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Views and Opinions.

Bottomley Again.

I was quite under the impression that my last week's notes would have finished all I had to say on the Bottomley case. It was not a subject that I approached with any pleasure, nor do I willingly return to it. During the war one was compelled to deal with Mr. Bottomley's alleged discovery of God, his assumed conviction of the reality of a future life, and his attempt to impose upon the public the "miracle" of the hanging Virgin. His other activities did not concern the *Freethinker*, and so they were left alone. Then after the trial and sentence we were compelled to deal with him, because we observed a tendency on the part of some of our delightfully dishonest newspapers to associate Bottomley with Freethought, and to couple his career with the influence of Charles Bradlaugh, on whose public and private life there rests neither the shadow of suspicion nor the stain of dishonour. Then we hoped we had quite done with the subject. But, unfortunately, the *Sunday Express* for June 4 (I was unable to deal earlier with it owing to the holidays and other matters) contains an account of an alleged interview with Bottomley in Wormwood Scrubs Prison, which calls for further comment. It is, on the whole, an amazing article, and one which will probably lead those who do not already know something of the inside history of the case, to believe that there is much in it that neither Bottomley nor the Government cares to tell the general public.

* * *

Reaching the Limit.

With that we have no concern here. With other matters we are concerned. And I commence with this reported utterance of Bottomley concerning what he calls the "flying voice of rumour" of his being the illegitimate son of Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh. He says:—

I understand that the flying voice of rumour has said that I am Bradlaugh's son. I wish it were true. I loved my mother, and I love her memory. If I thought that Bradlaugh was my father, I should not only love her memory, I should revere it.

No honest man or woman, gifted with the slightest psychological insight, can read the above without a feeling of disgust. It reeks of the contemptible cant

with which Bottomley has been deluging a gullible public on the question of religion. It implies a doubt, a possibility of the story being true. He must know that the story is an unadulterated lie, and an honest man would have said so, and would have given the facts that would have killed the rumour, and saved his mother's reputation. As we pointed out last week, Mrs. Besant was only just turned twelve years of age when Bottomley was born. Mrs. Besant had not then met Bradlaugh, and was a very earnest Christian. It was Bottomley's place to have made these facts public before he went to prison. To have waited until he is in prison, and then meet the slander in a way that leaves it open for Christians to believe it if they choose, is contemptible. Perhaps it is a move in the direction of exciting public compassion for the supposed neglected son of a famous Freethinker, whose life might have been better than it has been had he been born of pious parents and reared in an atmosphere of religion.

Poor Bottomley! * * *

There is more in the alleged interview to support this view. Speaking of his early years he says:—

In those days I was entirely in the Bradlaugh camp. My associates were Bradlaugh himself, Holyoake, and Foote. Foote was a most overbearing man and had no interest in life except expounding the doctrine that there is no life after the grave. I could not help noticing as a boy that they were all very unhappy men. Theirs was an unhappiness which I did not share. Theirs was a pitiable faith in the mortality of human flesh, which I have never shared.....In the days when I was with Bradlaugh, Holyoake, Foote and the rest, I was a boy in a hostile camp who had no chance of ever meeting the leaders of spiritual thought such as Newman or Manning.

A more thorough mixture of implied falsehood and deliberate cant I have never read. In any legitimate sense of the expression Bottomley was never in the Bradlaugh camp. Never in his life did he play or take a part in Freethought propaganda. He may have known Bradlaugh—how intimately, I know not. Holyoake was his relative by marriage, and his "intimacy" with Foote consisted in the fact that for some time they both had apartments in the same boarding-house. And those who know anything of Foote's taste and early career—the period named by Bottomley—will not hesitate to characterize his statement by the only term that properly describes it. At that time Foote was a very keen politician, and he retained an active interest in social subjects to the end of his days. His interest in literature was always great, and it grew stronger with the passing of years. To describe him as being only interested in proving the non-existence of a future life is clearly intended for the benefit of the outside public. Once more, it is Bottomley whose life was ruined by the influence of wicked men like Bradlaugh, Holyoake, and Foote, but who may yet repent given the chance of religious salvation, that is the new pose for the public. Even so lengthy a term as five years will pass, and it is well to make preparations in advance.

Pure Cant.

Except in the lying pages of religious tracts I have never heard of Bradlaugh, Holyoake, and Foote being "very unhappy men." All who knew them will smile, and to do Bottomley justice, he will also grin when he thinks of pious and credulous folk reading this description and then shaking their heads in sorrowful agreement therewith. Only some of them, however. The legend of the unhappy Freethinker is a very old one, and has been pretty well settled by the multiplicity of unbelievers. It is strange that Bottomley should be driven to resurrect this absurd story—and of such well-known men. It confirms the impression that Horatio Bottomley is not, and never was, a man of genuine intellectual ability, but one who made a more than usual endowment of cunning pass as mental ability with those who were unable to look below the surface. Surely a man of genuine ability could have manufactured a story that would have better held water than this one. In the early days of my Freethought lecturing, when I so often came into close contact with a special type of Christian Evidence lecturer, I often complained, not that their stories about well-known Freethinkers were lies, but that they were clumsy, inartistic lies, such as were an insult to the intelligence of their audiences, and not complimentary to their own. And I often suggested to them that if they must tell lies about Freethinkers, I would, without any previous notice whatever, manufacture on the spot a much more convincing set than any they were retailing. Horatio Bottomley has evidently not yet discovered that the war is over, and that the unbounded credulity which characterized the war period no longer exists. People are slowly getting back to the normal, and they may well ask themselves whether men who gave themselves "body and soul" to the work in which they so heartily believed could really have been "very unhappy men?" Are men ever unhappy as a consequence of doing that? Those who really understand human nature know that this is not so. Other causes of unhappiness they may have, but not that one. I feel inclined to repeat my old offer to the Christian Evidence lecturers to the friends of Mr. Bottomley.

* * *

Preparing for the Future.

As I have hinted above, I fancy the article is written with a purpose. The British public is one of the most sentimental in Europe, and where religion is concerned, the most foolishly sentimental. Consider how hard "the religion I learned at my mother's knee" is worked, and how it appeals to many an audience. As though anyone but a fool would conclude that because he learned something at his mother's knee therefore it must be true! Therefore the future of the poor prisoner, brought up under the evil and depressing influence of Bradlaugh (the champion of liberty and of public honesty), Holyoake (the founder of the Co-operative movement and cheery old octogenarian), and Foote (the lover of literature and freedom, and ready to fight with tongue and pen the cause of the oppressed), the poor prisoner brought up under such conditions is lacking the spiritual help of Manning and Newman (why not General Booth?)—the plea is one that may appeal to the public; and if it cannot affect Bottomley's position at the moment, it may in the future. The part of the converted sinner is, again, one that impresses the religious gallery of the British public. Charles Bradlaugh's brother lived for years on the strength of his being related to the famous atheist, and on his own alleged conversion. Many a converted burglar has earned a good living on the evangelical platform as a saved soul. And we shall not be at all surprised to find Horatio Bottomley, when again at liberty, posing before the world as a converted

sinner. The wiser ones will smile, but the fools will applaud—and the fools are always in the majority. There is room in heaven for all, and the Christian platform can hold all—all save keenly intelligent and upright men and women. They remain a company apart. But it is not for them that Horatio Bottomley writes.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Blindness to Facts.

II.

THIS is a subject which has seldom been scientifically investigated or critically discussed at all. The theologians assume that Christianity won Europe because of the Divinity of its founder, but very few of them have the courage to face the facts as recorded in contemporary history. Principal Greenup, for example, in a sermon entitled "The Church and Her Founder," published in the *Christian World Pulpit* of May 25, and reviewed in last week's article, lays it down almost as an axiom that Christianity owes its pre-eminence to the Deity of Jesus Christ. That is the reason, according to him, why no religion "can compare in its progress with ours." The reverend gentleman seems incapable of making the slightest allusion to any Pagan religion without either misrepresenting or withholding the facts about it. "Buddhism," he says, "which spread over the greater part of Asia, has found no foothold elsewhere." That Buddhism overran the greater part of Asia is beyond dispute, but how does the greater part of Asia compare with the greater part of Europe, over which Christianity spread? Professor Rhys Davids, Ph.D.; LL.D., who has made Buddhism the study of his life, declares in his famous book, entitled *Buddhism*, published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, that it is a most striking fact that the living Buddhists far outnumber the followers of the Roman Church, the Greek Church, and all other Christian Churches put together. While not attaching much value to religious statistics, Dr. Rhys Davids supplies the following table, showing at a glance the relative numbers of the different religions and the percentage each bears to the whole:—

Parsee	150,000		
Sikhs	1,894,723		
Jews	7,000,000	(being about ½ per cent. of the total).	
Greek Catholics	75,000,000	about 6 per cent.	
Roman Catholics	152,000,000	" 12 "	" "
Other Christians	100,000,000	" 8 "	" "
Hindus	200,000,000	" 13 "	" "
Mohammedans...	155,000,000	" 12½ "	" "
Buddhists	500,000,000	" 40 "	" "
Not included in the above	100,000,000	" 8 "	" "
Total about	1,300,000,000		

The 500,000,000 Buddhists are made up as follows: *Southern Buddhists*, in Ceylon, Burma, other parts of India, Siam, Anam, 31,000,000; and *Northern Buddhists*, in Dutch possessions and Bali, British possessions, Russian possessions, Iliou Khen Islands, Korea, Bhutan and Sikhim, Kashmir, Tibet, Mongolia, Manchuria, Japan, Nepal, and China, 479,000,000. Each of the above statistics is based upon authentic census returns of the various countries and districts concerned, and may be regarded as supplying the nearest approximation possible to the actual number of living Buddhists. Surely in the light of such facts, furnished by an accredited modern scholar, Principal Greenup's assertion looks uncommonly ridiculous, and he ought to be heartily ashamed of it.

He is equally wide of the mark in his next statement, which is as follows:—

Mohammed used the sword to propagate his religion, and held out the hope of a sensual life to those who attached themselves to him. Its early progress was not maintained, whilst that religion which fought its way without sword to the imperial throne of Rome was ever a warfare against the flesh.

Here again our preacher, in his inordinate desire to prove the superiority of his own religion, shows his phenomenal blindness to facts. It is undeniable that Mohammedanism did use the sword for its propagation, but it is equally true that Christianity, too, employed it for the same purpose. Dr. Greenup quibbles at this stage by saying that his religion "fought its way without sword to the imperial throne of Rome"; but that is only half a truth, or less, because up to this point Christianity had not got a sword. The Principal knows full well that as soon as the Church obtained one through the conversion of the Emperor Constantine its appeal to it for many centuries was terrific in the extreme, slaughtering on the right and on the left in the most callous manner. Indeed, from its very start Christianity was essentially a warlike religion. During the years of its weakness the only sword at its disposal was the tongue or the pen, and this was not neglected, but exercised with a vengeance in vilification now of the Pagans in general, now of woman in particular. The majority of the Church Fathers were bigoted fanatics, the extravagance of whose language against all opponents was an outrage upon reason and calm judgment. As a specimen of their general outlook upon life let us cite some of the utterances of Tertullian, a man of real genius, but whose judgment was horribly warped by his religious zeal. Of all the Fathers it was he who used the most revolting language about woman, calling her the "Devil's Gateway," for whose "deceit and for death, the very Son of God had to perish." It was he who expressed the extreme view that "there was hardly a single occupation or business in which any Christian could engage without soiling his conscience with idolatry." It was Tertullian who proudly exclaimed:—

When we believe we have no desire to sally beyond our faith. For our belief is the primary and palmary fact. There is nothing further that we have still to believe beyond our own belief.....To be ignorant of everything outside the rule of faith, is to possess all knowledge.

His attitude to the Empire and the Emperor may not have been altogether antagonistic, but for Paganism his only feeling was one of uncompromising contempt, in condemnation of which no terms could be scathing enough. To him Mithra was his majesty of the Lower Regions, of whom he said:—

The Devil baptizes certain folk, his believers and faithful ones, promising remission of sins after immersion. And if I still recollect aright, Mithra there sets a mark on the forehead of his soldiers, celebrates the oblation of bread, introduces a symbol of the resurrection, and wins a crown under the sword.

As long as they lacked numerical strength and official recognition the very worst that the Christians were capable of doing against the Pagan gods and their worship was wagging the tongue and rattling the pen; but with the conversion of Constantine the situation radically changed. In course of time Paganism was suppressed by brute force, its temples and libraries were destroyed, and not a few of its devotees cruelly put to death. Later on, not only Pagans and unbelievers, but all who deviated, however slightly, from the prevailing standards of orthodoxy, had to face all the horrors of martyrdom. Even that ideal saint and missionary of the eighth century,

the Englishman known to history as Boniface, who claimed to have baptized a hundred thousand Germans in one year, won his converts at the point of the sword. Often and often people conquered in battle were forced to accept from their victors either baptism or violent death. And what were the crusades but a series of mad attempts to recapture the Holy Land for Christ by force of arms, in the course of which several millions of precious lives were uselessly sacrificed? Principal Greenup makes no reference whatever to this sad aspect of the Christian story. And with these melancholy facts in mind can he honestly assure us that Christendom has ever been a paradise fit for heroes to live in?

There is still another fact, to which the Principal seems to be totally blind, which shatters to smithereens his argument for the Divinity of Jesus Christ, namely, the fact that Christianity does not owe its triumph in the Roman Empire to any intrinsic merits of its own, but solely, to all appearances, to a purely fortuitous concurrence of exclusively natural forces. This fact is frankly recognised by Harnack in the Appendix to Chapter iv., Book IV., of his *Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. ii., pp. 447-458. Like other first-class scholars, this distinguished historian is fully aware that particularly during the third century there was the keenest rivalry between Christianity and Mithraism, and for a long time it was highly doubtful which of the two was calculated to win through. We do not pretend to be able to decide which would have ultimately survived had the contest been allowed to continue. Mithraism was supported by the Emperor and the army, and it was rapidly spreading among the populace, though, as Harnack says, "we know nothing about the number of its adherents in the different localities." Of course, Harnack's opinion is bound to be more or less affected by his attachment to Christianity, but he is honest enough to express it merely as his "opinion." However, the rivalry was suddenly brought to an end. Harnack says:—

Galerius would fain have enforced Mithraism, at the instigation of its priests. For the cult had become a shield and safeguard for all the rest of the decaying cults. But the attempt failed, and Constantine gave the quietus to any hopes cherished by the priests of Mithra. Certainly Julian's philosophic worship of the sun, in which even philosophic Hellenism finally tried to establish some point of contact, would have favoured Mithraism. Only it proved abortive.

We naturally ask, would it have proved abortive had Julian's reign been as long as Constantine's? He was proclaimed Emperor in 360, became sole Emperor in 361, and died in 363, having proved himself a ruler of great ability, and a thoroughly honest and sincere man. What would have happened had he lived longer no one can tell, but a careful study of events shows conclusively on how insecure a foundation rests the evidence for the Divinity of Christ suggested by the progress of Christianity.

At the present time a sharp rivalry is taking place between Christianity and science, between supernatural belief and secular knowledge, between superstition and humanism. It is too soon yet to prophesy. So far, however, science has been victorious all along the line, and religion has been steadily sinking into the background, and this fact fills our hearts with a most inspiring hope.

J. T. LOYD.

In the legends of early Rome we have ample evidence of the high moral estimate of women, and of their prominence in Roman life. The tragedies of Lucretia and of Virginia display a delicacy of honour, a sense of supreme excellence, of unsullied purity, which no Christian nation could surpass.—W. E. H. Lecky, "History of European Morals."

The Value of Voltaire.

Voltaire was a stupendous power. —Lord Morley.

Of all the intellectual weapons which have ever been wielded by man, the most terrible was the mockery of Voltaire. —Lord Macaulay.

FRENCH literature has been one blaze of splendid scepticism from the far-off days of Abelard to those of Anatole France, but no name on that brilliant bea-roll of intellectuals has inspired such terror in the breasts of the orthodox as that of Voltaire. Indeed, Victor Hugo regarded Voltaire as the protagonist of Freethought, and, in his characteristic epigrammatic way, said: "Voltaire smiled, Christ wept." And that smile of Voltaire's cost him dear, for none has been more hated, none more reviled by pious people. The reason is simple. He attacked religion, not in the dry-as-dust fashion of professors writing for the few, but with a pleasant wit which survives the winnowing of generations. He made priests appear ridiculous as well as odious, and those who felt the sting of his lash denounced him as the Devil incarnate, whose writings all Christians should avoid as they would a plague.

In his own time this jaundiced view of Voltaire was very prevalent. Dr. Johnson, not at all a bad-hearted man, has voiced this prejudice. In a conversation with Boswell he described him as "a very bad man," and intimated his willingness to sign a sentence for his transportation as a felon. In artistic circles there was the same animosity. Sir Joshua Reynolds, in one of his most popular pictures, introduced Voltaire as the personification of sophistry. The clergy, of course, made him the target of innumerable insults, and exhausted on him the generous vocabulary of clerical scorn. He was the target of countless homilies, and served to point multitudinous morals. The Christian clergymen lied to such purpose that whole generations of innocent church-goers firmly believed that Voltaire was personally responsible for the French Revolution and the execution of Louis and Marie Antoinette.

In England, which as a nation, is more devoted to ledgers than to literature, there is still prejudice against Voltaire. The shouts of friends and foes still fill the troubled air, and the dust of controversy is blinding. One turns with a sigh of relief from books about Voltaire by enemies and partisans alike to his own incomparable letters and books. Here one finds the man himself, no mere jester, but a sensitive nature bent on the destruction of cruelty and intolerance, and striking hard at the superstition of which these vices are the outcome. His keen eyes saw the atrocities and absurdities bound up with Christianity. He saw it was necessary that the religion in which intolerance had its root should be proved detestable and ridiculous.

Voltaire's motto was, "Straight to the fact." He brought, smilingly, religion to the test of truth and common sense. Was it true that Omnipotence had chosen savages as his peculiar people? Was "God" born of a virgin? Did he ascend from the earth like a balloon? To ask these, and similar questions, and to cross-examine priests, was to provoke inextinguishable laughter. Mind you, Voltaire was a man of very serious aims. He had profound convictions, and employed his exquisite wit as a weapon.

There is no case of Voltaire mocking at any men who lived good lives. He did not gibe at the English Quakers; but he was merciless when he attacked the petticoated priests of France, who invoked the laws to destroy their opponents. A Protestant pastor, Rochette, was hanged for merely officiating in Languedoc. Jean Calas was broken on the wheel because his son was found dead and some liar chose to say that the father had killed him to prevent him becoming Catholic. So malignant were the priests,

that even Calas's wife and children were put to the torture. La Barre, a lad of eighteen, was condemned at Amiens, for mutilating a crucifix, to have his tongue and right hand cut off, and then be burnt alive, a sentence which was commuted to decapitation. It was Voltaire, the infidel, who exposed these judicial murders. His services in undoing such foul wrongs will never fade from the memory of men.

Voltaire was ever an apostle of common sense. One is as much struck with the soundness of his judgment as by his happy expression. A book might be written on his anticipation of modern thought. In a pre-scientific age he stated the view of man's savage origin. He derived the belief in ghosts from dreams, and discerned the magical nature of religions. He anticipated many of the social and political problems of our time. Before Malthus he stated the population question, and cleared the way in so many directions for modern science. His clear eyes saw through the central myths of the Bible a century before the clergy were forced to recognise them. "Monsieur Multiforme" was his witty name for D'Alembert, and he himself had an equal right to it. In his sixty years' warfare with the Great Lying Church he proved himself a great writer and a great humanitarian. MIMNERMUS.

Religion and the Rod.

ONE of the most curious manifestations of religious madness is the practice of self-flagellation. Originating in the combined superstitions of expelling demons by thrashing them, and that blood is an acceptable offering to the deity or deities, it has extensively prevailed from the most ancient times, and yet lingers in certain districts in our own day.

The custom of the priests of Baal cutting themselves "after their manner with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out upon them" is mentioned in the Bible (I Kings xviii. 28). Movers, in his *Phœnecia* (p. 681), thus describes a Syrian religious ceremony:—

The priests and Galli, dressed like women with turbans, appear in a band. One who surpasses all in the tonsure begins to prophesy with sighing and groaning; he publicly laments for the sins he has committed, which he will now punish by chastisement of the flesh. He takes the knotty scourge which the Galli are accustomed to carry, whips his back, or cuts himself with swords till the blood runs down. The whole ends by *taking up a collection*.

This last item is important, not only as showing the similarity of these ancient devotees with the Salvation Army of to-day, but because it indicates that the flagellants were held to have done a public service by lashing evil spirits.

Note the similarity of the description of the Christian flagellants of the Middle Ages by Herzog:—

At the time of flagellation they selected a square, a churchyard, or field. Taking off their shoes and stockings, and forming a circle, they girded themselves with aprons, and laid down flat on the ground. The particular position or gesture of each signified his chief sin ["They fell on their back, side, or belly, according to the nature of their sin" (*Chron., Thuring.*)] The leader, then stepping over each one, touched them with the whip, and bade them rise. As each was touched they followed after the leader, and imitated him. Once all on their feet, the flagellation began. The brethren went, two by two, around the whole circle, striking their backs till the blood trickled down from the wounds. The whip consisted of three thongs, each with four iron teeth. During the flagellation a hymn was sung. After all had gone round the circle, the whole body again fell on the ground, beating upon their breasts. On arising they flagellated themselves a second time. While

the brethren were putting on their clothes, a collection was taken up among the audience.¹

The sect of the Flagellants made their appearance in Italy during the time of the Crusades. As described in an old Paduan chronicle:—

Noble as well as ignoble persons, young and old, even children five years of age, would go naked about the streets without any sense of shame, walking in public two and two, in the manner of a solemn procession. Every one of them held in his hand a scourge made of leather thongs, and with tears and groans they lashed themselves on their backs till the blood ran.

During the ravages of the Black-Death (1348-51) this religious mania followed the plague through Europe. The Flagellants marched from town to town, girded with ropes or carrying spiked scourges, with which they wounded themselves, calling on the people to repent and do penance, for the day of wrath was at hand. Everywhere troops of men, women, and children fell into the ranks; mothers would even hold up their tender infants to have the devil expelled by the lashes of the holy brotherhood.

These Flagellants, be it observed, were only putting into practice both the doctrine and the example of self-mortification put forward by the early monks. Their excesses were but the natural development of the penitential features of orthodox doctrine and discipline, especially of the belief that the wrath of God could be propitiated by self-inflicted punishment. In last century Father J. B. Thiers, in his reply to Boileau's work on the Flagellants, cites popes, saints, and fathers who recommended the discipline of the rod, the baptism of blood, which had been inflicted on our own King Henry II. in 1174. Dean Milman, in his *Latin Christianity* (bk. xi., ch. 2), says:—

How entirely self-flagellation had become part of sanctity appears from its being the religious luxury of Louis IX. Peter Damiani had taught it by precept and example. Dominic, called the Cuirassier, had invented or popularised by his fame the usage of singing psalms to the accompaniment of self-scourging. It had come to have its stated value among works of penance.

It was the current religious teaching that years of ordinary mortification might be condensed into the less troublesome, if more painful, infliction of the scourge. Yet, when the Flagellants spread and became a powerful order, venturing to denounce the corruption of the priests and to usurp their emoluments—which was indeed laying hands upon the sacred ark—they were denounced by a papal bull (Oct. 20, 1349), and in many places their leaders were put to the stake. They were, however, succeeded by the Brothers of the Cross, and the Bianchi or white penitents, whose leaders were put to death in the Papal territory in 1399; while in 1414 ninety-one Flagellants were burnt to death at Sangerhausen.

But the discipline of the rod continued as a penance in the Church, and St. Dominic was the great exemplar for all disciples. One of the most fervent of these was Hardwig, Duchess of Poland, who, in addition to the daily scourge, wore next her skin a cloth that mangled her flesh. Margaret, daughter of the King of Hungary, unlike the lady mentioned by Boileau, who, desirous of saving her soul without spoiling her body, whipped herself with feathers, would not only take the number of stripes imposed by her spiritual director, but asked for more; while the famous Marie Angélique requested a friend to provide her with a strong country-woman to flog her soundly.

In his recent book, *The Land of Poco Tiempo*, 1893, Mr. C. F. Lummis describes the practices of the

Penitent Brothers as they exist in Mexico at the present day. He says (p. 81):—

So late as 1891 a procession of flagellants took place within the limits of the United States—a procession in which voters of this Republic shredded their naked backs with savage whips, staggered beneath huge crosses, and hugged the maddening needles of the cactus; a procession which culminated in the flesh-and-blood crucifixion of an unworthy representative of the Redeemer. Nor was this an isolated horror. Every Good Friday, for many generations, it has been a staple custom to hold these barbarous rites in parts of New Mexico.

Mr. Lummis was fortunate enough to witness, and even to photograph, a penitent procession and crucifixion, which are reproduced in his book. It was not without risk. He says:—

It is well, however, to cultivate secretiveness. Woe to him if in seeing he shall be seen! A sharp-edged knife or flint shall be over curious of his back, and across its bloody autograph a hundred fearful lashes shall lift their purpling wales in barbarous hint to him, henceforth to keep a curb between the teeth of his inquisitiveness.

The penitent Brothers not only flagellate themselves to expel their own sins, but select, by lot, a brother to be crucified and bear the sins corporate. On the occasion described by Mr. Lummis the victim was only lashed to a cross. "Always before, up to this very year, the victim had been nailed to the cross by great spikes through hands and feet, and the death of a Penitent during the crucifixion was by no means rare." But the new Superior was more intelligent and humane than his predecessors, and drew the line at nailing, despite the appeals of the victim not to be dishonoured by a lighter agony. In addition to the self-flagellation which the brothers inflict as they march in procession, this Superior marked their backs with a flint knife thrice across, and then "cross hatched" them thrice up and down. They were no mere scratches, but long, bleeding cuts. This is the official seal of the order, and is annually renewed.

Mr. Lummis says:—

Until recently there were also female penitents; and up to 1886 there dwelt in San Mateo fully ten women who whipped their bare backs, wore cactus thorns in their loose shoes, and wound their legs with ropes and wire till the blood stopped; practices which still obtain among the men. Other common forms of penance are to lie down before the church and to request worshippers to walk over them and kick them; or to crawl on hands and knees along a path paved with cactus.

Life is becoming so humanized, that is, secularized, that early manifestations of religion appear so absurd and atrocious as to be well nigh incredible. It is therefore well to put on record such interesting survivals as those witnessed by Mr. Lummis. They show how dangerous a disorder is religion when unmodified by secular common sense. J. M. WHEELER.

But what does it matter, some will ask, whether man do the thing that is just because he thinks God is watching; because he believes in a kind of justice that pervades the universe; or for the simple reason that to his conscience this thing seems just? It matters above all. We have there three different men. The first, whom God is watching, will do much that is not just, for every god whom man has hitherto worshipped has decreed many unjust things. And the second will not always act in the same way as the third, who is indeed the true man to whom the moralist will turn, for he will survive both the others; and to foretell how man will conduct himself in truth, which is his natural element, is more interesting to the moralist than to watch his behaviour when enmeshed in falsehood.—*Mactertlnck*.

¹ *Religious Encyclopadia*, art. Flagellants.

Writers and Readers.

ON THE GLORY OF ENGLISH PROSE.

Many of my readers will no doubt have noticed that one of the traditions of our English Freethought is a prose-style commendable for its clean and sinewy vigour. In the main, and in my opinion quite rightly, we Freethinkers have always been a little suspicious of eloquence, of fervid persuasiveness, and the note of emotion, in fact, what we are usually assured is "fine prose." We have been wise enough to choose for our models the great writers of the eighteenth century, of that *saculum rationalisticum* which for so many good people is the low water mark of English letters. And there are some of us who are not ashamed to confess to an incorrigible preference for the prose of that period, the prose of Swift, Sterne, Goldsmith, Hume, and Thomas Paine. If it were my duty and pleasure to stimulate and direct the literary curiosity of an intelligent boy, I should be inclined to insist upon an exclusive and careful study of those writers. I should drill him into critical appreciation of their grammatical correctness, their precision and clearness of statement, their clean structure of sentence and paragraph. Not until his own prose had taken on something of the strength and simple adequacy of these masters should I deem it wise to introduce him to the more emotional, complex, gorgeous prose of the Jacobean and Victorians.

But this, I am afraid, is not the way some good judges of English literature would set about the business. For example, the Hon. Stephen Coleridge does not agree with me as to the primary educational value of the simple and direct prose of the eighteenth century. In a delightful little book he has just published (*Letters to My Grandson on the Glory of English Prose*. Mills and Boon, 4s. net.) his object is, by comment and quotation to help the youthful and ingenuous intelligence to a knowledge and love of our prose writers, from the translators of the Bible to Mr. Hilaire Belloc. But the curious thing is that although Mr. Coleridge is aware of the value of the writers I have mentioned he does not seem to regard their prose as "fine." For him it would appear to be in attractive because there are no purple patches of emotional colour, because, to vary the metaphor, it has more light than heat. Mr. Coleridge's bias is made plain by the importance he attaches to the archaic prose of the authorised version of the Bible. If we are to believe him, and others, it is in itself a liberal education in style. But even at his best, and in the historical books it is poor indeed, it is only one among many examples of splendid prose. And at its finest it is not to be compared as a formative influence to the prose (let me say!) of Thomas Nashe who is the Henley or C. E. Montague of the late sixteenth century. Indeed the composite archaic English, the old-world Tudor flavour were and are strictly in keeping with the sacrosanct character of the English version. It has always been more of a literary curiosity than a seminal factor in our colloquial or written speech. Its influence we are assured by those who make an idol of it is everywhere. Yet when we ask where precisely we are to look for it we can get no clear direction. It is everywhere and nowhere. Frankly, it is my considered opinion that the prose style of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods would not have been vastly different if there had been no version of the Scriptures but the Latin one; for after all the bulk of the culture of that age traces back through the humanists of the Italian and French Renaissance to the Greek and Latin writers who were not only construed by scholars, but were also read eagerly and currently in excellent translations which reflected to some extent the styles of the originals. Cicero and Plutarch, for example, counted for more in the humanistic culture of the age than did the Hebrew moralists and poets.

The obvious, if not strictly relevant, objection to every anthology, is that it is not the kind of selection we should have made. But if it really represents a point of view

its existence is justified. The following sentences are, I imagine indicative of Mr. Coleridge's standpoint:—

You will have noticed (he says) that all the writers whom I have quoted, and who reached the true nobility of speech necessary to command our tribute of unstinted praise, have been men of manifest piety and reverence. And you will find it difficult to discover really great and eloquent prose from the pen of any man whose heart is not filled with a simple faith in the goodness of God.

Now this is altogether too simple an explanation of the relations of art and morals. It is plain that this nobility of speech is not the inevitable result of piety and reverence, or we should be surprised to find the pious people of our acquaintance writing and speaking prose that is as common as dirt. What then is it that makes one man write nobly while another is barely or brutally articulate? It is just a question of æsthetics into which morals and religion do not enter, although they are often dragged in by people who are unable to dissociate ideas. The fine writer is an exquisitely sensitive organism. To express his ideas and emotions he uses words as a painter uses forms and colours. He has carefully developed a natural feeling for rhythm and cadence, and elaborated the complicated art of supreme verbal expression. The pious and ingenuous man may be also a master of elegant and noble prose; but on the other hand if piety is the condition of all fine writing how are we to account for Ingersoll, who, however wanting he may have been in subtlety, was certainly not "filled with a reverent faith in the goodness of God"? All fine prose is a blend of intellect and emotion. When emotion is the dominant quality you get the popular Freethought, political and religious orator. The more tough-minded Freethinker prefers a blend of reason and emotion in which the intellect provides a firm, clean contour, and the emotions the warmth and glow of rich or delicate colour.

If we consider for a moment some of the writers to whom Mr. Coleridge attributes, by implication, a "simple piety and reverent faith in the goodness of God," we shall see that he has been hard put to it to find those who precisely fit his definition. Sir Walter Raleigh, even if we do not put much trust in the contemporary attribution to him of militant atheism, was probably deeply bitten by Renaissance scepticism, and in spite of the glorious and moving passage on Death in his *History*, we do not get from his life and work the impression of ingenuous piety. At least that is not the side of him that appealed to Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe and John Donne. If Mr. Coleridge is wrong in making Raleigh a pious and simple soul, he is more than wrong in measuring Shakespeare by his religious rule. Gervinus and the ablest of English critics are agreed that the plays are wholly secular in spirit; that "just as Bacon banished religion from science, so did Shakespeare from art." And Mr. A. C. Bradley sums up that the world-dramatist "was not, in the distinctive sense of the word, a religious man," and that for him the upshot of all things was mystery. Mr. Coleridge is entitled to include under his pious category Jeremy Taylor and John Bunyan, but I rather fancy that Sir Thomas Browne is out of place by reason of his montaignesque scepticism. Sextus Empiricus is hardly the sort of master we should be inclined to associate with sincere believers in the goodness of God.

If it were possible to "rope in" the author of "Christian Morals" in virtue of an easy-going and half-sceptical religious conformity, it is not easy to see an example of devout reverence in Gibbon. And Landor, too, is not exactly remarkable for manifest piety, his virtues leaning obviously to the side of classic epicureanism. In the same way Matthew Arnold is hardly an ideal of the simple God-fearing soul. His wit was just a little too nimble. But then, Mr. Coleridge cannot bring himself to accept Arnold as a great master of prose; which is one of the many points on which some of us differ from him, especially when we find him praising the prose of Lord Morley, which for us has too often the wearying effect of over-wrought eloquence.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

Acid Drops.

The *Guardian* is now highly indignant at the attitude of the Soviet Government of Russia to the Orthodox Greek Church. "Churches have always been the enemies of Revolution." This was tragically true of the Greek Church in Russia in the "good old" Tsarist days. Not many readers of the *Freethinker* to-day remember William MacCall and his *Russian Rhymes*, in which he characterized England as "the slave and babler of ten thousand cants." But with impartial eye he took the measure of the Nicholases, the Franz Josephs, and the Williams, emperors all of them by the grace of God, and all of them equally ready to defend their "bonds in the stock market," and "in honour of Christ's wounded feet and hands, the feet and hands of millions more to pierce." And Nicholas, of blessed memory, was far the most pious of them all:

Thus in her very tortures Russia shows
How much the Crucified her deeds inspires;
Each of her slaves must learn from chains and blows
How grandly orthodox are her desires.

The same issue of our contemporary contains a report of the anti-Christian movement in China, and the work of the National Non-Christian Student Federation, which has issued a manifesto declaring its goodwill to all friendly Powers, but emphasizing its antagonism to religion. "Our Federation is founded on the belief that science can conquer religion." The branch of the new organization associated with Peking National University declares that "the sins of religion are too numerous to mention," and on its moral side religion teaches docility. "Of all religions Christianity is, we believe, the most detestable." The association of Christianity and militarism is also scathingly denounced. This is not pleasant reading to the Christians of a "great Protestant State" like England. It suited their political morals much better to draw lurid pictures of the Yellow Peril, and to urge the necessity of evangelizing China in order to reduce the "peril" to a minimum. Evangelization has been so effectual at home. At the moment of writing we read that in Ireland "even schoolboys and schoolgirls are going about carrying revolvers."

We wonder how much longer it will be before our present Home Secretary is quietly moved elsewhere? If politics were a cleaner trade than it is, his action over the blasphemy laws would have disgraced him in the eyes of all his fellow politicians. And now immediately after declining to reprieve a boy charged with the murder of Lady White, he does reprieve the man True, who was found guilty of a murder under circumstances of the most degrading character, and who for years had lived a life of a disgusting description. We do not at all find fault with the doctors who declared True to be insane, and therefore have no wish to see him hanged. But Jacoby, a boy of 18, was clearly abnormal also, and the sole distinction in the two cases is that the one was a poor boy without powerful friends, the other had wealthy and fashionable connections. Pressure could be brought to bear in the one case, it could not be brought to bear in the other. Such men as Mr. Shortt tend to bring the law into as great contempt as they do politics.

Some of the papers are complaining that Mr. Shortt believes in one law for the rich and another for the poor. That is obvious, but is it any worse than believing in one law for Christians and another for Freethinkers? And yet we did not observe a very strong protest in any of the papers against his so acting in the case of the blasphemy trial. If a Home Secretary is encouraged to believe that he is in office in order to protect particular interests or special beliefs one ought not to complain if sometimes he acts in a way that all cannot approve.

"Catholic Student," writing in the *Yorkshire Post* (May 31), is greatly perturbed because people deny the Creeds with impunity. Nor is he at all attracted to those Anglican Vicars who invite local Nonconformist

Ministers to occupy their pulpits. He declares, further, that the Invocation of the Saints seems "natural in any believer in the Communion of Saints." We should be glad to know with what section of the Free Churches orthodox Christians like "Catholic Student" will throw in their lot under any scheme of reunion. If unimpeachable orthodoxy is required, what is the matter with Rome? She offers much more than the Invocation of Saints.

About 500 pilgrims left Victoria Station *en route* for Lourdes under the leadership of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham. Yet there are some people who imagine that this is a civilized country.

The Bishop of Willesden declares that "the bravery of out-of-work chorus girls is really wonderful." How does the right reverend gentleman know this?

At the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church at Edinburgh it was stated that the King had made the customary grant of £2,000 for the promotion of Christian knowledge. This may partially explain the fervour of prayers for the welfare of the Royal Family.

An echo of the last blasphemy prosecution is found in an article in the *Japan Chronicle*, which has just reached us. The writer points out, quite properly, that men in position are immune no matter what they may say. It is the man who is assumed to be defenceless that is pounced upon. Such laws as the blasphemy laws are, in existing circumstances, necessarily put into operation in a cowardly manner, and will continue to operate until civilized common sense wipes them out of existence, or judges have sufficient dignity and respect for the law to speak out plainly about them from the Bench. Of course with vindictive characters such as Mr. Justice Avory, and ancient stupidities such as the late Lord Chief Justice, this will not happen, but others of a different type may arise. The *Japan Chronicle* rightly says of Mr. Justice Avory, "He is with the reactionaries, and reaction is at the moment popular." That is so; we are paying the usual price for having won a war for freedom. There never was a war fought ostensibly for freedom that did not leave people worse off in respect of freedom than it found them.

There is quite an energetic campaign being conducted at present to induce the country to go in for an air force that shall be able to defy the world. It is the same old game, and one would like to know what money is behind the Press campaign. The old cry was that we must have a navy strong enough to whip the world because we must maintain our sea communications. Now we must have an air force that can whip the world. And the rest of the world is expected to agree to our having a force strong enough to defy it, and to take it for granted that we shall never use it for offensive purposes. On the other hand, we are quite justified in taking it for granted that when another country increases its fighting strength it can only be because it wants to be ready to attack us one day. Our inoffensiveness and their truculence must be accepted as unquestionable truths. People who expect the world to get along peaceably on those lines are fit only for asylums. At present they are running the governments of Europe.

"Rambler" is the pen-name, or let us say the *nom de guerre*, of a contributor to the *Weston Mercury and Somersetshire Herald*, Weston-Super-Mare. In the issue of June 3 he returns to his attack on Freethought, and calls upon the local bill posting company to realize "the significance of this Freethought poster propaganda," and when the present contract expires "to refuse to display a poster which is not merely offensive but a standing insult to the Christian opinion of Weston." In answer to what he calls our recent "three-column fulmination" against him, and our statement that the posters contained "nothing that could be called offensive by anyone," "Rambler" quotes the sentence: "The expansion of

knowledge is loosening the very earth clutched by the roots of Creeds and Churches." He adds that "if Mr. Cohen seriously considers that such proclamations, placed at the very doors of Weston places of worship, cannot be regarded as 'offensive by anyone,' he is a far sillier man than I have yet regarded him." He then quotes passages from the *Freethinker*, which he never mentions by name, and connects these with the poster propaganda. Finally, the same cultured journalist declares that he did not "assail the point of view or *bona fides*" of Freethinkers, but suggested censorship by the bill posting company from the same motive that would have instigated him to object to "a course of purple sex novels for Sunday-school scholars."

The article in our Weston contemporary is one of the symptoms of "vitality" in the religious life of England to-day. It gives form to ideas and feelings that "Rambler" shares with many, perhaps most, Christians in a country whose cant is almost proverbial throughout the world. "Rambler" does not "assail the point of view or *bona fides*" of Freethinkers. It would require a little pluck to do that, and pluck is not a basic ingredient in his make-up. He is a better Christian than at first we thought he was. What he lacks is the honesty of some of the old-time "defenders of the faith."

At the recent half-yearly meeting of the Central Committee of Women's Church Work, Miss Rhoda Williams, a member of the Church Missionary Society, said that "barriers of racial prejudice, and the lack of spiritual unity among Christians, were insuperable stumbling-blocks to the progress of the Church in India." In some districts, she added, Europeans invariably stand aloof from the congregations which are under a native ministry. Caste was to disappear from India before the rising sun of Christian brotherhood—the same brotherhood, apparently, that reached its fruition in Europe in August, 1914.

At the Rush Medical College, Chicago, a patient who died was found to possess two hearts, the larger one on the left side, and the smaller on the right side. Christian Evidence lecturers kindly copy.

In an obituary notice of Armstrong, the poisoner, it states that "he had taken a leading part in the services at the local church." His career is a striking example of the value of a religious environment.

At the meeting of the United Free Church at Edinburgh the Rev. D. Fraser, a missionary, said that at Accra, on the Gold Coast, a steamer unloaded 25,000 cases of liquor exported from Leith. Scotland was making money out of the damnation of Africa. Brother Fraser should have learned by this time that Christians are, on occasion, able to serve both God and Mammon.

The Rev. P. Phillips, a Chatham parson, found his home being ransacked, and saw a man leaving with a sack. He arrested the man and took him to the police station. A very striking example of a Christian turning the other cheek.

A discussion has been going on in the columns of the *Labour Leader*, now closed by the editorial fiat, on the question of Religion and Socialism. We notice the names of several of our contributors in that discussion, including those of Mr. Marriott and Mr. Malcolmson. We are glad to see the letters, if it only betokens a growing sense among Socialists that the religious question cannot be shelved, but must sooner or later be faced. Religion is too large a fact in the lives of a number of people for it to be ignored, and too dangerous a fact for any reformer with a head on his shoulders to pander to the sentiment of pious people. There is not a sinister interest in the country that is not backed by religion, and to leave religion alone, to use a popular but misleading phrase, is to play straight into the hands of the reactionists.

Apropos of the above, a correspondent asks us why we never notice the *Daily Herald*, except to say something disparaging. We do not know that we have ever gone out of our way to say anything against the *Daily Herald*. On the contrary it is in our minds that we have said we should be sorry to see anything happen to it because it represents a view of things that cannot obtain a hearing in the ordinary Press. And, above all, we like to see all sides get a hearing. And in defence we might say that we have often refrained from saying things against the *Daily Herald* when we might have done so, for the reason that it is a paper struggling against very great odds. Apart from that, when we have had occasion to "go" for it, it has been because there has been some stupid comment on a Freethought topic—as, for instance a recent comment on Paine—which has been obviously written to please its sentimentally pious readers. That seems to us the weak point of the paper. It affords plenty of room for religious gush, which has not the slightest intellectual warranty, and can only disgust many of its readers.

We do not mean to imply by what has been said that the *Herald* should conduct a campaign against religion as does the "Freethinker." That is not its business. It should either leave religion alone, or it should face it in a spirit of scientific enquiry. And to give the space it does to praise of religious writings, and to religious articles, while carefully refraining from noticing Freethought writings or Freethought works hardly does credit to the brains or the courage of those responsible for the management of the paper.

It is interesting to find the *Times* pointing out that the existence of twenty thousand Turkish officers who know that without war or talk of war they will be out of employment is a standing threat to the peace of the Near East. It is quite a stroke of Providence that British human nature should be so differently constituted from other human nature that an increase in the number of our military and naval officers makes for the peace of the world. Thank God we are not built as others are built. If only other nations would recognise the distinction between ourselves and others the peace of the world would be guaranteed for ever.

Major Armstrong, of Hay, is now added to the high and low in Madame Tussaud's; this we suppose, is a tribute to those fine qualities engendered by the war, and about which our skirted priests had so much to say. The best attraction at the waxworks is the smile of Voltaire, and it was he, and not the much-advertised Mr. G. B. Shaw, who suggested that this planet was used as a lunatic asylum by other heavenly bodies.

How to Help.

There are thousands of men and women who have left the Churches and who do not know of the existence of this journal. Most of them would become subscribers if only its existence were brought to their notice.

We are unable to reach them through the ordinary channels of commercial advertising, and so must rely upon the willingness of our friends to help. This may be given in many ways:

By taking an extra copy and sending it to a likely acquaintance.

By getting your newsagent to take an extra copy and displaying it.

By lending your own copy to a friend after you have read it.

By leaving a copy in a train, tram or 'bus.

It is monstrous that after forty years of existence, and in spite of the labour of love given it by those responsible for its existence, the *Freethinker* should not yet be in a sound financial position. It can be done if all will help. And the paper and the Cause is worthy of all that each can do for it.

THERE IS A NEW READER WAITING

To Correspondents.

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

VERA.—We did not write on the subject with any degree of pleasure, and you will see that we have had to return to it this week. But as we had to say something on the matter we are naturally pleased that you think so highly of the article, as do many others of our readers who have written.

A. ELSEY.—It is good of you to resolve to take two extra copies of the *Freethinker* until such time as we have gained the thousand new readers for which we asked. That is a real help, but we would much prefer the actual extra readers. Then we are advancing the Cause as well as increasing our sales.

ALPHA.—We quite appreciate what you say, but we do not want to reopen the Sustentation Fund if it can be avoided. We have felt the influence of the abnormally bad trade, as have others, and have hopes that as trade improves we shall be getting into smoother waters. We must wait and see.

F. W. HAUGHTON.—Your congratulation on the Bottomley article is appreciated because we know that you do not praise lightly nor hesitate to express dissent when you see reason for doing so. You wrote us soon after your return, and we replied. We often think of you and other Irish friends. The present state of affairs is a great disappointment to those who hoped for a more sensible settlement of affairs.

H. L.—We see no reason for being disheartened. The world will not be converted in a day, and there is a consolation coming from doing what one regards as the right kind of work which nothing else can give.

A. FRANKAEU.—A thousand new readers may be a great many for a paper such as the *Freethinker* to ask for, but if only a thousand of our readers would make up their minds to get one, it can be done. And that does not seem so difficult a task. The great thing is to determine to get that one. And the thousand means all the difference between continually losing money and paying our way. That is surely something worth asking for.

J. PARTRIDGE.—Sorry to hear of the illness of Mr. Williams. Hope that it is nothing serious.

R. FRANKHERD.—Owing to the newspaper regulations we are compelled to print the title of the *Freethinker* on the back of the wrapper. The only alternative is to pay extra postage. Then it can be sent in a plain wrapper. Thanks for paper. See "Acid Drops."

A. W. COLEMAN.—Mr. Cohen's booklet on *Foreign Missions* has been out of print for some years. The publishers of Mr. Manson's *Salvation Army* are Routledge & Sons. There was an edition at 5s. and another in paper at 6d. Pleased you were interested in the "Views and Opinions."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

We have received several letters containing suggestions as to how the circulation of the *Freethinker* may be increased, and we thank those who have taken the trouble to write. All are receiving consideration, but for the most part they are ruled out for the time being as involving expense, and that we are not at present able to stand. We have been suffering, as all others have been, from the bad trade, and that has prevented our launching out as might have been done under more favourable circumstances. When men are unemployed even threepence weekly is a consideration, and the purchase of books is quite out of the question. It is an open secret that nearly every paper in London is at present either losing money or barely making ends meet. So for the time being we must be content to push the paper where we can, relying upon the help of our friends and our own determination to keep the old flag flying.

Some of the letters received since the above paragraph was written may lead us to return to the subject later. But as we have always made it a rule to keep our friends informed as to the general position we may as well say, as a reply to some enquiries, that all we are after is making the paper pay its way. At present, as the balance sheet which our accountant has presented us with shows, the paper is still following the old path of losing money, and that means fresh appeals, which we are anxious to avoid, and which we have no immediate intention of making. But clearly there are only two ways in which a paper can be kept going. One is by means of subventions, the other is by making income meet expenditure. We want all to help us to realize the latter, and the more desirable plan. That plan has not yet been realized, thanks to the very bad state of trade, but we must try to overcome this as we have overcome other things.

The Rev. W. H. Bass, writing in the *Challenge* (June 2), says that "it is among the commonplaces of religious thought at the present time that the younger generation is drifting, or has drifted, further and further away from all forms of organized religion." At the recent N.S.S. Conference more than one speaker urged energetic effort to enlist the support of the younger generation in our cause. As a "spiritual" force Protestant Christianity in England is moribund, and it is more than doubtful whether it seriously anticipates ever again making a real impression on what are sometimes called the "lower" classes. But its interests are well organized and are still powerful enough to impede free speech. There are even indications of an attempt to introduce further restrictions in this direction. That Christianity is, admittedly, now more than ever hopelessly unacceptable to our youth, reinforces our appeal to the idealism of Young England to apply practically the lessons of the past eight years and to make its views an effective factor in constructive Secularism.

The *Catholic Herald* (June 10) thinks that the harbouring of "the leading English anti-Christian body, the N.S.S., this Whitsuntide" was a "doubtful honour" for Nottingham. Well, it may be that it is of special value, not only to anti-Christians but to all lovers of mental freedom, to note what a representative R.C. organ regards as a "doubtful honour." Our contemporary draws special attention to the annual report of the N.S.S. and the reference therein to the "historic foe of progress." It scorns to repudiate the impeachment, and that is what we like about the *Herald*. In the language of the golfer, it is not afraid to "bring the shoulders round," and in a religious organization that claims universal domination that attitude is worth more than a host of such minor virtues as toleration and broad-mindedness.

The same issue of the *Herald* contains an article pouring copious ridicule on the Protestant idea of the right of private interpretation of Scripture, and another on the

IN EVERY STREET—WHY NOT GET HIM?

"essential hopelessness" of the advances of the various Protestant bodies "towards what is euphemistically called a united Church." Rome is vexed with those Protestants who see a pattern of ecclesiastical unity before their very eyes and still remain aloof. She is equally sorry for the Protestant sects who do not know any better. And this combination of vexation and sorrow worries her. There is so much spiritual waste in the world, and she feels a personal displeasure at the sad sight of it. That is her job.

To-day (June 18) the Manchester Branch has arranged an excursion to Darwen. Those joining will leave Victoria Station at 1 o'clock, booking to Bolton. From Bolton they will go to Darwen by charabanc, where they will be met by Mr. Hampson, one of the members of the N.S.S. He will conduct the party to Tockholes, where Mrs. Hampson has kindly volunteered to provide tea. The total cost of the trip will be about 5s.

Now that the Shelley Centenary is on us, most Freethinkers will be pleased to have in their possession a collection of Shelley's prose writings, which contains such essays as the *Necessity of Atheism*, the *Refutation of Deism*, and the *Essay on Christianity*. These and other pieces have been published in one volume by Messrs. Watts & Co. with an excellent introduction by H. S. Salt. The book can be ordered from the Pioneer Press, price 1s., or by post 1s. 2d. We hope to see the collection have the sale it deserves.

In mentioning the matter of Press correspondence last week, we unfortunately wrote the name of Mr. H. F. Williams as being ready to take part in such if papers were sent him. We should have written H. F. Wilkins, Bishops Itchington, near Leamington Spa. Those interested will please note the correction.

Mr. Whitehead will visit the Newcastle-on-Tyne district this week, commencing with a lecture at Spen (June 18) at 11 o'clock, and on the Town Moor at 7 in the evening. He will visit places in the district during the week, particulars of which will be found among our lecture notices.

Twenty-six members of the Birmingham Branch joined in the ramble on Sunday, 11th inst. This was the Branch's first meeting of the kind, and we congratulate it on the excellent muster. Tea was provided at the Botanical Gardens, Edgbaston, after which Mr. F. E. Willis, one of the Birmingham delegates, gave a report of the Nottingham Conference. Mr. E. Clifford Williams, the other delegate, was absent through illness, and a vote of sympathy and hope for his speedy recovery was passed by the meeting.

One way in which our friends can help to get the *Freethinker* better known is by a judicious distribution of specimen copies. We have always these on hand, and if those interested will write us we shall be pleased to send on as many as they require.

Prior to visiting Newcastle and district Mr. Whitehead is spending a week at Plymouth. These are also open-air meetings, and from reports to hand we learn that the meetings have been very successful. We hope it will lead to a strengthening of the movement in G. W. Foote's native town.

The immortality of the soul is a thing that concerns us so closely and touches us so profoundly, that one must have lost all feeling to be indifferent as to knowing how the matter is. All our actions and all our thoughts follow such different paths, according as there are external goods to hope for or not, that it is impossible to take a step with sense and judgment, without regulating it in view of this point, which ought to be our first object.—*Pascal*.

Freethought From a Sick Room.

Paper read at the N.S.S. Annual Conference, Nottingham, June 4.

LET me begin with a quotation, a Christian intellectual's admission—unconscious, of course, of the Freethought case :

The eighteenth century philosophers were cheerful and kindly, and they were witty; and in some moods of impatience with the myriad broods of fanatics and doctrinaires, one comes to think that if a man be cheerful and kindly and witty, the rest matters little. One is seduced by La Mettrie's cheerful grin, by Voltaire's deliciously devilish smile, by Saint Evremont's charmingly ironic gaze, even by Diderot's less polished, more theatrical look of amusement. But the gloom of modern life is indescribably tedious when one sees it reflected in thousands of depressed countenances and echoed in a hundred new sheets. Certainly we need a new Cervantes to laugh our pompous gloom to death. Diderot does bring out his truths with a smile and a jest. We are cheerful insincerely; we are pseudo-happy humbugs; we cannot accept life and make any good of it.

What I wish to make clear is this: that Freethought is an attitude of mind, a passionate belief in the intellect and the heart which most emphatically *does* make life acceptable, and on the whole a good thing. And this attitude of the mind makes an enormous difference in the sick room where a healthy, more life-giving atmosphere breeds a warmer, cheerful spirit and gives the patient a better chance. Naturally to the good Christian writer whom I have quoted, Voltaire's smile must be "deliciously devilish," instead of just charming; and Diderot, perhaps the finest and liveliest of the group of eighteenth century pioneers in France—Diderot's smile is "theatrical" because his cheerful mixture of atheism and optimism and science will persist in breaking through. The Freethinker is essentially a humanist in the greatest sense; he derives, if I may so speak, from the free intellectualism of Greece, her wonderful passion for beauty; and the ordered sanity of Rome. If Freethinkers and Freethought remain true to its splendid heritage then it must be altruistic, and the love and service of man will ever be, for us, our highest aim and our noblest duty. It takes centuries for a creed to die. Spiritually, the Church was mortally stricken with the rise of science; and now more clearly than ever do we realize how she cumbers the ground. The war was a startling revelation to the Church of what Freethinkers already knew. You cannot revivify a corpse; even the Churches know that. But, unfortunately, the frightful tyranny of the Dead Hand remains. That can and will be vigorously fought by militant Freethought, and victory is not uncertain because the forces of progress are also fighting on our side. If we take a considered view of the progress of the rational spirit since 1870, I think there is every reason to possess our souls in peace with a quiet confidence. Remember that although 1870 saw the passing of the Bill making elementary education compulsory, it was probably twelve to fifteen years before the Act could be fully enforced simply because the schools had to be built and the teachers were not adequately equipped. Then again the Sunday school was practically compulsory for most of us, whereas to-day children are given larger freedom everywhere. The teaching of Science is no longer a fad; it is a serious and one of the most enthralling parts of the school curricula. And evolution is a fact. I am fully aware that, by hook or by crook, the Defenders of the Faith will continue to square the circle, and they will adapt their explanations to satisfy the credulous and the simple. But science grows and is pressing hard

all absolute and all supernatural beliefs. There never was a time when the Freethinker and the Humanist had so much solid ground for hope. Education will ever fight on our side, and with the advance of knowledge, the natural and the true tend to fall more into place. Here, in this Conference, I am speaking to the converted, but I know even with them there is a certain measure of disappointment at the apparent slow progress and the terrible apathy which surrounds all forward looking causes—and the Freethought cause perhaps seems far more lacking in public recognition. May I venture upon a word of gratitude to the gallant bands all over the country whom I shall never see, but whose splendid love and loyalty to the Secular Movement reaches me from so many sources? I know it is very depressing to go on for months and years without an adequate outside response, but still I would beg of them to be of good courage and keep pegging away. It is largely through the Secular platforms all over the country reaching the working classes that the localised heaven "up above" has been for ever shattered and some dim consciousness is dawning of an infinite space of millions and millions of universes.

Worlds on worlds are ever rolling,
From creation to decay.

With such a conception of the universe all ideas of a gigantic non-natural Heavenly Father become the faintest shadows of a vision. Astronomy knocks the bottom out of the Heavenly Vision and Anthropology, perhaps the youngest and most comprehensive of the sciences, gives a local habitation and a name to all man's energizing ideas and ideals; it explains man to himself by showing how he has made fire his servant, cultivated the ground, shaped language into speech and writing, domesticated the wild beasts, built the Parthenon, and evolved the symphonies and fugues of Beethoven and Bach! Here we see humanity toiling from the vasty deep through hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of years. The legend of the "Garden of Eden" is poor and petty when this sublime achievement takes its proper place in the mind; and as the last remnants of the supernatural fade away, giving place to the full splendour of Humanism, we may say, as in a prophecy of the not distant future:

Admiration has reappeared and rejoiced a saddened earth.

Courage and hope! My brethren! That is my message for to-day to the Freethought party. We seek for truth. We demand intellectual freedom for all, and we welcome the light from whatsoever source it may come. Love and service will lift man to nobler heights than ever we can see; and after all it is a great thing to be pioneers. Shelley was a pioneer, and he loved humanity with a fine tenderness and a wonderful warmth. Yes, he loved men, he strove to serve—and because I have a passionate belief in the Freethought cause, I quote you his prophetic vision (from *Prometheus Unbound*), making it my own, and my last words here, to you. *Let us work for it.*

Love, from its awful throne of patient power
In the wise heart, from the last giddy hour
Of dread endurance, from the slippery steep
And narrow verge of crag-like agony, springs,
And folds over the world its healing wings.

F. W. WALSH.

The Difficulty of Belief.

IN a local Sunday newspaper, a contributor who signs himself "The Padre" recently put forward an argument concerning the difficulty of belief. His theme was that it is much easier to believe some of the Divinely inspired stories which the Bible contains, than to believe in the latest mysteries of science.

"Some men," he says, "cannot accept the Christian religion because it makes too great a demand upon their faith," and he *pities* the position of such men; also, "they will not give their allegiance to a cult of science which they do not understand." It seems remarkable that the "Padre," together with many other men of his calling, cannot or will not bring themselves to understand that the Christian religion *does* make in many cases, too great a demand upon one's faith. A little straightforward study of the Bible, combined with a little clear thinking, should not fail to convince anyone of this.

To illustrate his point concerning religious belief, he takes "the greatest perplexity in the Christian faith—the doctrine of the Trinity," and brings outside evidence to support his argument. Of the Trinity, he says, "an agnostic like the late Professor Huxley said its mysteries were child's play compared with the mysteries of science." I seek here no quarrel with the great departed, but I would remind the "Padre" that the element of mystery in science has greatly decreased since the days of Professor Huxley.

But now comes the key-note of the "Padre's" argument. He says he is asked to believe that a common pin is a wonderful object lesson in science—"electrons, so many and so small that the race in one million years would not count them all, and yet not one electron touches another"—"they are as far apart as the planets of a solar system—not one ever slips by an infinitesimal degree from the control of law." And this, he says, is the latest science. He concludes with a remark which plainly begs the question. "Pick up a pin," he says, "and ask whether it is easier to believe this statement than it is to pick up the Bible and believe what it contains."

Reader! I think you will agree with me entirely when I suggest that in the majority of cases it is easier to believe some of the mysteries of science than some of the mysteries in the Bible. The ordinary man who takes an interest, however slight, and who understands to a certain extent the workings of modern science, has little difficulty in believing in the existence of the various laws of nature, the solar system, wireless telephony, or the theory of the disintegration of matter into atoms and electrons. The element of mystery begins to disappear when one gives a little clear thought to science in general.

But can the same be said of the mysteries of the Bible? The more one studies the strange stories it contains the more the element of mystery deepens, until one soon becomes as though enveloped in a fog. For instance, to believe the theory of the evolution of the planets and the solar system from a great nebulous mass, is a much more simple matter than to believe in the "theory" of creation. A child can understand that it is impossible for the sun to pause in its never ending journey through space, yet we are told in the Bible that it stood still to allow the privileged Joshua to complete a battle. Can any open, clear-thinking mind believe this?

There is a whole list of miraculous incidents which "men cannot believe because it makes too great a demand upon their faith." The "Padre" *pities* them. I do not, I *congratulate* them on their possession of good sound sense.

Concluding, he says that "not only religion, but science and life itself would be impossible without

Bellarmin makes sweating and crowding one of the chief torments of hell, which Lessius (no doubt after an actual and careful survey) affirms to be exactly a Dutch mile (about a league and a half English) in diameter. But Ribera, grounding his map on deductions from the Apocalypse, makes it two hundred Italian miles. Lessius, it may be presumed, was a Protestant, for whom, of course, a smaller hell would suffice.—Coleridge.

faith." This may be quite true, but nevertheless I would remind the "Padre" that *there are some things*, belief in which would require an *almost impossible amount* of faith.

ALFERNA.

N. S. S. Annual Conference.

HELD IN THE CORN EXCHANGE, NOTTINGHAM.

Whit-Sunday, June 4, 1922.

MORNING SESSION.

THE following branch delegates were present: W. A. Littlewood (Barnsley); F. E. Willis and E. Clifford Williams (Birmingham); J. T. Lloyd (Glasgow and Swansea District); A. Lee and Mrs. Ben Lee (Huddersfield); Harold I. Bayford and F. E. Monks (Manchester); J. Fothergill (Newcastle-on-Tyne and South Shields); Miss K. B. Kough (N. London); R. H. Rosetti (West Ham); James Neate (Bethnal Green).

Amongst the visitors were noticed: Mr. and Mrs. James Farmer and family; Mr. and Mrs. Beesley; Mr. Allen; Messrs. C. G. Quinton, Jun., A. D. McLaren, C. A. Williams, S. Cohen, Elstob, R. Chapman, W. Pitt, G. Whitehead, H. Irving, H. Shaw, John Wilson, S. E. Beasdale, T. Moseley; Mrs. Neate, Mrs. Rosetti, and Miss M. Pankhurst.

The minutes of the last conference were confirmed on the motion of Mr. F. E. Willis, seconded by Mr. R. H. Rosetti.

The Executive's Annual Report was adopted unanimously on the motion of Mr. Willis, seconded by Mr. Williams.

Mr. A. B. Moss thought the Executive had been diligent in its pursuit of the work for which the Society was established, and strongly supported its action in fighting the Gott case, because our principles are at stake where the blasphemy laws are put in motion. Mr. E. Clifford Williams also spoke in support of the report.

The Financial Report was next considered. Several questions were asked by the delegates and answered by the President and Secretary. Mr. F. E. Willis moved that the item, "£20, Loan," appearing in the balance sheet, be wiped off as a bad debt. Mr. F. E. Monks seconded. Carried unanimously. The Financial Report was then adopted on the motion of Mr. F. E. Monks, seconded by Mr. F. E. Willis.

The next business being the election of President, Mr. Cohen temporarily vacated the chair. Miss Vance said there was no competition for this office, and Messrs. F. E. Willis, R. H. Rosetti, and E. Clifford Williams having spoken in favour of the nomination, she declared Mr. Chapman Cohen unanimously elected. He thanked the delegates, adding that six years ago he had made only one promise—to do his best. That promise he had kept.

The President then moved, and Mrs. Ben Lee seconded, "that Miss E. M. Vance be re-elected General Secretary." Messrs. Bayford, Neate, and Rosetti, and Miss Pankhurst spoke in support of the motion. Carried unanimously.

Mr. James Neate moved and Miss Pankhurst seconded, "that Mr. C. G. Quinton be elected Treasurer." Carried unanimously.

Mr. Monks moved, and Mr. Willis seconded, "that Messrs. H. Theobald and Co. (Incorporated Accountants), be appointed Auditors." Carried.

The following nominations for the Executive appeared on the Agenda:—

SCOTLAND.—Mr. James Neate, nominated by Glasgow Branch.

WALES.—Mr. J. T. Lloyd, nominated by Swansea Branch.

N.E. GROUP.—Mr. C. H. Kelf, nominated by Newcastle Branch; Mr. A. B. Moss, nominated by South Shields Branch.

N.W. GROUP.—Miss Pitcher and Mr. R. H. Rosetti, nominated by Liverpool and Manchester Branches.

MIDLAND GROUP.—Miss M. Pankhurst and Mr. J. G. Dobson, nominated by Birmingham Branch.

SOUTH LONDON.—Mr. F. R. Corrigan, nominated by South London Branch.

NORTH LONDON.—Miss K. B. Kough, nominated by North London Branch.

EAST LONDON.—Mr. H. Silverstein, nominated by Bethnal Green and West Ham Branches.

It was announced that Miss Pitcher was unable to act on the Executive, and on the motion of Mr. James Neate and Miss K. B. Kough, Mr. A. D. McLaren was elected in her stead. Mr. Williams moved, and Mr. Monks seconded, that the other nominees whose names appeared in the Agenda be elected. Carried.

The next item on the Agenda was the following motion by the Executive:

That this Conference hereby approves the Trust Deed of the National Secular Society, and commends it to the favourable consideration of all Freethinkers who are desirous of financially benefiting the Freethought movement.

The President said that the Trust Deed covered the principles and objects of the N.S.S., and as these principles were declared by the House of Lords to be unquestionably legal, the Deed was perfectly secure and binding. In regard to bequests it placed the N.S.S. on the same footing as the Free Churches, except that the latter were not within the Rule against Perpetuities, which did not apply to money left for religious or charitable purposes. The President further stated that the Conference and the Executive had supreme authority over the appointment of trustees. After some discussion, the following words were added to the motion:

The present Trustees are the President, Secretary, and Treasurer, in virtue of their office, with Mr. T. Robertson, of Glasgow, and Mr. G. H. McClusky, of Plymouth.

The motion, thus amended, was seconded by Mr. R. H. Rosetti and carried unanimously.

In view of the preceding resolution, the following motion, the next on the Agenda, was withdrawn:

That in view of the fact that the funds of the National Secular Society are legally secured by Trust Deed, this Conference requests the Executive to make this information known as widely as possible among branches, individual members, and friends of the Society.

Mr. F. E. Monks moved:

That the Executive circulate among the members of the N.S.S. a copy of the essential parts of the Trust Deed.

Carried.

Mr. A. B. Moss moved:

That in view of the proposed concordat between the various Churches, and the promise of the Minister of Education that, provided agreement can be reached between the Nonconformists and the Established Church, the Government will introduce a new Education Bill which still further establishes religious teaching in State supported schools, this Conference enters the strongest possible protest against the proposed sacrifice of principle to the preferential treatment of religious sects, and calls upon the Government to end this sectarian struggle by confining the State to its proper function—that of imparting purely secular education—leaving it to parents and Churches to give whatever religious instruction they desire at their own cost and convenience.

Mrs. Ben Lee seconded. Carried.

Mr. R. H. Rosetti moved, and Mr. Sam Cohen seconded:

That in view of the growth of non-religious opinion in the community, and of the gradual secularizing of the State in all centres of civilization, this Conference is of opinion that the time has arrived when a united effort should be made to exclude religious offices and functions from every branch of civil administration, and calls upon Freethinkers, on and off public bodies, to do what lies in their power to bring about this much needed reform.

Mr. James Farmer supported the motion, which was carried.

Mr. J. T. Lloyd moved:

That this Conference strongly protests against the repeated application of the blasphemy laws as being contrary to the best thought of the day, and views with disgust and indignation the infamous sentence of nine months' hard labour passed upon Mr. J. W. Gott by Mr. Justice Avory and confirmed by the Court of Criminal Appeal for the priest-made crime of blasphemy, and calls upon Secularists throughout the country to bring such pressure upon the Government as will force the abolition

of the blasphemy laws as an intolerable survival of religious intolerance.

Mr. J. Fothergill seconded, and Messrs. S. Cohen, F. E. Willis, Dobson, and the President spoke in support. Carried unanimously.

Mr. J. T. Lloyd moved :

That the Annual Conference decide the place of meeting of the next conference. Branch proposals regarding same to be forwarded to the General Secretary in time to be placed on the Agenda. The meeting place for 1923 to be selected as under present rule.

Mr. E. Clifford Williams seconded, and Messrs. Rosetti, Willis and the President, spoke on the proposal. Carried, with two dissentients.

Miss K. B. Kough moved, and Mr. A. B. Moss seconded :

That demonstrations in connection with the open-air propaganda of the London branches be held under the auspices of the President and the Executive during the summer months.

Carried.

Mr. F. E. Willis moved :

That this Conference deplores the marked tendency of Labour leaders and other reformers to appeal to religion and religious feeling in their advocacy of social reform. It considers such appeals to be fraught with grave danger to genuine progress, and instructs the Executive to take such steps as may be necessary and possible to counteract a policy that is, at best, fruitless, and, at worst, inimical to the best interests of the nation.

Mrs. Ben Lee seconded. Mr. Fothergill spoke on the motion, deprecating Freethought organizations giving special attention to any political party, whether representative of Conservatism, Liberalism, or Labour. The motion was carried.

AFTERNOON SESSION.

The afternoon session was devoted entirely to the reading and discussion of the three papers prepared by Messrs. Walsh, Rosetti, and McLaren.

Miss Kough read Mr. F. W. Walsh's paper, "Freethought and the Home." In the discussion which followed Mr. F. E. Willis said that the delegates would be extremely grateful to Mr. Walsh for his cheering message, especially in view of the circumstances in which it was written. Mr. A. B. Moss was sure that the note struck would find a response in the hearts of all present, Mr. Walsh's paper revealing lofty ideas combined with a brightness of outlook which was worthy of their highest admiration. Miss Vance moved, "that those present regard Mr. Walsh's paper as expressing the spirit of the true Freethinker, and tender him their best thanks." Carried.

Mr. A. D. McLaren and Mr. R. H. Rosetti then read their papers on "Freethought and Religious Equality." Messrs. Moss, Williams, Willis, Farmer, Miss Vance, Miss Kough and the President spoke on the subject as presented in the two papers. The prevailing notes of the discussion were (1) the great leeway still to be made up before Freethinkers attain to a position of complete religious equality in England, that is, before the State is completely secularized; and (2) the need of renewed effort to keep religion out of State-aided schools, and to enlist the support of the rising generation for our cause.

The afternoon session was brought to a close by the President tendering the hearty thanks of the delegates to the Nottingham friends for all they had done to make the Conference a success. Miss Vance spoke of the complete arrangements which had been made for the visit, and hoped one result would be the formation of a strong branch of the N.S.S. in Nottingham.

A. M.

Correspondence.

BUDDHISM.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The success of the Buddha's teaching in his own life is, as your correspondent, Mr. Vincent J. Hands, says, a striking vindication of secular principles. If people would "sack" their gods, treat the priestly confidence tricksters with the contempt they deserve, and confine themselves to secular matters—to the betterment of

earthly conditions—the world would be much happier, more moral, and a better place to live in than it is. The Buddha said :—

But, unfortunately, with the lapse of time, the simple, rational teaching of the Buddha has been overlaid with every kind of superstition, the result of just those speculations about "the soul," which he discouraged. Also, forms, ceremonies, ritual, and so forth, have crept in, such as the teaching of the Buddha (as we find it in the Pali books) certainly does not countenance. This is particularly the case with what is called the "Northern" (Mahayana) School, although the "Southern" (Theravada) School is not wholly blameless in this respect. But ignorance and superstition still dominate the minds of the vast majority of mankind, who simply *will have* childish toys which the more developed minds cast aside as being not only useless, but encumbrances.

There is, as perhaps my articles have indicated, a movement afoot in the Southern Buddhist countries (Ceylon and Burma), and also to some extent in Japan and China, to clear the rank jungle growth which has accumulated in the course of centuries, and to bring out the original rationalism of the Buddha which is still to be found underlying it all. Freethinkers who are interested in this study cannot do better than get the *Essence of Buddhism*, by Professor Lakshmi Narasu, which can be got from Messrs. Luzac and Co., 46, Great Russell Street, W.C., the price being, I think, 3s. 6d. Messrs. Kegan Paul and Co. are publishing the *Message of Buddhism*, by Sudhadra Bhikkhu. This edition will appear in the course of a few weeks, and the price will be about 2s. 6d. These two works will do much to strengthen their rationalism, apart altogether from their Buddhist implications.

Mr. Hands asks for direct proof of the Buddhist doctrine (or theory, if he prefers the term) of re-birth. I have to say, speaking for myself alone, that I have none. It is said that by means of a certain meditation (samadhi) the memory of a previous life, or lives, can be evoked. The effect of this samadhi is to "tap" the stream of the subconscious to which Mr. Hands refers. So far as I am myself concerned, I do not remember any previous life, nor have I attempted the meditation practice referred to. But I have met Buddhists who have done so, and who assure me that they can recall, at least, the life-experience immediately preceding this present one. I do not suppose that they were attempting to impose on my credulity, for there would be no object in doing so. Further, it is very difficult to get even one of these Buddhists to speak of the matter at all. Of course, we may say that it is pure imagination on their part, and let it go at that, without offence. Or, assuming that it is really a fact, such memory would not be evidence to any save themselves. I have memory of many strange experiences and adventures which have occurred in this life, but concerning which I could advance no proof other than my bare statement. Belief would depend on whether the person to whom I recounted them had confidence in my veracity. He might, however, believe me to some extent, with reservations as to how far my observations of these occurrences had been accurate, or whether I had perhaps been to some extent deceived myself.

It has always seemed to me that there must be some valid reason why I am cast into this particular heredity and environment, or subject to, or free from, pathological conditions; why, for instance, Mr. Hands and myself differ in these respects from each other, and from all our fellow human beings. We agree to rule out the tyrannical caprice of a god; and then we have to choose between an equally tyrannical blind chance, or the orderly working of natural cause and effect. I prefer to accept the latter alternative. I can trace out the sequence of cause and effect in this particular life which has brought me to where I am at this particular moment; and it seems to me that there must be prior causes and effects of the same kind which caused me to "arise" at the beginning of this life just when and where I did, in such and such a family and place, possessed of just such and such physical and mental abilities and disabilities which are unlike those of anyone else. Whether Mr. Hands, or others, fail to see it in the same light does not matter in the least, and we are not offended with each other, for there is no "article of faith" involved. It must be re-

membered that this "I" which is now typing this letter is not the same "I" that existed so many years, or even days, ago, still less the same "I" that may have existed in a previous life manifestation; but is simply the phenomenal sequence of that previous—let us call it "vibration," since the Pali term "calana-lakkhana" is used in this connection. In the book called the *Milindapanha* it is stated thus: "What is reborn is Namarupa (phenomenal being). But it is not the same Namarupa. By one Namarupa deeds are done, and by these same deeds another Namarupa is reborn. One Namarupa finds its end in death, another is reborn. But this other is the result of the first, and is therefore not released from the consequences of its evil deeds," or good deeds, as the case may be. The word Namarupa is often translated "name and form." This is literally correct, but as a technical term in this connection it means, as I have said, phenomenal being, *i.e.*, mind and body. The question is the most abstruse of all in the elaborate psychology of Buddhism, and it would require too long, technical, and therefore wearisome dissertation. It is dealt with at some length in the *Essence of Buddhism*, in reading which the expression "name and form" should always be understood as Namarupa as I have explained it.

I am returning to the Far East in a week or two, but shall from time to time send a few notes which I hope may be of interest to your readers. E. UPASAKA.

CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE.

SIR,—Forgive me for so soon again trespassing on your valuable space, but the subject raised by Dr. Salkind is one of great importance to Freethinkers who have the cause at heart. The facts he states are undeniable; but is he not unduly pessimistic? After all there is nothing in the situation to-day that the enlightened Freethinker did not foresee when the Christian nations were killing each other "to the glory of God." It is true that the Christian Church is impotent when faced with such an event as the "Derby"; that no one heeds its voice on those rare occasions when it denounces the vices of the age. But have we not for years been asserting that ultimately life is too strong for such an artificial system as Christianity? And is this not only one direction in which our words are coming true? There is no place for the "Derby" and all the human passions that gather round it, in the Christian philosophy; and yet there it is, strong and menacing. (I wish, Mr. Editor, you would write an article, "Christianity and the Derby"—in your best ironic vein!) I deplore as much as friend Salkind, the rottenness of our twentieth century civilization, but it is infinitely better than "the ages of faith"; and if, as we know, life is ultimately fatal to religion and wrong-thinking, may it not also prove fatal to all those forms of frivolity and evil-doing that are so rampant to-day? I cherish "the larger hope."

As an anarchist, surely Dr. Salkind realizes the extent to which the current immorality and frivolity is due to our industrial and social system, and it is certainly due to these factors more than to religion or irreligion. Again, it is life, not speculative theories that determines conduct.

With our friend's last paragraph I am in complete agreement, but would add as a rider: "The Church's extremity is Freethought's opportunity." Courage, brethren! Let us be up and doing!

VINCENT J. HANDS.

Freethought on Tyneside.

THERE is a belief amongst us on Tyneside, which may be allowed to pass as a pardonable conceit, that we lead in most things progressive. But can we as Freethinkers fairly claim to share this conviction? We are holding on, it is true, but is it not full time for us to resort to some heart-searching? It is not because we have outlived our work that we can afford to sit by the wayside; it may well be that never has there been a more urgent call for the power of reasoning than at the present moment. The danger would seem to repose chiefly in the conception that we have actually arrived at the "age of reason." Much has been gained, undoubtedly; but we

are at best a scattered army, victorious on a wide front, with the task of "digging ourselves in" before us. And keeping to military parlance, we can only meet the inevitable insidious counter attack successfully if we ever and always keep faithful watch. There are young recruits everywhere waiting for their opportunity. Small wonder if there is some diffidence on their part; the work of Freethought savours of the arid plain, the ruffled hill, and the trackless ocean. It was no puny people that traversed and conquered these things; so in a similar way our task is to remove the shadows and phantoms from the land of thought, in order to ensure mental health and consequent happiness. Pride of place impels me to hope that we will show "some front" on the occasion of the visit of Mr. Whitehead, and not "hide our light under a bushel." Are there not a hundred devoted women and men on Tyneside who will make "reasoned truth" their speciality? Such a phalanx would "save the world," and that is only one out of each hundred thousand on the banks of the coaly Tyne. A humble ambition, surely! J. FOTHERGILL.

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, Joseph McCabe, "Modern Pessimism."

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 6.15, Mr. Darby, A Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Regent's Park): 6.30, Mr. A. D. McLaren, "Christianity and Civilization."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15 and 6, Mr. Corrigan, "The Story of the Ages."

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

COUNTRY.

OUTDOOR.

NEW MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S.—Rambles: June 18, Darwen and District. July 16, Prestwich Clough and Philip's Park. September 3, Dunham Park.

NEWCASTLE AND SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCHES: Propagandist Mission. Speaker, Mr. George Whitehead. June 18 at 11, Spen; 7, Newcastle Town Moor, entrance from North Road. June 19 at 7, Greenside. June 21, Hebburn. June 22 at 7, Newcastle Town Moor. June 24, Afternoon Outing at Jesmond Dene. June 25 at 11, Newcastle Town Moor; evening, South Shields. June 26, Greenside. June 27, Chopwell.

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