related charge, his remarkable defence drew from the judge a definite ruling on the blasphemy law which marked a turning point in the history of the common law on this subject. Lord Coleridge laid it down that it was quite permissible to criticize and attack the very fundamentals of Christianity provided this were done in a proper and becoming manner. That decision has been upheld and repeated by every judge since who has had to try a case of blasphemy—there have been many during the past fifteen years—and it was upheld in the case of *Bowman v. Secular Society, Limited*, in the House of Lords in 1917.

#### Judicial Darkness.

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We have seen that there are two main grounds on which heresy and blasphemy have been punished in the past, the one ecclesiastical, the other civil. The ecclesiastical ground is, broadly, that it is wrong to teach a religion contrary to the established religion because it would mean the teaching of a falsehood. That may have been a conclusive ground when Christianity was so generally believed in that the Church covered the whole of the people, but, to-day, when there is not a single tenet of Christian teaching that is not admittedly open to question, we may put it on one side, merely noting its existence in the past as a curious illustration of the change of human opinion. The second ground is different, and was laid down by Blackstone in his *Commentaries*, and still enjoys, in a slightly altered form, some popularity to-day:—

The preservation of Christianity as a national religion is, abstracted from its own intrinsic truth, of the utmost consequence to the civil State, of which a single instance will sufficiently demonstrate. The belief in a future state of rewards and punishments,

the entertaining of just ideas of the moral attributes of the supreme Being, and a firm persuasion that he superintends and will finally compensate every action in human life.....are the grand foundations of all judicial oaths which call God to witness the truth of those facts which perhaps may be known to him and the party attesting. All moral evidence, therefore, all confidence in human veracity, must be weakened by irreligion and overthrown by infidelity. Wherefore all affronts to Christianity, or endeavours to depreciate its efficacy, are highly deserving of human punishment.

So far as Blackstone's specific illustration of the oath is concerned Parliament, by the passing of the Oaths Amendment Act of 1888, has deliberately expressed its opinion that the value of a man's evidence is in no wise affected by his dispensing with the oath. Nor is it a very violent compliment to pay the believer to assert that unless he has before his mind the fear of punishment in the next world no reliance can be placed on what he says in a court of law. And on the general issue, that a repudiation of religion makes for evil in the State, it is only necessary to remark that none but the most ignorant of religious apologists will take up that position to-day. Fortunately, for one's respect for human nature heretics are to-day too common and their lives too well-known for that argument to carry conviction. CHAPMAN COHEN.

### Baseless Optimism.

It is a common statement that a clergyman, if he expects his labours to be crowned with success, is bound to be an optimist, and the statement is true. A pessimist never flourishes in any department of life, and least of all in the Christian pulpit. Nevertheless, the preachers' optimism, even when sincere, has faith for its foundation rather than fact, and uncritical hearers are deceived by it. In an article in the *Christian World* for December 29, entitled "The Brighter Side of 1921: A Review of Some London Churches," an attempt is made to convince readers that the churches are well attended. It seems that the writer had occasion during last year to visit a great number of London churches, with the result that he "cannot understand why so many sad laments are heard about our empty places of worship." Then "M" asks:—

On conference platforms and at various religious assemblies why is there so much weeping and gnashing of teeth over empty churches and so little praise and thanksgiving for the full ones? As a matter of fact, the experiences of the year go to prove that the Londoner is not half as indifferent as he is made out to be.

Characteristically enough, "M" singles out some fifteen or sixteen places of worship described as crowded, full, well-filled, or as having magnificent audiences, but no mention whatever is made of the nearly two thousand churches and chapels the great majority of which are being ever increasingly deserted. The outstanding fact, however, is that the percentage of the population of London found in churches and chapels on any given Sunday is tremendously small and steadily becoming smaller. The late Bishop Boyd Carpenter admitted that even to-day the Christian Church can only claim one third of the population of the world, the number of Christians, according to him, being 500,000,000 in a world-population of 1,500,000,000. According to a greater scholar, the late Bishop Lightfoot, the proportion of Christians in the present day is one in five. On the other hand, Professor Rhys Davids, a distinguished Buddhist



scholar, gives the number of Christians as 327,000,000, while he estimates that there are 500,000,000 Buddhists.

It is really immaterial which of those three estimates is the most nearly accurate because, even according to Dr. Boyd Carpenter's estimate, the Christians have no ground for indulging in self-congratulation. On the one hand the Church claims to be Divinely founded, Divinely governed, and Divinely inspired, but, on the other, this self-same Church, after becoming the official religion of the falling Roman Empire, not only failed to arrest the fall and redeem the Empire, not only even allowed the fall to continue, but also considerably accelerated it. Yes, this supernaturally created and guided institution, this body of the eternal Christ and temple of the Holy Ghost, instead of saving the Roman world hastened its destruction, and became itself not only impure and depraved, but a very cesspool of all corruption and wickedness, sinking deeper and deeper, century after century, into social and moral degradation. This is frankly admitted by Catholic and Protestant historians alike, even by Baronius who, at the special request of the Pope, wrote his *Annals* in defence of the Catholic Church. Curiously enough, the Church, as an organization, continued to pursue a down-grade course till well on in the sixteenth century, most of the popes being thoroughly bad men.

Thus the history of the Church furnishes no encouragement to cherish any optimistic views as to its future. And yet the pulpit persists in falsifying the records of the past in order to paint gorgeous pictures of the future. For example, the Rev. Mr. Norwood, at the City Temple on Christmas morning, quoted a Hyde Park orator who "dismissed Christianity in a couple of sentences." Then the reverend gentleman, dramatically gathering up the Gospel pages between his fingers, said:—

The evangelists have dismissed the life story of our Lord in a few words. How small and fragmentary are the Gospels! But there is a fact behind that handful of leaves. The greatest thing that has ever happened in the world. A fact that transformed the world, and is even yet its greatest hope.....If you could take these books out of memory altogether it would leave history a mass of jangled and inexplicable forces. A million spires that point upwards would have nothing to which they might witness. The greatest of books would have no meaning. Poetry would still be with us, but its choicest expressions would sound like insanity. The sacrifices of great and noble lives would have lost all direction and meaning.

Mr. Norwood does not tell us what fact lies "behind that handful of leaves." What is "the greatest thing that has ever happened in the world"? Is it the alleged virgin birth at Bethlehem or the slaughter of the innocent for the guilty on Calvary? We are anxious to know what this greatest thing is, for the preacher asserts that it "transformed the world." We should like to be informed, further, from what and into what state this marvellous fact transformed the world. When was the transformation achieved? We challenge the reverend gentleman to tell us. The Hyde Park orator "described the attempt to apply religion to the complex problems of modern times as a failure." Has the present minister of the City Temple the temerity to characterize it as an eminent success? Lecky, who did possess some knowledge of history, says that after the conversion of Constantine to Christianity:—

For long centuries the history of the Empire is a monotonous story of the intrigues of priests, eunuchs, and women, of perpetual crimes and conspiracies encircling the throne. After the conversion of Constantine there was no prince in any section of the Roman Empire altogether so depraved, or at least so shameless, as Nero or Heliogabalus; but the

Byzantine Empire can show none bearing the faintest resemblance to Antonine or Aurelius, while the nearest approximation to that character of Rome was furnished by Julian, who contemptuously abandoned the Christian faith.....Few men who are not either priests or monks would not have preferred to live in the best days of the Athenian or of the Roman republics, in the age of Augustus or in the age of the Antonines, rather than in any period that elapsed between the triumph of Christianity and the fourteenth century (*History of European Morals*, Vol. II., pp. 13, 14, 15).

The fourteenth century was the period of the revival of ancient Greek and Roman learning which the Church had previously forcibly kept in a state of suspended animation, and of the rise and almost triumph of Humanism within the Church itself. It was an intensely interesting age, an age of new questions, new ideals, new points of view, and certain to involve great changes in all departments of society. But the Protestant Reformation ere long broke out and swept like an avenging avalanche over many parts of Europe, setting up a temporary barrier to all progressive movements and reacting unfavourably to Humanism on the Catholic Church. Now, however, the Protestant Reformation is gradually becoming a spent force, and Humanism is arising once more as a giant refreshed after a long enforced rest.

With such facts facing us we confidently ask Mr. Norwood, when did his alleged fact transform the world, and what are the effects of the transformation? The report of his Christmas sermon in the *British Weekly* for December 29 is exceedingly brief; but the sentences cited in this article are within quotation marks. Let us glance at one of them again. He calls something undefined "a fact that transformed the world, and is even yet its greatest hope." It is a somewhat ambiguous statement, in need of a little elucidation. Was the transformation for the better or for the worse? If for the better, why is the fact that transformed it even yet the world's greatest hope? Its greatest hope of what? Of another transformation proving that the former transformation was a failure? If the transformation was for the worse, on what ground does Mr. Norwood believe that the fact which so transformed it is even yet the world's greatest hope of a transformation for the better? What evidence can be adduced that the fact having once failed is capable of success in the time to come? The truth is that across all the Christian centuries, as far as supernaturalism is concerned, can be written, in letters of blood, the tragic word FAILURE. All the good ever done in this world has been the fruit of purely human effort prompted by the social sense of sympathy and love. This is Humanism pure and simple which is now gradually penetrating most of the Churches and which therein is hurling heaven and hell in a conjectural after life into an almost invisible background. Herein even yet lies the world's greatest hope, in fact, its only hope, and herein, if anywhere, Optimism finds its justification. Mr. Norwood's cant and twaddle about history becoming a hopeless and meaningless tangle if the Gospels were to be blotted out of the world are perfectly harmless, being founded on ignorance and prejudice. He cannot possibly foretell what the effect of the disappearance of Christianity upon the life of the world would be, and his undertaking the useless task of doing so is but one of the tricks of the profession.

J. T. LLOYD.

Better than councils, better than sermons, better than Parliament, is that free discussion through a free press, which is the fittest instrument for the discovery of truth and the most effectual means of preserving it.—J. Anthony Froude.



## Pioneers in Prison.

Rough work, Iconoclasm, but the only way to get at truth. —O. W. Holmes.

Stone walls do not a prison make,  
Nor iron bars a cage. —Col. Lovelace.

"You see how this world goes!" is one of Lear's pregnant exclamations in the greatest tragedy penned by the master-hand of Shakespeare. Gloster, who is blind, says he sees it feelingly, and Lear replies:—

Look with thine ears: see how yon justice rails upon yon simple thief. Hark in thine ear: change places, and handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief.

Lear, even in his ramblings, gives terse, pungent expression to thoughts extraordinary for acuteness and depth, but he seldom surpasses this transformation scene in respect to suggestive import and vivid presentment.

The paradox is explained by the history of religion. Read the stories of the judicial murder of heretics, Jews, and witches. Read Fox's *Book of Martyrs* and McCabe's *Biographical Dictionary of Rationalists*. See how, through many ages, independence of mind was killed off and hypocrisy and servility fostered. For many centuries Europe was given up to the Church as a sheep to the shearers. With thumbscrew in hand, and lies on the tongue's tip, the "Bride of Christ" did her awful work. Thus it happens that some prison records are bright spots on the scroll of history.

There is an unfortunate affinity between pioneers and prisons. Many of the noblest men and women in history suffered long and cruel incarceration within the grim walls of prisons for their devotion to truth. Prisons have thus not infrequently been glorified by the halo of the martyr. How many brave soldiers of the Army of Human Liberation have rotted in gaols? How many men of genius have solaced their imprisoned hours with their pens, learning in suffering what they taught in books?

The ancient priesthood commenced the work of persecution. In old-world Athens Socrates solaced his prison hours with philosophy before he drank the deadly hemlock among his sorrowing disciples. The Christian priests, even more fanatical than their predecessors, sometimes dispensed with the mockery of a trial, and, as in the case of the unfortunate Hypatia, resorted to plain murder. The great Galileo, when he was old and poor, suffered in a Roman dungeon, and Roger Bacon was on two occasions imprisoned—once for a period of ten years—on the common charge of heresy and magic. Yet he, too, like Galileo, disturbed the pious ignorance of his contemporaries with ideas of discoveries that were to be realized after his death.

Nor can we forget that the hapless Giordano Bruno, perhaps the greatest martyr of all, suffered the horrors of a cruel imprisonment before his tragic end by burning at the hands of the hired assassins of the Great Lying Church. Thomas Paine was another fine illustration. To relieve the tedium of the loneliness during his captivity in prison he composed part of the world-famous *Age of Reason*, a work for which scores of persons afterwards suffered imprisonment. It was while in the Bastille that Voltaire wrote the greater part of the *Henriade*. The priests were always anxious to arrest Voltaire, but thanks to his influence and position he always evaded their eager clutches. Richard Carlile, his family and associates, had more than their share of pains and penalties for daring to defend free speech. Carlile himself suffered over nine years' imprisonment, and his family and shopmen divided among them about fifty years' confinement.

That warm-hearted poet, Leigh Hunt, calmly endured two years' captivity for satirizing the Prince Regent, afterwards George the Fourth, of indifferent memory. Thomas Cooper, the Chartist, was no stranger to the interior of a gaol. His *Purgatory of Suicides* was another instance of mind triumphing over captivity. Ernest Jones, another Chartist leader, also belongs to the roll of men who have, by the resources of genius, converted a prison into a palace of thought.

Another noteworthy prisoner was honest John Bunyan. He was not a Freethinker, but he spent twelve years in Bedford Gaol for militant Nonconformity, and wrote part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* while in durance vile. Bunyan had an excellent humour. A snuffing busybody came to visit him, and declared that the Lord had ordered him to search for him in half the prisons of England. Bunyan retorted: "If the Lord had sent you, you need not have taken so much trouble. The Lord knows I have been in Bedford Gaol for years." It is a singular coincidence that the authors of two of the most popular books ever written should have been not only contemporaries, and of the same nationality, but both imprisoned in the same country. Daniel Defoe did not write *Robinson Crusoe* while he was imprisoned, although other works of his prolific pen were born of his captivity. Cervantes, a greater writer than Bunyan and Defoe, and one of the world's foremost authors, was held captive by the Moors for five years.

Among the host of noble names of those who have suffered imprisonment we have referred only to a few, and most of these were apostles of Freethought. Freethinkers have ever been the most potent forces of progress. No other men are discussed so widely, but magnificent as is their life-work the men are greater. Hissed at by superior people, stoned by the vulgar, they find that intellectual honesty is not a paying career, yet good and true men have had to submit to this treatment. Bradlaugh, prematurely aged by his fight for liberty, saw honours showered on men not fit to black his boots. Ferrer, fronting the rifles of the soldiers, had to find his reward in his own conscience. Foote had to listen to the mocking voice of the Roman Catholic judge telling him that he had devoted his great talents to the service of the devil, yet, in their hours of apparent failure these men had triumphed. They were martyrs who missed the palm but not the pains of martyrdom; heroes without the laurels, and conquerors without the jubilation of victory. They laboured not for themselves but for the world and coming generations.

MIMNERMUS.

## The Meaning and Significance of Freethought.

IN the present work, undoubtedly one of the most noteworthy the Pioneer Press has published, and which is aptly named *A Grammar of Freethought*, Mr. Chapman Cohen furnishes, in attractive literary form, a concise compendium (1) of the meaning and various aspects of Freethought considered as a principle, and (2), the opinion on the chief subjects of human interest held by the bulk of those who go to form the secularist movement in its party sense. It is important to distinguish the two things. "For," as Mr. Cohen excellently puts it (p. 57),—

his (the Freethinker's) social value does not lie wholly in the fact of his opinions being sound or his judgment impeccable. Mere revolt or heresy can never carry that assurance with it. The important thing about the rebel is that he represents a spirit, a temper, in the absence of which society would stagnate.



Mr. Cohen further justly says:—

That man should have the courage to revolt against the thing which he believes to be wrong is of infinitely greater consequence than that he should be right in condemning the thing against which he revolts. Whether the rebel is right or wrong time and consequence alone can tell, but nothing can make good the evil of a community reduced to sheep-like acquiescence in whatever may be imposed upon them.

All of that portion of the book dealing with Freethought as a principle will be heartily endorsed by every Freethinker whatever his positive opinions may be, and so far as our experience goes this truth has never been better stated.

Freethought stands for the honest basis of opinion on evidence such as is present to the mind of the thinker, and for the moral duty of every man to follow the pursuit of truth in this sense, unbiased by authority, tradition, expediency or any other consideration which may tempt him to swerve from the acceptance of a reasoned conviction, and from the candid expression of such conviction. In Chapter V. Mr. Cohen well shows the influence of the Christian Churches and sects in warping the minds of children by producing what is called a "religious atmosphere" round the child. The aim is to create an environment which shall mould the child's mind not to accept evidence, fact, or thought-out conviction, but "in a manner which is favourable to the aims and teachings of the Christian Church." The object of the old "institutional" religions is "to keep the modern mind as backward as possible in order that it may rest content with a teaching that is reminiscent of a past stage of civilization." It is needless to say that our author is justly severe on the utility-theory of religion, on the Deity in his capacity of big policeman up-above, and the effect of the rewards and punishments postulated by "religion," as influencing the conduct of human beings. In his excellent last chapter on "What is to follow religion?" he observes (p. 229):—

The impotency of religion in matters of conduct is, too, decisively shown in the fact that it is quite impossible to arrange men and women in a scale of values that shall correspond with the kind or the fervency of their religious beliefs.

And again:—

No business man would ever think of making a man's religion the condition of taking one in his service, or if he did the general opinion would be that it indicated bigotry and not shrewdness.

The word religion as used by Mr. Cohen is, of course, synonymous as regards modern times with what is called "institutional" religion, as based on belief in the supernatural. Up to quite recently it must be admitted the word "religion" was used mainly in this sense. Lately, however, there has been a tendency to extend its meaning to include any far-reaching ideal. Such an ideal is said to be a man's "religion." Mr. Cohen objects to this extension of the meaning of the word. For him it should be retained exclusively for organized belief based on theories respecting the supernatural. He sees no purpose in employing it in any other connection. Here, the present writer must beg leave to differ from him.

We will not lay too much stress on the popular etymology of the word from *religare* as employing merely a binding influence. But we are convinced, in any case, that the extension of the definition of the word religion to include an ideal object in life, social or personal, has its justification. Let us take one of the instances from the book before us, and objected to by Mr. Cohen, viz., the phrase "the religion of Socialism." Now "Socialism" has two distinct connotations. It may mean a purely economic change, from the municipalization of gas and water to the com-

plete socialization of the means of production, or it may mean a body of aspiration for which the economic change *per se* is but the material condition, to wit, the realization of a higher social life in general. In this latter sense it includes, among other things, much of the *Weltansicht* covered by Freethought as expounded by Mr. Cohen. In this sense I would speak of Socialism as a religion, which in the sense of municipal gas and water (or for that matter of any purely economic proposition taken by itself alone) it is not. The ideal of a higher social life, of which the economic change is the indispensable vehicle, is what constitutes the "Religion" of Socialism as distinguished from the "Economics" of Socialism as such. The distinction seems to be a valid one, and "Religion" the most suitable word to represent it. It need not take so very long for the term to shed the supernatural associations it has suggested until lately.

In the chapter on Evolution there is much interesting matter of argument. A good many will dissent, however, from Mr. Cohen's statement that evolution "has nothing whatsoever to do with progress," which smacks, to our thinking, rather too much of the recent attacks on the notion of progress from different and even opposite quarters, e.g., Dean Inge and Professor Bury. Surely evolution means the realization of the possibilities inherent in the nature of that which evolves. And surely such a realization means progress. This differentiates growth or evolution from mere change. If the change is not in the direction indicated, it has either no ulterior significance at all or it has the opposite significance, viz., that of decay or disintegration. Needless to say, this does not invalidate Mr. Cohen's just strictures on the importation of the idea of a ready-made plan or aim as being implied in the evolutionary process. Again, many will consider the purely mechanical theory of evolution which Mr. Cohen seems to advocate as inadequate and hence misleading as regards, at least, the higher forms of evolution. Life, organic animal or social, as is widely recognized now, cannot be adequately reduced to terms of mechanism in its final explanation, as the older materialists attempted. To speak philosophically, life requires for its interpretation categories different from those adequate for dealing with inorganic matter.

It may here be noted that Mr. Cohen while he says many excellent things on the subject of social evolution seems to us to fail in recognizing the importance of the economic factor in social, political, and intellectual changes. The present writer, in common with his friend the late H. M. Hyndman, has repeatedly insisted that the school of strict Marxists has always laid too much stress upon economics to the exclusion of the psychological and other factors, but our author seems to us to err in the opposite direction, that of *underemphasizing* the effect, direct and indirect, of economic conditions in moulding social and intellectual life.

We quite agree with Mr. Cohen in repudiating the use of the word Agnostic as applied to Theism or any form of theological dogma. On the other hand, we should be inclined to admit it in connection with certain other matters where it seems our author would adopt a more severely negative attitude, e.g., "telepathy," and some of the problems coming under the head of what is known as "psychical research." We cannot be agnostic in matters inconsistent with plain inference from well-known and admitted fact or involving patent absurdity. No Freethinker, for example, could possibly be agnostic on the subject (say) of the "real presence." But when no direct and manifest absurdity is involved, but the theory or alleged fact is based on inadequate evidence, i.e., evidence insufficient to establish positive conviction in the average reasonable and cultivated mind, there the expression "agnostic"



would seem to be in place. These distinctions in the "grammar of assent" (or denial) are not altogether unimportant for the education of the mind in just reasoning.

But enough of criticism, even friendly criticism, where there is so much good material stated with a logical and convincing force that no Freethinker can fail to appreciate and no opponent can refute. It may be mentioned that the writer of this review has read certain portions of the present book more than once, and that in every case a re-reading has created an impression of greater strength than the first perusal, alike as regards literary style and mode of statement. We can, therefore, heartily recommend this little book of 240 pages as eminently suitable from its popular character to be placed in the hands of young people, especially those who are likely to come under the influence of the propaganda of the Catholic Church, the most dangerous and insidious of all the Christian sects of the day, owing to its apparent attraction for a certain type of religious mind which is no longer amenable to the blandishments of Calvinism, Methodism, or the old "Evangelicalism" generally.

There are not wanting signs that the final struggle of Freethought with the Christian religion will be fought out on the Christian side under the banner of Roman Catholicism, for the indications are becoming more and more frequent every year and every month that the old dogmatic Protestant sects are disintegrating rapidly of themselves. We would, in conclusion, especially recommend to the young and inchoate Christian Mr. Chapman Cohen's concluding chapter, already referred to, notably, the remarks on pp. 234-5, anent the purely individualistic outlook of Christian morality and its cant of self-sacrifice as though the latter were an end in itself, together with its corresponding hostility, or at best, indifference, to reform or revolution in the interests of social justice and of human mundane well-being and happiness.

E. BELFORT BAX.

## Immortality.

People sing now in the churches :—  
O paradise! O paradise!  
'Tis weary waiting here;  
I long to be where Jesus is,  
To feel, to see Him near.

And yet not one of them but will battle earnestly with death, and spend time and money lavishly to ward off his assault!—*Dr. Knighton, "Struggles for Life,"* 1888, p. 90.

I know of but few Christians so convinced of the splendour of the rooms in their Father's house as to be happier when their friends are called to those mansions than they would have been had the Queen sent for them to live at Court; nor has the Church's most ardent desire "to depart and be with Christ" ever cured it of the singular habit of putting on mourning for every person summoned to such departure.—*John Ruskin, cited by Dr. Knighton, Ibid.,* p. 90.

ANY person of middle-age who will examine the present status of belief in a future life will recognize that it occupies a very different position from that it occupied fifty years ago. If the same rate of progress continues during the next hundred years this belief will become as extinct as the Dodo among civilized people.

This progress has not been achieved suddenly; like all true and abiding progress it has been gradual. Like the belief in witchcraft and hell it is not dying because of any particular new discoveries in science, it is dying of inanition because the soil and the environment will no longer support it. It belongs to the

supernatural, and the supernatural is being slowly but surely eliminated.

Professor Osler, the famous physician, divided modern society into three groups upon this question. The majority who, while accepting the belief in immortality along with the phrases and forms of the prevailing religion,—

live practically uninfluenced by it, except in so far as it ministers to a wholesale dissonance between the inner and the outer life, and diffuses an atmosphere of general insincerity. A second group, larger, perhaps, than ever before in history, put the supernatural altogether out of man's life, and regard the hereafter as only one of the many inventions he has sought out for himself.<sup>1</sup>

A third group, "ever small and select," still hold, by the anchor of faith, to this ancient belief. "Practical indifference," says the same author, "is the modern attitude of mind," and he asks:—

Where, among the educated and refined, much less among the masses, do we find any ardent desire for a future life? It is not a subject of drawing-room conversation, and the man whose habit it is to button-hole his acquaintances and inquire earnestly after their souls is shunned like the Ancient Mariner.<sup>2</sup>

And further, continues Professor Osler:—

If among individuals we find little but indifference to this great question, what shall we say to the national and public sentiment? Immortality, and all that it may mean, is a dead issue in the great movements of the world. In the social and political forces what account is taken by practical men of any eternal significance in life? Does it ever enter into the consideration of those controlling the destinies of their fellow-creatures that this life is only a preparation for another? To raise the question is to raise a smile.<sup>3</sup>

As for the craving for a future existence, it is quite artificial and the result of the teachings inculcated during childhood. The many millions of Buddhists are not taught to believe in a future life, and, therefore, have no craving for it. John Stuart Mill observed:—

It seems to me not only possible, but probable, that in a higher, and above all a happier, condition of human life, not annihilation but immortality may be the burdensome idea; and that human nature, though pleased with the present, and by no means impatient to quit it, would find comfort and not sadness in the thought that it is not chained through eternity to a conscious existence which it cannot be assured that it will always wish to preserve.<sup>4</sup>

John Addington Symonds, one of the most cultured minds of the age, writing to Henry Sidgwick, declared that he did not wish to see immortality irrefragably demonstrated. His words are:—

Until that immortality of the individual is irrefragably demonstrated, the sweet, the immeasurably precious hope of ending with this life, and the languor of existence, remains open to burdened human personalities.

Professor Leuba, in his valuable work *The Belief in God and Immortality*, from which the last quotation is taken, observes:—

Not only is it true that a certain number of believers do not desire immortality, but a relatively considerable number of unbelievers, and, perhaps, a few believers, abhor the idea of endless continuation.

Many instances of marked dislike for immortality have been recorded. Professor Leuba gives several in-

<sup>1</sup> Osler, *Science and Immortality*, 1906, pp. 16-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>4</sup> J. S. Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, 1904, p. 56.



stances, one of a man twenty years of age, a member of the Presbyterian Church, who writes:—

I have thought about immortality considerably, but it does not cause me any uneasiness at all. I shall be content to die, absolutely dead and pass off into nothing—beautiful, blessed, peaceful nothing—when I die. Of course, I love life, and shall live with a vim as long as I can, but I do not desire to live for ever. I want to be unconscious, and not even know that it is "I" who am resting.

Another of a college student, who says:—

For some cause which I do not know how to explain, I feel a great dread of the possibility of having to live for ever, or even again. If I could be certain that at death I would find oblivion it would add greatly to my present happiness.<sup>5</sup>

When we also take into consideration the millions of votaries of eastern religions who have no belief and no craving for a future life we can see that the belief is a purely artificial one, due to early training.

The clergy profess to be much concerned as to the moral effect of the loss of belief in immortality. They say that if men lose the belief in a future life, in which virtue is rewarded and evil punished, then there will be no incentive to live a moral life and immorality will prevail. But, as we have seen, a large proportion of the earth's inhabitants in India, China, and Japan have no such belief, and yet they do not rob and slay one another. There are even European scholars who have lived among them who declare that their morality is higher than ours. As Professor Leuba remarks:—

Who does not feel the absurdity of the opinion that the lavish care for a sick child by a mother is given because of a belief in God and immortality? Are love of father and mother on the part of children, affection and serviceableness between brothers and sisters, straightforwardness and truthfulness between business men essentially dependent upon these beliefs? What sort of person would be the father who would announce divine punishment or reward in order to obtain the love and respect of his children? And if there are business men preserved from unrighteousness by the fear of future punishment, those who are deterred by the threat of human law, are far more numerous. Most of them would take their chances with heaven a hundred times before they would once with society, or perchance with the imperative voice of humanity heard in the conscience.<sup>6</sup>

As an illustration of the manner in which men deceive themselves as to the motives governing their actions we may cite the experience of an Oxford philosopher, who tells us:—

Many people who reason about Ethics for the first time are convinced at an early stage by the specious arguments of those who hold that pleasure is the only good, and the only possible object of human desire. I remember with what excitement I was myself converted to this view, and set about life in a new spirit, believing that I had knocked the bottom out of virtue, and need not bother myself any more about being unselfish; for was not all unselfishness just a somewhat peculiar method of getting pleasure? It was something of a shock to find that my new convictions did not in practice make the slightest difference. I went on acting in precisely the same way as before, and was not noticeably worse in point of conduct than I had been in the days when I still thought there was some virtue in being good.<sup>7</sup>

Just in the same manner people who discard the religious sanctions for morality discover that the laws of morality do not depend upon religion, but spring from the social life of the community. W. MANN.

<sup>5</sup> Leuba, *The Belief in God and Immortality*, 1921, pp. 296-7

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321.

<sup>7</sup> G. E. M. Joad, *Common-Sense Ethics*, 1921, pp. 12-3.

## Acid Drops.

There are reported to have been over ten thousand "conversionists" in the course of the present epidemic of religious insanity in Scotland. It is not by any means all Scotland, although to read some of the accounts one would imagine that there were very few folk in Scotland who are not giving themselves to Jesus. And it appears that anyone who gets up and raves about "the Lord," and burns his tobacco pouch, or behaves in some semi-insane manner is converted. So far as the people affected are concerned there is little or nothing to be said. Those who are suffering from a delusion are the sufferers and their plight deserves treating with all sympathy. But we are on a different level when we come to those who are not suffering. Here there should be understanding and treatment, not as we actually find, misunderstanding and exploitation. And when we find a paper of the standing of the *Daily Telegraph* treating this outbreak as though it were something essentially different from any other epidemic delusion, one is left wondering whether its comments are dictated by fear of speaking the truth about the matter or an expression of sheer ignorance. Probably it is a mixture of both.

Let us suppose that instead of the outbreak assuming the form of appeals to Jesus these same fishermen had manifested a belief that their bad season's fishing was due to the agency of witches, that they had actually seen some visions of the Devil at work fouling their nets and driving away the fish, and that they had set themselves to work to drive out the suspected witches. All of these things have happened in the past, and the annals of Scottish religion will provide plenty of illustrations. Would the *Daily Telegraph* then have written as it does? There is not the slightest doubt but that it would have written of it as an outbreak of sheer insanity, and would have prescribed medical and other treatment as a means of removing it. What we should like to know is in what respect this outbreak, this particular epidemic, differs from the witch mania, the dancing mania, the flagellation mania, and the other manias that have from time to time smitten uneducated and ill-balanced people? From a certain type of clergyman we expect nothing but that they will make the most of these things. The genuine ones are much on the mental level of savages, and the rogues among them are ready to exploit anything that promises to serve their purpose. But from one of our leading daily papers one expects better things—or at least one would expect better things if one did not know the type of mind that goes to the conduct of the ordinary press.

We see there is a suggestion that the outbreak of epidemic religious insanity in Scotland shall be extended to London. We have no doubt but that if some of these revivalists make the attempt they will find in London a number of mentally unstable people who will behave much the same as the Scotch fishermen are reported to have behaved. Once the pattern is set there will always be a certain number of people who will play up to it. This is true not alone of religion but of everything else. It is a simple case of suggestion acting on an unstable character. Students of mental pathology are quite familiar with the phenomenon, and that is the reason why the proper place for the study of these outbreaks is not the Chapel but the laboratory. Those religious persons who live on these particular outbreaks, and those journalists who write them up as a manifestation of "an unseen power," etc., are exhibiting either their ignorance or their rascality.

Pastor Fred Clark, one of the leading spirits in this outbreak of revivalistic dementia, has been preaching in Edinburgh, and at one of his meetings he is reported in the *Daily Telegraph* of December 24 as saying: "In a cry to God last night I said, 'God take hold of the reporters and see that no false reports get abroad.' He answered—as you will see in the Press this morning." It is interesting to know that "God" is on such familiar terms with Pastor Clark, and not less interesting to find



him directing Pastor Clark's attention to the Press of that morning's date. It shows that God Almighty does keep himself up-to-date. Or perhaps it is that there is a heavenly press-cutting agency which keeps the celestial authorities well informed as to what goes on in Fleet Street. In that case, may we venture to direct their attention to the *Freethinker*. We don't know how to address copies or we would see that Peter was put on the free list. But we like the formula used by God to Pastor Clark, "See in the Press this morning." Presently we may find prayers answered in the same manner. "See answer to John Smith, April 1, 1922," or some other reference that will express the heavenly intention.

According to the Bishop of London, Church finance is in a bad way, and the clergy are "starving." In spite of this £640,000 has been subscribed towards the Welsh Church Fund.

During the evening service at St. Matthew's Church, Cheltenham, a man in the congregation died suddenly. Had it been a Freethought lecture, the finger of Providence would have been traced in the event.

The clergy sometimes say things worth noting. Canon Meyrick, of Norwich, declares that "the picture palace has come to stay, probably to outlast the bishop's palace." This sounds like a true prophecy.

The lectures of Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd in the Rhondda Valley seem to have disturbed Christians considerably. Some special lectures were arranged to remove the impression made, and then Dr. Ballard was brought down to do some more removing. A writer in the *Methodist Times* says:—

Mr. Cohen seems to have a large following, and his attacks on Christianity have impressed some who were in the habit of attending religious worship. The matter was considered so serious that the Superintendent Minister engaged the Workmen's Hall after Mr. Lloyd's and Mr. Cohen's meetings and spoke on the same subjects, and in the judgment of many gave very effective answers.

After that Dr. Ballard arrived on the scene and gave eight lectures, and he gave "the church-going people the impression that the Secularists can be and have been effectively answered." It is, perhaps, an unimportant detail that the Secularists were answered in their absence. If Dr. Ballard ever ventured on the same effort in their presence a different impression might be produced. But Dr. Ballard is not likely, from all we hear, to do anything so rash. Fighting at a distance is considerably safer.

There is nothing that quite comes up to genuine religion for rousing the temper. Before the Kingston Bench the other day a domestic servant, a Roman Catholic, complained that her mistress had pushed her across the kitchen, and then her master came into the kitchen and struck her on the shoulder. The girl said they had been having an argument about religion, her employers being Protestants. We think the girl was lucky that nothing worse happened. A Roman Catholic and a Protestant arguing about religion holds all the material for a first-class tragedy. And as Mr. Justice Avory would say, the first impulse of anyone worthy of being called a man on hearing his religion spoken about disrespectfully would be to give the speaker a thrashing. If on the Bench it would be to give him nine months' hard labour. But we are not all on the Bench, and so the lay Christian has no other way of showing how deep and how genuine are his religious feelings save by engaging in a fight. And there can be no depth about a religion that does not lead us to want to murder those we disagree with.

The *Daily Sketch* quotes a saying by a Mr. A. E. Boydell that "sentiment is unknown in business." The gentleman has overlooked the gospel-shops.

"It doesn't make much difference to one's happiness whether he has £2,000 or £200 a year," says the Bishop of Lincoln. It is curious, however, that the bishops all prefer four-figure salaries.

The late Canon Hitchcock, of Worthing, left estate of the value of £20,856, and the late Dean Patterson, of Canterbury, left £21,224. Both these distinguished ecclesiastics will miss the joys of Paradise.

There is trouble over the action of the Church Missionary Society in Bangalore. In order not to offend Hindus and Mohammedans hymn books and prayerbooks have been issued from which the name and work of Christ are omitted. It certainly does seem a little curious, but we are so used to Christians trimming this way and that way that nothing need surprise one very much. But one would like to know what the Missionary Society is really doing in Bangalore, and in what way they justify their action. We should ourselves not have so much fault to find with Christians in this country if they dropped all talk of Jesus Christ, God, a future life and one or two other minor matters. And it may yet come to that.

One of our readers sent a strongly worded letter of protest to both the *Daily News* and the *Daily Herald* on the subject of the blasphemy prosecution. Neither paper would insert it. He has forwarded the letter to us for reprinting if we see fit. We should be quite ready to do this, but we have so much waiting for insertion that we are unable to do so. And we are loth to take up our small space with repetition. In these columns it would not be new. In the *Daily News* and the *Daily Herald* it would have done good. But these papers have their limitations.

The Church of England paper *The Challenge* suggests that it would be a good thing if Holy Communion could be taken in the evening as well as in the morning. It seems that people will not get up early in order to feast—symbolically or otherwise—on the body and blood of Jesus, but they might be induced to take it as an evening relaxation. Might we suggest that small parcels might be prepared and posted to those who require the wafer and wine. The Communion by post might prove attractive. *The Challenge* also suggests that the reason why marriages were celebrated early in the day was in order to avoid drunken persons Communicating. If it were not for Justice Avory we would suggest that being drunk is the only sound excuse for anyone taking the Communion at any time. But that might be called blasphemy, and so we refrain from making the suggestion. We do not care to run risks of having nine months in order to meditate on the beauties of the Christian faith and of Christian brotherhood.

Writing to the *Daily Mail* the Chairman of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals advocated flogging as a punishment for brutality. Evidently, this Royal Society has not yet recognized man as "the paragon of animals."

The chapel attached to St. Peter's, Eaton Square, London, has been sold and will be made into a cinema theatre. This is a conversion which will not bring hallelujahs to the lips of the faithful.

A newspaper headline reads: "Madman at St. Peter's, Rome." It did not refer to the Pope. Papa is sane enough, but one of the ignorant faithful imagined that he was a new Messiah.

Here is a good child's story. A little girl was afraid of the dark. "Darling," said her mother, "don't be frightened. When mamma takes away the candle Jesus is in the room." "Oh, mummy," wailed the young hopeful, "can't you take Jesus away, and leave the candle?"

**WHY NOT HAND THIS COPY TO A LIKELY**



## The Blasphemy Case.

THERE is nothing new to add this week as to the progress of the blasphemy case. The date of the hearing in the Appeal Court is not yet fixed, but it will probably come on about January 16. Under the surface a great deal of attention is being excited, and we are missing no opportunity of keeping the interest alive. Every endeavour will be exerted to make this a fight to a finish, and the approaching general election will enable us to see what can be done on the political side. Some of our friends are doing good service by their letters to the public press, and we wish all would follow their example. We think something might be done in the shape of getting the names of those liberal minded members of the clergy who realize the indignity of calling in a policeman to the help of their religion. There may be more of these clergymen than one thinks. And friends should continue to bombard the Home Secretary with resolutions and letters.

We continue to receive notice of resolutions passed in favour of the repeal of the Blasphemy laws. Three just to hand are from the Liverpool, Fulham and South Shields Branches of the N. S. S. But we believe more have been passed by outside societies of which we have received no information. We should like twice as many of these passed if possible.

We are glad to see the following in the *Methodist Times* for December 22 :—

Unless wise and speedy action is taken, a man will spend Christmas in an English prison whose detention is a grave reflection on the Christian religion. John William Gott has been sentenced to nine months' hard labour for blasphemy. The weakness of the case is indicated by the fact that the first jury disagreed, and the second jury brought in a verdict of "guilty" with a recommendation to mercy on the ground that Gott did not realize the gravity of his offence.....The foolish publications which Gott was selling are well-known to Christian Evidence lecturers, and if a man in a public place persists in utterances which may pollute the minds of children and young people who are passing by, some means must be exerted to deal with him. But that means must not be a brutal sentence on an illiterate man. The law of blasphemy is an anachronism, stating as it does, that "every publication is blasphemous which contains matter relating to God, Jesus Christ, the Bible, or the book of Common Prayer, intended to wound the feelings of mankind, or to excite contempt or hatred against the Church of England as by law established, or to promote immorality." Such a law imposes a special obligation on Anglicans to deal with this pitiful case. But Nonconformists also might find time amidst their happy Christmas festivities to send a letter to the Home Secretary asking that the case of this prisoner whom Christianity has bound shall be immediately reconsidered.

We congratulate the *Methodist Times* on this deliverance, although there is at least one suggestion in it against which we must offer a word of protest. There was not the slightest suggestion in the case that Mr. Gott was saying things that polluted the minds of anyone, young or old. His offence was that he had published jokes at the expense of Christianity. But there was no suggestion of indecency or moral "pollution" in the case. What he did publish would have been quite all right against any subject other than Christianity.

But Mr. Gott has spent Christmas in prison, and has had still further leisure to reflect upon the fact that his opinion of the character of the Christian religion was quite borne out by what our contemporary calls the "brutal sentence" of Justice Avory. But there is still time for Christians to take the advice given and bombard the Home Secretary with letters on the subject. And there is still the Court of Appeal which has to express its opinion on the subject. When that opinion is given, and having carefully studied Justice Avory during the whole of the two trials, we shall be able to say more upon both the sentence and the judge.

It is not at all a bad thing now and then to see ourselves as others see us. The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (December 27), referring to the Gott blasphemy case, says that it would almost fain forget that people were everywhere celebrating the birth of "the gentle Saviour."

These instruments of propaganda cannot have been

very offensive, for the first jury, doubtless composed of honourable and virtuous Englishmen, could not agree, and the second recommended the prisoner to mercy. There is no intimation that the Home Secretary approved of the prosecution. The English people pride themselves on their solicitude for justice, and that this solicitude needs no codified legal system is an added commendation. The reverse side of this state of affairs appears whenever an antiquated, half-forgotten law is revived. The verdict in this case affords occasion for noting that only the Anglican State Church and its ordinances enjoy police protection in England, whose Mohammedan subjects far outnumber those of the Christian faith. You may, with impunity, throw as many defamatory libels as you like at Allah and the gods of the Indian Pantheon.

This remark of our Swiss contemporary is very true; but perhaps the Christians think that where their God is concerned the old legal maxim applies, "The greater the truth, the greater the libel."

With regard to funds. I think we shall require at least another £70 or £80 to see us through. It must be remembered that there will have been three cases—two in the Criminal Court and one to come in the Appeal Court—and members of the bar do not work for nothing. They belong to the closest trade union in the world and demand full fees for each appearance. Upton Sinclair said that the reason why there was more "graft" in America than here was because in America there was no other way of public men getting the money. In this country "graft" is legalized in the various institutions, and men get it by established processes. One day we may bring our law charges within reasonable limits, at present we must grin and pay up, or allow ourselves to be trampled on.

It is quite clear that our friends do not wish us to allow this, nor have we any intention in that direction. This spirit is clearly shown by Mr. W. B. Columbine who, enclosing a second subscription of £20 says: "I trust you will be successful. In any case I think it is good policy to fight these prosecutions to the last ditch. It will tend to make the authorities think twice before they again set the abominable blasphemy laws in motion." Mr. H. Jessop, enclosing a second cheque of £25, wishes us every success in our "glorious fight for freedom of speech." Most others who have written express the same spirit, and we hope, even after the appeal is disposed of, to set going an agitation that will go a long way towards wiping out these disgraceful laws. If the legal expenses are over-subscribed the balance will be spent on this object.

The following is a list of subscriptions to date :—  
 Previously acknowledged, £306 5s. J. N. Hill, 5s.; R. Gibbon (second subscription), £3; J. Gallery, 5s.; W. Mck., 5s.; John's Grandpa, £1; R. H. Side, £1; E. D. Side, £1; Arthur Forbes, 5s.; W. Hill, 2s. 6d.; G. Oakley, 5s.; Mr. and Mrs. Neate (second subscription), £1; H. L., £1; S. (Pontwedyndd), 5s.; J. Farmer, 2s. 6d.; Mrs. B. Bayfield, 15s.; W. Bailey, £1; J. Brodie, 3s.; J. Molyneaux, 2s.; D. Leyland, 2s.; T. Pate, 2s.; A Friend, 1s.; John Hayes, 2s. 6d.; L. E. Singer, 3s.; F. Wood, 10s.; J. Dean (Dundee), £1; C. E. Hooper, £1; F. Porter, £2; Roger Anderton, 10s.; A few Dundee Friends, per D. Gloak, £1 10s.; W. P. Rudd, £1 1s.; B. J. Rudd, 5s.; C. Rudd, £1 1s.; W. Baldie, 1s.; Mathematicus, 10s.; R. Young, 10s.; T. C. Riglin (second subscription), 1s.; J. Shipp, 10s.; The Bindle Club, 10s.; J. Lazarnick, 10s.; J. Harvey and W. Napier, per J. Robertson, 7s. 6d.; per Glasgow Branch N. S. S., £5 11s. 6d.; Tom Love, 2s. 6d.; F. W. Theobald, 5s.; G. C. Saphin, 10s.; W. Challis (third subscription), 5s.; W. B. Columbine (second subscription), £20; H. Jessop (second subscription), £25; Gippovic, 3s.; J. Boston, 2s.; J. Kelsey, 2s.; Apoxymenos, £5; J. W. Arnott, £1 2s. 6d.; F. Cox, J. Adams, J. Williams, G. Strickland, £1; D. Gordon, 2s. 6d.; V. Phelps, 15s.; "Atheist," 8s. 6d.; Thomas Dixon, £1 1s.; R. Terroni, 12s. 6d.; W. Stewart, 1s.; "Labor Temps Viendra," 2s. 6d.; E. Whitehorn, £2; M. Morris, £1; R. H., 2s. 6d.; M. Blakeman, 2s. 6d.; G. G. (second subscription), 5s.; G. L. Alward, £1; Mr. Barnard (second subscription), 2s. 6d.  
 Total—£397 6s.

Are all your Mosques, Episcopal Churches, Pagodas, Chapels of Ease, Tabernacles, and Pantheons, anything else but the Ethnic forecourt of the Invisible Temple and its Holy of Holies.—*Richter*.

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## C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements

January 8, Stratford Town Hall; January 15, Swansea; January 22, Stratford Town Hall; January 29, Stockport; February 5, Birmingham; February 19, Glasgow; March 5, Nottingham; March 12, Manchester; March 19, Leicester.

## To Correspondents.

J. BRODIE AND F. WOOD.—Thanks for collections made on behalf of Blasphemy Defence Fund.

MRS. B. BAYFIELD.—Doubtless if, as you say, a hundred people in each district could be induced to organize and sell any pamphlet prosecuted as blasphemous in the district in which the prosecution took place, it would speedily teach the authorities a lesson. But it would have to be well and carefully organized, and it would need funds to a considerable extent in case of eventualities. For it is no use starting a campaign and stopping half-way. Fining yourself 5s. for not sending earlier is a very gratifying form of penitence.

J. FARMER.—Have noted the subjects for March 5.

G. OAKLEY.—Glad to learn that the *Freethinker* has been of so much assistance to you. We shall be repaid by your introducing the paper to others. There is always a new reader waiting round the corner if one only looks for him.

A. ERNST.—Thanks for paper containing notice of the blasphemy trial. It must strike intelligent Germans as a fine satire to find after all our lavish talk of fighting a war to win the peace of the world the same people reviving religious persecution under the guise of regard for public decency. Still, there are many Christians who are getting heartily ashamed of these laws, and one day we shall succeed in getting them abolished.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges: W. Stewart, 2s.; T. Saunders, 5s.

W. RUDD.—You are one on whom we can always depend, early or late. We shall very soon announce a closing date for the Defence Fund, perhaps next week. It will not be continued after the end of January, and the sooner it does end the better.

F. M. LEWISON.—Your notice for the Leeds Branch for January 1 did not reach us early enough for publication owing to the holidays. We had to go to press twice during the week ending December 24. Printers will not work over Christmas, and some of them will not work between one Christmas and the next.

E. D. SIDE.—We only did our duty in taking on what you describe as "an uphill task." Pleased to have your appreciation all the same. Our regards to all the family.

JOHN'S GRANDPA.—We cannot succeed much beyond the support that is given us. It is the feeling that we have the Freethought Party solidly behind us that gives us confidence in the work.

W. J.—Thanks for new year's wishes. We will try and bear your advice in mind about not overdoing it. But when work *must* be done it must be, and there's an end on't.

E. MANLEY.—We hardly think the sermon worthy of a special article, but it may afford material for a paragraph or two.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.—Not surprised at your news. We will forward covers so soon as we receive them, which will be about the end of January when we expect to have the bound volumes of the *Freethinker* for 1921 ready.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Sugar Plums.

To-day (January 8) Mr. Cohen gives the first of a series of three lectures at the Town Hall, Stratford. In view of the recent blasphemy prosecution emanating from West Ham he is taking for his subject "Free Speech and the Blasphemy Laws." Perhaps before long the very pious police inspector who initiated the prosecution will discover that he has gone quite the wrong way to work to stop people bringing religion into contempt. And in the intervals of laughing at his ridiculous attempts at acting as Defender of the Faith we shall all feel that Christianity is even more ridiculous than it was as a consequence of his efforts. Admission is free to the lecture, which commences at 7. We hope that Inspector Elphick will be present. The only other person we should dearly like to have there is Justice Avory.

Next Sunday (January 15) Mr. Cohen visits Swansea. He will lecture in the Elysium, High Street, at 7 on the "Foundations of Faith." Admission is free, but there will be reserved seats at 1s. and 6d.

Arrangements are being made by the National Secular Society's Executive for the holding of a public meeting demanding the repeal of the Blasphemy laws. The meeting will be held in the South Place Institute on Wednesday evening, January 18, and we sincerely hope that all London Freethinkers will do their best to see that the hall is crowded on that occasion. If we can manage we ought to see that this is the last agitation for the repeal of these laws, which means that we must keep the agitation going until the vile things are swept out of existence. And it is for Freethinkers to show that they are in deadly earnest about the matter.

The list of speakers for the meeting is not yet complete but it looks as though it will be a very striking and catholic one. They will probably include the Rev. Walter Walsh, Rev. Stewart Headlam, Miss Maud Royden, Mr. Joseph McCabe, Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, Colonel Arthur Lynch, Mr. George Lansbury, Mr. B. T. Hall, Mrs. Seton Tiedermann, with others well known in the ranks of liberal Christianity and the reform world. It will be a platform that could hardly be got together on any other subject to-day, and will be something to be remembered. Next week we hope to be able to publish a full list. Meanwhile, we beg all our friends to make a note of the date, and to send to Miss Vance for a supply of the slips advertising the meeting.

We can only give brief quotations from a few of the letters received, but we will give more next week. That fine advocate of genuine freedom, Mr. Halley Stewart, writes, as a staunch Nonconformist, "The Blasphemy laws being themselves blasphemous against humanity and not only criminal as well as blasphemous because of the fact that they legalize iniquity, I am in full accord with those who are anxious to remove from the statute book laws which can be used for the suppression of religious convictions that do not in their expression offend against the welfare of society." Rev. Walter Walsh says, "By all means put me down as being willing to do anything I can to get the blasphemy laws abolished." Mr. Verinder says, although no one expected him to say anything else, "Add my name by all means to the list of those who are in favour of the repeal of the blasphemy laws." Mr. Norman Angel says that but for being out of London on the date of the meeting he would certainly have been present at the South Place meeting. Colonel Lynch hopes that this time it will be a fight to a finish. Miss Royden writes: "Please add my name to the list of those who desire the abolition of the blasphemy laws." The Hon. John Collier says he will endeavour to be at the meeting, but, "in any case you can give my name as a supporter of the movement for the abolition of the blasphemy laws." Mr. E. S. P. Haynes writes, "I am quite ready to support your movement"; again, what one would expect from the author of *Religious Persecution*.



Finally, for the present, the Rev. Stewart Headlam says, "I have now for many years maintained that they (blasphemy laws) are a scandal." We shall give more next week. But it looks as though the promise we made privately to some of those who initiated the prosecution that we would make them sorry they began will be made good. We *must* make the bigots pay.

Friends who can guarantee to be present at the meeting for the repeal of the blasphemy laws to be held at South Place on January 17 will be able to give valuable assistance by offering their services as stewards, as a crowded meeting is expected. They need not necessarily be members of the N. S. S. A post-card, giving name and address, sent to the General Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, 62 Farringdon Street, E.C. 4, will enable her to call a meeting for the allocation of their duties.

The Secretary of the North London Branch desires us to call attention to the opening of their Spring Session at the St. Pancras Reform Club. An attractive syllabus has been drawn up, copies of which can be obtained by application to the office. For further particulars see Guide Notice.

At the Trades Hall, Cricklewood Lane, Cricklewood, to-morrow at 9 p.m., Mr. A. D. McLaren will address the members of the Associated Engineers' Union on "The Workers and the Freethought Movement." The subject should be of interest to the representatives of the rival claims of economic and intellectual factors to the support of the worker.

The South London Branch of the N. S. S. is holding a social this evening (January 8) at 189 Ferndale Road, Brixton, S.W. 9. No charge will be made either for admission or for refreshments.

The Birmingham Branch of the N. S. S. opens the second half of its lecture session with an address by Mr. E. Clifford Williams on "Christianity and Modern Apologetics" to-day (January 8). The address will be given in the Picture House, Station Street, at 7 p.m.

We are glad to hear that the new N. S. S. badge is giving great satisfaction. When lady members realize that a badge makes a very neat and inexpensive brooch, as well as a signal to comrades in arms, the sale, no doubt, will materially increase.

We received a new year's message which we believe our readers will learn with much gratification. By the will of the late Mr. Edward Shield, of Broughty Ferry, the *Freethinker* receives a legacy of £50. Mr. Shield was a great admirer of this paper, and although we only knew him by correspondence he was always ready to do what he could to help the paper in its work. This final remembrance of the *Freethinker* and its needs brings with it reflections far beyond the value of the legacy itself. The cheque has been duly paid into the *Freethinker* account.

At the request of the parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Batey, of North View, High Spen, their son Alan Batey was officially "named" by Mr. J. Fothergill, representing the South Shields Branch of the National Secular Society. Mr. Fothergill read the service prepared by Mrs. Annie Besant many years ago, and added a few words expressing the hope that the child would grow up true to the basic truths of Freethought, and so develop into a useful servant in the best of causes. We can only add our own fervent hope to the same end. The ceremony carries with it no pledge, save that of the parents to do their best to see that the child shall grow up with an instructed mind capable of forming an unbiased opinion upon the many problems that life will present to it.

## Prosecution for "Blasphemy."

IV.

(Concluded from page 13.)

MR. CURTIS BENNETT, addressing the jury, said it was for them as ultimate judges to say whether, on the facts, they thought that the prisoner was guilty of the very ancient offence of blasphemy. He asked them not to allow any strong views they might hold to prejudice them, but to look at the facts. He would not argue that the contents of the *Liberator* and *Rib Tickler* were in good taste or that they might not perhaps have been better put in some other language, but it was quite clear that as time had gone on the way in which blasphemy cases had been dealt with had very materially changed. Some people might think there was too much right of speaking in public places such as Trafalgar Square, while others might say that was the safety valve of the State. One could not help feeling that it was a curious thing that the Christian faith which had lasted through so many centuries, which had been attacked from all sides should, in 1921, have recourse to a Court of Justice, and to a dock, for a man who took the view that the Christian religion was not to be believed. The Christian religion was apparently the only one protected by this old common law. The Jewish faith had been attacked on every side, had no protection, and yet had resisted successfully. It was clear Mr. Gott, rightly or wrongly, did not believe in the Christian faith, and he had taken certain matters up and said "I am right in not agreeing with the Christian faith. I think that the story of Christianity is something which in the light of to-day is not a true religion." Then he took certain stories and dealt with the different points saying, "Now look at that. That cannot be true for this reason." One might in the same way, in order to prove to someone who believed in Father Christmas that no such person existed, say, "How ridiculous is this story of a man with a long white beard coming down the chimney and not getting his beard dirty." Mr. Gott's words were not well chosen and they might be vulgar literature. But the jury had to determine whether a man holding his views and attacking Christianity was doing something which was likely to cause a breach of the peace and to outrage the feelings of society. This was not a case of a man going into a public place and saying a great deal that people there would object to. These were documents which upon the face of them showed the sort of thing they contained. They showed that they were an attack upon the Christian religion and they were sold by him not given away. It would be a different matter if they were given away decked out in the guise of a tract to people coming out of church. The jury must look at it from the point of view of members of the public. If someone did not desire to read this sort of stuff he would not buy the document. It was only the person who desired to buy it for the sake of its argument that, in fact, would pay his twopence.

It was quite clear that instead of resorting, as the prosecution had, to this ancient law of blasphemy, which he suggested ought not to exist any longer owing to the progress of time, this man might have been dealt with for obstructing the highway, and was, in fact, arrested on that charge. Apparently, on a previous occasion he was told to go away and went. On this occasion the inspector, who knew what was in these documents, did not arrest him for blasphemy. When the jury asked themselves whether it was likely to cause a breach of the peace they must put this test, and they could not have a better one. Here was a man who had sold these things in large numbers to a large crowd of people in Stratford Broadway at half past seven on Saturday night. Yet he did not cause a breach of the peace. Let them test it, too, by their own views. Supposing they, not knowing what they were buying, paid twopence for such a document, would it be likely to provoke them to a breach of the peace? In this case it did not provoke a breach of the peace. All that happened was that one man said "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," and the woman said "Disgusting, disgusting."

There was another matter he desired to refer to. Sir Richard Muir had referred to one or two paragraphs which he (Mr. Curtis Bennett) suggested were in bad taste and



nothing more. One read, "He made his entry into Jerusalem like a circus clown on the back of two donkeys," and Sir Richard said that Mr. Gott was there likening our Lord to a circus clown. He was doing nothing of the kind. What he was saying was that if it was true our Lord went into Jerusalem on two donkeys he was doing a common circus trick of riding on two donkeys at once, and that particular paragraph only appeared in one of the Gospels, St. Matthew's, and was denied in the other three Gospels, which described Jesus as riding upon an ass. Mr. Gott was not likening Him to a circus clown, but was saying that if that was true it would be the act of a circus clown, that it was an impossible thing that could have happened.

These matters were not in good taste, but they had to look at the class of man they were dealing with. People in different classes of society used different language to make their point. People in all classes of society did not use the best language in trying to show their fellow human beings what was wrong with their opinions.

They must remember this was an important case not only to the man in the dock but on the law of blasphemy altogether. In this case it was for the prosecution to prove that a person was guilty of the offence of which he was charged. If he had been charged with obstruction it was difficult to see what the defence could have been, but he asked them to say that the prosecution had not proved the charge of blasphemy and to return a verdict of not guilty.

#### JUDGE'S SUMMING UP.

THE JUDGE: The defendant here is charged with having published on November 12 a blasphemous libel in two pamphlets, one called the *Liberator* and the other the *Rib Tickler*. It is my duty to lay down the law applicable to this particular case, and your duty to apply it to the facts of this particular case. If I am wrong in the law there is a Court of Appeal which can correct me, and I need not point out that your duty is quite irrespective of any particular religious views or convictions you may hold. If I had reason to suppose that any of you or all of you were members of the Jewish faith or were Agnostics I should still lay down the law as I am going to, and it would still be your duty to apply the law to the facts of this particular case. If the law is to be altered it must be altered by constitutional means and not by juries or anybody else saying "I will not administer that law."

It is quite true, as counsel for the defence has said, that the law of blasphemy has progressed as has the law of many other subjects. It progresses sometimes one way, sometimes the other. It sometimes becomes less strict and sometimes more strict. The law in bygone times was that any person who denied the truth of Christianity was guilty of blasphemy. In 1883 the law was laid down by the late Lord Chief Justice Coleridge in the *Queen v. Bradlaugh* and the *Queen v. Ramsey and Foote*. Anybody who knew the late Lord Chief Justice knows that he was universally recognized as a most liberal minded man, and the law he then laid down is still the law to the present day. It was recognized as being the law as late as 1917 in the House of Lords in the other case quoted, and it is this: "The mere denial of the truth of the Christian religion or the Scriptures is not enough by itself to constitute a writing a blasphemous libel so as to render the writer or publisher indictable. But indecent and offensive attacks on Christianity or the Scriptures or sacred persons or objects calculated to outrage the feelings of the general body of the community do constitute the offence of blasphemy." That same principle was adopted in the passage which has been read from the judgment of one of the Law Lords in the case in 1917 where he says: "I am of opinion that to constitute blasphemy at common law there must be such an element of vilification, ridicule, or irreverence as would be likely to exasperate the feelings of others and so lead to a breach of the peace."

Counsel argued as if he were contending that because there was no evidence of any breach of the peace having been committed at the time when these publications were being sold, therefore there was no evidence that these were blasphemous libels. It is my duty to tell you that the words "And so lead to a breach of the peace" do not mean and do not involve even the idea that there must be evidence of the peace having been broken at the time

when the publication actually takes place. The principle is exactly the same as in the case of an ordinary defamatory libel upon an individual. As you are doubt aware a defamatory libel published to an individual may be made the subject of an action claiming damages or it may be made the subject of an indictment in a criminal court, and the only ground upon which it has been laid down that it may be made the subject of an indictment is that the publication of a defamatory libel of an individual is calculated to provoke a breach of the peace. Supposing you receive by post some abominable libel on yourself—not written anonymously as so many of them are—what is your first instinct? Is it not the instinct of every man who is worthy of the name man to thrash the man or woman who has written it? That is why the law says it is calculated to provoke a breach of the peace. Of course, in our days of civilization people have learned to control their feelings and not gratify their natural instincts, and so they either bring an action for libel or prefer an indictment asking that the man should be punished for it. These words as to a blasphemous libel have exactly the same meaning, and what you have to ask yourselves is whether these words which are published in these pamphlets are, in your opinion, indecent and offensive attacks on Christianity or the Scriptures or sacred persons or bodies calculated to outrage the feelings of the general body of the community, and so lead possibly, not inevitably, to a breach of the peace. You must ask yourselves whether if a person of strong religious feelings had stopped to read this pamphlet whether his instinct might not have been to go up to the man who was selling it and give him a thrashing, or at all events, to use such language to him that a breach of the peace might have been occasioned. That is quite sufficient to justify this definition. Supposing the woman who said "Disgusting, disgusting" had been a man and had gone up to the prisoner and said "You disgusting brute, what do you mean by selling such filth?" and the prisoner retorted. You can imagine what kind of language a person who writes these things is likely to use. If he had retorted by some language that would have led to a breach of the peace then the definition would have been satisfied. You must not be misled by the argument of counsel that it is necessary, in order to constitute this offence, that the publication should lead to an immediate breach of the peace or an assault being committed by any person there and then on the man who was selling it. There are other words of the judge in a case he tried just before Ramsey and Foote in which he said what is applicable here also: "It is a question first of all whether these things are not in any point of view blasphemous libels, whether they are not calculated and intended to insult the feelings and the deepest religious convictions of the great majority of the persons amongst whom we live and if so they are not to be tolerated any more than any other nuisance is tolerated. We must not do things that are outrageous to the general feeling of propriety among the persons amongst whom we live." That being the law which you have to apply to the facts of this case you must not turn your attention to one passage only, but look at the whole of these passages which are set out in this indictment and ask yourselves whether, looked at as a whole, this is anything more than vilification and ridicule of the Christian religion and of the Scriptures. Is it in any sense argument, is it in any sense within the bounds of decent controversy on religious subjects? Is it anything more than vilification of sacred subjects and contemptuous insult?

Your attention has been called to some passages. I am not sure that it was called to a very early one in the first count which begins, "Jesus Christ had two fathers," and a little lower down you will see, "Not caring for work he turned his attention to prophesying as being simpler and easier, and persuaded twelve men who were working to down tools and follow him even as the wise men followed the star." Your attention has also been called to one on the top of the next page, "He occasionally amused himself by walking on the top of the sea, although this course is not recommended to Christians and others who cannot swim."

Counsel has just criticised the statement about making His entry into Jerusalem on the back of two donkeys, and he asked you to say that is in the nature of real con-



controversy on a disputed point as to whether our Lord rode on two donkeys or one. Was it intended to be in the nature of decent controversy to say he made his entry like a circus clown unless it was for the purpose of exciting ridicule and insult. In the second count you have a passage which would apply also to persons who are members of the Jewish faith just as much as to Christians. "Much of the Bible reads as if it had been written in a pub under the inspiration of spirits." Is that decent controversy on a religious matter, or is it mere contumely or insult? Again, there is a matter which you must consider in the light of the other passages, "Where the Bible reports Jesus as saying 'in my Father's house there are many mansions' the word mansions should read flats." You see the obvious double entendre. "Consider all the filthy sinners that have been plunged in the fountain filled with blood; there must be a dirty sediment at the bottom." Again, in the third count a little lower down, "If not a sparrow falleth to the ground but your Heavenly Father knoweth it, is He on the side of the Zeppelins?" That is not merely an insult to Christian religion, it would apply equally to Jews, that passage. The Heavenly Father is recognized by the Jews. "If Jesus were alive now would he be interned in gaol or in khaki," and the final passage on page four, "If God is everywhere can the man in the trenches say he is with God in a hell of a hole." Is that in your opinion within the bounds of decent controversy on the subject of Christian religion or the Scripture, or is it within the definition which I have given to you as to what constitutes blasphemy?

One other word only I have to say to you. Counsel for the defence has relied on the fact that these things were being sold and that it was open to anybody to pass by without buying them, it was of their own choice that they paid twopence for each of these things. That does not affect in any way the question whether they are blasphemous libels. It may affect a degree of publication. It may affect the gravity of the offence whether a man publishes these things by shouting them from the house-tops or by selling them in a street or by selling them in a shop. It does not affect the question of whether they are blasphemous libels. It may be a greater offence to shout them in the street than sell them in a street. It may be a less offence to sell them in a shop, but it does not affect the question whether they are blasphemous libels. Counsel says the people who bought them knew what they were buying, and quotes the description of one of the pamphlets as being *Rib Ticklers, or Questions for Parsons*, and therefore he says people must have known they were buying something that was irreligious, but in point of fact that particular pamphlet was enclosed in the pamphlet called the *Liberator* which is described outside simply as a journal advocating birth control, and the person who paid twopence for that upon opening it finds inside these other two things which are the subject of the indictment, one headed *God and Gott* and the other one headed *Rib Ticklers, or Questions for Parsons*. That is not disclosed until the person has bought the pamphlet and opened it. The other one is simply described on the outside as *The Rib Tickler*. Therefore, you may imagine the kind of people who might be tempted to buy these things.

The jury then discussed their verdict among themselves and after a time, at their request the judge again read to them the late Lord Chief Justice Coleridge's definition of the offence of blasphemy.

After almost an hour's deliberation they returned the following verdict: "We find the prisoner guilty, but we recommend him for clemency as we think he did not realize the gravity of the offence he was committing."

THE JUDGE: Perhaps you had better hear a little more about him, and you might modify that recommendation.

SIR RICHARD MUIR: The prisoner, as your lordship knows from looking at the original exhibits, has already been convicted for publishing blasphemous documents and also for publishing indecent literature.

THE JUDGE: Gentlemen you may now know that the reason why you did not have the actual pamphlets before you but only the indictment is that on the face of them the defendant is apparently boasting that he has already been prosecuted and sent to prison for this offence, and it was not desirable that you should know that fact before you came to your decision.

SIR RICHARD MUIR: The placard that he had with him consisted in part of himself in fancy costume, the costume being decorated in broad arrows.

INSPECTOR ELPHICK said the prisoner was considered a Socialist and Atheist of the worst type. He first came under the notice of the police when he was fined five shillings at Leeds Police Court for selling literature in a public place. It was probably obstruction. On November 9, 1911, he was sentenced to four months' hard labour at Leeds Assizes for publishing a blasphemous libel. On November 22, 1916, he was sentenced to fourteen days' hard labour at Birkenhead Police Court for selling a profane book. On July 10, 1917, he was sentenced to six weeks' hard labour at Birmingham Assizes for publishing a blasphemous libel. On July 13, 1918, at Westminster Police Court, under the Defence of the Realm Act, he was fined £25 or two months' imprisonment for exhibiting a poster. He thought it was the same poster.

The inspector then produced the two posters which Gott was carrying when he was arrested. One showed him in a prison cell and the other read, "The *Rib Tickler*, price 2d. Fifty-nine questions for the Rev. Horatio Bottomley, M.P., and other star turns in the parson business. Will they tackle them?"

On 28 February of this year, continued the Inspector, he was sentenced at Birmingham Assizes to six months' imprisonment for sending obscene books through the post and for publishing a blasphemous libel. He was convicted of both offences and received two sentences of three months each. There were three or four complaints about him at the police station on this occasion, and one man told witness he almost came to a fight with prisoner.

MR. MURPHY, for the defence, handed up a medical certificate with regard to prisoner's health.

THE JUDGE: You appear determined to defy the law. You have previously been warned on several occasions not only with regard to this offence but also with another offence equally shocking to the general feeling of the community, that is, the publication of obscene matter. With regard to the state of your health that will be properly cared for in prison. You must now go to prison for nine months with hard labour.

### The Labour Press and Blasphemy.

"ON December 9, at the Central Criminal Court, J. W. Gott was sentenced to nine months' hard labour for blasphemy. He was tried earlier in the week, but the jury disagreed, and a new trial was ordered, with the above result. To us these blasphemy trials seem supremely ridiculous. The one under notice, reduced to simple language, was an effort on behalf of the law to protect the Almighty from the attacks of Mr. Gott. To the latter, of course, the Almighty is only an imaginary character, but to the Christians he is very real. As to them he is an all-wise and all-powerful being, and yet has not sent any lightning or fire or brimstone to Mr. Gott, it is evident that he has decided to let him alone, an example the Christians should follow—unless they consider themselves wiser than the All-wise. Looking as it from the Christian point of view, we would say that Atheists are one of the minor worries of life inflicted by the Almighty on sinners during their journey through this vale of tears to that happy place where the Gotts cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. Why not try to convert Gott? Get the prison chaplain to work overtime on him during his nine months' detention. What a glorious victory it would be if he saw the error of his ways and became a Christian. Then there would be a monster gathering at the Albert Hall to welcome him from prison, and when, robed in sackcloth and ashes, he solemnly burnt one of his vile *Rib Ticklers*, the assembled Christians would shake the roof with their joyous shouts of '*Gott mit uns!*'"—Freedom.

"The continuance of 'blasphemy' prosecutions under the antiquated Act of the seventeenth century, and the continuance of that Act on the Statute Book, are a crying shame. The usual excuse that they are intended to protect the 'decencies of debate' is utter hypocrisy. People of



orthodox views may infringe the 'decencies of debate' as much as they like. Blasphemy prosecutions are intended solely to penalize attacks on the State religion. Moreover, their application is cynically partial. Scholars and men of letters by the score are known to hold identical opinions with Gott; but because they publish them in expensive books, only bought by the few, nothing happens. What is the Labour Party doing? What may we expect from the 'Wee Frees,' whose great light, the Right Hon. J. M. Robertson, President of the National Liberal Federation, has devoted much learning to proving that Christ never lived at all? Till self-styled 'democrats' and 'progressives' have a little pluck, this nauseating hypocrisy will go on, and poor men will continue to be harried and gaoled by illiterate inspectors in the witness-box and ermined brutes on the Bench for saying outright what professors, politicians—aye, and deans—say with circumlocution and impunity."—*Justice*.

## Correspondence.

### THE LATE H. M. HYNDMAN AND SECULAR EDUCATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Before "A. G. B." teaches me accuracy he might, with advantage, learn it himself. He now repeats the assertion that Hyndman in 1880 opposed secular education. As I have previously pointed out, the evidence he produces proves nothing of the kind, but only that Hyndman then opposed disestablishment of the Church of England. It is possible to be in favour of secular education and opposed to disestablishment, or vice versa. However, "A. G. B." admits that in 1884 the Social Democratic Federation declared for secular education, and he does not deny Hyndman's subsequent consistent advocacy of it.

In saying that "Hyndman founded the Social Democratic Federation in 1881" I was stating, in a concise form, the fact that Hyndman in that year took the lead in forming the party, under the name of the Democratic Federation, which prefixed "Social" to its name three years later, and which is best known under the later title. The circumstances are more fully described in *Reminiscences and Reflections of a Mid and Late Victorian*, by Mr. E. Belfort Bax, whose competence to speak in the matter is, I suspect, as great as "A. G. B.'s."

My object, however, in this correspondence is not to enter on a political dispute, or to set up as a "historian," but to defend the memory of a great Englishman and an honoured leader and friend, who is subject in death as in life to the misrepresentations of his opponents, both of the "right" and of the "left." ROBERT ARCH.

### THE FREETHINKER AND POLITICS, ETC.

SIR,—As a Socialist I look askance at compromise, but I feel as a Secularist that you do right, sir, in keeping the *Freethinker* to its proper work of promoting Secularism. I am not willing to act with other parties in politics, but as a Secularist I ask for the support of all individuals whatever their opinions on other subjects may be. I take the same line as the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection and the Anti-Vaccination League, of both of which I am a member. We have in both these societies teetotalers, vegetarians and professed Christians, some of whom would ban all who did not agree with them. I do my best when they break the rules to remind them I am a Socialist and Secularist, but if they claim a right to force their ideas I claim the right to put forward mine.

If, incidentally, a correspondent to the *Freethinker* misrepresents anyone professing anti-Vivisection or other matters the *Freethinker* has always handsomely allowed correction, and, I must add, sometimes I have broken the rules in my ardour on other questions, when the Editor has done his proper business. I hope I may be allowed here to add a word on Hyndman's manifesto re the Church of England in his Marylebone address. I cannot see how anyone can justify any Secularist giving any support, either direct or indirect, to any religion whatever. And it was not the only charge of the same sort made against Mr. Hyndman. A. J. MARRIOTT.

## Obituary.

It was with a deep sense of personal loss that we received the news, on the morning of the last day of the year, of the death of Mr. George White, of South Shields, which occurred two days earlier. Mr. White was one of our oldest and dearest friends, and was well known as one of the sturdiest upholders of Freethought in that district. Although engaged in business his opinions were never in the least degree hidden, and so far as we are aware his standing in the town lost nothing in consequence. The man's own character took care of that. In the course of a nearly thirty years' acquaintance we never knew him to be guilty of a mean or ungenerous thought or action, and in that respect we are certain that our experience would be that of others. He had been a staunch supporter of the Freethought movement for over forty years, and was at the end as steadily earnest in its service as ever. Knowing him as we do both in the home and in the outside world we can say, with more thoroughness than is often put into the words, that his family loses an ideal head, the town of South Shields a worthy townsman, and Freethought a devoted servant.

We should have dearly liked to have accepted the invitation to attend the funeral on Monday, January 2, but preoccupations made it impossible. My hands are so full just now that I simply cannot, at short notice, take two days out of the time available for home and office work. Could I have managed it at all, I would certainly have gone to South Shields to pay a last tribute of respect to one whom I esteemed as highly as I did George White. But private inclination had to yield to Party needs, and I must content myself with these few words of respectful farewell. But in thought I was with the band of mourners mourning the loss of a personal and deeply valued friend, and one that has left me the better for having known him.

The arrangements for the funeral are, I believe, in the hands of Mr. J. Fothergill, from whom I hope to have an account in time for the next issue of the *Freethinker*.

C. COHEN.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

### LONDON.

#### INDOOR.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (JOHNSON'S DANCING Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, near Edgware Road): 7.30, Discussion—"Secularism and Socialism." Opened by Mr. George Elmer.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, Miss B. M. Mabbs, "The Need for Fellowship in the Moral Life."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W. 9, three minutes from Kennington Oval Tube Station and Kennington Gate): 7, Social. Instrumental and Vocal Music.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, Dr. John Oakesmith, "The Dying Gods of Hellas."

STRATFORD (Town Hall): 7, Mr. Chapman Cohen, "Free Speech and the Blasphemy Laws."

### COUNTRY.

#### INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Picture House, Station Street): 7, Mr. E. Clifford Williams, "Christianity and Modern Apologetics."

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (19 Lowerhead Row, Leeds, Youngman's): 7, Mr. A. M. Selater, "Revolutionary Fallacies."



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