

# The FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions.

### The Moral of the Bottomley Case.

We said last week that we had no desire merely to add another stone to the number that are now being thrown at Horatio Bottomley, and we are not writing on that subject with any intention of doing so. Most public men are very cowardly, and although Bottomley's character was well known all along, they were quite willing to use him so long as he served their purpose, and are now quite as ready to denounce him with a fine show of injured and outraged virtue. Even the government which prosecuted him knew quite well the kind of man he was, and yet during the war it helped him to pose as almost a national hero, thus being as ready to trade on the gullibility of the general public as any low-down charlatan or fraud could well be. That Bottomley could pursue his career for so long is a reflection upon the intelligence of the general public, but it is also a still more deadly indictment of the morality of those men who stand forward as the guides of that same public. It is absolutely certain that but for the patronage which Bottomley received during the war period he would never have been able to draw the money from the class of people who were led to him. The average man or woman who merely knew him as one who had been mixed up with a number of big financial transactions, of which they understood nothing, saw him patted on the back by men in position. They saw him invited to headquarters by the Commander-in-Chief, and used in a semi-official manner time after time. They were misled by those who should have guided them; and had I been on the jury that tried him I think I should have been inclined to decline to convict until they who had so commended him to the public were placed by his side as accessories to the frauds he was charged with committing. It is at least a pity that the jury did not add a rider to that effect to their verdict.

### The Uses of Piety.

It was part of a well calculated shrewdness when, soon after the war commenced, Bottomley assumed the part of a converted unbeliever. He turned to God—not to a definite religious belief such as might be found in one of the established Churches, in these days that would not have affected the class aimed at. To be serviceable it had to be a more or less nebulous

kind of a belief about a more or less nebulous deity, accompanied with a deal of what the Americans call "soft stuff" about a future life. To catch the mass of the British public that was almost essential. For the British public is one of the most unintelligently sentimental in Europe. It has established the Prince of Wales as a popular favourite on the strength of a well advertised smile, and it takes to its heart countless religious impostures because an appeal is made to a vague religious feeling that is not worth sixpence in theory or a penny in practice. For note it was the general public that was angled for this time. The appeal to religion would not have been so widely effective with other classes; they understand the function of religion too well for that. But to work any sort of a fraud on the British public there is nothing like using the religious motive. Every politician knows this, and Bottomley was a good politician. The way in which he used the statue of the Virgin in France proved that he understood how to entrap the great gullible British public. The statue, it will be remembered, was hanging over the Church on which it stood, fixed in that position by our own engineers to prevent it falling. Some of the religious papers here, and some of our religious leaders, presented this to the people as a "miracle." They trumped up a legend to the effect that it was kept in that position, defying gravity, by an act of God, and the German shells could not affect it. They knew it was a lie, but they told it. Our own men in France knew it was a lie, and smiled when they heard of the "miracle." Bottomley knew it was a lie, but it served his purpose. But was he worse than our religious leaders and papers who fathered the lie? If Bottomley plundered the public, what are we to say of these men and these papers who do their best to encourage the frame of mind which makes the public an easy subject for any plausible charlatan that happens to come along?

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### The Frauds of Religion.

It should never be forgotten, we ought never to let it be forgotten, that Bottomley's most colossal fraud was perpetrated under the shelter of religion and patriotism. The first, in a civilized society, nearly always covers credulity or roguery, or both. The latter is so often a shield for knavery or self-seeking that it requires the most careful scrutiny if it is to be the medium of good. And the evil consequences attaching to both spring from the same root. Both appeal to the more primitive feelings (not necessarily bad on that account, although it does establish a case for the most careful scrutiny), and in the play of these feelings credulity and unreasoning passion are apt to carry all before them. Putting patriotism on one side, it may be noted that just as Bottomley used religion as a means of achieving his ends, and just as those who knew better remained silent and used him to gain their ends, so we have to-day innumerable frauds carried on in this country in the name of and under the cloak of religion against which no effective protest is ever made, and concerning which no warning is ever given the public. Some years ago there was a par-

ticularly ugly case of a certain missionary society, with its headquarters in Glasgow. After the secretary had bolted, first lifting as much money as he could in various quarters, the office effects were cleared and some of the letter books—which I myself saw—fell into the hands of a temporary caretaker. This man took a summary of the proceedings of the mission in its exploitation of West African natives to the editor of one of the leading Scottish papers. The editor admitted that it was a very bad case indeed, but he declined to go on with the exposure on the ground that it did not pay to stir up the illwill of these religious organizations. So the fraud is allowed to go on year after year. Whatever and whoever is wronged the interests of religion must not suffer. For religious organizations are still strong enough to make enmity to them a very costly game.

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#### More Pious Frauds.

In the Bottomley case *Truth* has been very busy exposing the methods employed and calling upon the Government to prosecute—it might also have asked for an enquiry as to the relations of the Government to him. So far, so good. But there are plenty of other things *Truth* might well turn its attention to. For instance: Some years ago, as some of my readers will remember, I made a very careful examination of the work of the Foreign Missionary Agencies. I went very carefully through all their published reports and balance sheets, and from their own mouths showed them to be a mass of lying, dishonesty, and folly. The exposure was complete inasmuch as I said nothing myself, but let the missionaries tell their own story—divested of the trimmings intended to throw dust in the eyes of their dupes. Naturally the missionaries kept silence, although the *Daily Chronicle* said that the booklet called for some official reply. Well, during the course of my investigations I came across a number of the Home Missions, and I was able to prove that in a very large number of cases these were little better than schemes for clerical failures to get a good living out of their missionary activity. By giving a very small portion to the ostensible purpose of the mission, much as some portion of the subscribed money for Victory Bonds was paid back, the missionaries escaped prosecution. I gave a mass of particulars to Mr. Labouchere at the time, and was certainly under the impression that he intended making use of them. It was never so used, and I suggest to *Truth* that here is a field in which they could save the public from being preyed upon by a number of pious adventurers. Then there was the exposure made a few years ago by Mr. Manson of the methods of the Salvation Army. That was complete if ever exposure was. But the Army remained silent, and was able to see to it that the Press boycotted the work. To-day the people have forgotten, and this pious trading concern goes on as merrily as ever, utilizing a little questionable charity to cover its other activities. Finally, there is the case of the notorious evangelist Torrey. This adventurer came to England and was taken up by a number of leading religious preachers. He circulated a number of particularly lying and filthy stories about Paine and Ingersoll and was dealt with faithfully by G. W. Foote. Mr. Foote's exposure attracted the attention of W. T. Stead, who although a Christian, was intellectually honest. He thought that by exposing the character of Torrey to religious leaders he would cause them to disown him. But he did not know his religious leaders. He circularised them, but they would not publicly say anything against Torrey. He was allowed to finish his "mission" under their auspices, they helping to circulate false statements as to its results. They told Mr. Stead that if anything was said publicly it would injure the cause

of religion. The lesson is always the same. Anything is permissible so long as the popular faith in religion can be kept undisturbed.

#### Sterilizing Roguery. \* \* \*

Now you cannot stop this exploitation of public credulity merely by locking up a rogue here and there. That is the legal method and its futility makes one smile. If locking up a rogue would stop rascality there should to-day be quite a scarcity of that commodity. They have been locked up and punished for generations, yet the crop is as plentiful as ever. And the pomposity of legal jargon is in this connection simply ridiculous. To tell the victims of some colossal fraud that justice is satisfied because one man is imprisoned, still leaving them the sufferers from what he has done, is to make the law laughable instead of impressive. If a house is infested with rats it is a poor plan merely to catch an occasional one. It is far better to overhaul the house and so to arrange matters that the building no longer provides the wherewithal for them to live. Under the influence of our delightful religion we have gone on making intellectual uprightness one of the most costly qualities a man could possess, and we have praised simple credulity as the greatest of the virtues. We have thus tended to breed both fools and rogues. And while the two exist the one will prey upon the other. Cunning—which is the outstanding feature of these financial sharks, and which is a far different thing from intellectual ability—feeds upon credulity, and will continue to do so till the end of the chapter. The sharp need not search very far to find the flat; the flat will meet him at least half-way, and will be disappointed if he does not find him. If we are to end this deplorable state of things we must see to it that we make the social environment such that credulity is regarded as a vice instead of a virtue. That will, of course, injure the cause of religion, but it will make for the greater sanity and happiness of mankind.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

#### Blindness to Facts.

THEOLOGIANs, as a class, have the reputation of making extravagant, unverifiable, and often positively false statements. This is not in the least astonishing when it is borne in mind that most of the subjects which they discuss lie outside the range of knowledge. God, Christ, the spiritual world, and the human soul are the names of beings and things at once unknown and unknowable. Their very existence even is not ascertainable. And yet these are subjects on which the theologians have written and published innumerable tomes with which the world's libraries are overcrowded. Nobody knows that there exists an infinite, almighty being called God, and yet the theologians speak and write of him with far greater freedom than they would or could of their dearest, best-known friends. They are not restrained by any sense of responsibility, for they know that they will not be called into account for their utterances, however inconceivably silly they may be. Preachers, for example, tell their congregations what God thinks and does and wants them to think and do. Not so long ago a minister assured his people that dancing and theatre-going are sins in which Christians cannot indulge without wounding the Divine heart and injuring their own souls, though dancing and instrumental music occupied a prominent position in the Jewish religion, as portrayed in the Old Testament. With equal lack of reserve are heaven and hell treated in the pulpit almost every Sunday. The unseen world is much more freely described than the seen, simply because it is unseen and unknown. For the same

reason the soul is of immeasurably greater importance to the theologian than the body, and he can talk about the former much more eloquently than about the latter.

This unreservedness in the treatment of unknown and unknowable subjects naturally weakens the moral sense in general, and the sense of responsibility in particular. That this is true is often shown in the theological treatment even of historical facts when they have any bearing on religion. The fact is that the theologian is blind to all facts that throw discredit upon miracles and the supernatural. As an example of this we shall take a sermon on "The Church and Her Founder," published in the *Christian World Pulpit* of May 25. It is by A. W. Greenup, M.A., LL.D., D.D., Principal of the London College of Divinity, and was delivered in St. Paul's Cathedral on Sunday morning, May 14. The Principal begins by calling special attention to the marvellous growth and development of the Christian Church. The sketch he gives of the amazing results achieved in three hundred years is exceedingly vivid, and after presenting it he says:—

May I ask you to consider this morning whether the progress of Christianity is not one of the evidences—though not one of the highest, yet one of the evidences of the Divinity of its Founder? Is not the success of Christianity, together with all its implications, a miracle which Christ has wrought? Examine the results of this widespread religion in any direction that you please, and the impartial mind will irresistibly arrive at the truth of the Divinity of its Founder, the truth that Jesus Christ is God. We can postulate nothing less than this to meet the facts of the case.

That extract calls for two significant comments. The first is that there are many Christians, quite as familiar with the progress of the early Church as is Principal Greenup himself, who do not believe that Jesus Christ is God. Are we to infer, for example, that Unitarians do not possess impartial minds because they do not believe in the Divinity of the Founder of Christianity? Perhaps no more exhaustive work has ever appeared than Harnack's *Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, in two large volumes; and yet the author has the temerity to be a Liberal theologian. In the Principal's estimation evidently only those who agree with him have impartial minds, a fact by no means creditable to his humility and charity.

The second comment is that the triumphs of Buddhism during the first two centuries of its existence were even more astonishing than those of Christianity. Does it follow that the impartial mind will irresistibly arrive at the truth of the Divinity of the Founder of Buddhism, the truth that the Buddha is God? We know that Gotama never claimed to be a Divine Being, and that his early followers were practical Atheists. And yet Buddhism conquered India in much less time than Christianity won the Roman Empire, and it is to be remembered that Buddhism never had recourse to the sword.

Principal Greenup refers to the "beginning of man's fellowship with the greatest of all teachers, a fellowship which since that time has been constantly increasing and will go on increasing until to him every knee shall bow." But that is not a true statement. It is an incontrovertible fact that for a hundred years the Church has been steadily losing ground, and that Christ never meant less to the world than he does to-day. The clergy sorrowfully declare that a rising wave of immorality is sweeping over the land, and that deeds of reckless violence are multiplying on every hand. If this is true, it only proves that Christ is practically of no account, and that at present there is no indication whatever that the time is coming when to him every knee shall bow. On the contrary, the

signs of the times do not promise a brilliant and triumphant future to the Church. Despite the dark prospects, however, the Principal has the audacity to paint in glowing colours "the effects of Christianity on the world at large." Take the following sample:—

It is Christianity that has raised woman to her present position of honour, Christianity which first ameliorated and then in the civilized world abolished slavery, Christianity which has been foremost in denouncing bitterness of feeling between various classes of society, Christianity which has been responsible for the great philanthropic movements, and which has done much to mitigate the horrors and evils of the ancient world. I submit that no thoughtful man can shut his eyes to these patent facts. They are before the world embodied in its history.

Unbelievers have no wish to ignore any facts, but they do have the strongest objection to taking fictions for facts, as is done in the above extract. It is not a fact that Christianity has raised woman from a low to a high position. Indeed, the Church has always taught the subjection of woman. Paul did not permit a woman to teach, but held that she "must learn in quietness with all subjection." Both Paul and Peter exhort wives to be in subjection to their husbands in everything. Man is described as the head of the woman, not woman of the man. In all ages of its history the Church has been absolutely loyal to the apostolical conception of woman's inferiority to man. Even to-day that conception predominates, with the result that in all departments of life, in the Church as well as in the world, her rights are granted to woman reluctantly, and after a stupendous fight on her part.

It is not a fact that Christianity abolished slavery. Neither Jesus nor his Apostles uttered a single word in condemnation of the evil, while the overwhelming majority of theologians in every age justified it, calling it a Divine institution. Even at the commencement of the second half of the nineteenth century the champions of abolition were violently denounced and cruelly persecuted as enemies of God and the Bible. This is an absolutely undeniable fact which Dr. Greenup utterly ignores, though he cannot be entirely ignorant of it. It was Humanism not Christianity, that abolished slavery. Was not Wilberforce fully aware that the Church and its bishops were against him, and were not William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Henry Ward Beecher, and others in America generally hated and treated as dangerous heretics simply because they advocated abolition? It is also a noteworthy fact that Abraham Lincoln, who abolished American slavery, was a convinced and active Freethinker.

Yes, Principal Greenup's "patent facts" turn out, on examination, inescapable fables, to which no thoughtful man, whether he likes them or not, can shut his eyes; and to build upon them an argument for the Deity Christ is an unforgivable offence against reason. That Christianity became politically powerful in the Roman Empire is beyond all doubt; but there is no historical authority whatever for the assertion that it transformed social life. The reverend gentleman refers again and again to the evils of the ancient world from which Christianity redeemed the race. He affirms that it is "Christianity which has been responsible for the great philanthropic movements, and which has done much to mitigate the horrors and evils of the ancient world"; but he is blind to the fact that philanthropy is much older than Christ. The late Dr. Emil Reich, an orthodox theologian and a vigorous opponent of the Higher Criticism of the Bible, in his *History of Civilization*, calls special attention to "the charitable institutions of the Emperors Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian, which embraced all the orphans and the minor children of the vast Empire."

He speaks contemptuously of the popular Christian estimate of Pagan Rome, and claims that its administration of justice was wonderfully pure and efficient, and that it presents us with innumerable "cases of the most magnanimous individuals." Harnack, too, one of the most exact of ecclesiastical historians, in his *Expansion of Christianity*, approvingly quotes Uhlhorn, who, speaking of the Pagan Empire, says that "there had already appeared a universalism foreign to the ancient world"; that "the Stoics had passed the word that all men were equal, and had spoken of brotherhood as well as of the duties of man towards man"; that "hitherto despised, the lower classes had asserted their position"; and that "the treatment of slaves had become milder," Pliny seeing "in them his serving friends" (vol. i. p. 24). Quotations to the same effect might be given from Lecky, Renan, Boissier, Dill, and others.

Later on in his sermon Dr. Greenup recurs to the subject of the early progress and triumph of Christianity as evidence of the Divinity of Jesus Christ; but an adequate discussion of this point demands another article.

J. T. LLOYD.

## A Foul Fetish-Book.

Hebrew mythology contains things which are both insulting and injurious.

—J. A. Froude.

The Zolaism of the Bible is far more pernicious than the Zolaism of fiction.

—G. W. Foote

THE clergy have rare noses for indecency. Some time ago the clerical members of a Conference of Headmasters issued a warning to the parents of schoolboys, in which they called attention to the danger of modern books, magazines, and plays, which dealt with sex matters. "We venture to do so," said the parsons, "because we have special opportunities of observing the actual effect upon boys and young men of suggestions so conveyed to which we feel bound to bear witness." And they added, "too little care is exercised to exclude them from the lives of the young." To-day a controversy is raging in the newspapers between Dean Inge and the novelists, whom he charges with "catering for the corrupt taste of the moment." Indeed, the dean seems to consider that most modern fiction is tainted with indecency. The novelists whom the dean attacks directly are so exceedingly able to take care of themselves that championship of their side would be, what the Prayer Book calls, "an act of supererogation." There is, however, another aspect of the whole matter, which both the dean and the novelists have overlooked.

To read allusions to the books, magazines, and plays of the day as if they were full of hair-raising indecencies, and were a noisome danger to society, is not pleasant. When such remarks come from priests and their satellites, who thrust the open Bible into the hands of little children, one's sense of justice is outraged. For there are things actually in the sacred volume which are calculated to bring the blush of modesty on any face except that of a priest. Raw, naked filth, which cannot be read aloud to a mixed congregation, is forced compulsorily into the hands of every child from the age of five years. Clergymen attach such loose meanings to the words they fling about so recklessly, but how such men can read the account of Ezekiel's banquet, the story of Onan, the adventures of Lot and his daughters, and other horrors, without a squeal of remonstrance, and point the finger of scorn at modern novelists and playwrights is inexplicable except on the hypothesis that they are insincere.

If the novels, plays, and magazines of the day are likely to corrupt the morals of the rising generation,

what, in the name of common sense, is the Old Testament calculated to do? In the sacred pages may be found plain, unvarnished accounts of rape, adultery, and unnatural vice, written with all the nasty particularity and love of detail which is the peculiar birthright of all Eastern writers. The florid, heated rhetoric of the Old Testament leaves nothing to the imagination, and the least lettered reader can appreciate the glowing periods. In plain English, this Oriental nastiness begins where modern writers, of necessity, leave off.

The protest of the parsons is hypocritical. If they had any real reason for safeguarding the interests of the young, they would see at once that, if an ordinary novel or play will corrupt a boy, the Bible is open to the same grave objection. No novelist or playwright would dare to fill his pages with detailed accounts of incest, rape, and sex inversion. He would be imprisoned, and his books destroyed by order of a Court of Justice. Yet the clergy force the Bible, which contains all these things, and much more rubbish, into the hands of millions of children.

We do not believe in bowdlerising books, but if ever there were any occasion for such drastic treatment it should be directed against that Oriental fetish-book, the Bible. Singularly, if all the objectionable passages were deleted, "God's Holy Word" would be so reduced as to be almost unrecognisable. Instead of shouting of indecent literature, let the clergy set an example. Let them cease to place in the innocent hands of little children a volume which they dare not read aloud in its completeness to a mixed audience of adults. Until they consent to do this, they merit the title of "Chartered libertines."

MIMNERMUS.

## Diffusion.

If an unlighted gas jet be turned on, or the stopper be removed from a bottle of ammonia, the smell of the gas is quickly noticeable at a considerable distance. The tendency which all gases display to diffuse to an indefinite extent, as well as such other properties as pressure, are due to the continual and rapid motion of the gas molecules. If a gas jar of hydrogen (say) be stood mouth downwards over a second jar of oxygen (say), the gas in the upper compartment is roughly sixteen times as light as that in the lower. Hence, one would expect that the two would not mix however long they might be left in juxtaposition. But if they be left a considerable time they will form an homogeneous mixture of the two gases. This apparent contradiction of the law of gravity is only explainable on the assumption that the gas molecules are moving.

The process of diffusion in liquids is much slower than in gases. The molecules of a liquid are much less mobile. But that there is molecular movement is certain. If a small grain of aniline dye, or a crystal of copper sulphate be dropped into a tumbler of clear, still water the whole water will be uniformly coloured in a few weeks, showing that there has been a considerable amount of movement in the apparently immobile water. Of course, the water should be maintained at an even temperature, since otherwise the uniform coloration may be more rapidly produced by a process of heat transference known as convection.

Even the molecules of solid substances have not entirely lost their mobility. Carbon laid in contact with pure, hot, solid iron will diffuse into it; gold in contact with lead will, in a few years, diffuse into the metal in appreciable quantities; carbon will diffuse into the body of hot, vitrified porcelain; and metallic silver will diffuse into hot glass.

Thomas Graham (1832) showed that the speed at which the molecules of a gas can diffuse through their

porous membranes is related to the density of a gas, and his generalization, called *Graham's Law of Diffusion*, states that, *The relative speeds of diffusion of gases are inversely proportional to the square roots of their relative densities.* To illustrate this by an example: hydrogen diffuses about four times as fast as oxygen, and oxygen is about sixteen times as heavy as hydrogen.

There is a good deal of theoretical and experimental evidence for the theory that the less dense the gas the greater the average velocity of its molecules.

Taking the experimental evidence first: a porous pot (ordinary clay tobacco pipes with the mouth of the bowl closed with plaster of paris, will do) containing air is fixed to the end of a bent tube. A cylinder of hydrogen is then brought over the pot. Hydrogen, being lighter than air, diffuses through the walls of the porous pot, faster than the air can diffuse out of it. Consequently, the pressure of the gas inside the pot increases, and if the bent tube be filled with water before beginning the experiment, this will be depressed and driven out at the other end. Before placing the hydrogen cylinder in position, air, of course, was diffusing inwards and outwards at the same rate. If a cylinder of carbon dioxide, which is heavier than air, be used, the reverse action takes place. The air diffuses out faster than the carbon dioxide diffuses in, the pressure is reduced, and the column of water rises towards the porous pot. Some rather curious effects can be obtained. Thus, if in the first of the above experiments the end of the tube be drawn out to a fine point, the water will be sprayed out like a miniature fountain. Or the outward pressure of the imprisoned gases can be made to blow a soap bubble, by placing a film of soap solution across that mouth of the tube farther from the porous pot.

Some rather interesting practical applications have also been suggested. By arranging a device whereby increased pressure in a porous pot causes movement of a column of liquid, which makes electric contact and rings a bell, it has been argued that a useful alarm for giving warning of the escape of coal gas in a house, or the presence of fire-damp in coal mines could be made, for these gases, like hydrogen, diffuse through porous walls faster than air can escape. The diffusion of gas through the walls of buildings plays a part in ventilation. Diffusion through the walls does not take place so readily when they are saturated with moisture. This is one of the reasons that newly built houses are, other things being equal, less hygienic than older houses. The lime in the cement is gradually acted upon by the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (exhaled by all animals and plants) with the formation of water.

Of the theoretical considerations which suggest that the less dense the gas the greater the average velocity of its molecules, the following is a very brief and simple account.

The pressure which a gas exerts on the walls of a containing vessel is due to the steady bombardment of its molecules. The pressure which each molecule exerts is measured by the kinetic energy which it possesses at the moment of impact. This is measured by the product  $\frac{1}{2} m v^2$  where  $m$  is the mass of the molecule and  $v$  is its velocity. It is possible to demonstrate experimentally that the product of the volume and pressure of a given mass of gas is constant. Thus, if the gas be compressed to one half its volume, it will exert a pressure double what it did before compression.

This observed fact can be explained by the *Kinetic Theory of Gases*—as the phenomena and theories I am writing of are called. We have the space occupied by the molecules, without, of course, reducing their number. Hence the number of molecules striking the surface of the vessel in any given unit of time is doubled, and, therefore, the pressure is doubled.

At a temperature of 0 degrees C. and a pressure of 760 m.m. of mercury (known as normal temperature and pressure), 1 cubic centimetre of air exerts a pressure of 1.033 kilogram per square centimetre. Under similar conditions 1 cubic centimetre of hydrogen exerts the same pressure. Yet hydrogen is only about one-fourteenth as heavy as air. Hence, to exert the same pressure the average velocity of the hydrogen molecules must be much greater than that of the air molecules, which, as already stated, is the case. The average velocity, at normal temperature, of hydrogen molecules is about 1800 metres per second, and of air about 450 metres per second.

The same theory also gives a simple explanation of the increase of pressure which a gas exerts as its temperature is raised. The heat energy put into the gas is represented by an increase in the average velocity of the molecules, and this increase in velocity is manifested as an increased pressure. W. H. MORRIS.

## National Secular Society.

### Executive's Annual Report.

BY THE PRESIDENT.

It is not by way of expressing disappointed hopes or frustrated endeavours that the Executive opens its annual report by pointing to the great difficulties that at present beset the carrying on of a propaganda such as that in which this Society is engaged. The consequences of the war are still with us to an almost undiminished extent. The severe trade depression, with its consequent unemployment, and over absorption of the minds of people in the problem of how to live, the still very high cost of travelling to lecturers whose business it is to travel the country, are all handicaps to our work, and are noted here in order that members may appreciate the difficulties under which that work is at present being carried on.

On the credit side of the account it has to be noted that in spite of all difficulties the activity of the Society has been well maintained. Such old established branches as Glasgow, Manchester, and Birmingham have kept their work well abreast of previous years, and other branches have done what lay within their power. The difficulty of obtaining suitable halls still continues and hampers the work in many ways. But the meetings held have been, on the whole, better attended than ever, and the Society's lecturers have been as busy as ever. Mr. A. B. Moss, Mr. A. D. McLaren, and Mr. R. H. Rosetti have been busier than in recent years, visiting many of the provincial centres, and lecturing with great appreciation to those who heard them. Mr. J. T. Lloyd has covered his usual ground and has, if that were possible, endeared himself more to Freethinkers for the work he has done and is doing. Your President has spent most of his week-ends during the lecturing season out of London, and reports audiences above the average. Special mention may be made of two of these. At Glasgow the usual meeting place had for several visits been uncomfortably crowded, and it was resolved to take the large City Hall for a special evening meeting. The experiment fully justified itself. The audience was one of the largest Freethought meetings held in Glasgow during the long history of the branch. There was a good sale of literature, much of which would go into new hands, and, consequently, the propagandist effects of the meeting may be said to have been excellent. Those concerned with the experiment were highly gratified at the outcome, and it will probably be repeated.

It is worth noting that for the first time in his over thirty years' connection with the National Secular Society your President received an invitation to lecture in a Christian Chapel. Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool, has always been noted as a centre of liberal Christianity, and it invited him to give an address there. He consented, provided it was upon a Freethought subject. No difficulty was raised, and the lecture was given to a good audience, with the acting minister presiding. The incident caused considerable local comment, and it need hardly be said, that your President is willing to visit

any Church or Chapel in the country—on the same conditions.

The Executive during the year tried the experiment of seeing what could be done in various parts of the country by sustained open-air propaganda during the summer months. For this purpose arrangements were made with Mr. George Whitehead to visit certain centres in order to conduct arranged "missions"—the Society bearing the expense of the work. Swansea, the Rhondda, Stockport, Huddersfield, Manchester, and Leeds were visited, and in these places large, sometimes very large, meetings were held, and these cannot have been without good results to the general movement, some of which will doubtless manifest themselves in the future. The Executive proposes continuing the experiment during the present summer. This work involves, as a matter of course, considerable expense, a consideration which the Executive recommends to all its friends, especially to those in the districts visited by Mr. Whitehead.

A week's propaganda was also undertaken at the beginning of the winter season by the President on Tyneside, with very gratifying results.

On the side of finance, it is desirable to point out that the balance sheet placed before this conference represents the income of the Executive only, not that of the Society as a whole. Each branch of the Society receives and expends its own funds, and is solely responsible for their collection and use. But it will be noted that, in spite of the state of trade the Society's income has increased. Part of this is due to the generosity of one friend who forwarded, through the *Freethinker*, £100 to be expended on propaganda, and a legacy of a similar sum from the late Edward Shield. This is the third legacy received by the National Secular Society during the past three years, and as one of these was paid over by the Public Trustee, it may be taken that all doubts as to the security of any money so bequeathed may now be considered at an end.

It may also be noted that the Trust Deed, authorized by previous Conferences, has been completed, and that the National Secular Society now possesses all the security enjoyed by any of the Free Churches. This ends one of the disabilities under which our movement has for so long suffered. The articles also give the trustees power to undertake the administration of special funds for particular purposes connected with Freethought work. There are five trustees, the President, Secretary, and Treasurer, in virtue of their office, with Mr. T. Robertson, of Glasgow, and Mr. G. H. McClusky, of Plymouth.

During the year new branches have been opened at Derwent, Huddersfield, and Stockport.

It is without dismay, but with regret, that the Executive reports the occurrence of another trial for "blasphemy." In December of last year Mr. J. W. Gott was summoned before the West Ham Police Court on a charge of obstruction, the offence being that he was selling a publication of his called the *Rib-Tickler* in Stratford Broadway. He was remanded for a week, and on a subsequent hearing a charge of blasphemy was substituted for the original offence. He was committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court, and the case was heard before Mr. Justice Avory. Mr. Gott appealed to the Executive for assistance, and it was felt that this was a case which could not be allowed to pass without fighting. Mr. Gott was not a member of the National Secular Society, nor was the publication one which was issued or sold with its sanction. It was purely a matter of principle, and the Executive felt that whenever so infamous a law as the blasphemy law was put into operation no Freethinker who showed that he placed principle before everything else could stand quietly on one side.

The trial came on at the December sessions, and Sir Henry Curtis Bennett was briefed for the defence. After a forcible speech from the defending Counsel the jury disagreed, and Mr. Justice Avory, who showed himself determined to secure a conviction, ordered a new trial to be heard two days later. Again the Society came very near to victory. A new jury found great difficulty in arriving at a decision, and after being kept in open court for about fifty minutes, returned a verdict of guilty,

with a recommendation to "clemency." Mr. Justice Avory showed so much contempt for the recommendation, that, in spite of a medical certificate being handed in showing that Mr. Gott was suffering from a serious disease, he proceeded to inflict the savage sentence of nine months' hard labour. The Executive was determined to fight the matter through to the end and at once lodged notice of appeal. This was again unsuccessful, but it was noteworthy as having brought from the Lord Chief Justice (Lord Trevethin) the peculiarly stupid comment that blasphemy was "a most dangerous class of crime," a deliverance which placed among dangerous criminals most of the notorious heretics of the world, from Jesus Christ to Charles Bradlaugh and G. W. Foote.

The expenses of the two trials and the hearing before the Court of Appeal, it may be here noted, were naturally great. This was met by a Defence Fund opened in the *Freethinker*, and the editor of that paper was able to pay over to the Executive the sum of £434 19s. 3d., raised in about one month, leaving a balance of income over expenditure of £24 9s. 3d. It was quite evident that the Party had no intention of permitting the bigots to have their own way if mere finance could prevent it.

Rebuffed, but not disheartened, the Executive set to work to see what could be done in order to make this trial a starting point for a new agitation in favour of the repeal of the blasphemy laws. A pamphlet on the subject was written by your President, and thanks to the generosity of several readers of the *Freethinker*, copies of it were sent to every member of both Houses of Parliament, to nearly a thousand newspapers, and to a very large number of judges, justices of the peace, and other public men and women. One thousand copies were taken by the Rationalist Press Association for distribution, and a similar number by the Executive. The pamphlet was noticed in many quarters, and had the effect of calling attention to the state of the law on the question of blasphemy, and it drew from one distinguished northern Churchman, through the columns of the *Manchester Guardian*, the remark that he would not like to have set him the task of replying to its arguments.

The Executive felt that it was not advisable to let the matter rest with fighting the case in the Courts. In these matters individuals are only incidents, and serve but to illustrate principles. It was felt that the trial might be made the starting point of a new agitation for the repeal of the blasphemy laws. A public meeting was convened at South Place Institute, and was attended by a number of well-known publicists and clergymen, while many wrote expressing sympathy with the purpose of the meeting. Invitations were also sent out by the Executive to societies and prominent individuals with a view to founding a society having for its specific purpose the advocacy of the total abolition of the Blasphemy laws. The result was quite favourable, and a Society for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws was founded, with the Rev. Copeland Bowie as Chairman, and the Rev. R. Sorensen as Secretary, the Freethought party being well represented on the Executive Committee. That committee has succeeded in getting a Bill introduced into Parliament, through the agency of Mr. J. F. Green, and it is hoped to do something definite with this during the next session. But the main work of the Society will be to conduct a public agitation to the end of educating opinion, and to this end it asks the cordial support and co-operation of Freethinkers all over the country. We must persist in fighting a cause that will ultimately be won. We are a fighting party waging a war worthy of the struggle. Here and there the forces of superstition may win a skirmish, but the ultimate victory is with the army of the light. And it should be part of our policy to turn even the temporary successes of the enemy into steps towards their final defeat.

The question of a leaflet or pamphlet giving an account of the legal rights of Freethinkers in various relationships was raised at the last Conference. This has now been done in the shape of a pamphlet, *General Information for Freethinkers*, showing what is to be done in the case of Freethinkers desiring to affirm, the law as to civil marriages, secular funerals, withdrawal of children from religious instruction, etc. Something of the kind was needed. Cases in which the rights of Freethinkers under the Oaths Act of 1888 are ignored by ignorant or bigoted

officials are constantly cropping up, and it is important that all should know what are their rights, and insist upon having those rights respected. They have been won only after a great struggle, and only when we show that we are determined in the matter will bigotry cease offering opposition to their exercise.

During the year the Executive has had under consideration the question of the supply of speakers for our platform. Here the difficulties are great, and in some ways unique. Freethought speakers cannot be advertised for as one may advertise for a trades union official. It is a service which can offer but very slight commercial compensations, and no social advantages. It calls for a higher mental equipment than does any other propagandist party in the country, and for a higher standard of character. It is not lack of money that is the difficulty here. Were the men forthcoming the money would soon, we are convinced, be provided. So far the Executive has to confess that it has not been able to hit on any scheme that it could with confidence recommend to the Conference. For the time being it can only promise to give every encouragement within its power, financial or otherwise, and to ask that branches shall give their serious attention to the matter and send to the Executive, without delay, any suggestions they may have to offer. One thing is certain. There is plenty of room for more workers, while it is impossible to overestimate the good that might be done by a larger number of speakers travelling the country devoted to the Freethought cause.

There is very urgent need that the activities of the Society should be extended as much as possible. Notwithstanding the growth of Freethinking ideas in the general community—perhaps because of that advance—there is no mistaking the fact that a strong spirit of reaction is abroad. The Roman Church, that historic foe of progress, claims to be making headway in this country, and although that advance, if real, is at the expense of the other Churches, yet it is no less a threat to the health of the general community. The spirit of Sabbatarianism is far from inactive, and there is very great prospect that as the result of some sinister and secret bargaining between the established and the non-conformist Churches, the government may very shortly bring a measure that will establish more firmly than at present Christian teaching in State-supported schools.

Against all these things the only radical and permanent cure is to go on making more Freethinkers. Propaganda, propaganda, and yet again propaganda, should be our motto. The distribution of literature should be ten times what it is, and the number of avowed Freethinkers who connect themselves with an organisation such as the National Secular Society ought to increase noticeably. The number of Freethinkers in the country grows very rapidly, but unfortunately they remain aloof from any organisation which exists to represent their views and to fight their cause. This not only makes the burden heavier than it might be on the shoulders of such as are engaged in active work, but it gives the common enemy a false idea of our numbers and his own strength. This ought not to be the case. There are a dozen towns in Britain in which branches of the Society could be established in a week if only those who agree with us would bend themselves to the task. There are scores of places in which our literature could be circulated with telling effect on the standing of the Christian Churches. It is useless for Freethinkers to stand aloof and merely to wish that more were done. What this Society can do must be ultimately dependent upon the amount of support, financial and moral, that it receives from the general body of those who agree with its objects. And after all, ours is a cause of which all may feel proud. It appeals to the best that is in us, and it makes for the real welfare of all. No nation can be really free and sanely progressive so long as the mind of the people is held subject to superstition. So long as that is the case no society can consider itself safe against a drastic reaction. More than once in the history of the world a whole civilization has gone down before a superstition upon which the enlightened few have looked with contempt. And if we are to be protected against such another happening it can only be by planting the seeds of reason where now superstition rules, and taking the welfare of man here as our sole standard of worth.

## Acid Drops.

Something should really be done to check the insolence and ignorance of coroners and magistrates in connection with the Oath question. We are constantly coming across instances in which these people set the law at defiance and openly insult the witnesses before them. The following, from the *Star*, of June 1, is not exactly a case connected with the affirmation, but it illustrates the same point:—

Mr. Graham, the Durham Coroner, was about to swear Dr. Plummer, when the witness declared his intention of taking the oath in Scottish fashion.

The Coroner: Why on earth quibble about it on such a hot day? You are in England now, and if you don't take the oath I will either commit you or refuse to take your evidence.

Dr. Plummer: I protest and say I am entitled by law to take the oath in the Scottish fashion.

The Coroner: Fiddle-de-dee. Is the Book too heavy for you to hold?

Dr. Plummer: I will raise my protest in another place.

He then held the Testament while the oath was administered.

It is a great pity that Dr. Plummer did not refuse to give his evidence. It is quite true the Coroner has the power to commit for contempt of court, but it is equally true that there is a very speedy remedy for such action and one that would make this particularly insolent coroner look both sick and silly. The case may be taken as one more illustration of the refining influence of religious belief.

During the recent abnormal weather a number of people died from the effects of the heat. Paternal Providence!

At Lowestoft, the local clergy walked through the town to invoke blessings on the coming crops, and then went to the beach to petition for successful harvest of the sea. Yet folks still pretend modestly that England is a civilized nation.

Roman Catholics and Anglicans are uniting in opposition to the Divorce Bill, and are promoting a separate measure of their own on limited lines. Adversity makes strange bedfellows.

Grafton Road Chapel, Kentish Town, is being converted into an electricity station. This is bringing light into a dark place.

Among the stupid things said by that biblical wisecrack, Solomon, was that if we spared the rod we spoiled the child. One teacher belonging to the Umlazi Mission, South Africa, has just been taught by the Durban magistrates that Solomon's authority is not supreme at law. A native teacher was charged with assaulting a girl of 16 by placing her face downward across a desk and beating her with a cane. It appears that she and a boy had been making love. The complaint was infectious as nine other girls were found guilty of the same terrible offence. The Rev. S. T. Harp, superintendent of the mission quite agreed with the punishment inflicted. But the magistrate disagreed and inflicted a fine of £15 or six months' hard labour.

At the annual meeting of the General Council of the League of Nations Lord Robert Cecil made a remarkable admission in answer to a question. He said, that, generally speaking, the League was supported by clergy of all denominations, but there were certain of the clergy of the Church of England who were not very keen on the question. We presume that these courageous gentry are relying on gratuitous jobs as Army Chaplains on officers' pay, whilst the rest will remain behind to comfort the soldiers' wives. It is just possible, however, that the rear of the fighting will be as lively as the front—owing to the devilish ingenuity of Christian nations and the followers of the Prince of Peace. What spineless curs masquerade as priests—to refuse a sudden journey to the other world—in batches of 50,000.

The Young Men's Christian Association is now represented in forty-nine countries. In forty-nine countries people will now have an opportunity of seeing that Christianity is a joke.

A Bedfordshire preacher who journeyed ten miles to two services found a congregation of four at one chapel and three at the other. Is this the promised revival of religion?

Councillor Vidler, chairman of Kensal Rise Public Library, speaking at a Quaker meeting, said his conscience would not rest until he had destroyed the library copy of Voltaire's *Candide*. Highly interesting! We hope the Councillor was made to pay, and that the book was restored to the library.

The Rev. A. Plumtre, Vicar of Rye, Sussex, died suddenly in church; Mr. F. W. Tucker, of Exeter, died shortly after entering St. David's Church, Exeter. There is no moral.

One of the Church papers recently contained an article entitled "A Confession," in which the writer declared that he had no desire for a future life, and that prayer "meant nothing to him." "Artifex," the well-known contributor to the *Manchester Guardian* (May 31), referring to this article, says that "to-day religion is out of fashion," and that "we have carried adulation of the man in the street far enough." Yet the religious journals are constantly assuring us that materialism is dead. This is one of the "isms" that the professional soul-saver has killed too often to suit the reasoning faculties of "the man in the street." Nowadays when we read the obituary notice of materialism we are reminded of the death of Washington's faithful body-servant, George, of which Mark Twain has recorded some interesting details. Mark first read a notice of George's death in the *Oklahoma Sentinel*, in 1856. In 1863 he again saw it announced in a journal published at Spokane, this time embellished with a wonderful account of George's memory, and his reminiscences of Bunker's Hill. Mark read the story again at Memphis in 1868, and at St. Louis in 1875. He was now convinced that George really was dead. But in 1888 the news was dished up once more, with additional facts concerning George's memory. It was then that Mark "began to be eaten up with doubt."

The Bishop of St. Albans, speaking at Cheshunt, Herts, at the annual festival of Bishops' College, on May 30, deprecated any lowering of the standard of those who were to be accepted for the priesthood. The Bishop of London urged greater effort to get hold of the young boys for the priesthood. Young England will note with becoming gratitude that neither of these Right Reverends suggested that vice in our youth is the great obstacle. It is quite possible, despite the animadversions of Father Vaughan and the Rev. Dr. Meyer, that conduct still matters more in life than some of our moralists imagine, and that intellectual sincerity counts for something as one of the "arguments" against taking "holy orders."

Dr. H. H. Rushby, Dean of the College of Pharmacy at Columbia University, has just returned from a botanical expedition in Bolivia. When he left home he had a warm regard for missionaries, and for what he considered their unselfish work. He has had this opinion modified a little, as may be judged from the following:—

Our trip cost us \$100 a day, which the foreign missionaries got. They charged that amount for the use of a raft and men to pilot it—a most prodigious sum. They may be all right in their way, but they are out to make all the money they can. I earnestly believe they would have charged us more, but they knew we had no more money left to give them. The missionaries cleaned us out completely.

The commercial instincts of missionaries are pretty sharp all over the world. In the New Hebrides, for instance, they are among the keenest trade rivals of the regular planters, and are not over scrupulous in their competition.

The clergy of St. Matthew's Church, Luton, have banned dancing, whist-drives, raffles, and "draws," in connection with Church work. They do not wish the religion of the Man of Sorrows to be too jolly.

"The earth is the Lord's" is a familiar text. From a West-End auctioneer's catalogue we notice that Lord Airlie is offering for sale 12,750 acres of land in Forfarshire. Evidently there are more lords than one.

The Christian Evidence Society lecturers should note that a natural spring of soda water has been found at Glinton, Northamptonshire. If the Design Argument were true, that soda-water spring would have been discovered at Glenlivet, where the whiskey is.

"Cain and Abel on the Stage" is the headline in a Sunday paper. The services of the Metropolitan Police will not be required. It is merely the notice of a dramatic production in Vienna.

The Bishop of Guildford has decided to sell his Georgian residence, the Dower House, Womersley, Surrey. The Founder of the Christian Religion had not where to lay his head.

There is a Socialist Sunday School in Putney, and the Religious and Missionary Committee of the Parochial Church Council was empowered to see into the matter. The Committee has reported that the teaching was wholly secular, and "contained no religious doctrine whatever, but mainly taught love and justice, the practice of good deeds, love of school fellows, love of learning, honouring the good, not to hate, not to be cowardly." Shocking! These people have no right to teach such things without some mention of religion. Had they taught the goodness of murder, and the beauty of hate, a Christian could forgive them, because that is what he thinks they ought to teach in such circumstances. But to teach the reverse of these things, without Christianity is quite inexcusable. They should be suppressed. Their existence is a threat to every Church in the country.

God, as torturer—no, this is not street corner blasphemy according to law; it is simply Mr. H. G. Wells speaking through one of his characters. He is, be it noted, a *little* God, too—and this with a total disregard of the definite instructions about him as specifically and categorically explained in language that even a child cannot understand—need we say, that we refer to the Athanasian Creed?

The official statement on reunion has been issued from Lambeth, signed by the two English Primates and the Moderator of the Federal Council of the Free Churches. Its leading "principle" is that "in a united Church there must be unity of faith." Little effort was required to reach this declaration. The real difficulty between the two bodies concerns the questions, "What are the ground and articles of this faith, and how are they to be maintained?" Judging by the attitude of the Anglo-Catholics to the Evangelicals within the Establishment, one might suggest that the two Primates should find some "principle" for the common acceptance of the "orthodox" within the fold, before inviting other denominations to close up the ranks.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, performing the opening ceremony at a Missionary Exhibition, said we were living in great times, and people were trembling and despondent. If his Grace trembles on £15,000 yearly, what does he expect the people who earn two pounds weekly to do?

The late Rev. J. Fawcett, of Enfield, left estate of the value of £3,253, and the Rev. A. G. Brown, of Easton, Northants, left £4,222. Remembering where these poor parsons are spending eternity, their congregations should be sorrowful.



## Special.

ON Sunday last the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society did me the honour of electing me its President for the sixth time. I could do no more on that occasion than say "Thank you!" And I can do no more than repeat that now. When I was first elected President I made no promises beyond that of trying to do my best, and I think I may say that undertaking has been kept. The six years of my Presidency have been a stormy and a trying time—far more trying than many would imagine. We had the long period of the war to get through, and there have been constant legal fights in which the interests of the movement were involved. The office is, therefore, anything but a sinecure. It involves much work, and I add this for the benefit of those who are not familiar with our movement—it carries no salary. The President makes no charge, not even for out of pocket expenses. I am not asking for it to be otherwise. It has always been the custom, and I fancy it will continue to be so.

I mention this last fact as a justification, if any be needed, for my asking for the continued and increased co-operation of Freethinkers all over the country to give our Society a push forward. The admission of new members is a regular feature of our monthly Executive meetings, but I think that this number could be very largely increased, and ought to be increased. I should like to see a very serious effort made, both by branches and by individual members, during the coming year to secure a record number of new members. Organization is essential, not as an end, but as the means to an end. If we are to meet the enemy with the success that we might, we must get together as closely as possible. A great deal of the enemy's strength is due to our own voluntary isolation. That should be reduced to a much smaller amount than is at present the case. We are fortunate in having all over the country a number of men and women who give their time, their money, and their energy to the Cause. I appreciate their efforts but write thus because I would like to see more done. And if twice as much were done, I expect I should be still asking for more.

I should also like to call special attention to the Executive's Annual Report which appears in this issue. There are one or two parts of that which I consider of very great importance indeed.

I think I may be pardoned touching on another subject which is of great importance to all interested in Freethought. I refer to the *Freethinker*. That, too, has during the past six years, passed through the most trying period of its forty odd years' existence. Thanks to its friends it has come well through an ordeal that killed scores of papers, and is to-day stronger than it was when the war period opened. But there is one thing with which I am not satisfied. When I assumed the responsible editorship of the paper I set myself the ideal of making the paper pay its way. It had never done this during my thirty years' acquaintance with it, but I meant to try to make it break its own distressful record. And but for the phenomenal increase in the cost of production I believe this would have been done, and I might have been in the proud position of saying that we had actually made enough in the shape of profit to buy the editor a packet of tobacco or perhaps a new pipe.

Events prevented the realization of that ideal. First the war, then when the war ended, costs still mounted that the worst had been reached, costs still mounted upward, and even when that ceased and there was a move in another direction, an unprecedented trade slump set in which was not without its effect on sales—

not so much on the paper—nothing seems able to seriously affect that, but upon other things.

The upshot of this is that we are still not paying our way, and I want to see whether that cannot be done in the very near future.

Freethought papers never have paid their way, but there is no reason that I can see why that tradition should not be broken. I am quite aware that this may worry me more than it does the friends of the *Freethinker*. They are generous and ready when their financial aid is required, but they will not misunderstand if I say that that fact makes me less ready to call on them. I want to see the paper going along without Sustentation Funds if it can possibly be done. I am sure this can be done if all its readers—or a fair proportion of them resolve that it shall be.

What I am after is 1,000 new readers. It is not an enormous number, but it will enable us to turn the financial corner, and I promise them that the first sovereign of profit that is made I will take the liberty of spending on a new book and have it suitably inscribed to commemorate the event.

Will those of our readers who are really interested see what can be done to get that 1,000? It is no use thinking that a particular one does not matter. Each one matters, for a thousand is only a thousand units after all. We are doing what we can at this end. No trouble and no labour is spared on the paper, but when that is done we have reached our limit. Others must do the rest. The late G. W. Foote once said that he had always found me willing to take soldiers' rations when they were available, and to go without when they were not. I do not think I have altered in that respect. When we have made the paper pay its way—and I am sure that it can be done—I shall have a further announcement to make, and will outline a plan for the future of the literary side of our movement which will be of interest and importance to all concerned.

There does seem an unusual amount of "I" in these notes, but in this kind of talk one cannot avoid it.

And now let us bear in mind the consideration that a thousand is made up of separate numbers, and that each unit brings the whole number nearer completion. We must achieve what has hitherto been next to the impossible, for it is only the impossible that is worth achieving.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## To Correspondents.

W. MACFARLANE.—Quite a good article, but we have said the same thing so often that we do not see any purpose in going over the same ground just at present in the form of comments. Thanks all the same. Cuttings from papers are nearly always useful and interesting.

J. LATHAM.—Thanks for cuttings. Should have liked a brief appreciation from your pen of the late Mr. Forrester Brown. Hope you are quite well.

ALFERNA.—Received and shall appear.

H. A.—We will deal with the alleged Bottomley interview next week. Conference business prevents our doing so in this issue. We may say at once that Mr. Bottomley's alleged connection with the N.S.S. work at any time is pure myth. Perhaps it is a preface to playing the converted sinner dodge—which is in its way even more profitable than the patriotic one in war-time.

A. LINDSAY (Chicago).—We think you have been treated with great discourtesy. The enquiry was obviously prompted by the best of intentions and should have been taken in the same spirit. Still, it is better to suffer from one's good nature than to let slip a chance of exhibiting it in practice. You lose nothing, the other loses much.

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

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

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.

Foreign and Colonial.—One year, 15s.; half year, 7s. 6d.; three months, 3s. 9d.

## Sugar Plums.

The Nottingham Conference was a complete success. The arrangements made by the local friends were in every way excellent, and they deserve the thanks of all for the excellent manner in which they worked. At the reception on the Saturday evening a pleasant surprise was prepared in the shape of an excellent concert, to which Mr. A. B. Moss contributed a couple of recitations. There were many friends from various parts of the country, and everyone seemed pleased to meet everyone else. When the President brought the concert to a close shortly after ten o'clock, most seemed as though they would have liked more, which is very much better than their feeling that they had had enough. Now that the train and other arrangements show signs of returning to the normal we must see what can be done to restore the Whit-Monday excursion which gave still further opportunities for fraternising among members.

The Conference itself passed off very smoothly, and there was no mistaking the spirit of earnestness among those present. A report of the proceedings will be published in due course, as will also the very excellent papers that were contributed by Messrs. Walsh, McLaren, and Rosetti. Mr. Walsh, who, as some of our readers know, writes with a pencil between his teeth, being unable to move hand or foot, contributed a paper of much force and delicacy of feeling, which was read for him with striking emphasis by Miss Kough. This is a feature of the Conference which we think might be further developed on future occasions.

The public meeting in the evening suffered somewhat, so far as numbers are concerned, from the very fine weather, which made it something of a sacrifice for people to sit inside a hall for a couple of hours. But those present seemed delighted with the speeches made. The list was an unusually lengthy one, but the speakers were brief and put their points well. There was a fair report in the local paper, the *Nottingham Journal*, which also refers to the N.S.S. and its Nottingham associations in the following paragraph, which appeared in the same issue under the notes headed, "From Day to Day":—

Thirty years ago Charles Bradlaugh had many adherents in Nottingham, and there existed a flourishing local branch of the National Secular Society, which about that time held its annual conference in the city. Although the two facts cannot be associated, the local branch became defunct soon after that conference. Yesterday, rationalists from all parts of the country again assembled in conference at Nottingham, and now it is proposed to revive the branch if possible. A Freethought mission was held in the Great Market Place, and at Bulwell last week, many people turning out to hear the strange views expressed about the finality of life. Whether the branch would prosper, if revived, one seriously doubts.

We welcome the publicity accorded to our views, which are not nearly so "strange" to-day as they used to be. With regard to the prospects of a branch of the N.S.S. in Nottingham, this will depend, of course, upon a number of circumstances. One of these is the enthusiasm of the local Freethinkers, and our Whitsun experience prompts us to dissent, respectfully but firmly, from the opinion of our contemporary.

Having finished his week's lecturing at Nottingham, Mr. George Whitehead is now proceeding to Plymouth to undertake a week's open-air lecturing there. He will commence on the North Quay this morning (June 11) at 11.15. In the evening he will speak at the back of the Market Place at 8 o'clock. There will be other meetings held during the week, and particulars of these will be announced during Sunday's proceedings. We hope to hear that the meetings are well-attended and will give Freethought in Plymouth a move forward.

Mr. Whitehead's visit to Tyneside has been considered by the local branches as a suitable occasion for getting together and making each other's better acquaintance. They will have a joint outing in Jesmond Dene (Newcastle) on Saturday afternoon, June 24. Members and friends will meet at the east end of the Armstrong Bridge at 3 p.m. Teas will be arranged for at 1s. 3d. per head at Deep Dene House, at 5 p.m. Secretaries are requested to advise the Newcastle Secretary, Mr. A. Bartram, 107, Morley Street, the number of their members and friends who will attend, and unattached friends from outside districts will be welcome if they postcard their intentions to this address not later than June 20 (as a guide to the caterer). Visitors should take the Jesmond Road car from Newcastle Central Station to the Armstrong Bridge.

As our readers are aware it is not—thanks to the boycott—easy to get reviews of Freethought publications, and this must be our excuse for publishing the following letter to the editor from one of our South African readers, Mr. Charles Baker:—

Allow me to congratulate you on the production of that monumental work, *A Grammar of Freethought*. I have greatly enjoyed it, and it is one of the most thought-provoking books I have read for a long time. To the controversialist it should prove simply invaluable, and the insistence placed on the psychological method is sound. Freethinkers who engage in propaganda work and controversy would do well to follow on the lines laid down, taking as companion volumes Prof. Bury's *History of Freedom of Thought* and a good text book on anthropology. Biblical questions can be dealt with from the Bible text—many will find the *Bible Handbook*, published by the Pioneer Press, useful. Your chapter on *Ancient and Modern* is a most necessary enunciation of principles that young students should read and re-read. It is to the controversialist what the compass is to the mariner.

I shall be greatly interested to see how our friends, the enemy, welcome your latest bombshell. They will have a tough morsel to digest and much chewing of the cud to do.

"Our friends, the enemy," will do as they always have done—ignore a work they cannot answer. That will at least serve to keep the eyes of some of their dupes closed.

Mr. Baker also suggests the formation of a number of corresponding members of the N.S.S., or an Overseas Branch. We have readers in all parts of the world, and members of the N.S.S. as well. But we think the suggestion a capital one, and if those of our Overseas readers will let us have their opinion on the matter we shall be pleased to submit a proposal to the Society's Executive.

We have often pointed out the importance of Freethinkers making whatever use they can of their local papers for the ventilation of Freethinking opinions. We are far less known that we ought to be among the general public, and often letters to the public Press advertise our existence as nothing else can. The religious world is well alive to this medium, and is actively organizing it at the present moment. We should like to see Freethinkers who have the time give close attention to this matter. One gentleman at least is ready to do his share, and if Freethinkers who do not care to do this themselves will take the trouble to send a copy of their local paper when there is anything calling for comment to Mr. H. F. Williams, Bishops Itchington, near Leamington Spa, he will do his best to deal with the points raised. Perhaps we may have other volunteers in other parts of the country.

## A New Phase of Mysticism.

LOVING the occult, yet holding to the rational idea that water wets and fire burns, I was brought to strange company one night, and I now set down for all unbelievers the following account of my experience, leaving the facts to speak for themselves.

One night, when the sun was fifteen degrees in Scorpio, and the lashing of this animal's tail was felt at the Washington Conference, I could not go to sleep. The wet winds through the half-naked poplar trees called to me—I felt a desire to be walking on a moor, with the rain in my face—to tire out the frame that I have to take with me wherever I go—to woo inspiration—to take the Kingdom of Man by force. Hastily dressing, I wandered to the moor, yet at every step I took, someone seemed to be walking behind me; when I turned round to face my follower he was still at the back of me. First I tried turning to the right quickly, but I could not meet him face to face that way; next I tried turning to the left, but to no purpose. Then, acting on an impulse, I made a sudden forward head spring which brought me in a sitting position on the wet leaves and grass. Opposite to me, in the same position, was my follower. He was very much like myself in appearance, but he had on his head a skull cap, and he wore a velvet robe. "I have been expecting you," he began, "knowing that you are in pursuit of the Absolute, or failing that, the Identical, I have summoned you hither. You desire to lift the veil of the Inscrutable, you long to skewer Fallacies on a rapier as Cyrano de Bergerac skewered the hats of hirelings. You wish to make atoms of Immensity—you have also designs on the Moon; your idea of filling with putty the craters of the lamp of heaven, to remove from her form any suggestion of a man's face, was considered by me in 1295—and rejected. It shall yet be noble to see a man's face on the blue screen of the sky. You are wont to speak of trivial things seriously, and serious things trivially—for that and your other sins you have been compelled to come here. In my hand is a phial containing three ounces of Eye-Skin Remover; that is enough to enable all the inhabitants of the world to see through a Chubb safe door three thousand miles thick. In this little box containing the Powder of Cupidity made from the dried and ground brains of Priests and Politicians there is enough—" "Stop!" I yelled, "Insomnia is sufficient punishment in itself." He continued as though I had never uttered a word. "See for yourself. Down there is the earth" (I could see it moving and I was no longer sitting on the ground—the soft and downy cloud yielded a seat fit for a king). "I shake the powder over it. See now the result—war, ruin, slaughter, famine, pestilence. In that round house, one year's harvest will keep its granary full, without work, for four—but this powder prevents those little black forms that are dashing about from even recognizing the fact that they are all living on it. This compound of Logical Absurdity, for the chasing of Mare's Nests, has quite a different effect. Over the earth I shake Piety in large doses—there, note how the forms are making two groups—the world now is dividing into two sections. The men and boys are all becoming monks; the women and girls are retiring to convents to become nuns. The race is dying out—the compound of Logical Absurdity, or Have it your Own Way Then, is saving the world by killing the human race. The little girls would sooner have rosaries than dolls; the little boys prefer hair shirts to knives that close with a click."

Reading in bed is the last word in the triumph of mind over matter. If a king wearing his crown tumbled into bed, in that place he could imagine that he was a beggar with trembling hands held to the fire

of a night watchman. He could imagine that his subjects loved him, and his courtiers had truth as their mistress.

The next morning when I awoke I had to settle an important question. Would it be easier to move the bed into the glory hole called the study, or move the bookshelves and books into the bedroom? After a rapid calculation I picked up nine books and carried them to their respective places on the shelves. In the street two out-of-work ex-service men were playing Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* on two euphoniums. Irony, like murder, will out. I wish now that I had broken the phial containing the Eye-Skin Remover; if the House of Commons treats unemployment as a subject *pour rire*, then so might we with more reason treat the spectacle of 50,000 useless members of society registering at the Exchanges. These might then experience the Fate of the Heathrafter—basted in their own fat, fried to a turn, jerked to reality; as pricked bladders, that operated on men's and women's feelings, we may yet see them—for men and women are composed of a trinity of attributes—reason, instinct and emotion, and the greatest of these is Reason.

JONATHAN HORNBLOWER.

## An Easter Echo.

AN echo it is, nothing more; and just as echo haunts the woodlands, so this empty echo of the Resurrection haunts the Christian mind. The poetical Greeks deified it, and so had at least a beautiful suggestion for their sylvan goddess as she was heard calling from the hidden cliff in the leafy month of June. But the risen Christ, where is he? Echo answers where? But he lives! he is risen! If Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain! and our faith too. Strauss had said the Resurrection was the centre of the centre of the Christian religion, and the reverend gentleman I heard "proving" the matter last Easter Sunday put it forth as a challenge that the Resurrection was the most important event in all history. Everybody agreed with him because in Church no one can contradict the parson. How majestic he seems in his silken vestments, his snug and ornate pulpit, his fine hands on its brass rail or extended in magnificent gesture. It is, indeed, the seat of the mighty where even the coarsest creature may look cultured and dignified. The gilt ornamentation in chaste design we must admire as the afternoon sun—that dear old pagan sun—shines softly in at the stained glass windows, leaving the preacher and the ornate sounding board behind him in soft and soothing, mysterious shade!

With some Freethinking friends I had spent a very pleasant Sunday in the open-air. Curiosity, and other things, took me to the church at night. Whence comest thou? they might have asked me, as the Lord asked Satan (Job, 1-7), and like Satan I might have answered: "From running to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." Truly a goodly race for a devil, but tiring too, and I was glad to rest a little in the hypnotic atmosphere of the house of God. The church was gratifyingly full, the reverend expounder middle-aged and homely, but lucid and vigorous, and with the most naive, material, internal, "circumstantial evidence" proved (?) the Resurrection to be the best attested fact in history. We were all silent, if not silenced: never a murmur of dissent: think of that ye Atheists. Again and again the preacher overwhelmed us in a flood of evidence. I looked as credulous and reverent as I possibly could, though inwardly and most wickedly roaring with mirth.

"If I did not believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead," said the preacher impressively, "I would get

down from this pulpit, go outside, and leave the ministry!" And one reflected it might be no irreparable loss, as there would be any god's number of pulpit orators to take his place.

But there were other more purely pagan and beautiful notes in this Easter service, notably, a bowl of chaste, white flowers, set in delicate sprays of tender green, emblematic of all that is pure and good and true; and the young lady soloist who in sweet and well trained voice sang divinely the two Handel numbers, "Angels, ever Bright and Fair," and "I know that my Redeemer Liveth." The latter seemed the very votaress of heaven, offering her pure girl spirit to the angels; full of life and love, yet, in the music of the great Master, seeming to stand at the edge of death offering to the gods of the better and eternal worlds her pure young spirit, "clad in robes of snowy white." It was but the perfection of human art, the result of many years of careful training by merely secular means. Suns, winds and waters, and the mountains were its sponsors; it was compounded of all, but only, mundane things. The visitor to the church read the lesson of the maiden and the flowers in his own way, and sat entranced in a diviner, more wholesome hypnotism than the feeble fable of the Christian Passion could inspire.

ANDREW MILLAR.

## The N.S.S. Annual Conference.

### Evening Public Meeting.

THE attendance at the public meeting, held in the Corn Exchange, Nottingham, on Sunday evening, June 4, though not large at the commencement, gradually increased till the hall was nearly full.

Mr. Chapman Cohen, who presided, said that the meetings regularly followed the proceedings of the Conference, their purpose being to enable strangers to get an idea of our aims and views. The N.S.S. was not the most powerful organization in Great Britain, in numbers, wealth, or fashion. Yet there was no more important society in the whole country. It was one of the few organizations which made no appeal to man's craving for money, notoriety or popularity. For all that, it embodied principles which lie at the root of all human progress, and upheld ideals which no other society could surpass, and not all could appreciate. These principles and ideals could be expressed in three words, freedom, naturalism, and rationalism—freedom in the world of opinion, naturalism in the world of morals, and rationalism in the world of sociology. One of the fiercest battles of the past raged round the principle of freedom in expressing one's opinions, and all the Churches, so far from encouraging perfect liberty of opinion, had opposed to this principle the authoritative command, "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not," declaring that man's salvation in the next world depended upon holding and professing certain opinions here. Secularists, on the other hand, contended that opinions were not necessarily right because they were upheld by authority or majorities. All the delusions in the world had been held by majorities, and all the falsities by authority. Truth must always be a matter of individual conviction, and no one who merely echoed some other person's opinions could claim to possess the truth. Freethinkers maintain that opinion cannot be altered by force, which merely stops its expression, and sets an example to others to do the same. The result is, to consecrate a lie, to drive people to hypocrisy, and to create an uncritical and credulous public ready to be exploited by Horatio Bottomleys. The responsibility for such men does not rest on the Bottomleys but on the unthinking, exploitable public. For hundreds of years we had tried to protect the fool against the shark by locking up the shark. The proper method was to eliminate the fool. Freethinkers wanted a free Press and a free public, which did not exist at present in Great Britain, but without them any party in power could do as it liked. With regard to morality, there were only two theories about its basis. One made this basis supernatural,

the other natural. The Church clung to the former, asserting that without such sanctions as God and a future life, men would be false and treacherous, and weighed down by all those other qualities which one never meets to-day in a Christian society. The Secularist combated this view of morality, which meant nothing more or less than the desirable relations that exist between men and women living in groups. These relations were not even confined to human beings, but could be traced through the love of parent for offspring, and through the principle of association seen in the hunting pack, up to its highest development in human society. Freethinkers, again, stood for rationalism in sociology. They were charged with seeking to do away with the day of rest; but most of those whom he knew appreciated as much rest as they could get. What they wanted was to make Sunday a day of rest, but they did not interpret "rest" as sitting in a badly ventilated building and listening to a badly educated expositor treating a subject which he did not understand. They had to thank Secularists for working to make it possible for them to visit museums and art galleries on Sunday, instead of having no other choice than the spirit offered by the Church or by the public house. Every unjust privilege dreaded Freethought, which meant the death of tyranny, monopoly, and exploitation. The Churches would come to terms with everything—Socialism, Communism, Anarchism—except Freethought; Jesus Christ could be brought into line with everything except full mental and intellectual freedom. Give men and women this freedom, and freedom in other respects will follow. That is why religion monopolizes all the avenues of education and publicity. They believed there were enough material resources in the world to bring happiness within man's reach, if the mental resources were properly equipped, and that human intelligence and co-operation must meet and overcome the adverse conditions of life. Man's salvation lies in his own hands.

Mr. A. B. Moss said that he had attended many Freethought conferences, and he congratulated the President on the very successful outcome of the one held that day. They lived in what was called, inaccurately, a Christian country. They not only had an Established Church, but religion was supported and enforced through various institutions in the country, despite the fact that the creed of this religion had undergone important modifications in the past half century. When he was a boy the Bible was inspired, and was literally true on every subject treated therein. Freethinkers all over the world fought strenuously against this view, and the Bible was now in a fair way to be placed on its proper basis. Many intelligent members of the Church of England, as well as scholars outside the Church, now admit that the Bible in many respects is inaccurate, both scientifically and historically, and that it is not a trustworthy moral guide. In the future still more will be thrown overboard, until gradually they would arrive at a social organization based solely on the secular outlook. But, though the advocacy of Freethought had achieved marvellous successes, and though the laws impeding it had undergone a change owing to the resolute effort of Freethinkers here and in other countries, blasphemy laws remain on our statute book, rendering a man liable to prosecution for the expression of his views on religion, unless he is extremely careful not to hurt the feelings of Christians. He found, however, that Christians were never very careful to avoid wounding a Freethinker's susceptibilities. They were now conspiring to retain their control of the child and to coerce the teachers in the State-aided schools. Freethinkers must be on the alert to prevent any preferential "rights" from being granted to religious bodies in future measures dealing with public education.

Mr. R. H. Rosetti said that, considering the enormous mass of science within the reach of the most humble, and contrasting it with the obsolete and primitive mental make-up of the Christian religion, one felt puzzled. The average Christian was ignorant of both the nature and the history of religion. He was prepared to discuss social and political questions, but to discuss his religion would be a waste of time. He was the victim of phrases, such as "Christian knowledge," "Christian civilization," and "Christian morality," all of which when examined were found to be empty verbiage. To put a sectarian label on

knowledge, for instance, was ridiculous. But for the sterilizing influence of Christianity human knowledge would be purer and more extensive than it is. Again, analyse the phrase "Christian civilization." The mental and moral cleansing which made civilization possible in Europe was due to the growth of secularism and humanism. "Christian morality," too, must be judged by the same standards of morality as other systems. No country had the best system of morality; no country had the worst.

Mr. E. Clifford Williams urged his hearers to examine the Christian conception of God, to try to imagine or conceive a being, without a beginning, that made himself or itself out of nothing, that thought without a brain, and that was fashioned out of neither a material nor a spiritual entity. This being, according to the Christians' belief, is unchangeable. Yet they believe that he does change and can be influenced by prayer. Let any number of Christians give their definition of God, and each will give something different, thus showing that there is no objective existence corresponding to the conception or the word. The influence of this belief throughout the ages had been to divert time, attention, and thought, which should be devoted to human progress and interests, to unreal and unsolvable problems. Christianity was entrenched behind the battlements of hypocrisy, and only one gun could drive it from its stronghold—free and clear thinking.

Mr. J. T. Lloyd declared that he renounced the beliefs in which he had been brought up, and in and for which he lived for many years, because in the first place he became convinced that there was no truth in Christianity or supernatural religion. God, Christ, the spiritual world, and immortality were objects of belief, not knowledge. In the second place, he found that cowardice was a fundamental characteristic of Christianity. The Churches were ready to suppress Sunday games and recreation because they were no longer centres of attraction which could compete against secular influences in a fair field. In the third place, he asked those present to bear in mind that, from the Christian point of view, intolerance was a virtue and divinely inspired. An infallible religion cannot tolerate opposition, because it regards such opposition as fundamentally evil. Persecution and intolerance were Christian, not human virtues, the orthodox believer regarding heretics as the murderers of immortal souls, in comparison with whom the murderers of the body were as nought. Is it not our immediate duty to rid the world of this most absolute superstition of the ages? Its policy from the beginning was characterized by (1) repression, (2) wholesale borrowing from suppressed cults. Was it any wonder that men and women of intelligence, bearing in mind the long history of immorality associated with that policy, and the corruptions of the Papal Courts, were turning their backs on Christianity and regarding it as the chief obstacle to human progress? Judged by the intellectual life of to-day, the mental attitude of the present generation was marked by the adoption of evolution and the complete rejection of the idea of supernatural intervention. Reason was winning its way to supreme control in every department of life, and the struggle for social justice was approaching its day of fruition. He saw in imagination, though he would never see it in any other way, that the problems which oppressed us now would be successfully solved, and he comforted himself with the thought that the time was coming when men and women would join hands as brothers and sisters.

Mr. F. E. Willis said that most Freethinkers regarded a man's or woman's religion as a geographical accident. A child born in China would be a Confucian, in India a Brahman, or perhaps a Buddhist, in Persia a Zoroastrian, while here he may be a Roman Catholic, a Baptist, or a Wesleyan, or, better still, he may reach knowledge and become an avowed Freethinker. During the war we had before us the spectacle of all denominations, except the Quakers, praying to God for victory; on the other side, our enemies offered similar prayers for victory to the same God. What was the origin of prayer? It carried us back to the infancy of the race, to the time of the primeval forest and the fear excited by the thunder and the lightning. To-day, from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the meanest minister of the Gospel, religion was still based on a form of that primitive fear. Freethinkers claimed

the right, not as a favour but as mere justice, to express their views on religion. When it was possible to express honest doubt freely, the death-knell of religion would be sounded. It is largely owing to the conventional attitude to religious beliefs, and the lack of moral courage where these are concerned, that Christians do not see the absurdities and anomalies of their creed. The treatment of the Peculiar People, who, following Mark's Gospel, in cases of sickness called in the elders of the Church instead of medical aid, showed how even honest Christian opinion is punished in England. He hoped the appeal to form a branch of the N.S.S. in Nottingham would not be in vain.

Mr. George Whitehead recounted a "parable" of a boy who had long been afraid of bogies, which his parents had taught him to believe in to keep him well-behaved. In a somewhat similar way many people still thought that religion was necessary in the interests of morality. But there was a fatal flaw in this view. Just as the boy, after coming into contact with a young sceptic, doubted the existence of the bogey, so when men come to doubt the existence of God it loses all efficacy as a moral sanction. This sanction gave us the fruits of belief in God in the "Dark Ages" when that belief exerted the greatest influence on men's minds and characters.

Mr. A. D. McLaren urged his hearers, and especially those who thought that aggressive Freethought work was no longer necessary, to bear in mind that at that moment a man was undergoing a sentence of nine months' hard labour for the "crime" of blasphemy. There were some things which Freethinkers had no right to forget.

The President, in his closing remarks, drew the attention of those present to the strenuous effort now being made to get converts to the "one true faith." It was true, these converts were secured at the expense of the Protestant sects, but they must remember that Rome carried to its logical conclusion the principle of uniformity in religious belief and was, consequently, Freethought's deadliest foe. He also reminded them that the new Education Bill made religious instruction in State-aided schools more stringent than ever, and would be a menace to progress and civilization in England. Movements like theirs were built up of numerous little efforts, in which all could take part, and in which the co-operation of the most humble had its significance. The whole philosophy of religion rested essentially on the primitive superstition that the gods are there, and that life is not livable unless their will be obeyed. But he knew no religious system, ancient or modern, to compare with Christianity for its degrading effects on character and personality. Christianity made it a crime to think, and under its influence the mass of the people gave up thinking. He appealed to those who were with the Freethought cause in name and belief to be with it also in fact. Forms of membership for the N.S.S. were available in the hall, and he asked Freethinkers to take one, sign it, and send it to headquarters. A. M.

THE RAVAGES OF WAR.

Fancy what we should have had around us now, if, instead of quarreling and fighting over their work, the nations had aided each other in their work, or if even in their conquests, instead of effacing the memorials of those they succeeded and subdued, they had guarded the spoils of their victories. Fancy what Europe would be now, if the delicate statues and temples of the Greeks—if the broad roads and massy walls of the Romans—if the noble and pathetic architecture of the middle ages, had not been ground to dust by mere human rage. You talk of the scythe of Time, and the tooth of Time: I tell you Time is scytheless and toothless; it is we who gnaw like the worm—we who smite like the scythe. It is ourselves who abolish—ourselves who consume: we are the mildew, and the flame; and the soul of man is to its own work as the moth that frets when it cannot fly, and as the hidden flame that blasts where it cannot illuminate. All these lost treasures of human intellect have been wholly destroyed by human industry of destruction; the marble would have stood its two thousand years as well in the polished statue as in the Parian cliff; but we men have ground it to powder, and mixed it with our own ashes.—*Ruskin.*

## Correspondence.

## FINANCE AND FAITH.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The strained financial position of the British and Foreign Bible Society is a welcome sign of the times. Patronised by the crowned autocrats of Europe as a useful instrument for fostering ignorance and superstition among the masses, it has passed the zenith of its glory. Credulous dupes and designing knaves will still, no doubt, rally to its support, but the spirit of the new age is fatal to its long continued existence. Its erstwhile glamour has vanished; and its claim to the continued gratitude of humanity is no longer conceded. The circulation of a book, which to-day is utterly discredited by enlightened intelligence is bound to decline in the very nature of things, and hence the Society. And what is this book? Condensed within its pages are more superstition, immorality, obscenity, and bloodshed, than any other we know. It has deluged the world in blood and been the cause of misery untold, and its pages have supplied the pretexts for the worst crimes in history. In short, it is a book of which every right minded man and woman should be heartily ashamed. From all this its service to the world is indeed conspicuous.

South Africa.

CHAS. BAKER.

## CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE.

SIR,—It seems a pity that some kind friend of Mr. J. M. Salkind, Ph.D., did not take him to see Charles Chaplin, Esq., or give him the *Pickwick Papers* to read before he rushed into print with his dismal screed on the above subject last week. A pinch of humour goes a long way—even with an Anarchist. "Has the Galilean," he asks, in that mournful tone we know so well, "been beaten because Darwin and Haeckel have conquered?" Well, if the pale Galilean isn't beaten to a frazzle by this time, and if Darwin and Haeckel have not had a long hand in the fray, I'm prepared to eat any old hat. I don't go so far as to say that the result of the battle is the only cause of the empty Churches, but who does, pray? I wish Mr. Salkind would tell us which of our "able contributors" have said so, for I don't remember one.

The people who leave the Churches are not necessarily Freethinkers—which explains why there is no "over-crowding of our meeting places." It takes a good many years to make a Freethinker, and I should not be surprised if Mr. Salkind himself has a long way to go. Certainly it is very funny to hear one tell us he would rather see the Churches "packed with brainless throngs"—grovelling in abject fear at the feet of a priest, I suppose—than see the same "brainless throng" pack to see Middlesex v. Surrey or pay to see Carpentier spar a few rounds with another "flat-nosed pugilist."

I want to tell Mr. Salkind something. Like most Freethinkers, my ideal in life is *happiness*, but my idea of happiness may be quite different from that of my neighbour. I'm a Freethinker. If he finds it in worshipping sport, why shouldn't he? Life is very, very short, and I for one am not going to blame anybody who prefers witnessing a football match—or even playing "tip-it" in a pub.—to hearing me lecture on the historicity of Jesus, however erudite I may be, or listening to Mr. Salkind expound the beneficent generosity of an anarchist state. My neighbour has left the Church. Good. He may get to see that there are many evils in the world to remove which his help is urgently needed, and I would rather trust him to do his share if he enjoys some sport, than if he returned to take part in such infantile superstitions as the Eucharist. For my part, I enjoy sport quite as much as I enjoy a good glass of beer, and I really have laughed at Charlie Chaplin and Harry Tate, and countless other merry makers, and I do not think my Freethought is any the worse.

Just one question. In that ideal Anarchist state of yours, Mr. Salkind, would you absolutely forbid all cricket, football, boxing, dominoes, hunt the slipper, and other "imbecilities of sport," and compel everybody to hear you on Anarchism and kindred subjects?

If not, why not?

H. CUTNER.

## 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.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.2): 11, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., "Virtue and the Emotions."

## OUTDOOR.

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

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

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15 and 6, Mr. F. Baker, Lectures.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Corner Technical Institute, Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, "Freethought, According to Facts, and According to Christians."

## COUNTRY.

## INDOOR.

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (12 Straker Terrace, Tyne Dock): 6.30, Delegates' Report Annual Conference; Picnic, Jesmond Dene, June 24; Mr. Whitehead's Lecture Campaign; Lecture, South Shields, June 25.

## OUTDOOR.

PLYMOUTH.—A Week's Mission: 11.15, North Quay; S. Back of Market. Speaker: Mr. George Whitehead. Further meetings will be announced at the Sunday meetings.

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