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Views and Opinions.

The Art of Dying Properly.

On Saturday, February 25, the Frenchman, Landru, was executed at Versailles. This is not a circumstance that would in the ordinary course of affairs call for notice here, but there is something about the case that is rather unusual. Landru, it must be remembered, was charged with having killed no less than ten women, and was certainly found guilty of having killed some of that number. The murders were committed with every circumstance of deliberation and brutality. The murderer faced his accusers and judges with the utmost callousness, and, if guilty, showed the utmost unconcern for his crimes. One is almost driven to conclude that his case was altogether pathological. But in all these directions it is not impossible to find parallels in the criminal records of this country. We have had murderers quite as callous and quite as deliberate, and they have met their fate with the same coolness that Landru met his. When Wainwright was asked why he killed the woman he was charged with murdering he replied, "Upon my word I don't know, unless it was because she had such thick legs." And we constantly read in the Press—which, although it may pass unnoticed matters of an intellectual character, never fails to give us an account of the last moments of convicted murderers—of the coolness with which this or that man walked to the scaffold. So far, if there were no more than these features in the case of Landru, we should leave him to the exclusive enjoyment of that class of newspaper readers who revel in their daily or weekly dose of murders, assaults, and divorce proceedings.

* * *

According to Plan.

Our interest in Landru is dependent upon a single circumstance which lifts him out of the ranks of ordinary criminals. In this country, as we all know, when a man is about to be hanged the whole proceedings are hedged about with religion. When the judge sentences him to be hanged he commends him to the attention of God; and the heavenly hosts, not the Satanic legions, are bidden to prepare for a new visitor. The prison chaplain steps in and pays special attention to preparing the criminal for eternity. From being a nobody he becomes a decided somebody, to whom special notice is given. And at the end he writes a letter, as often as not forgiving the person

has murdered, expresses the hope that he will meet him in heaven—for he is not quite sure of his destination—he expresses his thanks to the chaplain, joins in a final prayer, commends his soul to God, and walks to the scaffold in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection, and of spending an eternity with his Lord and Saviour. Now that is the way in which all the murderers of my acquaintance have died. But Landru has broken through all these traditions. When, we are told, he awakened for the last time and was ordered to prepare for execution, "he poitely refused the ministrations of the chaplain, saying that he did not wish to confess or to hear Mass." He made no profession of religious belief, he spent no time in silent prayer, he expressed no desire to meet in heaven the women he had murdered. He died without religion, and it is possible that he lived without it. Indeed, I see that one paper says he was without religion. He may have been, for anything I know, an Atheist. It is this circumstance that makes his case so unusual. For all the murderers I have known of have been Christians—or at least have belonged to some religion or other. And for Landru to murder this tradition as well as the women is too much. It is to add one more wrong to an already lengthy list. The Christian Church is losing supporters rapidly. If it is to lose even the murderer who is mounting the scaffold it may well complain of the hardness of fate.

* * *

Another Loss to the Churches.

We shall most probably be hearing protests against this unorthodox conduct of Landru. In form they will not be protests, but they will be that in reality. Most likely it will be said that the case is cited to warn young men and women of the danger of ignoring religion. But those used to analysing motives will not be misled. They will observe that, when the ordinary murderer dies a sincere Christian, no attention is called to the fact. He was a murderer, he was a Christian, and there is not a believer in the community who is disturbed by the combination. That is what one would expect. It is the unusual that attracts notice. Even a miracle would fail to arouse attention if it occurred every day. So there is something more than appears on the surface in this outcry when the combination of murderer and Atheist appears. In form the cry of outraged morality, in essence it may be no more than the shriek of a threatened monopoly. Free-thought, which has made headway in so many directions is, it appears, making headway here. And the Christian is disturbed. It is useless the Free-thinker explaining to him that as virtues and vices are human qualities rather than religious ones he must expect to find them manifested among aggregations of human beings, whatever may be their opinions on various speculative subjects. That explains the situation without removing the grievance. At bottom he feels that we now have something that once belonged to him. He has enjoyed so great a monopoly of blackguards for so long that he resents our having even a small number of them. Hence the silence when a score of criminals are found to be good

Christians. Hence, also, the outcry when a single one is found to be an Atheist. Every monopoly protests against its rights and privileges being infringed.

* * *

The Creed of the Cross.

It would appear that the Atheistic criminal not alone represents an encroachment on the Christian preserves, it also stamps Christianity as a failure in yet another direction. For it appears that Christianity was largely designed to suit the peculiarities of men of the Landru type. Last moment repentances have always played a great part in orthodox Christian literature. And the salvation resulting therefrom had not the remotest reference to any good deeds being done. The thief on the cross went straight to paradise as a reward for a mere act of belief. One of the greatest preachers of modern times declared that "great sinners shall have no back seats in heaven"—provided they believed—and assured these same sinners that thirty years of the vilest crimes should be forgiven, and it should not take thirty minutes to do it. There was really no need for anyone to go to the Christian hell—unless he had an unconquerable taste for good society—when it was so easy to keep out. There was no need to lead a good life, which to the orthodox Christian meant to deprive yourself of all sorts of good things. You could have what was in his eyes a devil of a time, and at the last moment repent and go straight to heaven and ruffle it with the elect. There never was a religion that came before the criminal classes with so many recommendations. And for a long time they took full advantage of the opportunities it offered. But if we are to judge from Landru, there is another market being closed to the Christian. No wonder that some of them cry out for protection! No wonder the Lord Chief Justice thinks blasphemy a dangerous crime! If the evangelist is left without the dying criminal, shrinking from judgment, casting himself on the love of Jesus, and dying comforted by that, what is there left in his armoury which he can use with equal effect?

* * *

The Lament of Faith.

The unrepentance of the dying criminal is a bitter blow to orthodox Christianity. It is the culmination of a series of shocks. The Christian never had any very serious objection to the unbeliever who led an evil life. On the contrary, he rather liked him. It was exactly what, in his opinion, the Freethinker ought to do. And we are all acquainted with those Christian productions which pointed out the crimes a Freethinker ought to commit—a kind of unbeliever's guide to the gallows—and which it was claimed they really did commit, although their offences were not always discovered. The first shock came when Freethinkers became better known and it could no longer be concealed that they declined to live up to the programme obligingly drawn up for them by Christians. Something was wrong somewhere, and eventually the explanation was evolved that although *they* might be unbelievers they came of a pious stock, and, above all, they had the example of the Christians around them. Such an influence as this last one could not be altogether ignored. But whether this explanation was accepted or not there was always the last moment of a man's life to fall back upon. On his death-bed, or in the condemned cell, he would infallibly return to the faith of his childhood. But now even this is breaking down. The death-bed story is almost given up. Only the dying murderer remains. The criminal has hitherto remained the property, or the perquisite, of the Churches. Landru has put another nail in the coffin of that monopoly. Christianity cannot claim to have all the good people on its side, neither is it per-

mitted to assert a monopoly of the bad ones. It must give us some portion in the world's blackguards, as it has given us our share of the world's heroes. The Versailles executioner was doing more than chop off the head of a criminal. He was helping to decapitate a superstition.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Revelation.

THE Bible is said to be or to contain a revelation of God and his ways with man. At one time it was regarded as an infallible book. Preachers were in the habit of saying that every word in it is true. There are a few who have the temerity to make that claim now. As a matter of fact, however, scholarship has completely discredited such a contention, and, consequently, the majority of theologians no longer advocate the inerrancy of Scripture, but content themselves with declaring not that it is, but that it contains, a Divine revelation. We maintain, on the contrary, that even this declaration is entirely false. Of course, religion, as popularly understood, takes the existence of God and the unseen world for granted. The Rev. G. H. A. Bell, resident chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury, recently preached a sermon on this subject in St. Paul's Cathedral, which was published in the *Guardian* of February 10, in which he says: "Religion and the religious experience always assert the vital reality of an unseen ruling world." Mr. Bell, after repeating and emphasizing that assertion several times, affirms:—

Unless this universe is a mad universe, and righteousness and goodness are of no account, we must believe that this sublime faith in the reality of the Unseen is founded on truth.

Such a statement is simply absurd, because, if an infinitely powerful, just, and holy God exists and sits as king for ever, the story of the evolution of life on this planet is an enigma. The struggle for existence does not bear witness to a loving heavenly Father. It has always been and is attended with indescribable suffering and cruelty. Huxley gives a wonderfully vivid account of the fierceness of the never-ending strife among animals and savages. Of savages he says:—

Among primitive men the weakest and stupidest went to the wall, while the toughest and shrewdest, those who were best fitted to cope with their circumstances, but not the best in any other sense, survived. Life was a continual free-fight, and beyond the limited and temporary relations of the family, the Hobbesian war of each against all was the normal state of existence. The human species, like others, splashed and floundered amid the general stream of evolution, keeping its head above water as it best might, and thinking of neither whence nor whither.

With such facts in mind and thinking also of the existing conditions of life even among most civilized peoples, who can honestly believe that this world is under the government of a Supreme Being?

Instead of endeavouring to answer such a question, Mr. Bell proceeds to discuss the possibility of knowing God and the meaning of revelation. He contends that God has revealed or unveiled himself to mankind. He admits that a complete revelation of him is impossible because of the limited capacity of the human understanding. Even the greatest and noblest people can at best see him only through a glass, darkly, while ordinary people cannot know him at all without being taught concerning him. Mr. Bell informs us that "there is a mystery still at the very centre of God's being, which must always remain so long as men and women walk this narrow world." This is the preacher's first point, the partialness of the knowledge

of God, and his second is that this partial knowledge "is in the deepest sense of the word natural." Mankind are God's children, but he does not force himself upon them. They may, and many do, go through life without knowing him at all. How this proves the naturalness of the partial knowledge of God is a perfect mystery. Indeed, several of Mr. Bell's statements are incomprehensible. Take this example:—

The supernatural itself before whose sublime presence we bow our heads in awe, is not a contradiction of the natural but an exaltation of it.

The supernatural has a presence before which "we bow our heads in awe," but, after all, it is not the supernatural but the natural in a state of exaltation. Here is another instance:—

Even the Divinity of Christ, however we conceive of it, was a Divinity that was capable of being expressed in a human life and through the words and acts of a human personality.

According to the orthodox creeds, even according to the second of the Anglican Articles of Religion, neither Christ's life nor personality was human. In him "the Godhead and Manhood were joined together in one Person never to be divided," with the result that both his life and personality were theanthropic—divine-human. This is totally inscrutable, but it is orthodoxy.

Mr. Bell is a sheer dogmatist. He does not even attempt to prove a single one of his strange assertions. In point of fact, they are all absolutely incapable of verification. In other words, revelation is a myth, as complete a myth as Santa Claus. By a myth we understand an idea converted into a fact. When we call God a myth what we mean is that he is a purely imaginary being regarded and treated as objectively real. Consequently, God is not an object of knowledge, but of belief. We cannot know him because he does not exist except in imagination. Principal Lewis Edwards, of Bala, was, probably, the greatest theologian Wales has ever had; and one of his characteristic sayings was that "faith is sanctified imagination." He styled it *sanctified* imagination because it is the imagination working religiously, and not secularly, as in a great artist or poet. Mr. Bell's fault is that he believes the God-idea to be an actual being, filling and transcending the universe. Grant Allen wrote a most able and interesting book, entitled *The Evolution of the Idea of God*, but Mr. Bell regards that evolution as the gradual manifestation of an objectively existing personality, "everlasting, without body, parts, or passions."

Mr. Bell is broad-minded enough to admit that each religion contains some truth, but claims that Christianity contains all truth. He maintains that "the greater religions contain more truth than the lesser, but that (save for one) they are still incomplete manifestations of God, waiting for some Epiphany to give a clue to them all to absorb and transfigure them all." In Christianity alone, Mr. Bell holds, is the complete revelation of God to be found, and the only hope for all other religions is to be finally absorbed and transfigured by this. It is perfectly true revelation has reached its highest point of evolution in the Christian religion; but it is nothing more than an idea. As Matthew Arnold was fond of saying, the Christian God is only "a magnified, non-natural man," only an idea powerless to transform and rule the world. The reality of an unseen ruling world has never been demonstrated in the history of this seen world. The plain, unmistakable fact is that the unseen world, whether it exists or not, has never ruled this. Christ was believed to have conquered Europe, but as the Prince of Peace he has never materialized in Christendom.

Let the conclusion to which we have come be stressed in a few closing words. In pronouncing revelation a myth and treating God as non-existing, we only do for Christianity what Christians generally have always done for all other religions, with their diverse deities, rites and ceremonies. To us all deities are alike purely imaginary creations. We are in agreement with Grant Allen in the great emphasis he lays upon "the intimate connection which always exists between cults in general and the worship of the Dead Man, natural or artificial." He says:—

Though I may not have raised the worship of the Dead Man to a supreme and unique place in the god-making process, I have at least, I trust, raised it to a position of higher importance than it has hitherto held, ever since the publication of Mr. Herbert Spencer's epoch-making researches. I believe I have made it tolerably clear that the vast mass of existing divine persons, when we come to analyze them, do actually turn out to be dead and deified human beings (*The Evolution of the Idea of God*, p. 156).

Assuming the truth of this view, we have a perfectly satisfactory explanation of anthropomorphism. The first object of worship was a dead body, or some part thereof, such as the skull, the hand, or the foot, which was kept in the hut, or carried about on the person of the survivor. Then, in a higher stage of religious development, the disembodied ghost or spirit of a chief, relative, or a friend was deified and made an object of worship. Naturally, deities multiplied with the utmost rapidity. In Shintoism there were as many as eight million gods formed out of heroic souls, and of necessity they were all in the image and after the likeness of their creators. Thus all Divine Beings have been and are anthropomorphic, undergoing a process, not of unveiling, but of gradual evolution. Anyone, studying the subject scientifically, realizes at once the utter folly of believing in the revelation, or unveiling, of a Supreme Being or Beings. J. T. LLOYD.

Breaking the Boycott.

The only true conquests—those which awaken no regret—are those obtained over ignorance.

—Napoleon.

It has been pointed out repeatedly in these columns that the Freethought Movement suffers from a boycott which is applied by Christians in the newspaper press, booksellers' and newsagents' shops, and at the municipal and private libraries. With rare exceptions, Freethought publications are ignored in the former, and kept out of the latter. Hence, it has become increasingly necessary that every Freethinker should assist actively in the propagation of the literature of the Movement. Orthodox organizations spend annually hundreds of thousands of pounds in furtherance of their faith, and, incidentally, no small part of their propaganda is the vilification and misrepresentation of Freethought. A glance at the capacious catalogues of such organizations as the Religious Tract Society, the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, the Catholic Truth Society, the Christian Evidence Society, and the many publishers who cater for the enormous orthodox public, will be sufficient to show how complete are their methods, and how large is their success. These thousands of books, periodicals, and pamphlets are distributed throughout the English-speaking world, and they penetrate into countless sheltered homes where wicked Freethought publications are never seen.

The clergy, of whom there are 50,000 in this country, have, as George Meredith has pointed out, entwined themselves in English society like a poisonous ivy. They are past-masters at circumventing any movement likely to prove dangerous to their professional success,

and they have rare noses for heresy. The original Sunday-schools were initiated by laymen with the sole and laudable idea of imparting education to poor children on the one day in the week on which, in the bad old times prior to the passing of the Factory Acts, and other humanitarian measures, they were free to receive it. Nowadays, the Sunday-schools are not concerned with other than theological instruction, and the average Sunday-school teacher cares as much for real education as a pigeon cares for hydrostatics. Similarly with the public library movement, which was started with the idea of bringing serious and informative literature within reach of the poorest. The clergy have great influence on the local committees of these libraries, and their one and constant aim is to render such institutions, from their narrow and sectarian point of view, entirely innocuous and harmless. So long as the library shelves are groaning with the charming volumes of the brothers Hocking, Marie Corelli, Charles Garvice, Mrs. Barclay, and other purveyors of the smooth story, generally of love, they are content. The moment any attempt is made to place before the public works which make for sanity or for ordered thought they at once display their enmity. The boycott is introduced, and the modern *Index Expurgatorius* contains the names of practically every author worth reading from Bernard Shaw to Swinburne. None of the "intellectuals" escape the net, and Robert Blatchford suffers in the company of Eugene Brieux. So successful is the clerical boycott that the public libraries of this country exist principally to provide novel-reading to ladies at the expense of the ratepayers. About sixty per cent. of the output is devoted to fiction, and a large proportion of the balance to literary rubbish.

With the idea of combating this lamentable state of affairs, our readers should ask for Freethought publications at the libraries they use, and see that they are supplied. An excellent beginning could be made with Mr. Cohen's *Determinism or Free Will?* and with Vivian's *Churches and Modern Thought*. In extreme cases, the books might be presented to the library; but, in this case, care must be taken that the volumes are not placed on a top shelf and quietly forgotten. So far as pamphlets are concerned it is, perhaps, better to hand or post them to likely readers. Orthodox persons are often interested in controversial literature, and such introductions often mean that regular readers of Freethought publications are obtained. Remembering that, in spite of all the boycott of all the churches, many thousands of pamphlets are already in circulation, it must be apparent that, with additional publicity, these figures may be largely exceeded in the near future. Literature should also be sold at all indoor and open-air meetings, and the sale entrusted as much as possible to the ladies of the Movement, who will thus find an outlet for their energies.

With regard to the *Freethinker*, it is useful to order this paper with other publications, so that the tradesman is faced with the dilemma of accepting or refusing a good customer. Another timely suggestion is for Freethinkers to join in any likely discussion in likely papers. These organs often give far more space to readers' opinions than the large London newspapers. Letters should be short, strictly to the point, courteous, and should be written on one side of the paper only, and authenticated with the name and address of the sender, not necessarily for publication. Back numbers of the *Freethinkers* should never be wasted, but should be left in trams, trains, and buses, or otherwise distributed. If these few hints are acted upon by our readers they should prove of permanent benefit to the Movement. Every Freethought book and pamphlet is a silent missionary for Liberty, and it is the bounden duty of every Freethinker to see that such publications

secure publicity. By such means the boycott may be broken once and for all. The general public is absolutely ignorant of the aims of Freethought, and it is imperative that this should be altered at once.

MIMNERMUS.

The Absurdity of Prayer.

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the Elders of the Church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of Faith shall save the sick; and the Lord shall raise him up.—James v. 14-15.

If anyone treated the above exhortation with the ridicule it deserves, he would be, according to the Lord Chief Justice, "a very dangerous criminal." Therefore, it should follow that a person who took it in a literal sense and refused to call in a doctor to attend to his dying child, but prayed instead, ought to be a most pious Christian. But is he considered so? A person who disbelieves and ridicules the utility of prayer is liable to be imprisoned as a common criminal. Another person who believes in its efficacy, and whose child dies, which is the least that can be expected under the circumstances, runs a serious risk of being charged with manslaughter. The very book that has misled them is declared to be God's word by the law of the land.

Now let us examine this question of prayer. The worst of it is that as soon as you start examining, as soon as you start to reason, and to call evidence to support any theological question, the more ridiculous it appears. It cannot be denied that prayer originated through superstition and fear among our primitive ancestors. Man found himself in the grip of various forces of nature over which he had no control whatever. Disease threatened him. Wild beasts attacked him, and he became a victim of floods, lightning, earthquakes, and other what we call nowadays "Acts of God." He naturally concluded, in his ignorance and fear, that he had somehow offended the ruling powers above him. He was struck with terror, and the first thing he did was to try to pacify these powers, believing they were human beings like himself. He cast himself on his knees and piteously besought them to have mercy upon him, and to restore him to their favour. After the lapse of many thousands of years man, to-day, still prays through fear and ignorance to his deity. We still have pestilence, famine, and earthquakes. Billions of prayers have been offered up since primitive man first started to pray. Has one prayer been answered?

Prayer is simply a useless attempt to interfere with scientific laws. He who suspends one law of nature suspends the lot. The most obtuse clerical intellect is beginning to realize this. When the life of the late Pope Benedict XV was threatened by illness prayers were publicly offered up in all Catholic churches. That did not prevent him from dying. If he was to be saved at all it would only be owing to a good constitution and the highest medical skill.

We are told that God knows the innermost thoughts of our heart. He is an all-loving and benevolent Being. If this is the case he would do his duty without being continually pestered with prayers. The Lord's Prayer contains a distinct request for bread. "Give us this day our daily bread." Fancy a child imploring his loving father for food. It is the duty of the father to supply the child with food, or else the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children will want to know why. "Lead us not into temptation." Would a father lead his child into temptation? It is ridiculous on the face of it. Then, again, how can God answer conflicting prayers? A farmer in Sussex prays for rain for his crops. A parson in the same

place prays for fine weather for his Sunday-school treat. You cannot have both at the same time and place. A nation also prays to win a war. The belligerent nation also prays for victory. This places the deity in a dilemma. Of course the parson has always some excuse to make. If you happen to get what you want it is an answer to prayer. If you do not get it, it is God's will that you shouldn't. You see they have got you both ways.

"But," says the parson, "God helps those who help themselves." This is nonsense, pure and simple. We would rather help a cripple or a blind man across the road than one in his full health and senses. It is the miserable sufferers and oppressed who cannot help themselves that God should help. A man who can help himself does not require outside assistance. What would happen to the unemployed if, instead of receiving their relief tickets, they were told to pray for their daily bread and next week's food for their families? Even the most devout Christian among them would assume a manner and expression which would argue ill for the one who made such a proposal. Where does the efficacy of prayer come in? The only way to get anything is by one's own exertion. Bread never came to the man who prayed for it. It is only obtainable in response to one's labour. "But," says the clergyman, "prayers for material benefits are not answered because they involve a change in the natural order of things."

Now the hardest condition of priesthood is the almost continuous strain put upon the powers of invention by the constant and harassing necessity for explaining these theological questions. They build up a wonderful structure, and, under the influence of spiritual intoxication, their themes become more and more exalted in exhorting their congregation to seek higher guidance in their troubles. The surprising thing about a structure such as these reverend gentlemen erect is that the taller it becomes the more ornamentation it will stand. A lie repeated a certain number of times assumes the cloak of truth with some people.

We are now told by the enlightened section of the clergy "that prayer is not for mundane benefits," but that it brings us into spiritual communion with the deity, the value of which is beyond measure great. It elevates the soul (whatever that may be). As soon as one tries to point out the futility of all this, they at once cry: "What are you going to give us in place of it?" A man who goes to his doctor to have a malignant growth cut out would not think of asking him what he would give him in place of it. The more we examine this question of prayer the less we see of its utility.

I have only heard of one answer to prayer, but as it took place in America I cannot vouch for its authenticity. A rector of a large town in a southern State received a cable from some farmers asking him to pray for rain as their crops were suffering from the want of it. Two days later another cable arrived, saying, "Stop praying, flooded out."

Enough has been said, I think, to convince all un-biassed persons that prayer is futile. There is nothing superstition dislikes more than contact with reason and facts. Self reliance is far more invigorating than praying to a god who pays not the least attention or interest in the supplications of his children that have ascended to heaven in all ages. It is only what can be expected from a god who is obviously the result of a singular series of creations born of an ignorant and superstitious mind. Swinburne, in *Felise*, asks:—

Can ye beat off one wave with prayer,
Can ye move mountains? bid the flower
Take flight and turn to a bird in the air?
Can ye hold fast for shine or shower
One wingless hour?

LEONARD MASON.

Humorous Blasphemy.

It has often been observed in these columns that Christians, on the whole, are a melancholy section of the community. And I know from painful experience that years ago when they believed more than they do to-day they were still more miserable; and when we consider that less than half a century ago the great mass of Christians believed in the horrible doctrine of eternal torment in hell-fire, not only for unbelievers, but for a large number of believers also who were unbaptized or not among the chosen, we can understand their awful state of mind under such circumstances. The alleged founder of Christianity himself was a solemn sort of individual. It is recorded that on one occasion he wept, but there is no record of him ever having made a joke or laughed at one made by somebody else. No! He was serious to the last degree. And the clergy, as his chosen ambassadors, are as miserable in their outlook on life as their master. When, therefore, we find a person who joked about religion, whether a philosopher, a poet, or a playwright, we may be sure that his religion sat very lightly upon his shoulders, and that he was a Free-thinker at heart who disguised his heresy beneath a thin covering of wit and banter.

Let us take Shakespeare as an example. When he had occasion to say something very irreligious he generally put it into the mouth of one of his fools, or in that of a pious person like Dogberry, who did not understand the meaning of the language he used. Take the case of the Porter in *Macbeth*, who is awakened out of his slumber by the furious knocking at the gate by Macduff, after the murder of King Duncan. He says:—

Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell gate he should have old turning the key. (Knocking): Knock, knock, knock. Who's there in the name of Beelzebub? Here's a farmer who hanged himself in the expectation of plenty. Come in time; have napkins enow about you; here you'll sweat for't. (Knocking): Who's there in the other devil's name? Faith here's an equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven; O, come in, equivocator. (Knocking): Knock, knock, knock, Who's there? Faith here's an English tailor come hither, for stealing out of a French hose. Come in, tailor; here you may roast your goose. (Knocking): Knock, knock, knock. Never at quiet? What are you? But this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further. I had thought to let in some of all professions, that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire. (Knocking): Anon, anon, I pray you remember the porter. (Opens the gate).

Fancy a man joking about the everlasting bonfire over three hundred years ago, when nearly everybody believed in the reality of hell flames! Shakespeare must have been an awful blasphemer, and he would assuredly have served some time in a Christian gaol if he had been brought before a narrow-minded judge like a Mr. Justice Avory of his day.

Let's take another case. When Iago in the great tragedy of *Othello* has succeeded by treacherous means in making Cassio drunk, the young lieutenant in a maudlin way begins to talk about religion. Now anything a drunken man says about religion must sound extremely blasphemous or ridiculous to a truly pious person. So Cassio begins by making the sage remark that "Heaven's above all," and then he goes on to declare in a thick voice, "And there be souls that must be saved, and there be souls that must not be saved—For mine own part—no offence to the General, nor any man of quality—I hope to be saved." Now all this to a truly pious soul must sound dread-

fully blasphemous. But it is the way the great poet reveals to us the rational condition of his mind under such circumstances—he seems to know instinctively what the young lieutenant would be likely to say “in his cups.”

One further illustration of a witty kind of blasphemy from Shakespeare. It is from the play of *As You Like it*. In his rambling through the forest Touchstone meets a shepherd, and he asks:—

Was't ever in Court, shepherd?

Corin.—No, truly.

Touchstone.—Then thou art damned.

Corin.—Nay—I hope—

Touchstone.—Truly thou art damned; like an ill-roasted egg, all on one side.

Corin.—For not being at Court? Your reason?

Touchstone.—Why if thou never was't at Court thou never saws't good manners; if thou never saws't good manners then thy manners must be wicked; and wickedness is sin, and sin is damnation. Thou art in a parlous state shepherd.

In other plays Shakespeare is constantly poking fun at the doctrine of hell-fire, but, as I have observed, he invariably puts his jokes in the mouths of his clowns, or of the gravediggers as in *Hamlet*. On the other hand, if Shakespeare wants to proclaim some profound truth of philosophy he puts such expression into the mouth of his hero.

If, however, we want some real strong, serious blasphemy from the poets we must turn to Shelley, Swinburne, Burns or Thomson. We shall find enough in their works to frighten a whole bench of bishops, let alone the poor sensitive Christian who gets frightened at the least bit of plain talk on the absurdities, the anomalies and immoralities of the Bible, or of the puerilities and improbabilities of the stories and miracles of the New Testament. We will take just one passage from *Queen Mab* (pages 34 and 35):—

From an eternity of idleness,
I God awoke; in seven days' toil made earth
From nothing; rested and created man,
I placed him in a paradise, and there
Planted the tree of evil; so that he
Might eat and perish, and my soul procure
Wherewith to sate its malice, and to turn
Even like a heartless conqueror of the earth,
All misery to my fame. The race of men
Chosen by my honour with impunity
May sate the lusts I planted in their heart.
Here I command thee hence to lead them on,
Until, with hardened feet, their conquering troops
Wade on the promised soil through woman's blood,
And make my name be dreaded through the land,
Yet ever burning flame and ceaseless woe
Shall be the doom of their eternal souls,
With every soul on this ungrateful earth,
Virtuous or vicious, weak or strong—even all
Shall perish, to fulfil the blind revenge
(Which you to men call “Justice”) of their God.

This is pretty strong, and must have hurt the feelings of many Christians at the time of issue, but fortunately both Shakespeare and Shelley are classics, and quite beyond the reach of fools or bigots to-day. Let us hope that Christians, in the future, will familiarize themselves with the writings of our great poets and get something of the larger and more generous spirit which animates the pages of the poets' great works.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

In man's world of ideas whatever has once become a living force never passes into nothingness. It continues to live a life of its own in the human spirit and thus it possesses a kind of immortality. In human history the fountain-head of the Greek idea does not always well up to life in equal strength, or in the same place; but it is never completely sealed up. It disappears, only to return; it is hidden, only to re-appear.—*Erwin Rohde*,

The Skull and the Egotist.

Behold this ruin! 'Twas a skull
Once of ethereal spirit full!
This narrow cell was Life's retreat:
This space was Thought's mysterious seat!
What beauteous pictures fill'd this spot,
What dreams of pleasure long forgot!
Nor Love, nor Joy, nor Hope, nor Fear,
Has left one trace of record here!

PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON has been called “the poet of mortality,” and there is a note of mingled simplicity and profundity, familiarity and grandeur, lighted upon at times by lesser poets; a note that instantly and impressively strikes the mind and lingers in the ear of learned and ignorant alike. This, it seems to me, is the true quality of great writing, and even its utility does not detract from, but adds to, its native grace and charm. The above well-known lines, by an anonymous author, and entitled “A Fragment, found in a Case containing a human Skeleton,” are of the latter arresting and eternal kind—sepulchral but sublime, gloomy but great, yet, “Like the wind through a ruin'd cell,” even in its pathetic silence and desolation, awakening, with the poignant possibility of the present and solemn certainties of the future, all the abiding harmonies of old remembered joy! How eloquent even the poor ox's skull!

Multiply man's mute and crumbling monument by ten millions more—each relic in its day a palace of sight and sound—

Beneath this mould'ring canopy
Once shone the bright and busy eye—

Here, in this silent cavern, hung
The ready, swift, and tuneful tongue.....

Say, did these fingers delve the mine,
Or with its envied rubies shine?

Avails it whether bare or shod
These feet the path of duty trod?—

multiply these millions, and presently meditate on the senseless ravages of war. The omitted portions of this fine picture of mortality are marred by reflections on “immortality” and “consolations” that find no place in modern philosophy, therefore out of place in these pages, but as a work of art the poem is a perfect whole.

It is not given to every minor poet—and sometimes not even to the “major” one—to strike the “never dying strain,” but it has happened in hundreds of instances which will be familiar to most Freethinkers, who are for the most part omnivorous and discerning readers.

If I may come down even “unto this last,” and be pardoned the egotism—which is only apparent, not real!—I might mention four “great lines” of my very own I had written in—very distant—imitation of Burns, a long poem, in the Doric, entitled “The Twa Ghaists”—the Ghost of the “Auld Brig” of Ayr, and the Spirit of a neighbouring “Auld Harbour,” in confab, in quarrel, and in combat—a fight between ghosts is an eerie and awfu' spectacle!—the “Auld Brig” was sneeringly boastful, and said:—

For I was grey wi' eild ere ye were new,
I'll stan' as lang when ye are passed frae view;
There's sic immortal spans for brigs an' men
As meaner brigs an' mortals maunna ken:
There's few o' either twixt the Lairs an' Girvan
That muse or mason thinks it worth preservin.

which, if it's not good poetry, is “the God's truth.”

I would fain quote more of this great poem, but I have one eye on the Editor, who has, no doubt, both of his on me.

ANDREW MILLAR.

Acid Drops.

We are pleased to know, from an address delivered at Weston-super-Mare by the Rev. F. C. Spurr, that there are good days ahead. His reason for believing so is that God has not abdicated and he "is going to see things through." That is very comforting, and we are relieved to learn that even God is not beyond reformation. Still, what numbers want to know is why on earth he let things get so bad before he decided to see things through. And in what way will his seeing things through in the future make up for his absolute lack of attention in the past? Owing to God not exerting his power several millions of the young men of Europe are dead, and millions of others are leading a more miserable and a more degraded life than they would otherwise have led. And it is hardly satisfactory to note that God, like a shady politician, finding that his constituents are not pleased with what he has done, promises to "see the thing through." That is exactly what our politicians do when they come back for re-election.

The headquarters of the Latter Day Saints at Tottenham have been attacked by an unruly crowd and four large stained glass windows smashed, besides other damage. It is quite evident that the Christian "saints" do not like rival "saints"; and, further, that such exhibitions of Christian charity are indistinguishable from sheer barbarism.

Father Bernard Vaughan says "the way to treat Modernism was with the knife. Cut it out of the system like appendicitis." How the reverend Father must sigh for the good old days when the Holy Church grilled its enemies to the greater glory of God.

"Does a congregation derive sufficient benefit from a fifteen-minutes' sermon?" asks a bishop. That all depends! The sermon may be, as our French friends put it, "a bad quarter of an hour."

Fifteen inches of rain fell in one night between Winton and Longreach, Queensland, Australia, creeks and water-courses flooding and sweeping a large area. Over 200,000 sheep and other animals were drowned. Providence doeth all things well.

The morbid outpourings of the converted murderer on the eve of execution supply some fine "copy" to our glorious free Press. We commented on one case recently. Another, still more illuminating, will be found in the *Streatham News* (February 24) in the report of a sermon by Rev. J. Ernest Bolam, of the Streatham Wesleyan Church. On the morning of the execution of the youth Field for the murder of Irene Munro, Mr. Bolam laid out "the beautiful Communion cloth," placing on it the silver chalice, and they both partook of the sacrament.

He talked to me of the life to come, and it seemed as if already he saw the great light beyond.....I knew that he had made his peace with the Almighty and that he realized that he stood in the presence of his God.

One might ask if Irene Munro also stood in the presence of her God. But let that pass. This conversion, duly witnessed and testified to, of a murderer into a fit candidate for "the presence of God" is quite in keeping with Christianity's doctrine of salvation. It is a safe religion, especially for the souls that are least worth saving. We ask the reader to have another look at the passage quoted and try to think of the effect of such a religion on human character and personality. Even if we do not expect the everyday murderer to talk like an Othello or a Macbeth, still we are entitled to ask that the details concerning his "conversion" shall not be rehearsed in the high-ways and by-ways.

"From the east comes light." Perhaps the traditional saying will have to be altered by the substitution of "north" for "east." The Scripture Text Display Society has solved the problem of filling the empty churches. Posters displaying suitable Scripture texts—

of course, some are not suitable—are accomplishing more than clerical warnings, enforced Sabbath observance, or even Blasphemy laws. We learn from the *Manchester Guardian* that "Hardened Agnostics had been converted, many sinful lives had been changed, and the sad and burdened had been comforted." Another suggestion emanated from Sir George Douglas. He thinks that jaded preachers should use the old sermons of the "great masters." Dr. Norman Maclean, however, fails to see much potency in the suggestion. "If borrowed oratory is going to fill the churches, why are they not filled now?" Oratory for the salvation of souls will have to be carefully adapted to the needs of the average Englishman to-day, for it has a lot of competitors to encounter.

According to the *Irish Times* (February 6) there is a growing feeling against the prevalent tendency to make the Scriptures the basis of humorous jests in our theatres. We have heard much at various times of religion and human needs. These needs, however, must not be supposed to comprise humour and jokes. Religion can stand almost anything but a good hearty laugh at its own seriousness. Jesus Christ never made a joke. Few biblical characters ever did—intentionally. There is, nevertheless, a rich mine to dig from in the Old Testament, and while it remains part of the "inspired" record, it is almost a pity for our dramatic entertainers to fall back on such small fry as the conventional Irishman, Scotchman, Yorkshireman or even the poor Cockney.

The Church Association is organizing opposition to the suggested revision of the Lectionary. Such revision, it contends, would permit the omission of St. John's Gospel as "not of equal and concurrent authority with the others," and "would hasten the disruption of the Church." We like the word "hasten." The reference to the Fourth Gospel is also highly interesting, and perhaps deserving of sympathetic appreciation. When this Gospel finally disappears "the man in the street" will get much nearer the bare frame-work of the Christ-myth.

The suggested revision includes the "Harmony of the Gospels" and an extended use of the Apocrypha. Sir Edward Clarke refuses positively to read such "lessons," which will, if introduced, cause friction in every parish of the country. Mr. G. A. Bryson, however, declares that the Apocrypha is part of the Bible, and that the Bible Society never had authority from the Church to exclude it from their editions. Such is the state of "the faith once committed to the saints" in the England of the twentieth century—a faith, be it remembered, which claims universal homage as the final revelation of God. If God can enjoy a capital joke, what a time he is having up there!

What do the letters S. P. G. mean? A number of ex-soldiers took them to represent Special Pay Grants and some hundreds of applications for these were sent to wrong addresses. An English boarding-school boy had once entered the letters S. P. G. in his note-book against a rather large item of expenditure of pocket-money, but he explained them as meaning "Sundries, Principally Grub." One of our readers assures us that the letters really stand for "Society for Plucking Geese."

Several religious journals have lately drawn attention to the large proportion of old and middle-aged men in their conferences. Rev. Dr. A. H. McNeile, of Dublin, says that young people take very little part in the Church's work. "They complained that the leaders were old fogies who would resent the interference of young men." Here, again, one may ask why the youth holds aloof from the churches in view of the "ever-present religious craving of human nature." This "craving," too, is reinforced by elaborate efforts, unfortunately confirmed by the State, to keep a tight grip on the nation's schools.

Meetings for humiliation and prayer were held recently under the auspices of the Church Association at the

Caxton Hall, Westminster. What a fondness religious people have for advertising that they are worms.

The Rev. G. H. Lunn says that "martyrs are scarce to-day." Surely, he does an injustice to the Bishop of London who cannot make both ends meet on a salary of £10,000 yearly.

"The Church of England has ceased to be a breakwater against the incoming tide of infidelity" says Father Bernard Vaughan. The peerless patterers of the Christian Evidence Society will be pleased to hear this.

Speaking at a Church Association meeting the Rev. G. H. Lunn said that the members of that society believed that the Bible was the truth, and wholly inspired. Such charming simplicity is rare in these dreadful days.

National Opinion for February contains a lengthy article on "The Proletarian Schools," which lays great stress on the shocking nature of the anti-Christianity taught in these schools. There is comparatively little reference in the article to the political or economic doctrines taught in them. The following is quoted as a choice specimen of Socialist depravity: "Let us be plain on this question of religion; there is no true God or Saviour. There is no heaven or hell, or saints or angels. Man has made them all, and man will change them all." These schools, our contemporary asserts, are believed to number at least 250 and to influence a minimum of 10,000 children. If the teaching is on the lines of the passage quoted, and is backed by scientific explanation, couched in simple language, of how the ideas of gods and saviours, heaven and hell originated, it will be far more fruitful of good effect on both mind and character than nine-tenths of what is now taught to children in the name of religion.

On this subject we would draw attention to the following statement which appeared in a recent issue of the *Challenge*: "In all Churches there is latent a certain distrust of such education as is not directed and controlled by themselves." This is perfectly true. Apart from the serious injury to national education from sectarian strife, and from erroneous teaching, this sectional control of education is itself a serious drag upon our mental and moral life, and to no class is it more injurious than to the toiling masses. For side by side with this control there has been an alliance, tacit or overt, between the defenders of the traditional religious faith and other forms of despotic authority, civil, military, or economic.

An Underground Railway advertisement informs the public that "It is warmer down below." It sounds like a revivalist poster.

Theologians blandly assure us that religion is without money and without price. Relief to the clergy under the Tithe Rent Charges Act means sixpence more in the pound to the ratepayers at Eversholt, Bedfordshire.

At a meeting recently called by the Scottish Church Union the Duke of Argyll, who presided, said that the Modern Churchmen's Congress represented a "small but noisy clique." The Rev. Canon Mackintosh, in a letter read at the meeting, characterized Modernism as "the root of all the evils in the Church." Re-union, in his opinion, represented a phase of Rationalism, because it meant that "it does not matter what we believe, the chief thing is for us to be united." Perhaps the reverend canon thinks that if the Church could only get rid of the Higher Critics, she would make short work of Rationalism and Agnosticism. Atheism we omit from the list as unworthy of a moment's consideration, and perhaps the same may be said of the other "evils" hinted at by Canon Mackintosh. It is the old, old question—how to get rid of the ideas behind the forces at work in the Modernist movement. On this head the canon offers no new suggestion at all.

Statistics show that a baby's expectation of life if born in Manchester is 28 years; in Brighton it is 50; and in London 46. It is not religion that prolongs a child's life, but healthy surroundings and good drainage.

"It is too much of a luxury always to take other people for fools," said a witness at Marylebone County Court. Yet the 50,000 clergymen in this country enjoy this unwise luxury.

A revivalist, wishing to explain the meaning of hell said that there was a grim side to religion. He might have added that there was also a resemblance to *Grimm's Fairy Tales*.

The *Star* used to call itself an organ of Radicalism, but it is evidently not strong enough to stand outside the columns of vacuities that are being written to work up enthusiasm over the wedding of Princess Mary. And as it has entered the competition, we suppose we may congratulate it on publishing, in its issue for February 25, what is easily the most imbecilic photograph yet issued in connection with the wedding. This is an illustration of a man and a woman who appear to be trying to hypnotise a weedy looking plant that is climbing up some trellis work. Reference to the letterpress shows it to be a photograph of the man and woman who are attending the sweet peas used in the Princess's bouquet. Of course, we may be doing the *Star* an injustice, and it may be only pulling the leg of the other papers. But we doubt it. And we are glad the wedding is over. There is one less proof of the stupidity of human nature every time we open a daily paper. One day we may have a newspaper that is brave enough and sane enough to ignore these things altogether.

We learn from the *Yorkshire Post* (February 22) that at the forthcoming Anglican Conference "The Claim of our Lord" will be the subject of important discussion. It will be considered "under three heads (1) What we believe; (2) How we live, and (3) What we aim at." We refrain from any comment on the second head, which, we hope, does not refer to purely material considerations. On the other two questions, however, we may remark that, if the Conference has anything new to offer, some members of the Establishment have taken a considerable time to make up their minds concerning their beliefs and aims. And yet we are fain to admit that we feel as high a respect for them as we do for the Anglo-Catholics.

The little wisdom it takes to manage human affairs? A father asked the magistrate at Marylebone what he was to do with his boy. He found it impossible to cure him of playing truant and stealing. He had kept the boy in bed over week-ends, and the police had assisted him by threatening the boy with the birch and dark room. These high-class and very intelligent educational methods having failed he wanted the magistrate's advice. The latter was equal to the occasion. He advised him to give the boy a good, sound whipping and bring him before the Children's Court. What a glorious trio—the policeman, the father, and the magistrate—make for the bringing up of a child! Between the three of them the outlook for the boy is anything but promising. If he doesn't become a criminal or a humbug it will not be their fault.

A Cambridge newspaper states that Jesus has retained the headship of the Lent races, and is now the head in both winter and summer races. Of course, the paragraph refers to the college of that name, but it must be amusing, during the races, to hear enthusiastic undergraduates shouting, "Go it, Jesus!"

"The restrictions on sport and exercise which prohibit Sunday games and bathing are now an anachronism," declares the *Daily Telegraph* (London). The same thing was said in the *Freethinker* over forty years ago. Imitation is such sweet flattery.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

March 5, Nottingham; March 12, Manchester; March 19, Leicester; March 26, Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool.

To Correspondents.

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

THOMAS MOORE.—The general idea of your lines is quite good, but its quality as verse is spoiled by the endings of many of the lines.

G. O. W.—Sorry to learn that you have had a cold. Most people appear to have had the same experience lately. We quite agree with you as to the sickening fuss over the Royal wedding. But most of it appears to be due to a newspaper campaign. And the people are very easily led in such matters.

J. HURCHINSON.—We are sorry if we have inadvertently been led, in the paragraph to which you refer, to misrepresent the facts. But our comment was based on a statement in the *Daily News*, which gave the figures we quoted. Thanks for pointing out the facts.

J. R. LICKFOLD.—We cannot print our lecture on Bishop Gore's *Belief in God*, as we do not write lectures, and it would therefore require a shorthand report. But we will see about writing on the book. We wish it were a stronger one than it is, we should then write about it with the greater pleasure.

C. DINScombe.—We are glad to learn that the Caerphilly Labour Party has sent a protest against the sentence on J. W. Gott to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, and the local M.P. Too many of these protests cannot be sent, and we are grateful for every one that goes forward.

V. J. HANDS.—We are pleased to find that as an ex-Spiritualist you find *The Other Side of Death* so illuminating and helpful. Perhaps some day we may write a larger and more exhaustive work on the same subject. We have, as was said, only touched the fringe of it in that book.

J. FOTHERGILL.—Thanks for addresses. Letter will appear next week.

H. WILLIAMS.—Blasphemy pamphlets are being sent. We are obliged for list.

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All Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to "The Pioneer Press" and crossed "London, City and Midland Bank, Clerkenwell Branch."

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

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

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

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The world of mind will be divided upon the question of baptism as long as there are two simple and effective methods of baptising, and they are equally disagreeable.
—Dod Grile.

Sugar Plums.

To-day (March 5) Mr. Cohen visits Nottingham. He will open a discussion at the Cosmopolitan Debating Society at 2.30 on "Blasphemy and the Blasphemy Laws," and at 7 will lecture in the Corn Exchange on "The Other Side of Death." We understand that the meetings have been well advertised, and we trust that the results will justify the efforts made. We should like to see a more systematic propaganda in Nottingham than there exists at present. Next Sunday (March 12) Mr. Cohen visits Leicester.

Owing to a sudden strike in the distributing branch of the newspaper trade some of the parcels of *Freethinkers* were not collected last week by the wholesale agents. We hope that those who did not receive their last week's copies will see that they get them this week, by which time we trust the trouble will be over.

Will those members of the National Secular Society who have not yet remitted their subscriptions for 1922 please note that all subscriptions are due on the first of January. The General Secretary would like to get her books as up-to-date as possible for the auditors and accountant, and members will therefore oblige if they will forward what is due with the least possible delay. Branches should also now be considering the question of the Annual Conference. There is to be a departure from the general practice, with regard to the afternoon session, and it is hoped that this will make the meeting more attractive. Railway facilities for attending the Conference are likely to be better than they have been for some years, and we may therefore anticipate a larger attendance than usual. So soon as invitations have been received for the Conference from the Branches they will be asked to vote on the matter.

Mr. William Marriott is giving at Essex Hall, Strand, on March 6, 13, and 20, a course of three lectures on "Modern Spiritualism." The lecture will be illustrated by lantern slides and will deal with the spirit photographs, materializations, etc. Mr. Marriott is an adept at exposing this kind of trickery, and his lectures should be interesting. Tickets to the lectures are, single lecture 1s. and 2s. 6d., or course tickets 2s. 6d. and 6s. The chair will be taken on the three dates by Dr. I. Tuckett, Mr. McCabe and Mr. C. T. Gorham.

On the last page of this issue readers will find a form, in connection with the repeal of the blasphemy laws, to which we hope they will pay serious occasion. The Committee is anxious to get questions put to every candidate for Parliament as to his or her attitude on the matter, and the more who question them in each constituency the better. The one thing that affects nine out of ten members of Parliament is whether they will lose or gain votes. And, therefore, we must show them that we have some strength in the constituencies. In every constituency in the country we must have the important question put and the answer recorded. Now turn to the back page, read the notice, and send your name to Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner at once.

Mr. Gilbert Dale, parliamentary candidate for North St. Pancras, has been questioned by one of his constituents as to his attitude towards the Blasphemy laws. He replies without equivocation that he is in favour of their abolition. We hope that other readers will press the same point upon all candidates and let us know the result.

Thomas Paine's old home in Bleecker Street, New York, has been purchased by the National Historical Association and is to be used as a club-house and school. The school is to be devoted to an exposition of Paine's political teaching as one means of inducing historians to pay regard to the influence of Paine on the ideals of revolutionary times. A resolution was passed at a meeting held in honour of the 165th birthday of Paine protesting against the way in which his work is ignored by historians. The

protest is merited. We have to point out in these columns, time after time, how Paine's teachings have been attributed to some parson or to some semi-religious organization, when circumstances have made the application of these teachings inevitable. Historians are much like other people. They follow the beaten track, and when a man has been boycotted for a generation or two writers seem to lack either the courage or originality to mention him.

Mr. A. B. Moss visits Birmingham to-day (March 5) and will lecture in the Picture House, Station Street, at 7 o'clock on "Paine, Shelley and Bradlaugh." We hope that Birmingham friends will turn up in force and bring some of their Christian acquaintances along. Admission is free.

Most of our readers are aware that in December last the Editor of that lively little paper, the *Free Oxford*, was "sent down" or expelled from the University by formal act of the Vice-Chancellor and Proctors. Dr. Farnell objected not only to the journal's support of Bolshevik measures, but also to what he called "certain unjustifiable passages about the king and religion." It is not difficult to imagine the horror of the academic bourgeoisie when it discovered that the youth of Oxford were making intellectual bombs, and throwing them about in anything but a haphazard way. Now, we can understand, if we cannot sympathize with, Dr. Farnell's point of view. Oxford has always been a sort of haven of quietness for the many who are content to get knowledge without expense of mind. To turn it into an intellectual bear-garden is as unseemly as it is disturbing. The poor Vice-Chancellor did not reckon on the war. He read, of course, his Greek and modern history to no useful purpose. He had a notion that men would come back pretty much as they went. And now he is stupid enough to think that he can stamp out ideas. Surely, of all fools the learned academic fool is the biggest. But, altogether, we are not surprised to learn that the *Free Oxford* finds itself in financial trouble and is appealing for £300 to see itself through the year. The address of the *Free Oxford* is 66 Charing Cross Road, and the subscription 4s. per year.

The Pioneer Press is issuing at once two new pamphlets of Colonel Ingersoll's. These are the *Foundations of Faith* and *What is Religion?* This latter is the last public lecture given by Ingersoll and may be taken as his final confession of faith. Both pamphlets are in Ingersoll's best style and should prove valuable for propagandist purposes. Each pamphlet is published at the low price of one penny each. That is the pre-war price, and is a circumstance that is worthy of notice.

Another pamphlet, also ready, is one by Mr. McLaren, entitled *The Christian Sunday: Its History and its Fruits*. This is a new pamphlet, in neat coloured wrapper, and is published at twopence. We are constantly having applications for something on the question of Sunday, and we are certain that this will meet what is required. Mr. McLaren writes with both force and restraint, and his pamphlet may be taken as an antidote to the efforts that are being made in many quarters to restrict the freedom that has already been attained on the "Day of Rest." Sabbatarianism is still an ugly and a demoralizing force in our midst, and a pamphlet on this subject was needed. These pamphlets will be followed, so soon as possible, by others. There is nothing like keeping up a steady stream of the literature of liberation.

We are pleased to learn that Mr. Dan Griffiths' lectures at Manchester on Sunday last had the effect of bringing to the meetings a number of the Welsh residents in Manchester. In the afternoon Mr. Griffiths gave a much appreciated speech in favour of secular education, and in the evening offered a plea for reformation as against punishment in the treatment of criminals. We should like to see all our judges compelled to attend a course of lectures on that topic. They badly need the instruction. Four new members were made during the day.

Ernest Dowson.

LOVE, of which the poets have sung throughout the ages, should not be fully achieved by a poet. Only by the failure of his emotions to realize in the flesh his desire will the necessity for expression remain to him. By virtue of his more responsive yet more critical nature he is denied the consummation found so satisfying by the grosser man. In his search for that phantasmal beauty which his soul utterly desires, the actual negation of his emotions throws him back upon the beauty he can make with words.

Were he ever to consummate his love, it would scarce be possible for him to sing so sweetly, although a few great poets have married and retained their fervour of creation.

Ernest Dowson was a victim of an unhappy, nay disastrous, love affair. He mistook the beautiful outwardness of his beloved for the case of a soul, forgetting the flower that is so beautiful contains no soul. On the altar of this love he cast his spirit, and out of this immolation has sprung beauty.

The other parts of his life, upon which too much emphasis has perhaps been laid, play little or no part in this creation. They were the other scale that was depressed when his spirit floated lightly away. It was only as a balance to his life that these other things happened. Sanity would have left him had it not been for these utter smirchings of his life.

The beauty of the other all-sacrificing love is found throughout the poems. The sadness of his inability to do that with his love that the ordinary man does, and thus make himself whole of the dread disease, is reflected in his work, and its climax is shown in the wonderful ode, "Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae," which contains the quintessence of his life.

The remainder of the poems are things of daintiness and sweetness, sometimes sad, less often joyful, but always they are fashioned with the most delicate beauty. Just the trivialities of a mind attuned to the ultimate of a fine appreciation are rendered with a clarity and charm which go so far to make up the indefinable quality of real poetry.

It is impossible, of course, that Dowson, consumed as he was by his passion, should have written any number of lyrics on any other subject. The poems are, therefore, in the majority love-lyrics. They are sad with that tinge of sadness which overflows the spirit on seeing a beautiful quiet landscape. They are dainty with the daintiness of the troubadours, and in the one or two poems of nature Dowson shows that he is a lineal descendant of the Provençal poets. The spirit of those old songsters is captured in the lines—

In the deep violet air,
Not a leaf is stirred;
There is no sound heard,
But afar the rare
Trilled voice of a bird.

But after all, the poet's preoccupation was life, and he has spent his spirit in the knowledge of love. Not possible would have been these wonder songs of beautiful imagery, not possible would have been the love that spent itself on "ladies' hands," if Dowson had been more fortunate in his chosen woman. He would have forgotten those days of vain longings, of deep and true and vivid joy in thinking of, in looking at, in solving the spirit in the emotion only one face, only one form was pregnant to arouse. These days before the sadness of disillusion, when he found the beautiful casket was empty of those treasures for which his soul hungered, Dowson has immortalized in the "Vilanelle of his lady's Treasures"—perhaps the most perfect specimen of this form to be found in the English language,

Even after the painful time when his beloved had failed him, Dowson worshipped at the old shrine. Truly his love must have been an idol, and he an idolater. She must have been a symbol with which his fancy played, and her beauty a hook on which he could hang the other beauties he so excellently made. It is not to a tangible beloved woman that many of his lines are written, it is to love itself, and to those queer and different gracefulneses that awaken passion at different times. Thus at one time he will love "ladies' hands," at another "the fragrant darkness of her hair," at yet another all these things are gathered together in a net of beautiful words, but always he "walked in love's land a little way." He must have feared to go too far lest he should discover he was walking in a land of dreams. His anxiety to avoid this terrible discovery was what prevented him from bringing his love to an apt conclusion: too often he had made the fatal error in a lighter manner, and thus he sings:—

Because he shall be utterly disowned,
Nor length of service bring
Her least awakening;
Foiled, frustrate and alone, misunderstood, uncrowned,
Is Love less King?"

Of course for Dowson he was not, and for any other poet it would be equally impossible. 'Twas love he loved and not a beautiful woman! So that when in words of haunting sadness he declares—

I knew the end before the end was nigh;
The stars had grown so plain;
Vainly I sigh, in vain
For things that come to some,
But unto you and me will never come,—

we know he would not have had it otherwise. He did not really wish "For things that come to some," for had he obtained them the beauty that saturated his soul and overflowed in verse he would never have known.

G. E. FUSSELL.

Where Was Methuselah?

"AND the days of Abraham's life were 175 years, and decaying he died!" So the Bible says, and it would seem to be time that Abraham died, for he had lived a busy, active, pioneer life; and "he was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born." Abraham seems to us to have had more than a reasonable lease of life, but in reality he was "cut off in the flower of his youth," so to speak, when compared with other very healthy ancients of these truly "good old days." Abraham's own father was 205 years when he went under, but that record is barely worth mentioning when we remember that that early explorer, Noah, had scored 950 years when he passed away, and even Noah was not at the top of the poll by a long way either. But it is on record that Noah "drank," and that probably accounts for his untimely decease.

How the patriarchs managed to stave off the grim old scythe-bearer so long is a mystery; one that makes even the people of this enlightened age seem "very small pumpkins" indeed. The man who tops the century now is looked upon as a good enough "draw" for a "freak" museum and has his photo in all the papers in his land; but in the olden times, in the Mellin's food age, many men were 100 years of age when they were gladdened by the arrival of their first-born child. It does not seem that the people of ancient Egypt, Greece, or Rome knew the secret of longevity, smart as they undoubtedly were, but there are records (more or less shady) of men of the Middle Ages, and even later, whose age was undoubtedly very great, even allowing for the "bloomers" for which they had a great skill in fabricating. The Wandering Jew must have had some sort of existence, and no doubt it was a fairly long one; in fact, he must have

been well up in years when he started to walk round the world for a wager—as so many younger frauds have done in our own days.

The luxury of longevity was enjoyed by Father Adam who lived 930 years. Methuselah lived 969 years—and the famous Melchizedek is not even dead yet! In respect of Methuselah, however, some carping critics will have it that, he not only succeeded in establishing for himself a name as "record-breaker," but that he also succeeded in laughing away time after his grandson, Noah, had "closed down" against the watery season, that the question arises, Where was Methuselah? It is pointed out that "Methuselah lived after he begat Lamech 782 years" (Gen. v. 26). Also, that "Lamech lived 182 years and begat Noah" (v. 28); and again (vii. 6) "Noah was 600 years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth" (600 and 182 equals 782).

If all the critics say Methuselah survived and outlived the flood by ten months and even a few days, did the old man die naturally just before the world's people went into a state of voluntary liquidation, or did Noah leave his old grandad to drown because he was getting past work? (And here, gentle reader, place this into the hopper of your thinking-mill.) "In the 600th year of Noah's life" (Gen. vii. 11), "in the second month and the seventeenth day of the month, the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were open"; (verse 12) "and the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights." Thus, being in his 600th year of Noah's life, in the second month of the year, was only 599 years, one month and seventeen days old! For example, from the birth of Methuselah to the birth of Lamech 187 years; from the birth of Noah to the flood 599 years, one month, seventeen days—968 years, one month, seventeen days.

Never sit down with a tear or a frown
But just paddle your own canoe.

So, no doubt, Methuselah thought with smug self-satisfaction.

And why he was not down beneath the hatches
With all the other creatures, two by two,
We find no mention in the old despatches—
The log gives ne'er a clue!

Was there ever such a wonderful G.O.M. since the world began?
THE OWL.

Writers and Readers.

WALT WHITMAN ONCE MORE.

Those of us who are allowed to air our opinions on literature in the pages of the *Freethinker* enjoy privileges which are seldom granted the literary critics of the more orthodox sheets. We are able to say precisely what we have in our minds in a way best suited to the subject. We are not told to keep one eye on the publisher and to divide the other between the author and the reader. The length and seriousness of our book-reviews are not measured by the published price of the volumes, the standing of the publisher, or the reputation of the writer. That compelling word, a "best seller," fails to move us, and we can afford either to ignore the inept and inane work of gentlemen who have made a name, or to correct their foolishness with a light but firm hand. We are at liberty to defend lost causes, to put in a word for the despised Victorians, and, on occasion, to let the wind out of a flatulent Elizabethan, and to shove a spoke in the wheel of one of our bumptious Georgians. At our pleasure we can exalt Poe at the expense of Lowell; we can raise up Hawthorne and cast down R. L. S. In fine, we have many advantages, not the least being our diligence in seeking for genius and talent in unlikely places—for which we sometimes get our reward.

To give an instance; a little while ago I was lucky enough to come across one of the best introductions to

Walt Whitman I have yet seen. The book is based on three lectures read before the Liscard Adult School by the author, Mr. Godfrey W. Mathews. We hasten to congratulate our Cheshire friends on their good luck. It would be hard to find better literary lectures even in London, and Mr. Mathews is a Sainte-Beuve compared with even the more intelligent of our University Extension lecturers, who are paid to bring English letters to the masses, with what results some of us have been made painfully aware. The little book, I may mention before I forget, is published by the *Daily Post* Printers, Wood Street, Liverpool, and sold at 2s. I can assure the reader who is wise enough to credit me with common-sense in the matter of literary taste that he has here a book which will give him pleasure as well as instruction; a more shapely piece of work than James Thomson's biographical jottings, thrown together by the late Mr. Dobell, and infinitely saner than the rhapsodical study of the "Prophet of the New Age" given us by Mr. Will Hayes. In my opinion it is even better than the book by J. A. Symonds, for the reason that Mr. Mathews is not afflicted with the distressing mania for writing beautifully and emotionally on all subjects. In criticism, what we need most of all is the old impartiality of a judge directing in the clearest and simplest language an average intelligent jury.

We do get a measure of this cool impartiality in Mr. Mathews' little study of a writer whom I am glad to say he never once refers to as "the tan-faced poet of the West." We are thankful for anything in the nature of critical acumen on a subject which so often leads us astray either towards unbalanced eulogy or equally unbalanced censure. We know the extremes to which Swinburne went, impelled first by his emotional and exotic temperament, and afterwards sacrificing his robustly independent judgment of life and art to the moral philistinism of his "dry nurse" Watts-Dunton.

Now the test of a critic's competence is his sympathetic reaction to new ideas, and there is no one who upsets our notions of life and art more completely than Whitman. We are forced to re-adjust our conception of poetry, to disregard the traditional structure of our verse, and to accept a sort of compromise between poetry and prose. In my opinion he has created a new viable medium, and one that gives us the genuine thrill of æsthetic pleasure. I cannot for the life of me agree with Mr. Mathews when he says that Whitman must be read only for the thought, and I think that he is off the mark when he tells us that we can enjoy the verbal melody of Shelley and Swinburne without understanding a word of what they are saying. That is a heresy he has learnt from Walter Pater. Whitman's prosody consists, I imagine, in an approximately equal grouping of phrases so subtle in its appeal to the ear that it eludes us even after repeated readings. But the temporal scheme is there, and could, I think, be exteriorized by a musical notation. It is the artistic side of his genius that has influenced European poetry. Any anthology of modern German verse will serve to make it clear that he has been studied attentively both as to form and substance, while in French letters we have an elaborate study by M. Bazalgette, a version of *Leaves of Grass*, and a general movement towards freer verse-rhythms in which he counts as a seminal force. Here in England he has a few acknowledged disciples, like Mr. Edward Carpenter and Mr. F. S. Flint, but his influence is not limited to a few, and shows itself in places where we should not expect to find it—in such a poem as Mr. Bridges' "London Snow."

It is not however the artistic side of Whitman that counts with our modern English democrats. For them he is a great moral force, and in their moments of ethical expansion they deny the artist, in this way revealing the immense courage of ignorance. They disregard the master's warning to those who would expound him, and sweat over the self-imposed task of turning a poet's vagrant impressions into a coherent system. For them he is Socrates, Buddha and the Jesus of the Gospels recast in a Yankee mould. We can understand their enthusiasm, although we cannot share it without important reservations. Mr. Mathews

has some intelligent remarks about Whitman's treatment of sex in his poetry. It is a difficult subject to handle without symbolism, and even for those of us who are not squeamish it is as unnecessary as it is difficult. It is wiser to leave the mere act to the imagination and develop the emotions accompanying it. All functions of the body are natural, but they are not all fit subjects for poetry. Whitman's earnestness keeps him straight in this dubious experiment in plain speech. There is not a hint of that lasciviousness which we find in Dean Swift and Sterne; but the result, in my opinion, is not worth the expense of spirit.

There is another article in the creed of this "later Socrates" to which some of us are not inclined to subscribe. He calls it "adhesiveness," a passionate form of friendship between man and man. Plato and the Greeks would have known what he meant by it much better than the average man of to-day, who has a rather ugly word for it. It is Whitman's claim that in the blessed democratic future "manly love" will take the place of love between the sexes, but, as history is always a weak point in our prophets, he does not know that this relationship has ever been associated with the degradation of women. The curious in these matters will have noted that for Whitman, as for the Greeks, woman was not the spiritual compeer of man, but merely the means by which the human race is perpetuated. Whitman was not the normal man his admirers make him out to be, and it is precisely this side of his nature that attracted a semi-Greek like J. A. Symonds. This dubious sentiment he makes the basis of the brotherhood or comradeship or democracy which is to save the world. I do not wonder now why some intelligent women of my acquaintance have an ill-disguised contempt for our Yankee Socrates. They have simply no place in his philosophy of life.

The prophet of a new era would be nothing without a religion. Mr. Mathews has an instructive chapter on the "religion" of Whitman. He admits that there is nothing definite to go upon, that the poet's ideas never got beyond the protoplasmic stage, that he might be identified with any creed, and yet would have rejected the claim of even the vaguest of religious beliefs. Religion was one of his great words, and what it meant for him was merely the suffusion of intellectual truths with emotion. He looked around him and saw not a providential government of the universe, a divine and beneficent ordering of all things for the best, but "rank on rank, the army of unalterable law." This conception of immutability is not religious in itself, while for certain types of mind the descent to fatalism is easy. You may, of course, name this observed enchainment of things God if you have an emotional craving for grandiose expressions for simple facts, you may also make the other pole of your religion love or sympathy, as it is claimed that Whitman did. But these truths of cosmic order, and sympathy with all sentient things may be held intellectually or partly touched with emotion. They are not the peculiar property of the religious mind. They are envisaged with unforgettable intensity of passion by Lucretius, and on a lower plane of thought by Tennyson. Whitman gave a new form to them, enriching them with his incomparable emotional force. He never had a definite idea of a God, although he uses the word, as Mr. Havelock Ellis notes, to obtain emphasis. He told his friend Bucke that he never had any particular religious experience, and never felt the need of spiritual regeneration, although he could appreciate the earnestness of a sweating Methodist evangelist. What he says about animals indicates his convinced opinion of that "religious" animal—man.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their
sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to
God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the
mania of possessing things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived
thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole
earth.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

Correspondence.

FREETHOUGHT AND THE STATE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Miss B. A. Bayfield is rather captious and irrelevant in her criticism of my essay "Mind Your Own Business." If she will consult the *Century Dictionary* she will there find anarchy rightly defined as: "A social theory which regards the union of order with the absence of all direct government of man by man as the political ideal; absolute individual liberty." And if she will read Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* she will there find a very strong indictment of the State for failing to mind its own business.

In the absence of severe legal penalties for issuing money, selling drink, keeping dogs and cats, she sees this country "travelling rapidly in the direction now taken by Russia," oblivious of the fact that under the Communistic regime of Lenin and Trotsky individual liberty has ceased to exist in Russia. Once the people did not see how they could get on if a commoner were allowed to dress like a nobleman; or if people were not hanged for a score of offences; or if everybody were allowed to read the Bible and judge it for himself; or how they could manage unless witches were burnt at the stake. Only sixty years ago the Southern States of America could not see how they could be saved from ruin without their slaves. At present most people like to be ruled by plutocrats, made rich by currency and land laws, and keep an army and a police force for the protection of them and their property. By-and-by, slowly enough, they will learn to love freedom, and as they learn to love it they will get it. And when they get it some Miss Bayfield of the future will say: "I do not see how a law-strangled, officer-bullied, state Socialistic and slavishly dependent society could have existed with as much ease and harmony as my forefathers seem to have enjoyed." G. O. W.

FREETHOUGHT DEBATING SOCIETIES.

SIR,—I heartily agree with friend Mason in advocating the formation of Freethought Debating Societies. Unfortunately, I am too far away from any Branch of the N. S. S. (Birmingham being the nearest, a distance of thirty-five miles) to do anything of a practical nature; and realizing the need for speakers I am endeavouring to acquire the art by attending the meetings of a local debating society. I would urge upon all my fellow-members the necessity of some such course of action, as the need for propagandists of the right sort was never so great as it is at the present time. Freethinkers, if they are to be of any use as propagandists, *must* thoroughly understand the Freethought case, and forceful advocacy can only come by continual practice. If our friends of the Birmingham Branch will "get a move on" in the matter, I shall, personally, be delighted to take part in it whenever the journey can be made. I am always open to lecture if I can be of any use, whilst the question of expenses need not arise. To serve the cause is all I ask.

VINCENT J. HANDS.

ANARCHISM.

SIR,—I desire to associate myself with your correspondent Beatrice A. Bayfield *re* the writings of G. O. W. I have appealed to you to deal with this subject as I felt myself inferior to G. O. W. in talent and ability. I may say this, however, he and I were old correspondents of the now defunct *Echo*, and neither I nor others of his critics were denied the space to criticize his most mischievous theories in that paper.

Anarchism is one of the silliest and most mischievous of delusions, even when dignified by the prefix of "philosophic." Down here in Reading during the war we have held meetings (Socialist) and indulged in a marvellous freedom of speech compared with what I read of elsewhere. Why? Because the Reading police, to their honour be it said, acted fairly and honorably, and checked incipient disorder by interrupters. I am distinctly a law-and-order man. Suppose, in the course of our history, we had, instead of trying to change bad laws for better ones, advocated anarchy, where should we have been now?

A. J. MARRIOTT.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON
FEBRUARY 23, 1922.

The President, Mr. C. Cohen, in the Chair. Also present: Messrs. Corrigan, Moss, Quinton, Rosetti, Miss Pankhurst, Miss Pitcher, Miss Kough and the Secretary. An apology was received from Mr. Jas. Neate who was absent from indisposition.

Minutes of the last meeting read and confirmed.

Monthly Cash Statement presented and adopted.

New members were received for Bridgfoot and Broughton, Leeds, Manchester, South London, West Ham and the Parent Society. Permission was asked by the residents of Bridgfoot and Broughton to form a Branch to be called the Derwent Branch. Granted unanimously.

A report was received from the Swansea Branch of indoor propaganda to date. It was agreed unanimously that a grant of £10 be made.

Report of the proceedings of the Committee for the Abolition of the Blasphemy laws was received, stating that a Bill had been prepared for presentation to the House of Commons and a printed question for candidates for Parliament was in circulation. Mr. Cohen's *Blasphemy* pamphlet was also being widely circulated, and it was resolved that the N. S. S. purchase 1,000 copies for free distribution. Members and friends to be invited to supply the General Secretary with names and addresses of persons likely to be interested.

It was further resolved that the penalty of £5 plus £1 is. for costs, inflicted upon E. Leggatt by Mr. Justice Avory at the trial of J. W. Gott for an interruption in Court, be paid.

Matters in connection with the Annual Conference were discussed and it was also agreed that Mr. Whitehead's services be utilized as far as possible for open-air propaganda in London and the Provinces.

E. M. VANCE,
General Secretary.

Obituary.

While we rejoice that they have lived and loved and adorned the Cause, we regret to record the passing of so many good and notable Freethinkers. In the course of Nature this must be so, and time and teaching may more than repair the rank and file thus sadly depleted. Many Glasgow Freethinkers will remember the venerable figure of the late Mr. Davidson Strathearn, who died a few weeks ago in the house of Mr. Lester his son-in-law, at Scotstown. Mr. Thomas Robertson went down and said a few appropriate words at the funeral. The late Mr. Strathearn was a kind of Grand Old Man of the Movement, seeming to epitomise in his person and address the dignity, culture and human kindness of Freethought. To hear him open a discussion, or propose a vote of thanks for services rendered, was to think of the gentleman in thought and word and deed. It is pleasant also to know that this fine old Freethinker survived to the ripe age of ninety-two.

A. M.

Death has again visited the maternal home of the well-known Turnbull family, at Raeberry Street, Glasgow. The writer was one of a party gathered there on Sunday, February 19, while in another room, in his silent sleep, lay the body of Tom Turnbull. Tom had been a fine musician, but the horrors of the late war upset a delicately sensitive mind, and the malady becoming slowly more pronounced, the peaceful end came on Saturday, February 18. Surrounded by numerous friends and relations the dear old mother still bears up and smiles amid her sorrows. It was beautiful and touching to see the bright, vivacious Nellie Black (daughter of the late Dan Black of the Glasgow Branch, and present Secretary of the same, and who shortly sails for Australia) catch the aged face between her hands and implant upon it a loving kiss. The whole was a memorable occasion, and such human touches and sympathetic intercourse rob even death of half its woes. The Turnbull family will have the sincere sympathy of Glasgow secularists.

A. M.

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Friends desiring to benefit the Society are invited to make donations, or to insert a bequest in the Society's favour in their wills. The now historic decision of the House of Lords in *re Bowman and Others v. the Secular Society, Limited*, in 1917, a verbatim report of which may be obtained from its publishers, the Pioneer Press, or from the Secretary, makes it quite impossible to set aside such bequests.

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

LONDON.

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METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Johnson's Dancing Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, near Edgware Road): 7.30, Mr. W. A. Hyatt, "The Sun, the Maker of the Seasons." Discussion Circle meets every Wednesday at 7.30, "Coronet" Hotel, Soho Street, W.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, Mr. H. V. Storey, "Indian Affairs."

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, John A. Hobson, M.A., "The Ethics of Taxation."

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BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Picture House, Station Street): 7, Mr. Arthur B. Moss, "Three Great Pioneers—Paine, Shelley and Bradlaugh."

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LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, 41st Anniversary of the opening of the Secular Hall.

NOTTINGHAM (Cosmopolitan Debating Society): Mr. Chapman Cohen, 2.30, "Blasphemy and the Blasphemy Laws"; (Corn Exchange): 7, "The Other Side of Death."

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (3 Thompson Street, Tyne Dock): 6.30, Future Propaganda; Annual Conference; Mr. J. Fothergill, "Freethought and Labour."

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