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## Views and Opinions.

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### Rome and Christianity.

I referred last week to the orthodox Christian picture of Roman civilization as being in a state of hopeless corruption at the time of the rise of Christianity. Against that I placed the fact of the political decay of Rome as serving the starting point of the growth of a religion such as Christianity, whose false ethics, religious fanaticism and contempt of secular civilization hastened a general decay that was not beyond the possibility of remedy. Professor Ferrero draws the following picture of the aim of the Roman government in the early part of the second century of this era:—

To bring justice to the world by a system of law, which was the work of reason and equity, had become the mission of the great Empire.....a mission the most noble and elevated which a State of the ancient world had set before itself and that realized completely the great doctrine of Aristotle which sets forth that the supreme aim of a State is neither riches nor power, but virtue. The large and small towns in all provinces vied with each other in the construction of the most beautiful buildings, in establishing schools, in organizing sumptuous fêtes and ceremonies, in encouraging the studies most in favour at the time, and in making provision for the well-being of the poorer classes. Agriculture, industry and commerce flourished; the finances of the Empire and of the towns were not yet in too bad a condition, and the army was still sufficiently strong to impose upon the barbarians hovering on the frontiers respect for the name of Rome.

Readers of the works of Professor Dill will not readily agree with the picture of the almost complete collapse of the administrative machinery only fifty years later drawn by Professor Ferrero, but the above is quoted in order to show how wide of the truth is the popular Christian picture of the state of Rome at the time when Christianity was beginning to gain in strength. Professor Ferrero sketches well and rapidly many of the causes which contributed to the decline of the Roman civilization, with which I have now no time to deal. What I wish to do is to consider certain features in connection with the triumph of Christianity which are indicated by him rather than emphasised or elaborated.

### Science and the Church.

To begin with there is the damning fact, already alluded to, that under Christian auspices and control the old civilization did die out. In this connection it is not sufficiently recognized that Christianity had much in its favour to encourage the development of civilization had it been so inclined. It came into existence as a definite political force amid a people with traditions of culture, of orderly government, rich in philosophical speculation, in art, literature and jurisprudence. In the case of Mohammedanism, we see that religion rising amid a poorly cultured people, and in the course of a few centuries—thanks to the readiness of its political leaders to embrace the learning of the ancient world—developing a rich and fruitful civilization, which gave the impetus to Europe to recover from the devastating rule of the Christian Church. With Christianity we witness the most frenzied opposition to the learning and science of the ancient world; we see the latter's civilization sinking the more steadily as the Christian Church advanced in power, and this, not as something against which the Church fought, but as a consequence which it heartily welcomed. On the most favourable count the case lies against Christianity that it did not save the ancient world, and on the least favourable, that it contributed largely to its downfall. And against that solid fact all the apologies of Christian advocates break down. And if a further fact is required to drive home this point, one need only contrast Rome Pagan with Rome Christian, or Greece Pagan with Greece Christian, at any period of their history, to realize the degeneration that set in with Christian dominance.

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### Narrowing the Social Horizon.

The Roman Empire commenced its career, naturally enough, on a somewhat exclusive basis, with a very definite, local religion, and an equally strong local tradition. It developed into a cosmopolitanism such as nowhere exists to-day, an Empire containing a mixture of races, manners, and religious beliefs, and displaying a tolerance which the modern world—thanks to the long dominance of Christianity—finds it very hard to appreciate. It never occurred to the Roman government to deny men equality of treatment on the score of colour or creed. The "colour bar" is something that belongs entirely to Christian times, and it is one of the ironical comments on Christian talk of brotherhood that it is precisely under the shelter of the Christian religion that elaborate and legal bars to the genuine brotherhood of men, such as were unknown to antiquity, have been created. Roman citizenship was among the most solid of facts. It embraced with ease men of all nations, races, colour and creed. In this respect the cosmopolitanism of Christianity was no new thing. It was taught by the chief philosophical sects of antiquity and was part of the settled policy of the Roman government. What Christianity did was to narrow this principle by giving it a sectarian application. It substituted the Church for the Empire as the basis of a common principle of humanity. Other things equal, a Christian was bound to befriend every



other member of the Church—in theory, that is, for in practice we know that the bitterest of hatreds raged and the most malignant of passions were manifested. But outside of that select membership the ordinary rules of social life failed to apply. The motto of the Church became “No faith with heretics,” and the principle was applied all round. In fact, there can be no reasonable denial of the statement that instead of Christianity acting as a moralizing force on life, no other single thing did so much to falsify the moral currency. And it has left its mark very deeply on the whole of subsequent European history.

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#### Politics and the Church.

In the political struggles of the second and third centuries Professor Ferrero notes the steady increase of Eastern religious cults, themselves a preparation for that synthesis of Eastern religions which became known as Christianity, and along with this he notes how the political situation led some of the rulers to lean more and more towards an Eastern and absolutist form of government. The sovereign himself became divine, or a representative of the divinity. There was some opposition to this departure, but it gained ground, and with the establishment of the Christian Church became firmly established. This, indeed, is one more instance in which we can trace the evil influence of Christianity. King worship in Western Europe came in with Christianity, and the subsequent history of Europe might have been far different from what it was had the Roman tradition held the field. Professor Ferrero makes it quite clear that Christianity rose to power very largely as a tool of the government, and it has owed the greater part of its power ever since to the readiness with which it lent itself to the schemes and aims of the governing interests. But while this aspect of Christianity is made quite plain by the Professor, we find him remarking of Christianity, as though it were some special virtue, that it gave “a sacred character to all governments alike, whether republican or monarchic, aristocratic or democratic, so long as they were legal.....Obedience to these governments was a duty imposed by God.” This expresses a true view of the influence of Christianity in the political world, and one of great consequence. For it meant, in practice, the loss of the traditions of civic freedom, the establishment of the divine right of kings, and made revolt against established authority one of the greatest of crimes. It is true that Christianity did not originate this principle, it belonged to the East, and was only planted in the West after a great struggle. But it is surely correct to say that the recognition that no government is “sacred,” but that all must be judged by their influence on the happiness of people, is essential to orderly social progress. Professor Ferrero is on much stronger ground when he points out that in his endeavour to overcome the old Roman tradition of freedom Constantine saw in Christianity one of the best of allies. When Paul counselled his followers to render obedience to the powers that be, for they were ordained of God, he was enunciating a principle that has played admirably into the hands of tyrants in all ages.

#### A Futile Apology.

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Before I leave Professor Ferrero's book there is one point on which a word or two may be said. There is a curious confusion of thought in the following passage, which almost looks as though it were penned in deference to the desire to find something good in the reign of Christianity. Dealing with the period from the fourth to about the thirteenth centuries Professor Ferrero says:—

For long centuries theology remained in the West the only form of high culture which survived among

the ruins of all the others; and it proved to be the means of preventing Europe from plunging back into complete and definite barbarism. It is, indeed, from this last surviving form of intellectual life that little by little were developed the other forms of culture, philosophy, literature and law, in short, all the great intellectual movements which culminated in the Renaissance. It was in the intellectual discipline which had been preserved by dogma all through the great chaos of the Middle Ages that little by little Europe found again and re-established that principle of authority which the Empire had sought in vain.

Now the only basis there is for such a statement as this is that *some* of the ancient culture survived. And to that it may be said that, had none survived we should be in a still more barbaric state than we are. But to put its survival down to the Church is quite unjustifiable. For the Church was one of the principal agents in its suppression, and one might fill columns of the *Freethinker* with the denunciations of the leaders of the ancient learning by the leaders of the Church. Further, it is not to the influence of anything the Church did that the Renaissance owes its origin. The immediate causes were the influences of the Crusades, the Mohammedan culture, and the downfall of Byzantium—that stronghold of Christian obscurantism and theology. Finally, all that can be said for the maintenance of the intellectual discipline of the Church, when of any value, is that it benefited here because it was never able to quite override the influence of the culture of the ancient world. But in the main the Church saw to it that the mental energy of men was spent on subjects that were not of the slightest value to anyone, and the value of its discipline is seen in the fact of its direct opposition to every scientific discovery by which our present ideas of the universe and of man have been built up. And when all is said and done, the positive portions of Professor Ferrero's book completely dispose of his apology for the Church. For he cannot help showing that it was under its auspices that the ancient civilization declined, that the ruin of the old world was one of the conditions of the growth of Christianity, that it fed on the growing decrepitude of the ancient world like some evil parasite on the weakening tissues of the human body, and that the attitude of the Church towards social life was in the highest degree deplorable. If Christianity had been the good influence its defenders claim, it should have saved the world. It did not; and one day it will be realized that no greater disaster ever befell the European peoples than the triumph of the Christian religion.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### “The Christian Synthesis.”

SUCH is the title of a unique discourse by the Rev. W. R. Matthews, D.D., Dean of King's College, London, which appeared in the *Christian World Pulpit* of April 13. The text was Rom. v. 8: “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” The uniqueness of this sermon must strike every thoughtful reader. Dr. Matthews is a remarkably broad-minded theologian who yet holds and boldly preaches the evangelical Gospel. He wants us to transport ourselves in imagination into the first century and put ourselves, as far as that is possible, in the place of those who heard the apostle's statement for the first time. The preacher has in mind the Gentiles to whom Paul's message specially appealed, and his point is that it would not have impressed them as containing anything startlingly new. It would have fallen upon



their ears with an amazing degree of familiarity. As Dr. Matthews says :—

There are, I suppose, two thoughts in our text : the love of God, commended to men by the death of Christ. Neither of these thoughts would be utterly strange to the Pagan whom we are imagining. He is, in fact, living in a civilization which is permeated by conceptions which have a remarkable resemblance to them.

Among scholars that is now a truism. Thirteen years ago Professor Flinders Petrie, the distinguished Egyptologist, called attention to the fact that as far back as 340 B.C. the doctrines of the sinfulness of the world and the beloved Son of God, who as Logos made the world, and rendered its rebirth possible, were more or less clearly taught in the Hermetic writings. Three years later Professor Gilbert Murray published his *Four Stages of Greek Religion*, on page 143 of which appears the following statement :—

The Gnostics are still commonly thought of as a body of Christian heretics. In reality there were Gnostic sects scattered over the Hellenistic world before Christianity as well as after. They must have been established in Antioch and probably in Tarsus well before the days of Paul or Apollos. Their Saviour, like the Jewish Messiah, was established in men's minds before the Saviour of the Christians.

Curiously enough, there is nothing in any of the Pauline Epistles to indicate the writer's indebtedness for his central ideas to the Gentile world. On the contrary, Paul vigorously contended that he owed nothing to either Athens, Rome, or even Jerusalem. It was his proud boast, as touching the Gospel preached by him, that it was not after man. "For neither did I receive it from man," he exclaimed, "nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. i. 12, 13). But the Apostle was radically mistaken. In reality, his Gospel was literally a rehash of several older Gospels which were well-known in the Greco-Roman world of his day. This is frankly acknowledged by Dr. Matthews, though not in our words. Saviour-Gods, or Hero-Gods, as he calls them, abounded in the Gentile world before the Gospel Jesus was heard of. The reverend gentleman says :—

Just at that time, all over the Roman Empire, there had been a remarkable outbreak of cultus of Hero-Gods, of supernatural beings who were supposed to have fought and died in order to conquer darkness and evil, and who had—so it was believed—the power of conferring immortality upon their worshippers..... Mithras was the most popular of these Hero-Gods. His shrines, shortly after the date when St. Paul wrote this Epistle, were diffused throughout the Roman Empire; and his worship was for two centuries a dangerous rival to the Christian Church. Our Pagan, then, will not be without ideas corresponding to the message of our text : God commendeth his love to us by the death of Christ.

So far the preacher and ourselves are in substantial agreement. Christianity is pre-eminently a syncretistic religion. In the early centuries it lived on and triumphed through borrowing from its rivals. By itself this fact does not prove it to be untrue, but it does put it in the same category as its rivals. Dr. Matthews is a Christian divine and is naturally under the influence of a bias in favour of his own religion; and yet his logical mind compels him to suggest, as regards his Pagan, "that, strange and imperfect though his version may sound in our ears, it has elements of profound truth." To a gentleman holding such views no other conclusion is possible. Having made that admission Dr. Matthews proceeds to establish the superiority of Christianity. This difficult feat he endeavours to perform by declaring that in Christianity God and the Hero-God are at one, whereas in

Pagan thought they remain throughout perfectly distinct. But the declaration is only very partially, if at all, true. In the Bible, anger, wrath, and indignation are passions constantly attributed to the Supreme Being. The Psalmist says that "God is a righteous God, yea, a God that hath indignation every day," while the prophet Naham assures us that "the Lord is a jealous God and avengeth; the Lord avengeth and is full of wrath; the Lord taketh vengeance on his adversaries and he reserveth wrath for his enemies." Even in the New Testament God is represented as the supreme object of fear, and the statement that "the Lord shall judge his people," has this addendum: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," "for our God is a consuming fire." Now, according to this teaching, the only begotten Son came into the world and assumed our nature in order that he might do something to turn away his Father's wrath from mankind and thereby secure their reconciliation. This used to be regarded as the only orthodox doctrine of the Atonement. As the *Shorter Catechism* puts it: "Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us."

Of that important article in the Christian creed there is no trace whatever in the sermon under consideration. Why Christ died for us while we were yet sinners we are not informed, we are only told that his having done so is a commendation of God's love towards us. Was so costly a sacrifice necessary to achieve such an end? Could not God have effectually manifested his love for humanity without resorting to so base and cruel form of murder? This question Dr. Matthews completely ignores; and yet he speaks of God's victory. He represents Mr. Wells and others as telling us that the Absolute will not help us, that the Supreme Reality has nothing to do with us, and that we need no Supreme Being. One would infer from the language used that Mr. Wells believes in some Hero-God who is neither eternal nor supreme, faith in whom would fill our hearts with courage and with hope. The Dean of King's College exclaims :—

As compared with these one-sided and truncated beliefs, how rich and full the Gospel appears as the consummation of man's spiritual pilgrimage, the satisfaction of all his deepest longings. You need the rest of the Eternal; you cannot stay your mind or heart on anything else than that. But you need, too, the Hero-God, the Friend and Saviour who suffers for you.

That sounds exceedingly plausible, but what does it really mean? What is the Gospel which is described as so rich and full? According to Dr. Matthews it is summed up in Paul's words, "God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." He forgets, however, that the Pauline Gospel was by no means the first in the field. There was the Apostolic or Jerusalem Gospel which is lucidly stated in the Epistle of James, in which the death of Jesus has no special significance or efficacy, which is simple and practical, laying its supreme emphasis upon purity and nobility of character manifesting itself in social service, and which the Lord's brother summarizes thus :—

Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth, but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing. If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and



undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

As compared with this the Pauline Gospel is a purely magical one, in which everything depends upon faith, trust, resignation, an idea tersely expressed in the Pauline supplement to Mark's Gospel, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." That is the Pauline Gospel in a nutshell. Even Dr. Matthews is not quite satisfied with it in the form given to it by the Pauline party in the primitive Church. He improves upon Paul by affirming that "the Christian message involves the taking of the Hero-God out of the sphere of magic and putting him into the sphere of morality." Unfortunately, such a transference is impossible except at the expense of completely transforming the Hero-God. The Christian synthesis of the Supreme Being and the Hero-God described by the preacher is a wholly imaginary transaction and of no practical value whatever. It is easy enough to talk glibly about God's victory, not primarily over the Devil, but over the selfish human heart. Dr. Matthews admits that "it is not easy to think of a battle that is worthy of a God, or of a victory which would not degrade him"; but the unsurmountable difficulty is to intelligently believe in God at all, and the more closely we study human history the more stupendous dimensions does that difficulty assume.

The only conclusion to which we are driven by the facts is that the Christian Gospel has been, and is being, falsified by the event, that at no period in its history has it been glorified by undoubted verification. The truth is that the warfare is not yet accomplished simply because it is human and not Divine warfare, and because believing it to be Divine mankind has never thrown itself into it, resolutely determined to win the victory at whatever cost. J. T. LLOYD.

## The Most Knightly of Saints.

What gasconading rascals those saints must have been, if they first boasted these exploits or invented these miracles. These legends, however, were no more than monkish extravagances over which one laughed inwardly.  
—Charlotte Bronte.

The most knightly of saints was not ill chosen to be patron of this land.

—The "Times" (London), April 24, 1922.

PROTESTANTS are supposed to be averse from saints, but, like so many other things connected with religion, this is far more accurate in theory than in fact. There is one saint, Saint George, who is treated with unusual respect in this Protestant country. The saint's portrait is on the gold coinage, and on some of the banknotes. Or, rather, there is a design of a man on horseback, apparently killing a large cockroach with a carving knife. This is meant to portray Saint George and the Dragon, and the man is supposed by innocent folk to be the patron saint of our "tight little island."

The inclusion during recent years of the Lewis gun among the sacred symbols of the most holy religion of the Prince of Peace has led to a renewed interest in the personality of Saint George. It was, indeed, fondly hoped that, by the help of the Almighty and Lord Northcliffe, many otherwise decent citizens might be persuaded to observe Saint George's day by wearing roses. The suggestion, unhappily, fell flat; but it may prove of interest to many to be informed who Saint George was, his connection with history, and his association with national sentiment.

It is with regret that we find the saint's biography is unpleasant reading, and quite unsuited for the perusal of young persons, and the still more youthful

"buds" of the Primrose League. Historians agree in disclosing a pitiable story of a misspent life. From the highest to the lowest, from the great Edward Gibbon to the popular William Smith, they agree in describing the saint as a creature unfitted to be invited to a garden-party at Fulham Palace. Even Emerson, humanitarian though he was, can find no redeeming traits in the saintly sinner's character. The cultured American tells us that Saint George was "a low parasite," who got-rich-quick, had to flee from justice, was made a bishop, and was finally lynched by the enraged populace.

There is something very distressing in the idea of a Right-Reverend Father in God being "jerked to Jesus." If the saint had died of *delirium tremens*, or had been a co-respondent in a divorce case, we might still have remembered, prayerfully, that even ecclesiastics are but human beings. This lynching, however, is a dreadful business, and we read through a mist of tears how this saintly sinner became in God's good time Saint George of England, and the pride of the leader writers in the *Times* and the *Daily Mail*.

A lemon-hearted cynic might, indeed, liken the history of the patron saint of England to a purple page from the earlier books of the Bible, or the Newgate Calendar, so striking is the resemblance. Some modern historians, realizing the ethical shortcomings of the saint's career, have made desperate, but unavailing, attempts to whitewash the life of the holy man. After silent meditation among the tombs, they have succeeded in deceiving themselves that George was not George, but another man of the same name. Criticism, sharp as Shylock's knife, cuts their nonsense to pieces. The tutelary saint of England, like so many religious heroes, was a scoundrel, and there is an end of it.

Saint George is not an English saint, and he never did anything for England. The chief exploit that we connect him with, the slaying of the dragon, is the one incident that is confessed, even by his warmest supporters, to be a mere solar myth, just a version of Apollo and the python, Bellerophon and the chimera, Perseus and the sea-monster. Even the alternative and comparatively respectable George, who is alleged to have suffered martyrdom under Diocletian, was a ludicrous personage, like some of the pantomime heroes in the *Thousand and One Nights*. This particular Saint George was, we are told, killed three times, coming to life again on two of the occasions. Among the commonplace incidents of his humdrum life were that he was roasted, beheaded, eaten by wild animals. Coming to life again, he was set on a wooden horse, and a fire lighted under him. Sixty nails were driven in his head, and he was sawn into four pieces, and these fragments were thrown into boiling pitch. Again he came to life, and he was finally forced into heaven on a wheel spiked with swords.

All this may be very edifying to Christians, but of what real value is this imaginative nonsense to-day? So far from recommending any citizen to honour such a saint, we suggest it would be a kindness to strew the poppy of oblivion over the grave of such a saintly sinner. Saint George is a disappointment, and one of the most pathetic shams from which ever a great nation sought to extract exalting sentiment. So far as this saint is concerned, there is nothing to celebrate.

MIMNERMUS.

No great factor in civilization, least of all the religious belief and worship of ancient Greece, has passed away and left no mark on the later world. Through its effect on the different phases of Hellenism, particularly through its influence on Roman religion and through its more subtle influence on Christianity, Greek religion had set in motion forces which are still operative.—Arthur Fairbanks, "Handbook of Greek Religion."



## Christianity and the Masses.

### WHAT THE ARMY CHAPLAINS SAY.

In a sense the war has not produced new problems. It has only heavily underlined the old ones. The "blank misgivings" with regard to suffering have always been in the minds of thinking men. But many have never been stung by them before, and now through the experience of these years feel the pains of an implacable doubt.

—Rev. F. R. Berry.

The children of this world are indeed wiser than the children of light; no average professing once-a-year communicant of the Church of England could hold his own for five minutes against any average mildly intelligent—not even intellectual—Agnostic. The unbeliever always knows better what he disbelieves, and why, than the believer knows why he has any faith, what good it is to him or anyone else, or even what it means. And this is only to be expected. Disbelief has the monopoly of thought in the average man.—Rev. T. W. Pym.

The great majority of men in the Army cannot be said to be in any sense closely connected with any branch of organized Christianity, or really interested in the propositions or problems of the Faith.—Rev. Philip C. T. Crick.

"The Church in the Furnace," 1918; (Essays by Army Chaplains), pp. 46, 299, 351.

THERE has been no systematic inquiry into the religious status of the people since the great work of Charles Booth—no relation or connection with General Booth—*Life and Labour of the People of London*, seven volumes of which were devoted to "Religious Influences." The result of the inquiry, as summarised at the end of the seventh volume, was: "The fact must be admitted that the great masses of the people remain apart from all forms of religious communion, apparently untouched by the Gospel that, with various differences of interpretation and application, is preached from every pulpit."<sup>1</sup> This most laborious investigation took place during the ten years 1890—1900. This revelation caused a great sensation among religious circles, and was much discussed in the daily Press, many plans being suggested to bring the sheep back to the fold. More than twenty years have passed since then; have the Churches gained or lost during that period? That is the question we propose to answer.

During the great war the Churches appointed a committee to investigate the state of religious belief among the soldiers of the newly raised armies in the various camps which sprang up, as if by magic, at home and abroad. A Questionnaire was drawn up and issued broadcast among the chaplains and agents appointed by the committee. An immense amount of evidence was accumulated, the result was boiled down into a stout volume of over 450 pages, and published in 1910 under the title, *The Army and Religion*. Unlike Booth's work, the book seems to have made no great stir, and, in fact, we only became acquainted with it within the last few weeks; yet it is quite as important as the earlier work, more so, in fact, to Freethinkers.

The importance of the inquiry, as the Introduction points out, is that the new armies contained "the flower of the younger manhood of the nation." Not of the old, who have had their day. Or of the children, who have not commenced theirs. Or of the women who, in the main, still kneel at the foot of the Cross, or, at any rate, still have one knee on the ground. The inquiry was wholly limited to the most virile portion of the population. The very men the Churches would most like to capture.

No pains were spared to make the inquiry as thorough as possible. The Bishop of Winchester (E. S. Talbot) tells us in the Preface that—

nearly three hundred memoranda, often of consider-

able length, resting on the evidence of many hundred witnesses, have been obtained from men of all ranks, generals down to privates, chaplains, doctors, nurses, hut leaders and workers, and also from committees appointed at the great bases in England and France to collect evidence (p. vi.).

It is perhaps needless to say that neither Atheism, Secularism, nor Agnosticism was represented on the committee, so that it cannot be said that the findings of the committee were contaminated by a bias to Free-thought.

It was feared at the outset of the inquiry that no definite conclusions could be arrived at, that reports from different sections of the Army would contradict one another,—

and that the result would be a mere blur. But in the event on nearly on all broad outlines of the situation, the papers, though coming from every kind of witness, were found to be practically unanimous, a fact which has assisted us to reach a practically unanimous report (pp. xxix-xxx.).

It should be borne in mind, too, that the armies were drawn from all ranks and divisions of the nations; skilled mechanics, clerks, shop assistants, mill hands, labourers, all were drawn into the net; yet the committee do not distinguish between the views on religion of the labourer and the mechanic, or the clerk and the mill hand, they are all, in the mass, agreed in rejecting the ministrations of the Churches.

There is no need to cavil with the assurance of the committee "That the evidence has been presented fairly and in due proportion" (p. vii.). Only upon one point do we believe them to have gone astray; that is where they report: "It is very remarkable that the whole materialistic and anti-religious propaganda, which made so much noise, and apparently had so much vogue among our labouring classes a few years ago, seems to have simply withered away in the fire of the line" (p. 7). Now the Freethinkers of Britain contributed their full share of recruits to the new armies, my own son and many thousand others went to the front. I have his letters, and other parents have theirs, to show that there was no "withering away" of their convictions in the face of danger. It is simply a calumny to say there was, and, in fact, there is no instance given in the book of an Atheist changing his opinions under such conditions.

It is easy, however, to see how this idea arose when we read that "The great mass of our correspondents .....are for the most part deeply Christian in spirit, and who are many of them loyally attached to the Churches, and not a few of them chaplains" (p. 192). It should be borne in mind that the chaplains held the rank and pay of officers and messed with them. Now it is not likely that the unbeliever would be so silly as to seek out the chaplain and roundly announce his unbelief, a procedure which would benefit neither his cause nor himself. In the Army you are in a machine, and the officer is the god in the machine; his power, in war time, is very great, and the rank and file have no appeal from any injustice he cares to inflict; the unbeliever, then, who delivered himself over, metaphorically speaking, bound hand and foot to the vindictive religious spirit would be, to use a common phrase, "asking for it." Moreover, as the book reveals, there were generals, colonels, majors, captains and lieutenants among the correspondents to the committee, and none of these, in the ordinary course of events, were likely to come in contact with the Atheists in the ranks. Therefore, Atheism was non-existent to them, hence the error in the report. Although the mass of the men were, as regards Christianity, unbelievers, and the committee, as we shall see, admit and emphasize the fact, yet we do not claim that the majority were Atheists. Atheism, as a logical and philosophical system, demands for its basis an

<sup>1</sup> Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People of London*, 1903; Third Series, Vol. vii., p. 423.



acquaintance with science, philosophy and history, which the great majority of the men were lacking. Still, we know that there were many Atheists in the ranks and that their philosophy did not "wither away in the fire of the line." As if all the blood and mud and brutality of the war would convert an Atheist to a belief in a righteous and benevolent God!

The proof that the anti-religious propaganda is still active is contained in the book itself, which tells of "difficulties about 'Jonah's whale' and 'Cain's wife' which recur with curious persistency in hut discussions" (p. 270). And again, a theological student in the R.A.M.C., finds the Bible "an obstacle" to the acceptance of Christianity because "The Old Testament conflicts with common-sense; the New Testament ethics will not work in the world to-day." Where did the men get these ideas if not through the anti-religious propaganda?

We learn very little as to the officer's views on religion, and that little shows him hostile to the Church. One chaplain writes: "I have had more than one case of officers previously religious who have chucked religion altogether" (p. 8). An officer of the R.F.C. reports:—

The average young officer has no philosophy of life at all. He thinks the Christian revelation "damned nonsense," though he has not the courage to say so. During six months at morning masses held three a week, the highest attendance was three officers. Most are entirely ignorant of the elementary facts of Christianity. Their attitude is not contempt, but towards a brother officer who accepts the Christian faith it is one of surprise and incredulity; if they like him, of enormous astonishment. Their public opinion proclaims that above all things religion does not matter, and, further, any way, it is quite unintelligible (pp. 115-116).

A major of artillery writes of a conversation with brother officers, winding up with the angry retort of one of them: "And when you go to Church the bloody thing they offer you is the most damned insipid thing imaginable" (p. 57).

Which quite agrees with what Sir Philip Gibbs—a religiously minded man—tells us of conversations on the subject in the officers' mess. He reports:—

"What price Christianity?" asked another, inevitably. "What have the Churches done to stop war or preach the Gospel of Christ? The Bishop of London, the Archbishop of Canterbury, all those conventional, patriotic, cannon-blessing, banner-baptising humbugs. God. They make me tired!"

Strange words to hear in a cavalry mess! Strange turmoil in the souls of men! They were the same words I had heard from London boys in Ypres spoken just as crudely. But many young gentlemen who spoke those words have already forgotten them, or would deny them.<sup>2</sup>

Probably they would not say such things now, because the discussion of religion is taboo in the drawing rooms of Mayfair and Belgravia; but under the stress of the horrors of war these conventions were swept aside and their inmost thoughts were revealed.

(To be Continued.)

W. MANN.

#### OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES.

You've heard about the little girl who was given a woolly bear that she said she would name "Gladly," after the bear in the hymn—"Gladly my cross-eye bear."

Another little girl was asked if she knew who Nero was.

"He's the Good Man," she answered, in awed tones.

"The Good Man? What makes you think he's the Good Man?" said her teacher.

Then in answer, the little girl, still in awed tones, quoted the hymn: "Nero My God to Thee!"

London Opinion.

#### Acid Drops.

In the *Sunday Chronicle* Mr. Robert Blatchford returns to his ruminations about Spiritualism and the soul, and as he is full as ever of wonders and doubts and useless reminders of how much the rest of the world doesn't know, there does not seem any reason why he should ever conclude. But there is one point in his last article which well bears out what we have previously said. It appears that he was much impressed by what the late W. T. Stead told him about communications from the dead. His puzzle was that Mr. Stead was, he believed, an honest man. That is the kind of thing one often gets, and honesty in such matters is the emptiest of recommendations. All the world's greatest frauds and follies have been backed by honest men. How could so great a delusion as the Christian religion have ever been carried on through the ages except through the co-operation of honest men? It is not honesty but ability that is required; and not ability merely, but the right kind of knowledge concerning the subject under discussion that is required. All the honesty and all the ability in the world will not save one from false beliefs and unscientific conclusions in the absence of the right kind of knowledge.

Here is the example we have in mind. Mr. Blatchford says he was much impressed with what Mr. Stead said about automatic writing, which, he was assured, consisted of messages from the dead. So Mr. Blatchford retired to the darkness of his room, and taking a pencil in his hand, sat quietly for an hour waiting for some communication from the dead. And nothing happened. So he continued in a state of bewilderment. The childishness of it all! Mr. Blatchford was evidently quite unacquainted with all that is known concerning this and other forms of automatism. He did not, and does not, apparently know that experiments both in automatic writing and crystal gazing are among the best known of experiments in an up-to-date psychological laboratory, and so he was left wondering then, and has been wondering since, and is still wondering over a "mystery" which a little of the right kind of knowledge would have easily dispelled. So might a child be staggered by a simple chemical experiment, and the experimenter appear as a wonder working magician in its eyes.

We have explained the machinery of this process in *The Other Side of Death*, and there is no need to go over it again here. We will only say now what we have already said so often. The best friends of Spiritualism are those who without knowledge of that branch of psychology which alone throws light on the matter go about either proclaiming that it is all the work of deliberate frauds, or that here is a mystery which science cannot explain. Both these classes of people are playing right into the hands of the Spiritualists. The first is offering an attack that can easily be defeated, the other is pandering to the sense of ignorant wonderment upon which such things live. There is a golden rule in such matters. In the absence of knowledge which covers all the facts, don't accept an explanation which is in contradiction to what we believe to be true in other directions; and when an explanation is not forthcoming don't go round wondering and mooning and assuming an air of philosophy when you are unconsciously donning the garb of the charlatan. The frauds and follies of the world are built upon the weakness and ignorance of man. A sound philosophy was never yet built on that foundation.

A sensation has been caused at Ilford by the report of angelic appearances in St. Mary's Church. We shall expect to hear next of bogeys at Barking.

There are 1,336 suits in next term's programme at the Divorce Court. Yet the Christian Churches frown at divorce.

Cardinal Bourne opened the new premises of the

<sup>2</sup> Sir Philip Gibbs, *Realities of War*, 1920; p. 225.



Catholic Truth Society recently. The premises are not at the bottom of a well.

That the Churches are anxiously watching the Labour movement in England, and will avail themselves of every opportunity of winning its support, has been notorious for some years—that is, to be precise, ever since the movement began to make a noticeable impression on public life and opinion. "Industrial Sunday" (April 30) was the occasion for loud protestations of the Churches' sympathy with the workers, and last Monday, May Day, at least one representative was appointed to speak, "in the name of Christ," from each platform at Labour's great annual demonstration. We have heard a good deal of late about the "divine carpenter" and his revolutionary ideals, but all this is quite a new feature in the religious situation. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Pious submission to the will of Providence, and the doctrine of natural depravity, receive primary emphasis in the New Testament, and they are doctrines which lower the tone and standard of the whole man, whatever his social or economic standing in the community.

Freethought, on the other hand, strikes at the fundamentals of oppression, and that is why the entrenched despot has always dreaded it above everything else. What the toiling masses need is their inheritance of mental freedom and the world's intellectual possessions. How tardily organized Christianity has conceded this claim may be seen in its history, its attitude to science in the past and to secular education in the present. No amount of "brotherly love" expressed in terms of benevolent institutions can compensate for its untoward influence in this respect. Those whose rallying cry is "Back to Christ!" assure us that "the common people heard him gladly." Much the same is said of the crowds that listened to Wesley and Whitefield. And the evangelical element in the Church has always boasted that Christianity made its early conquests among the slaves and down-trodden population of the large cities. In other words, the gospel of redemption appealed to those who had not the mental equipment to resist it.

The workers to-day are beginning to ask who the "common people" really are, and whether the phrase does not imply that there are other people that are not quite so "common." At any rate, the religious Press almost unanimously admits that the toiling city populace now turns a deaf ear to the Churches and religion. Many explanations are forthcoming to account for this. Some say the preaching is dull and the prayers too long, others that there is too much monotonous repetition in the services. No one now assigns drunkenness and vice as the ground of absence from "the house of God." The last thing these inquirers give the "common people" credit for is self-respect and the exercise of their intelligence.

Are the manual labourers the only members of the body politic that treat organized Christianity with contempt? What proportion of doctors, lawyers, landlords and stock-brokers attend public worship? But these descendants of Demas do not count for much. In any case it will be hard for them to enter the kingdom. It is only when the masses show some inclination to regard this world as their all in all, and resolve to make the most of it, that dire results are anticipated. If they, too, become gay and godless, and not quite so conscious of their sinfulness as they used to be, it is impossible to estimate what may happen in the course of time. They may actually ask, not where they are to spend eternity, but next week—and the week after.

An example of how little removed many people are from savagery is furnished by a recent case in one of the Swiss Cantons. A peasant recovered damages from one of the Courts against a neighbour who had circulated reports charging him with witchcraft. The specific offence was that a curse had been placed on some pigs,

which had died. The judge said it was high time that steps were taken to rid the country of such harmful superstitions. But one good way of doing this would be to destroy people's beliefs in Christianity and the Bible. After all, the Bible teaches the reality of witchcraft, and it was endorsed by Jesus. And you cannot play fast and loose with simple-minded people in these matters. If you give them a book as the word of God, and that book teaches them that witches exist, it is foolish to expect that they will quite ignore it in practice. As they get to know more about religion, and provided they retain the mental duplicity which Christianity encourages, they will come to the point of saying one thing and practising another. But at present these peasants are simple-minded and honest. Hence the trouble.

By the way, one or two of our readers have taken us to task for using the word "savages" of Europeans who retain such beliefs. But in that matter we are quite unrepentant. For in our judgment, going without trousers, tramcars, and living in huts instead of in houses are not the real evidences of savagery. We all might do these things on a holiday, but we should not be savages as a consequence. Savagery consists in a state of mind, a mental atmosphere which surrounds people, and we can see no real distinction between the naked man in Central Africa trembling at the assumed action of his tribal demons and the man in a lounge suit who can believe in the New Testament stories of demonic activity. This type of individual remains a savage in his outlook, and it is his state of mind that is of paramount importance. In the ordinary moralities of social life there is not, when all is said and done, much to choose between savage and civilized. It is the intellectual condition that sets up the real distinction, and which expresses itself in other directions.

Writing in the *Daily News* (April 24), the Rev. T. P. Stevens (Succentor of Southwark Cathedral) makes the statement that "the average decent man in the suburbs rarely goes to Church." The adjective is always a difficult word to use; what are we to infer from this assertion? That the indecent man in the suburbs goes to Church? Or that the man in the suburbs who goes to Church if he is not indecent must be the riff-raff of suburbia? There is matter here for the psychologist who may be able to estimate a man's intellectual position by noting the metaphors of his mind.

Messrs. Haig and Haig, the well-known whisky distillers, write in the *Daily Mail* that one of their San Francisco correspondents informs them:—

Although this country is dry, still the law allows us to bring in whisky in bond; it is then withdrawn for either sacramental or medicinal purposes as required. Recently a new religion has started up in California, the members of which meet several times weekly, at which they are required, as part of the ceremonies, to drink as much whisky as they can conveniently carry. Needless to say, everyone has joined the faith, and a big demand has now sprung up for sacramental whisky. The police are powerless to stop the ceremonies, as the courts have ruled in their favour, with the result that the police are now joining the faith fast; so we look forward to a steady business.

Messrs. Haig and Haig add, "We are not interested in doing this kind of trade, but we think it is probable that California will obtain supplies of whisky for sacramental purposes." We think it very likely.

Dean Inge has a rather neat retort to Mr. Hilaire Belloc's recently published and foolish anti-Semitic book on the Jews. He says: "It seems inconsistent, after annexing the sacred books of the Hebrews and using them every day in our devotions, to cherish a dislike against the race which produced them." That is true enough so far as it goes, but something more might be said. The whole thing is a first-class sample of the humbug that seems inseparable from Christianity in all its forms. Theoretically, Christians claim that all that is best in our lives is based upon the Jew book, the Bible. They assert that it is the one inspiration that built up



the civilization of Europe. Practically it is nothing of the kind. The influence of the Bible on Western civilization has been almost wholly bad. It has encouraged all sorts of senseless superstitions, and the man who attempted to model his life on a genuinely honest interpretation of its teachings would soon find himself in a prison or a lunatic asylum. No other single book has stood so much in the way of intellectual and moral progress as has the Bible, and the long fight of science for freedom of teaching has been mainly a fight against its influence.

The joke of the situation is that while a non-Christian may say this and so far blame the Jews for the influence of their Bible, it is open to neither Dean Inge, as a Protestant, nor Mr. Belloc as a Catholic, to say it. Both should pay devout homage to the Jew for what he has given the world. He gave them the Bible, he gave them their God. Without him there would have been no salvation. They owe everything to him—the Dean his position, and Mr. Belloc the very mediocre level of public intelligence which enables him to rank as a writer of weight. It is only open to a Freethinker to say that when the Jews gave the Christians their God they committed an outrage on the world that went a long way to justify all that was afterwards done to them.

New Zealand files just to hand contain lengthy references to the prosecution, for "blasphemous libel," of Mr. J. Glover, manager and publisher of the *Maoriland Worker* (Christchurch). The reports of the trial bring out in strong relief the cowardly and contemptible nature of such proceedings. Mr. Glover showed convincingly that it was only in the *Worker* that the "offensive" publication was blasphemous. The two poems written by Siegfried Sassoon were selected from a review which Frank Harris, the well-known literary critic, contributed to *Pearson's Magazine* (New York), the poet's works were on open sale at all the booksellers' shops, and had formed the subject of lengthy comment in several influential journals in the Dominion. Sassoon himself "by an act of conspicuous gallantry had won the military cross" on service during the war. The *Worker* (March 1) says that Sir Francis Bell, the Attorney-General, was actuated solely by the determination "to inflict a punishment on the *Maoriland Worker*, whose political and industrial policy he wishes to suppress." Undoubtedly no fair-minded man can read the published report of the trial without coming to this conclusion.

The charge was laid under the New Zealand Crimes Act, not under the Common Law. Mr. Justice Hoskings, who was the judge at the trial, said that blasphemy was not clearly defined in the Act, but it meant "to speak contemptuously" of religion "so as to show a pleasure in the insult." His summing-up could not be characterized as grossly unfair, but he was certainly not sympathetic to Mr. Glover, and declared Sassoon's poem to be unquestionably "indecent." After deliberating for three quarters of an hour, the jury returned a verdict of "not guilty," adding a rider "that similar publications of such literature be discouraged." If they had added the words "in newspapers intended for perusal by the lower classes," the farce would have been complete. This case is a striking confirmation of the fact that it is the toiling masses who are supremely interested in mental freedom and religious equality.

A million farthings' collection has been started by the clergy of St. Bartholomew's Church, Camberwell. Probably, a farthing represents the value of his religion to a Christian.

The *Daily News* has been discussing the subject of out-of-date religion in connection with empty, or nearly empty, Churches. And, of course, many of the writers appear to think that the cure is to be found in bringing forward a religion that is not out-of-date. Of course, it is quite easy to frame something or the other and call that religion, it is constantly being done, but the newcomers are not promising. They usually consist in stick-

ing to the old terminology and acquiring a new meaning, with the result that the doctrines which were at least intelligible and coherent in the old forms become masses of clotted nonsense in the new. And in the end the better type of mind gets disgusted, and only a very inferior type is left to carry the "new religion into the world." Some of our readers may remember the "New Theology" with which Mr. Campbell convulsed the Christian world. It is now as dead as a door-nail, and is discarded by its originator. The truth is that phrases cannot forever take the place of facts, and nebulous aspirations do not satisfy men and women with ability to do their own thinking.

Father Pope was one of the speakers at a recent Catholic demonstration in Glasgow, and from what he said the prospects of the Catholic Church in England are not quite so rosy as some of its champions would make out. For example, he said that there were forty millions of people in these islands who followed fancy religions and only three millions of Catholic. That is not an overwhelming number, and far less than the number of Freethinkers. Against that has to be placed the important fact that the Catholics are more united than any other body in the country, mainly because their religion is least of all tolerant of independent thinking, and of independent action when the interests of the Church are at stake. Still, the number of Catholics, when compared with the number of those who are opposed in opinion to Christianity, gives one furiously to think. If only we could get something like concerted action in those matters which affect Freethought its position in the country would undergo a startling change. We do not think that Freethinkers ever realize their potential strength. If they did they would act very differently from the way in which a large number of them do act.

Father Pope said the great danger to religion in Scotland was Secularism. We should be the last to deny that, but there is no reason why the danger should be confined to Scotland. The revolt against religion is not local, it is not national, it is world-wide and co-extensive with the spread of civilization. That is the real and ultimate enemy the Christian Church has to fight, and it is the only enemy against which the Catholic Church is ultimately powerless. But we are glad to see the Catholics getting more militant. It may awaken some of our friends to the fact that we have not by any means accomplished our work. There is still plenty to do, and there is room for everyone to lend a hand who will.

We learn from the *Guardian* (April 21) that the Bishop of London, preaching in St. Paul's Cathedral on Easter Day, said that "thousands of our ablest minds to-day did not profess Christianity." When we say the same thing, of course the notion is not to be entertained for a moment. It is always interesting, however, to compare such statements with others in the religious Press. The *Church Times*, of the same date, jubilantly announces that "the anti-Christian movement seems to have spent its force," and by way of confirmation refers to a previous article of its own showing that Atheistic propaganda had been driven out of some of the London parks. Yet our contemporary not long ago published numerous letters, far from optimistic in tone, on the dearth of suitable candidates for holy orders. Is it not possible to win some highly desirable recruits for the ministry from those who "listen gladly" to the speakers on the Christian Evidence platform? Or are we to conclude from the utterances of Principal Major and the modern churchmen that infidelity has left the parks to take up a much more comfortable abode within the Church?

Miss Evelyn Underhill, who has a reputation among mystics, in a review in the *Daily News* reduces religion to something to eat. She writes, "Religious nourishment is now mostly offered à la carte." Once it was imposed *table d'hôte* with the additional incentive of the block or the stake, and it does not need a mystic to see that the mental calibre of our own particular brand of priests would bring about these conditions again—if it were not for the diffusion of popular science—and the minor fact that they are found out.



### 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.

E. J. ROSE (N. Rhodesia).—To print your letter commenting on our very mild advice that we gave to readers not to be misled by the official stories as to the cause or the conduct of the war would mean to open up a large correspondence, and that we have no space for. But we think with the state of Europe as it is, it is perfectly plain now German aggression was no more than the immediate cause of the war, and that something far more serious was the real cause. Germany is now out of the way, but there is no great weakening of the military mind in Europe. Our advice amounted to no more than saying that in world movements or in the evolution of societies one must not take one country or one individual as being the all-important factor. If every German was at the bottom of the sea, and had been in 1913, militarism would still have found other enemies against which to arm—Japan, Russia, America, any country will serve. And when the talk of war has made war, then the militarists justify themselves by pointing to the evil they have helped to mature.

J. FOTHERGILL.—Glad to learn of the good work done in the Press by yourself and Mr. Bartram, but sorry to learn of the ill-health of your daughter. Trust that things will soon be better. All propagandists are having a rather trying time just now, but things will improve presently.

A. C. ROSETTI.—Seeds dropped by the wayside do not always fall on stony soil; sometimes they lead to quite an unexpected harvest. Will see that the paper is sent, and trust that it will do good.

A. W.—We should very much like to see Branches of the N. S. S. established all over the country. There are plenty of Freethinkers, the thing is to organize them. That is hard work, but it is worth doing. You may rely upon our giving whatever help we can.

R. PUCK.—We note that you are now getting your copy of the *Freethinker* through your newsagent instead of having it sent direct. Pleased to have your admiration of the paper. Those who write for it give of their best, and the thanks of those for whom they write is worth having.

CHRONICLE READER.—Trust your letter will do good, but we have our doubts. The case offers an example of the uselessness of one dealing with subjects that are quite out of his range.

F. SUTHERLAND (Queensland).—Your suggestion is quite an excellent one. An elementary treatise giving a frankly materialistic interpretation of phenomena, and at the same time written in plain language, is something to be desired. But we have no time ourselves to prepare such a work. If one were submitted to us we would see to the publishing. Perhaps some of our readers, with the necessary scientific equipment, will take the hint. Many teachers in State schools do already give lessons on evolutionary lines.

F. LECHMERE.—Naturally, a great many of our politicians will evade giving an answer to an enquiry concerning the repeal of the Blasphemy laws if they can manage it. The only thing is to press them until they do reply. Thanks for your efforts.

F. J. SNAITH.—We saw the notice of *The Other Side of Death*. The work is selling well, and evidently supplies a need. We are sending on a copy of the paper.

G. G.—The Whiteway Modern School, Whiteway, Gloucestershire, will probably give you what you desire.

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

The Secular Society, Limited, office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

The National Secular Society's office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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### Sugar Plums.

It is becoming a common feature with Branches of the Secular Society to arrange for "Rambles" during the summer months, and it is one of which we heartily approve. We have before us, for example, a list of such fixtures by the Manchester Branch—the first of which will be on May 21. But we would like to suggest to our friends who embark on these outings that they may serve as the means of useful propaganda. We have always unsold copies of the *Freethinker* on hand, and it would do some good if these could be judiciously distributed on such occasions. If any of our friends fall in with this idea, and will let us know how many copies they could do with, we will send them on a supply. At the moment, introducing this paper into new quarters is about as good a contribution to the progress of the cause as anyone could make. And if this method of getting new readers was generally acted upon we see no reason why the paper should not be quite self-supporting.

May we ask all those who intend visiting the Nottingham Conference of the N. S. S. on Whit-Sunday to write the Secretary, Miss Vance, as soon as possible saying what accommodation they want reserved for them, and for what period. It is as well to be in time in this matter.

We hear from Mr. L. Davey, of Adelaide, that a serious attempt is being made to set going a regular Free-thought campaign in South Australia. The Society has secured the use of the Central Theatre for Sunday evening lectures, and Mr. H. Scott Bennett is lecturing there to growing and enthusiastic audiences. The Society has also issued challenges to the ministers of Adelaide to debate, and while most of them offer more or less ingenious excuses why they cannot, or will not do so, several discussions have been arranged. We hope that the venture will prove quite successful. There is not a place in the civilized world where there is not need for an energetic Free-thought propaganda. And increased Free-thought activity could not but result in a better tone in the whole of our social and political life.

We reprint in this issue the leaflet which the Society for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws has just published, and invite the earnest attention of our readers to it. Supplies of the leaflet for distribution may be secured from the Secretary of the Society, the Rev. R. Sorensen. We also beg to point out to all concerned that membership of the Society is desirable, and the minimum subscription is 2s. 6d. per year. The Society means business, and it must get adequate support if it is to do its work properly.

Mr. Morgan Jones, M.P. for the Caerphilly division, writes in reply to a constituent that he is quite in favour of the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. There still remain a very large number of members from whom a reply of some sort should be extracted.

The North London Branch opens its summer campaign in Regent's Park to-day, May 7, at 6.30. Mr. Burke will be the speaker. We hope our North London members will do their best to make these meetings a success. Next Sunday Mr. George Whitehead will occupy the platform.



## Buddhism and Rationalism.

### II.

(Concluded from page 279.)

THE Buddhist religion became the dominant influence in India in the reign of king Asoka, *circa* 273-231 B.C.E., and so continued until the time of the first Brahman persecutions of Buddhism about the fifth Christian century.

Under the Buddhist influence Indian civilization rose to a level in art, literature, science, and the humanities generally such as it had never before known, and from which it has immeasurably fallen since the Brahman caste succeeded in gaining the upper hand. The days of India's glory were the days of Buddhist rationalism; the days of India's degeneration were those of gross superstition which inevitably follows upon the domination of theistic priestcraft, whether it be Hindu or Christian.

As we have said, the caste system had formed, but had not assumed the rigidity in the time of the Buddha that it did later. The teaching of Buddhism, impugning, as it does, all "divine authority," was wholly inimical to the caste system. But Brahmanism existed, and grew up side by side with, and even within, the Buddhist institutions. Whilst Buddhism appeals more to the educated, the cultured and the thoughtful, Brahmanism appealed most essentially to the ignorant and superstitious multitude. The culture of the Brahmans, and it was considerable, was directed wholly to the establishment and consolidation of their caste pretensions, which, when established, gave them a privileged position and an authority which could not have been established in any other way. Thus, the animosity of the Brahmans towards Buddhism is easily explained.

As Buddhism became favoured by kings and courts, to enter the Sangha, or Buddhist Order of monks (*bhikkhu*), became "the thing" to do. All sorts and conditions of men who were not fitted for the vocation of the *bhikkhu* entered the Buddhist Order, taking with them their worldly ambitions, knowing and probably caring little for the obligations which the Buddhist teaching imposed upon them in that position. Buddhism became corrupted from within, the process being undoubtedly aided by the intelligent and purposeful machinations of the Brahmans, many of whom became *bhikkhus* who are not priests in the accepted sense of the word. It was the permeation of Buddhism by Brahmanical priestcraft which ensured its downfall in India, and which has imparted to it those incongruous elements, contradictory of the true Buddhist teaching, which have puzzled European scholars and led them to many strange and erroneous conclusions.

Following the fall of the Asokan Empire, and after the time of King Kanishka (*circa* 100, C.E.), with the succession of Hindu kings who were adherents of Brahmanism, the Brahman priests were able to instigate a series of persecutions of the Buddhists, when those Brahmans who were within the Buddhist Order came out in their true colours. These persecutions continued intermittently until about the eighth Christian century, when the great fighting Brahman, Sankarachariya, or Sankara, carried the "holy war" against Buddhism almost to the point of extermination.

Had Buddhism been able to meet the intrigues and the aggressions of the Brahmans, there is no doubt that the caste system would never have matured, and that it might have disappeared altogether. In that case, the history of India in later years might have been other than one of racial degeneration and decay, impotent in face of foreign aggression. But Buddhism, not being inspired by the god-idea, and therefore not possessing a priestly hierarchy vested with "divine"

authority, was not a warlike religion. It needs a theistic religion and a theistic priesthood to inspire fanatical violence to the point of bloodshed and persecution. But the basis of Buddhism being a rationalistic humanism, such a spirit and such methods are wholly repugnant. Herein lies the weakness of Buddhism, if weakness it can be called. The Buddhist injunction to "honour all other religions for whatsoever in them is worthy of honour" is all very well; but what if one has to face a religion wholly devoid of this sentiment and which is without honour, ruth, or scruple? Toleration is, in itself, a most admirable principle; but non-resistance to tyrannical aggression and predatory violence is only to encourage such aggression and violence, and to give them the opportunity to assert themselves.

But the triumph of the Brahmans was not long lived. The division of the Hindu people into rigid castes which might not intermarry, the very touch, or even the shadow, of the lower castes being contamination to the higher, produced such conditions that no really effective combination was possible when India was confronted by invasion on the part of a foreign enemy not so handicapped. Moreover, as the result of gross and filthy superstitions, fostered and encouraged by the Brahmans, the masses of the Hindu peoples became, as S. C. Mookerjee says, violently, disgustingly degraded, and reached a stage in vice and indecency that became repulsive, and the whole society became viciously immoral, disorganized, decadent and tottering from a long time before the advent of the Mahommedans.

Thus the Mahommedan hordes found in India a country and a people reduced almost to a state of impotence. A terrible price, indeed, to pay for devotion to a priest-fostered superstition which rests upon a manifest fraud, a concocted falsehood.

With the advent of the British the history of India entered upon a new phase. Although the efforts of Christian missionaries are encouraged by the British Government, anything in the shape of religious persecution or forcible suasion is discountenanced, and put down with a strong hand when it appears either among the Brahmanical or Mussulman Hindus. An atmosphere of toleration is fatal to priestcraft, as we know very well in the West. But the influence of Western secular education is making itself felt among those Hindus who have had the benefit of it, and therefore a new factor is here found for the destruction of the caste system even more powerful than that of Buddhism. There can be no doubt, economic considerations aside, that much of the unrest in India is fostered by the Brahman priesthood for this reason.

But the Hindus who have been educated in English schools and universities never return to India with quite the same deference for the Brahmans and their caste rules which they had on leaving their native country. Very often they become open unbelievers in the authority of the "divinely inspired" Hindu scriptures. From this class of sceptical critics the Brahmans have most to fear. Students from India and the East generally are attracted by the free thought and the rationalism of the West rather than by the conventional forms of religion. To them, Christianity appears much inferior to the higher philosophy of Hinduism, as, indeed, it is. Many of them express surprise that such naive and childish notions as those which pass current for religion in the West can exist side by side with the scientific knowledge and rationalist philosophy which confute them at every turn. Only when they realize that religion is a vested interest here, as in India, do they understand the position of the clergy, many of whom are educated men who ought to know better, as, in fact, they do.

Another effect of the penetration of Western scientific knowledge, of secular education and of rationalism to



the East, is the renaissance of Buddhism, or "Neo-Buddhism" as some have called it, in Ceylon, Burma, and also in Japan. But it is not so much Neo-Buddhism, as an attempt to return to the original teaching of the Buddha himself which is contained in the Pali *Pitakas*, although surrounded by much extraneous matter, both in the *Pitakas* and the commentaries themselves, and, particularly, in the Sanskrit Buddhist literature, which last, of Brahmanical origin mainly, indicates the source and nature of the later corruption of the Buddhist religion. As a Singhalese Buddhist said to the present writer, the Buddhist tree needs pruning and cleansing of the fungoid growths which have accreted about it. Then the great system of the Buddha reappears as a body of teaching which we, "Neo-Buddhists," believe will prove of the greatest value in these modern times of rationalism, freedom of thought and critical enquiry. We know that there are contained in this teaching solutions of many of the vexed questions concerning the origin of the phenomenal universe, or whether there be such an origin, concerning the "soul" of man, and the laws which obtain in the moral and (what we must term for lack of a better word) the "spiritual" worlds. We believe, also, that many of the obscure problems of heredity, of those phenomena which are wrongly called "spiritualist," and of psychology, are satisfactorily explained in the Buddhist philosophy. But whether Buddhism will reassert itself decisively in India, or whether it will become established as a religion in the West remains to be seen. At any rate, it finds in modern rationalism a powerful ally, and it can be such to rationalism in the effort to dissipate the animistic superstitions of Christianity which have long outlived their time and have become an anomaly and a nuisance. E. UPASAKA.

### Christian Science.

A GENTLEMAN, whose acquaintance I have recently made, has got hold of the idea that I would make a very good Christian Scientist. We have had one or two small discussions—if you can call them discussions—but it soon dawned upon me that my most invincible arguments had about as much effect on him as if I were reciting the alphabet, first forwards and then backwards. I gathered that he had been very ill from some unspecified illness and that a healer had cured him—at least so he said, but it did not seem particularly apparent. The cure had settled one thing however in his mind (which I have since discovered is really the one Universal Mind—whatever that is), that Christian Science is the greatest thing in the world, that Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy is the greatest woman the world has ever seen, and that *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* is the greatest book that has ever been published (and thoroughly copyrighted) in this sinful—or is it sinless?—world. (On reckoning up, I find I have put in three wonderful things, but as they are three in one I hope those Scientists who may still believe in the Holy Trinity will forgive me.) To further the good cause, my friend has been good enough to send me a few copies of the *Christian Science Monitor* with two marked articles, one on "Atheism" and the other on "Free Thinking," for me to study. Alas, they have left me more puzzled than ever, and re-reading the extraordinary Christian Science text book (I find I must name its author, Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy) has made the possibilities of my instant conversion to Christian Science appear very microscopical.

Let me admit that the *Christian Science Monitor* is quite an interesting journal, well edited, and with literary and artistic articles thoroughly suited to the

people who eventually become Christian Scientists. I must confess that during the war I found the stray copies of the paper in the canteens and hostels a welcome change from some of the rubbishy "comics" that well-meaning ladies thought suitable intellectual fare for our Tommies. It is always interesting to read about one's favourite author or artist—especially after the useless drudgery of a soldier's life. But this part of the paper was the *jam*—and Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy saw to it that you got the *powder* likewise. This took the form of an article, gently insinuated on the literary page, which I always did my best to understand, but which would have been just as easy to understand, generally speaking, if you read it backwards. Every few paragraphs some more than knotty point would be elucidated by an equally obscure and, as a rule, irrelevant quotation from *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy. Mrs. Eddy is now, of course, called upon much in the same way as the Jews call upon Jehovah or the Christians upon Jesus or the Theosophists upon "H. P. B." or the thousand and one other religious peoples upon their particular deities to clinch finally any disputed point with infallible authority.

I very soon discovered that while the ordinary articles on Whistler or Dickens, for instance, were written much as other similar articles in other papers are written, those on Christian Science had a special vocabulary which certainly differed from that in common use by using all sorts of words in all sorts of combinations which could mean anything or nothing, just as you liked. If you were a Christian Scientist it was all as clear as crystal; if you were not, then the Lord only knows what was meant—for I never discovered. Take, for example, this extract from an article on "The Atheist" in the *Christian Science Monitor* for January 9, 1922:—

Mortal mind, the opposite of immortal Mind, or God, is the infidel. Knowing nothing about God or divine Principle, unable to demonstrate omnipresent good, this opposing mortal mind proves to be only a supposition and therefore nothing—nothing because Principle is the infinite something that guides and unfolds the universe and man.....

I must stop because the rest is even sillier. But what does it all mean? Has it a meaning? It seems to me if Christian Science wants to discuss Atheism or the Atheist there is a wonderful book ready at hand called *Theism or Atheism?* by Chapman Cohen that no believer in any religion has had the courage to tackle, and which will provide enough meat for the average Christian Science writer to chew for the next ten years and then some. But there is one passage in the article which *can* be understood, as it has done duty for all the Christian sects at one time or another. Here it is:

A system that proves that God exists leaves the unbeliever nothing to do but understand and love God. Christian Science is the system that is doing this, and many men who have thought themselves Atheists because they could not accept a whimsical God, have found in this Science of Christ the proof that has enabled them to worship a God who is All. One often hears at a Wednesday evening testimonial meeting the remark that before learning of Christian Science the individual was an Atheist.

Here we have the million times repeated testimony of the Atheist converted to religion, and, of course, no names are given to enable us to test its truth. Let me confess that I have met quite a number of Christians who have boasted of their conversion from Atheism to Christianity. The rub came when I asked them to repeat two arguments fully, which favour Atheism—if possible, from well-known Atheistical works, say from Bradlaugh or d'Holbach—and give the Christian replies, and not one of these converted Atheists had even a glimmer of an idea as to what was an



Atheistical argument. Would any Christian Scientist who has been an Atheist get in touch with me and try to convert me? This is a definite challenge which I hope will be taken up. I am particularly curious to learn why I "could not accept a whimsical God," and I want to know first what is a "whimsical" God? God has been described to me by many names, but a "whimsical" God—oh dear!

Our Christian Science writer admits that "men who have followed the doctrine of infidelity are oftentimes kindly by nature." We are asked why they "often choose to do good instead of evil?" Why do we "in the main, act very much like a Christian"? This is funny, but it is funnier still to be told of "that little prodding inner voice which tells us kindness is virtue and unkindness evil." And then we are gently led forward to the culminating argument that we are "daily, hourly, demonstrating intelligence," and that this intelligence "knows perfectly well that it can think and act without the assistance of matter." I have not seen it done myself, but with wonderful logic we are next informed:—

This leads one to the conclusion that intelligence is the Supreme Being, the Mind that is all good, and the reason for the man who calls himself an Atheist discerning between that which is good and that which is not good; it is also his proof that he really has a God.

Just as easy as that! So I really have a God and didn't know it. It was my intelligence, then, after all, or to give it another simple name, the Supreme Being, the Mind that is all good, which is responsible, not only for the whole of the Universe, but also for Mrs. Eddy and *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy. Fancy that now! Do we not live and learn if only we live long enough?

But we are not quite done with. "Once approach the unbeliever with a logical and reasonable argument, and it is easy enough to convince him that he has a God that he loves very dearly." Wonderful! But if this particular God is only our intelligence, it really is a "whimsical" idea to say that we love it (or him?) very dearly. My great difficulty is to imagine that I, or rather my intelligence, created the Universe and Mrs. Eddy. In fact, I refuse to believe it—at least as far as Mrs. Eddy is concerned. As for the Universe...

The Christian Scientist is not very concerned, as a rule, with such deep questions as the non-existence of matter or the undeniable existence of the universal Mind on which the erudite Mrs. Eddy has shed so much light—in her opinion. He relies on the miraculous cures which "healers" all over the world are performing—so we read in their books and papers—on sick people who have been given up by the greatest living specialists. The cures are always done in the name of Jesus—and Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy—and for the life of me I cannot see any difference between these cures and, let us say, those of M. Coué, which are done without the magic names of Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy and Jesus. But I may deal, with the Editor's permission, on this aspect of Christian Science some other time.

In the mean time, I beg respectfully to intimate to all concerned—or not concerned—that no Wednesday evening testimonial meeting has so far led me, an erring lamb, back to the fold. I am all for light and fresh air and clearness of vision. And for that I plump for Atheism every time. Can any Christian Scientist, in his heart, say me nay? H. CUTNER.

The rector is going to begin the sermon: he is a very learned man, people say he will be a bishop one of these days, for he edited a Greek play, and was private tutor to Lord Glitter.—*Bulwer Lytton.*

## The Blasphemy Laws:

What they Are, and why they should be Abolished.

(Issued by the Society for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws.)

DURING the first five centuries of Christianity in England the legal prohibitions of heresy were few and unimportant. The Church relied upon its terrible power of excommunication to punish the man who dared to exercise the right of private judgment. But when the authority of the Pope was rejected by a large and increasing number of persons, excommunication lost its power, and in the fourteenth century it was complained that there were "evil persons" who "expressly despised" the censures of the Church and refused to submit to its condemnation. At this period the aid of the law was called in, and there commenced a series of enactments for the extirpation of heresy by burning, imprisoning, and fining the heretic. Heresy now became a criminal offence not only under the statute law, but also under what is known as common law, which has its origin in custom and acquires legal force through the repeated decisions of more or less famous judges, or which expresses the views of the judges without warrant of legislation or custom.

Blasphemy is punishable both by statute and by common law. There is no record of any prosecution taking place under the statute (9 William III, c. 22), although it has been constantly cited to enforce civil disabilities. The common law as to blasphemy was settled in 1676 by Lord Chief Justice Sir Matthew Hale. The learned judge then laid it down that "Christianity, being parcel of the laws of England, therefore to speak in reproach of the Christian religion is to speak in subversion of the law." This was the generally accepted reading of the law for two centuries. So late as March, 1883, Mr. Justice North, in trying Messrs. Foote, Ramsey, and Kemp, said that it was blasphemy to deny the existence or providence of God, or to ridicule the persons of the Trinity, or the Christian religion, or the Holy Scriptures in any way. For some time, however, a more liberal interpretation had been gaining ground, and in April of the same year Lord Coleridge, in his celebrated summing-up, gave this view his judicial sanction. Specifically contradicting former rulings, he said that it was no longer true that Christianity was part of the law of the land, but that, "if the decencies of controversy are observed, even the fundamentals of religion may be attacked without the person being guilty of blasphemy." This ruling, in effect, put the law upon an entirely new footing. It was traversed at the time by several learned lawyers, and in 1886, in the case of Dr. Pankhurst v. Thompson, Baron Huddleston and Mr. Justice Manisty both expressed their disagreement with Lord Coleridge's ruling; but it was later reiterated and confirmed by Mr. Justice Phillimore and Mr. Justice Darling in Mr. Boulter's case (1908-9), Mr. Justice Horridge in the case of Messrs. Stewart and Gott (1911), by Mr. Justice Eldon Banks in Mr. Bullock's case (1912), and by Mr. Justice Avory in Mr. Gott's cases (1920-1). It was also endorsed by the House of Lords in the Bowman case (1917).

All laws against heresy or blasphemy are laws for the repression of opinion, and Lord Coleridge's reading of the law does not alter that fact or remove the danger of prosecutions. Who is to decide what are the "decencies of controversy"? Are twelve antagonistic jurymen to be the censors? What would be the decision of twelve Belfast Orangemen who had to try a Catholic speaker, or twelve Catholics who were trying a bitter Protestant lecturer? Is it reasonable to expect a more impartial verdict from twelve Christians in trying a Secularist for an attack upon their faith? The Secularist is, in effect, tried by a packed jury. At its best, Lord Coleridge's law as to spoken or written blasphemy is a law which gives immunity to "the scholar and the gentleman" while denying it to the poor and unlearned. Can any one defend the retention of a law which discriminates between two classes of the community in this way?

It should also be pointed out that the common law of blasphemy is a sectarian law in the fullest sense of the word. No matter in what language a speaker or writer describes the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Mass, or any other belief in which Roman Catholics differ from the



established religion of this country, no charge of blasphemy will lie. The same is true of any other Christian body with regard to any doctrine or belief in which they depart from the Established Church. The common law of blasphemy is a law maintained to protect the Church of England, and protects other sects only so far as they have something in common with that Church.

Moreover, experience shows that these police prosecutions are a complete failure even from the point of view of the prosecution. So far from promoting moderation of speech, by rousing resentment they actually lead to the more frequent use of violent language. Those Freethinkers to whom coarseness in controversy is extremely repugnant are placed in a very awkward position. There is something invidious in trying to moderate the violence of those who are open to prosecution. It is impossible to remonstrate with such a speaker publicly, since the remonstrance might set the law on his track, and be used against him on his trial. The law as it is administered to-day is an engine for silencing, not the advocates of scurrility, but the advocates of moderation.

It is argued that these laws are obsolete. If they are obsolete, then nothing could be more simple or more straightforward than to abolish them. The proof that they are not obsolete is, first, that they are enforced; second, that their abolition is resisted. So long as there are people who oppose the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, so long may we be quite sure that there are people who desire to see them enforced. The only way to ensure that no one shall be imprisoned or otherwise punished for his opinions is to take away the power to punish. Public opinion ought to be the one and only censor of the "decencies of controversy."

Freedom to criticize, freedom to express opinion, is one of the most valuable rights a man can possess, and should belong to the uncultured quite as much as to the cultured. We therefore plead for the entire abolition of the power to prosecute for the expression of opinion in matters of religion.

There is a considerable volume of public opinion in favour of the abolition of the laws against blasphemy, and the protests against the existence of these restrictions on free speech are not confined to people who are by conviction ranged against the Christian faith. Many clergymen, belonging to different sects, are opposed to these laws, and regard them as not only an unjustifiable interference with freedom of discussion, but as an insult to the religion in which they believe. What is now needed is the organization of this body of opinion into a solid and compelling force. The time has passed when it can be hoped to prevent the discussion of subjects on which varied opinions exist, and any endeavour to restrict freedom of speech will only increase hypocrisy and insincerity.

Those who value the right to speak freely, according to reason and conscience, are urgently requested to join the Society for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, and names and addresses (with subscription) should be forwarded without delay to the Secretary—REV. REGINALD SORENSEN, 5 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C. 4.

## Correspondence.

### LATEST DIVORCE FIGURES.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Since the opening of the Courts in January no less than 2,300 divorce cases, defended and undefended, have been listed, and one of the significant features of the list is the increasing number of undefended cases, namely, 1,300 for this term.

In all these cases a divorce can only be obtained through the medium of adultery, which places a premium upon adultery, misconduct, collusion and perjury. As there is no other way of obtaining freedom from a marriage which may have failed in every particular, people will, and do, in increasing numbers, deliberately commit adultery in order to get free.

It may safely be said that society so far from condemning the offending party is more and more condoning the offence on the ground that if you have rigid inhuman laws people will break them, and "who can blame them?" That this state of things must eventually have a serious

effect on marriage as an institution there can be little doubt. Adultery ever on the increase, and irregular unions as the result of a system of permanent separation without the power to remarry, will unquestionably lower the moral standard of our people, whereas a sane, humane, divorce law, based on the recommendations of the Majority of a Royal Commission which sat to consider this serious problem as far back as 1910, would tend towards better behaviour in marriage; such is the experience of the countries where wider facilities for divorce have been in operation for centuries.

Take, for instance, Norway, to quote Madame Vogt, the wife of the Norwegian Ambassador, in an address on this subject at the Forum Club on April 6: "Divorce following a separation of one year was granted if both husband and wife claimed a divorce, otherwise the interval was two years. Divorce cases were heard with closed doors, the whole proceeding was cheap, and for the poor practically gratuitous. In spite of this divorces were not exceptionally numerous, and were less than in most other Continental countries."

Mr. Shortt, of the Poor Person's Department, is receiving on an average ten applications a day, over nine hundred since the year began, while for the people who will not commit adultery there remains nothing but permanent separation, practically divorce without freedom.

Does it ever occur to the opponents of Divorce Law Reform that people who are willing to commit adultery may marry, divorce, and remarry well within two years under the existing law, while terrible sufferings from other causes must be borne in silence, or where no longer bearable can be relieved only by separation, with its attendant dangers to the individuals, society and the race?

(MRS.) M. L. SEATON TIEDEMAN.

### GOD AND SUFFERING.

SIR,—I was very interested in Dr. Lyttelton's letter in your issue of April 30, wherein he defends the proposition "that suffering is not altogether an evil."

I should say that suffering, considered by itself, is altogether an evil, but that taken in relation to its consequences it may sometimes be good. Thus, a certain degree of suffering, as in a surgical operation, may be the means of averting a greater amount of suffering. But it is not the suffering involved in the operation which is good, the operation is only good because it prevents more suffering than it inflicts. Suffering, then, is good only in so far as it is the means of averting greater suffering, or of increasing happiness.

The contrasts such as sickness and convalescence, success after failure, etc., which Dr. Lyttelton mentions illustrate this. He says, "life without contrasts would be a wretched, barren thing." But wretchedness is suffering, and I take it that the wretchedness in life without contrasts would, in his opinion, outweigh the suffering involved in the contrasts. This proves, not that suffering is not evil, but that human life without suffering in one form or another is inconceivable.

By the bye, what must life in heaven be like, where the contrasts of pain and pleasure are not supposed to exist? Must it not be "a wretched, barren thing, duller than words can say"?

E. I. HIRST.

SIR,—It seems to me that pain has nothing to do with the existence or non-existence of a God; it is simply a sensation inseparable from the possession of a complex nerve-system, without which we should have no capacity for pleasure. I think I must agree with Dr. E. Lyttelton that pain serves as a useful danger-signal, and, further, that it has been proved to be a valuable corrective. I cannot suppose that any right-minded master would flog a boy for being dull, but there are boys who exhibit the quality sometimes known as "cussedness," and, fortunately, their nether parts are provided with nerves. As the maintenance of order and discipline in a school is admittedly essential, I should be sorry to see the cane and birch abolished.

N.B.—I never cherished the slightest malice towards those who corrected me.

Those who could not see eye-to-eye with your correspondent when he took them for a trip into Shadowland, would doubtless concede that he knows something about the management of boys. EDWARD GRANVILLE ELIOT.



## National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON  
APRIL 27, 1922.

The President, Mr. C. Cohen, in the chair. Also present: Messrs. Lloyd, Moss, Neate, Quinton, Rosetti; Miss Pankhurst, Miss Pitcher, Miss Kough and the Secretary.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed. New members were received for the Manchester, Swansea, and South London Branches and the Parent Society.

Correspondence was received and dealt with from the Swansea and Birmingham Branches, and a successful visit to Huddersfield by the President reported.

The report of the Propagandist Committee, recommending, among other matters, that arrangements be made for a week's Freethought Mission to Plymouth and the neighbourhood, was received and adopted.

Report also received of the last meeting of the Committee for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws.

The various resolutions for the Annual Conference Agenda were read and remitted for preparation to the Agenda Committee, on which Messrs. Moss and Rosetti were elected. The Secretary was instructed to obtain a brief abstract of the papers to be read at the Conference by May 12, and the meeting adjourned until May 18.

E. M. VANCE,  
General Secretary.

*N.B.*—Branch Secretaries are requested to call meetings at the very earliest opportunity to elect their delegates to the Conference. As the arrangements for the delegates' reception will fall upon voluntary workers it is highly essential that ample time should be given.

## Obituary.

We have to record, with the deepest regret, the death of an old and valued contributor to this journal, and one who was wholeheartedly devoted to the cause of Freethought. Mr. George Scott was for many years an occasional writer in this journal, although during very recent times other calls on his leisure prevented his writing as frequently as of old. Still, his interest in the old paper never languished, and we always enjoyed a few minutes conversation with him when visiting Glasgow. But we had no idea that he was in bad health until his wife wrote us to say that he had already passed away. Mr. Scott was taken seriously ill on April 2, and within a few hours was taken to the Victoria Infirmary for an operation. He died five days later, having only temporary periods of consciousness. The immediate cause of death was hæmorrhage on the brain. The circumstances of his death are the more distressing as his wife had only just returned home after a severe surgical operation, from the effects of which she has not yet recovered. In accordance with his wishes he was cremated, and a secular address was delivered over the body. In this matter, his wife informs us, all his desires were carried out. Mr. Scott was a man of fine character, and his articles were always marked with a clearness of thought and a breadth of outlook that did both him and the cause he upheld credit. He leaves behind him two little girls, who with their mother are left to mourn one whose place can never be filled with them, but the memory of whose character will, we feel sure, be to them a cherished possession and a source of comfort as time passes. Mr. Scott, in his own unobtrusive way, was a zealous worker for the Freethought cause, and the world owes more than it kens to such as he who do their work and leave the world the richer for their having passed through it. In such cases one can give nothing but sympathy, but from all who knew George Scott his wife and children will have that without stint.

C. C.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.  
INDOOR.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (241 Marylebone Road, W., near Edgware Road): 7.30, Mr. Yeates, A Lecture. Discussion Circle meets every Wednesday at 7.30 at "Coronet" Hotel, Soho Street, W. Strangers welcome.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, H. W. Nevinson, "On Conferences."

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 6.15, Mr. A. D. McLaren, "The Triumphs of the Faith."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Regent's Park): 6.30, Mr. Burke, A Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Corner Technical Institute, Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. G. Whitehead, A Lecture.

BEAUTIFUL ART KNITTING SILK, 4s. 11d.  
per  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. hank; sold elsewhere at 5s. 6d. All shades in stock. Colours matched, if desired, as near as possible. Post free.—F. P. WALTER, 69 Valkyrie Road, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex.

F. T. DENT, 156 Whitecross Street, London, E.C. 1, would like to buy some books on Freethought from a fellow-Freethinker.

FREEDOM.—Bachelor, with simple life and "back to the land" ideas, would welcome criticism and suggestions from another; views—joint purchase of land, companionship.—CHESHIRE, c/o Freethinker Office, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

PROPAGANDIST LEAFLETS. 2. *Bible and Teetotalism*, J. M. Wheeler; 3. *Principles of Secularism*, C. Watts; 4. *Where Are Your Hospitals?* R. Ingersoll; 5. *Because the Bible Tells Me So*, W. P. Ball; 6. *Why Be Good?* G. W. Foote; 7. *Advice to Parents*, Ingersoll; *The Parson's Creed*. Often the means of arresting attention and making new members. Price 1s. per hundred, post free 1s. 2d.

THREE NEW LEAFLETS

1. *Do You Want the Truth?* C. Cohen; 7. *Does God Care?* W. Mann; 9. *Religion and Science*, A. D. McLaren. Each four pages. Price 1s. 6d. per hundred, postage 3d. Samples on receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—N.S.S. SECRETARY, 62 Farringdon Street, E.C. 4.



LATEST N. S. S. BADGE.—A single Pansy flower, size as shown; artistic and neat design in enamel and silver; permanent in colour; has been the silent means of introducing many kindred spirits. Brooch or Stud Fastening, 1s. post free. Special terms to Branches.—From THE GENERAL SECRETARY, N. S. S., 62 Farringdon Street, E.C. 4.

## Bargains in Books.

A CANDID EXAMINATION OF THEISM.

By PHYSICUS (G. J. Romanes).

Price 4s., postage 4d.

THE ETHIC OF FREETHOUGHT.

By KARL PEARSON.

Essays in Freethought History and Sociology.

Published 10s. 6d. Price 5s. 6d., postage 7d.

KAFIR SOCIALISM AND THE DAWN OF INDIVIDUALISM.

An Introduction to the Study of the Native Problem.

By DUDLEY KIDD.

Published 7s. 6d. Price 3s. 9d., postage 9d.

THE PIONEER PRESS, 61 Farringdon Street, E.C. 4.



## Pamphlets.

By G. W. FOOTE.

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