

The FREETHINKER

FOUNDED · 1881

EDITED BY CHAPMAN · COHEN ■ EDITOR · 1881-1915 · G · W · FOOTE

Registered at the General Post Office as a Newspaper

VOL. XLII.—No. 28

SUNDAY JULY 9, 1922

PRICE THREEPENCE.

PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

	Page.
<i>Shelley the Atheist.—The Editor</i> - - - - -	433
<i>The Key to the Better World.—J. T. Lloyd</i> - - - - -	435
<i>Slandering Swinburne.—Mimnermus</i> - - - - -	436
<i>Shelley's Atheism.—Viator</i> - - - - -	437
<i>Fried Souls.—G. W. Foote</i> - - - - -	438
<i>Literature in the Great War.—Agnes Weedon</i> - - - - -	442
<i>The People of Half-Way House.—Vincent J. Hands</i> - - - - -	443
<i>A Blood-Thirsty Creed.—A. W. Malcomson</i> - - - - -	444
<i>Writers and Readers.—George Underwood</i> - - - - -	445
<i>Freethought on Tyneside.—J. Fothergill</i> - - - - -	446
<i>Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, etc.</i>	

Views and Opinions.

Shelley the Atheist.

At the time of writing these notes we have not seen any of the speeches that will be delivered in connection with the Shelley commemoration meetings. But we shall be agreeably surprised if they do not fail to emphasize or attempt to gloss over the fact of Shelley's aggressive Atheism. The Christian world is made up of first-class haters, and the world of "respectables" is large and cowardly. And the result of this conjunction of unhealthy undesirables will be—unless we are vastly mistaken—to eulogize Shelley the poet, and to paint Shelley the reformer and the Atheist as a warm-hearted youth who allowed his immature opinions to express themselves in a form that did not represent his real and more mature convictions. But to do Christian intolerance justice it does not usually act so foolishly. When it hates it hates with a tolerably sure instinct, and it generally knows which is its real enemy and which is not. Had Shelley's attack on injustice and intolerance been merely the expression of youthful fervour, it would probably have been passed with the same contemptuous ease with which the Christian of to-day passes by respectable Agnosticism to spend his full vigour on the much more dreaded Atheism. The opinions expressed by Shelley were the outcome of keen intellectual conviction, and the bigots knew that there were many more feeling what Shelley expressed. Had Shelley devoted his energies to reform alone, he would by this have been—so far as the ordinary man is concerned—buried under the neglect which has met so many others. From this he was saved by his poetry. In his case literature preserved what ignorance and intolerance would have buried. And so to-day respectability and bigotry join hands in trying to make a religious liberal out of an ardent Atheistic republican.

The Revolutionist.

Shelley lived at a time when the circumstances were not unlike in kind the circumstances of to-day. On the one side the air was full of the hopes of reform, hopes that had received an impetus throughout Europe from the opening stages of the French Revolution of 1789. And on the other side there was setting in, as one of the consequences of the Allies winning a war of freedom, a period of reaction. Conservatism and

authority were in the saddle, and by nature and by conviction Shelley was opposed to both. His revolt against the stupidity of mere authority took at times a practical, at others an argumentative form. As a lad at Eton he made a practical stand against the stupid system of "fagging" by stubbornly refusing to take any part in it. When he went to Oxford the intellectual revolt was shown in his open opposition to the belief in God and in his attitude to Christianity. He might have weakened the opposition against him on the one side had he been more conservative on the other. But he hated compromise whether in relation to the State or the Church. In his crusade against war, in his plea for the right of the Irish people to self-government, and in his general attack on tyranny and vested interest under any guise, he stands as the Atheistic knight-errant of humanity.

The Anti-Christian. * * *

But it is Shelley the Atheist with whom I am now concerned, and that because except in a journal such as the *Freethinker* that side of him is likely to receive little notice, and the little it does receive will be of a deprecatory character. Shelley's hatred of Christianity was original and sustained. It was deliberate, repeated, and emphasized in all manner of ways. In one of his letters, in which he challenges the right of Southey to call himself a Christian, he asks, "What is to be thought of Jesus Christ's divinity?" And he describes it as "The falsehood of human kind." Later, in a letter to Janetta Phillips, he makes his position still clearer and more emphatic by saying:—

My rejection of revealed (religion) proceeds from my perfect conviction of its insufficiency to the happiness of man. My rejection of natural (religion) arises wholly from reason. I once was an enthusiastic deist, but never a Christian.

Over and over again in the course of various letters he returns to this subject of Christianity and speaks with the utmost disdain of those who would seek to preserve some kind of thing which they choose to call Christianity, by leaving out all that is essentially Christian and restricting the connotations of the term to certain moral associations that are common to every association of human beings. He says with absolute truth that a Christian and a Mohammedan—

cease to belong to the sect which either word means, when they set up a doctrine of their own, irreconcilable with that of either religion except in a few instances in which common and self-evident morality coincides with its tenets. It is then morality, which they set up as the criterion of their actions, and not the exclusive doctrine preached by the founder of any religion.

Shelley was standing for sheer intellectual honesty, and one would have liked to prove that he believed in what is fantastically called *genuine* Christianity. Although he knew little of the anthropological side of religion he was shrewd enough to realize that the restricting of Christianity to moral and social teaching is an indication of the dissolution of the Churches, not a sign of their vigour or vitality.

Shelley and his "Friends."

Shelley had evidently studied Hume with some purpose, and in his *Refutation of Deism*—a vindication of Atheism—we have all Hume's arguments against design in nature set forth, enforced by other reasonings which leave Atheism as the logical alternative. Attempts have been made, and will doubtless be made again during the present commemoration meetings, to prove that Shelley was not an Atheist because his arguments were against what he called a "creative deity." Such arguments have all the essential dishonesty that is so often associated with religious defences. For these apologists omit to state that a creative deity, a personal deity—the only kind of deity that is of consequence—was expressly repudiated. And it is of importance to note that one reason for Shelley arguing against this so strongly was that he saw its acceptance must lead to a rejection of Christianity. This is indicated in a letter to Miss Hitchener, where he says that he has two reasons for wishing to convince her of the necessity of Atheism, one that of truth, the other that it is "the most summary way of eradicating Christianity," and he adds, to the same lady, in reply to her horror of Atheism, that she should not be frightened by "verbal bugbears." That is a counsel more needed to-day than it was in Shelley's time, certainly as much needed. Were people less frightened at verbal bugbears than they are, there would be fewer misrepresentations of Shelley's actual opinions than there are. To take an early and classic example: Thomas Jefferson Hogg, friend and biographer of Shelley, asks in his life of the poet, "Did anybody ever know a poet—and Shelley was a truly great poet—who was an irreligious man?" Having put the question he straightway proceeds to make him as religious as possible. So in giving the public some letters of Shelley where Shelley wrote: "I burn with impatience for the moment of Christianity's dissolution," Hogg alters it to "I burn with impatience for the moment of the dissolution of intolerance." "Christians" is changed to "religionists," and praise of "Atheists" becomes praise of "philosophers," who might be anything. A religion that insisted upon intellectual honesty on the part of its followers would be something quite unique in the annals of mankind.

* * *

Shelley and "God."

The *Refutation of Deism* is, as I have said, a thinly disguised vindication of Atheism, in which a Christian in controverting the position of the Deist, manages to insinuate most of the arguments against the existence of God. In this Hume is the obvious basis, although some of the arguments are added to or put in another way. And for those who follow carefully the train of Shelley's reasoning, and the grounds on which it is based, it should be quite clear that nothing short of some mental disease could ever have brought him back to a genuine theism. God, he says, is an hypothesis, and he proceeds to show that the hypothesis does not fit the facts. To those who say that they cannot see how "inert matter" can produce what we see, he actually replies: "Doubtless, no disposition of inert matter, or matter deprived of qualities, could ever have composed an animal, a tree, or even a stone. But matter deprived of its qualities, is an abstraction, concerning which it is impossible to form an idea. Matter such as we behold it is not inert." In other words, the theist states his argument in a quite illegitimate form in order to gain his end. With equal neatness Shelley points out that "order" and "disorder" in nature are subjective, not objective facts. They belong to nature only in the sense that they belong to us. "Order and disorder are no more than modifications of our own perceptions of the relations which subsist between ourselves and external objects," they are

"expressions denoting our perceptions of what is injurious or beneficial to ourselves, or to the beings in whose welfare we are compelled to sympathize by the similarity of their conformation to our own." Shelley had no objection to calling the substance of the universe "God," a name matters little if one is only sure of what will be understood by it, but in a letter to Miss Hitchener he explains quite plainly that it does not answer to a God that will serve any religion that ever was or will be. He says:—

What, then, is a "God?" It is a name which expresses the unknown cause, the suppositious origin of all existence. We we speak of the soul of man, we mean that unknown cause which produces the observable effect evinced by his intelligence and bodily animation, which are in their nature conjoined, and (as we suppose, as we observe) inseparable. The word God, then, in the sense in which you take it, analogises with the universe as the soul of man to the body; as the vegetative power to vegetables, the stony power to stones. Yet were each of these adjuncts taken away, what would be the remainder? What is man without his soul? What are vegetables without their vegetative power? stones without their stony? Each of these as much constitute the essence of men, stones, etc., as much make it what it is as your God does the universe. In this sense I acknowledge a God; but merely as a synonym for the existing power of the universe.

That puts the matter well, and it is one with which an Atheist has no serious quarrel. For there is no dispute between Theist and Atheist as to existence; that is a datum common to both. It is a difference of interpretation, and Shelley's interpretation is the Atheistic one.

* * *

The Malevolence of Piety.

The French papers and reviews are paying wide tribute to the Shelley Centenary, and the *Echo de Paris* expresses its astonishment that less attention is being paid to the matter in England, and also the refusal of some places to allow statues to be erected proves that "England finds forgiveness difficult." The secret of this lack of "forgiveness" is given in what has been said above. Christian and mediævally aristocratic England can forgive anything but the two "crimes" of which Shelley was guilty. He was an Atheist and a Republican. He believed neither in an autocrat in the skies nor in his pale copy on earth. He stood for the reasonable equality of men, and the free play of reason in the criticism of established authority. At a time of reaction he could write of the national debt that it was "chiefly contracted in two libetricide wars undertaken by the privileged classes of the country; the first for the purpose of tyrannizing over one portion of their subjects (America); the second in order to extinguish the resolute spirit of attaining their rights in another" (France). And on the subject of war he could write these golden words, "War is a kind of superstition; the parade of arms and badges corrupts the imagination of men. How far more appropriate would be the symbols of an inconsolable grief, muffled drums, and melancholy music, and arms reversed, the livery of sorrow. When men mourn at funerals, for what do they mourn in comparison with the calamities with which they hasten with all circumstances of festivity to suffer and to inflict?" These were not things that pious England would be in a hurry to forgive. A lesser man our time-serving educationalists would long since have buried by sheer neglect. And even now their best endeavours appear to be given to hide the real Shelley under safe or apologetic praise.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

If you ask why you are to be honest you are in the question itself dishonoured. Because you are a man is the only answer.—John Ruskin, "Time and Tide."

The Key of the Better World.

In the twentieth chapter of First Kings there is a vivid account of the Syrian invasion of Israel with its disastrous consequences to Syria. With the historicity or unhistoricity of that event we are not now concerned, though it may be mentioned that on this subject Biblical scholars, German, Dutch, and British, are in hopeless disagreement. As the story stands in this chapter, however, the invasion extended to only two attacks, both of which ended in total failure. The first battle was fought and lost among the hills round about the capital Samaria, the defeat being most sanguinary. The servants of the king of Syria accounted for the terrible catastrophe by saying of the Israelites that "their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they." Full of confidence they laid their plans for the next attack:

And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Benhadad mustered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. And the children of Israel were mustered, and were victualled, and went against them; and the children of Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of kids; but the Syrians filled the country.

Verse 28 shows us Jehovah in his true character, a character more hellish than heavenly:

And a man of God came near and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is a god of the hills, but he is not a god of the valleys; therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the Lord.

What a horrible statement judged by any standard whatever, except, of course, that of blind pietism. For seven days the two armies simply looked at each other. Now, how did Jehovah prove that he reigned in the valleys as well as in the hills? In the most fiendish way conceivable, namely by slaying a hundred thousand Syrians in one day, and also, when the rest fled to Aphek, by causing or allowing a wall to fall upon and kill twenty-seven thousand more men. That was Jehovah's method of proving his universal presence and activity in defence of his chosen people.

Now on Sunday evening, June 18, the pulpit of Westminster Abbey was occupied by the Ven. F. B. Macnutt, Archdeacon of Leicester, who chose verse 28 in the aforementioned chapter as his text, from which he preached a remarkable sermon, which was published in the *Guardian* of June 23. The Archdeacon evidently regards that strange chapter as literally true, for he concludes that the two battles recorded therein establish the fact that God is present in the valleys as well as on the hills. To be sure, he is too wide-awake and prudent to say so in so many words, but guards himself by taking shelter behind the following evasive sentence:—

Once again Benhadad and his Syrians went down in disaster, and surrendered to Ahab and his troops, conquered by men who believed in a God who was not limited by locality, a God of the valleys as well as of the hills; a God whose power is everywhere active in the cause of righteousness and truth.

Are we to infer that every time the Israelites were victorious at war they were fighting in the cause of righteousness and truth, and that whenever they were defeated, as was often the case, the same was true of their enemies?

Archdeacon Macnutt is an exceedingly able and clear-headed man, but his theology inevitably leads him into some obviously absurd positions. He holds, for example, that in primitive religion there was no

conception of a deity who filled and transcended the universe. These are his words:—

Primitive religion had its ideas of God; but they were generally ideas of a local deity who dwelt in some locality, or was associated with some activity of Nature—a god of the tree, the wind, the sea, the mountain. To the Syrians the God of Israel was, of course, only one of many national divinities, and they conceived of him as dwelling in the hill-country, around the Israelite capital Samaria.

That is perfectly true as far as it goes, but it does not go nearly far enough. The Archdeacon ignores the fact that, at the period under consideration, the Israelite conception of God was exactly the same as the Syrian. As Sir George Adam Smith observes:—

The unit of religion was the living tribe; they were the interest and care of the Deity, with whom the individual had no part or portion except in his place as a living member of the tribe.

Sir George goes further still in the following passage:—

It is plain that to whatever heights the religion of Israel afterwards rose, it remained, before the age of the great prophets, not only similar to, but in all respects above mentioned identical with, the general Semitic religion, which was not monotheism but polytheism with an opportunity for monotheism at the heart of it—each tribe being attached to one god as to their particular Lord and Father. (*Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, pp. 130-1.)

Monotheism was reached through a long process of evolution. There was present in the Israelite mind the sense of the reality of other Gods than Jehovah. In spite of the most earnest advocacy of monotheism by the great prophets polytheism lingered on till very late. Jeremiah informs us that in the sixth century Israel worshipped a vast number of deities beside Jehovah, whilst he solemnly declared that the latter was the only living and true God. Of the truth of his declaration, however, there is not one convincing evidence. Judging by all the facts in our possession God is at best but an idea that has grown and developed in a great variety of different ways among different peoples; and we are now able to trace the idea back to its simplest and crudest forms among primitive tribes. With such facts in mind the idea of a Divine revelation is preposterous in the extreme. "If God has spoken," exclaimed Shelley, "why is the universe not convinced?" If God has revealed himself, why are there so many millions still ignorant of, and many of them courageous enough to deny, his existence?

Archdeacon Macnutt is a firm believer in the uplifting and etherealizing ministry of war. He assures us, on the authority of Mr. Lloyd George, of all men, that the Great War

scourged us to an elevation where we could see the great, everlasting things that matter to a nation, and gave us a vision there of the mountain peaks, the great peaks of honour we had forgotten, duty and patriotism clad in glittering white, and the pinnacle of sacrifice pointing like a rugged finger to heaven.

The Bishop of London and Dr. Horton indulged in similar if less daring rhetorical flights, and they, too, saw heaven-sent angels, arrayed in dazzling white, hovering inspiringly over our side of the fighting lines. But the World War came to an end, and the nation tumbled down headlong from the inebriating mount of transfiguring. What an unspeakable pity the great conflict ended so suddenly and robbed us of the vision of those enrapturing mountain peaks, with their rugged finger pointing heavenward! Sad beyond words is the result as painted by the Archdeacon of Leicester:—

There is scarcely need for me to remind you in detail, as we are nearing the anniversary of the

signing of peace, of the experiences of our valley-life these last three years. The clouds of strife and hopelessness, the mists of reaction and depression, have rolled up and swathed the valleys, and only at times, like Armistice Day with its flood of memories, or the opening of the Washington Conference with its golden promise and call to better things, have we seen the sun shining upon those mighty mountain peaks which were once our daily prospect. We have come to think of God as One who is "a very present help in trouble," who has somehow forgotten us in this confused after-the-war world.

If that is true, as from a religious point of view it easily may be, the Church's present prayer should surely be, "Dear Lord, please send us another war as soon as thou canst, and let it last another four years at least. It may incur another loss of nearly a million British lives, but we humbly remind thee, O loving Heavenly Father, that such a sacrifice would be infinitesimally small compared with the showers of blessing that would descend once more to revive thy parched heritage." Does that petition to heaven strike the reader as monstrously absurd? But the absurdity vanishes like a morning cloud in summer if the Archdeacon's teaching is true. Is it true? Look at it in the light of reason and common sense, and you will see.

The Archdeacon's sermon closes on a different note, quite as false as the one just described. The venerable gentleman says:—

My friends, it is Jesus Christ who holds the key of that new and better world which we are still seeking. We are standing before the shut gates, through which at times we can see just enough to get glimpses of what lies behind. But they will never roll open and admit us until he gives us his key.

Then why bother about it at all? Why preach and toil and weary Heaven with vain petitions? When Jesus Christ sees fit to give us that key, he will do so, but not a moment sooner. We can do nothing but patiently wait upon his will. What a gloriously soothing doctrine to a Church that has been and is a colossal failure. At various points in his eloquent discourse the Archdeacon solemnly warns us against falling into superstition, when all the time he himself is the slave of the supreme superstition of the ages. What we need to realize is that the key of the future is in our own hands, and that we alone, as members of society, can and ought to use it. J. T. LLOYD.

Slandering Swinburne.

Authors who have influence are merely those who express perfectly what other men are thinking: who reveal in people's minds ideas or sentiments which were tending to the birth. —Joubert.

By virtue of his splendid lyrical gifts, Algernon Swinburne's best work remains among the brightest gems of English literature, so rich in glorious genius and transcendent talent. Tennyson has told us that, when Byron died, it was as though the firmament had lost a mighty star, in whose vanishing the world was left in darkness. Swinburne was more to us than Byron, for he had been a living glory of our State for half a century, and the star of his genius had wheeled so long and with such majesty that we had got inured to his presence, and looked upon him as essential to the aspect of our heaven. So continuous was his influence that the intellectual life of our time runs in a channel largely of his making, and to ends that, but for him, had been shaped other than they were.

A striking instance of the provincialism of the average English reader was the comparative unpopularity of Swinburne. When the appointment of a Laureate to succeed Tennyson was under considera-

tion, Queen Victoria said to Gladstone: "I am told that Mr. Swinburne is the best poet in the country." But the choice fell upon Alfred Austin, or, as the scribes called him, "Alfred, the Little." The real reason why Swinburne's great claims on the position were totally ignored was that he sang Atheism, and was not considered respectable. At first Swinburne knew success, then abuse, followed by the ardent admiration of good judges, but he was never popular like Tennyson, or even Browning.

To students of poetry it must be startling to find that there is a growing tendency on the part of modern critics to gloss over Swinburne's heresies. Some go further, and flatly deny that the great poet was other than orthodox. M. Paul de Reul, a Belgian professor, for instance, goes so far as to accuse readers of ignorance who class Swinburne as "an immoral author, a republican, or an Atheist." The foreign critic adds: "He was in religion a Christian, like his contemporary Browning. But his was a wide Christianity." Professor de Reul may talk in this strain to his young scholars in Brussels University, but he is either weaving garlands of words, or else trying to please his Roman Catholic employers. For M. de Reul is not a hasty reader of Swinburne. He has translated many of the poet's verses into excellent French, and is in a position to realize his own Jesuitry in his critical notices of the author of *Poems and Ballads*, and *Songs Before Sunrise*.

Swinburne "was in religion a Christian," says the Catholic critic. "An ounce of civet, good apothecary!" Shelley himself never sang with greater passion than Swinburne when he was arraigning Priestcraft at the Bar of Humanity. Just listen!—

I that saw where ye trod
The dim paths of the night
Set the shadow called God
In your skies to give light;
But the morning of manhood is risen, and the
shadowless soul is in sight.

In another poem he sings:—

O lips that the live blood faints in, the leavings of
racks and rods!
O ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted
gods!
Though all men abase them before you in spirit, and
all knees bend,
I kneel not, neither adore you, but standing, look to
the end.

He is equally outspoken in his *Lines Before a Crucifix*:—

No soul that lived, wrought, and died,
Is their carrion crucified.

Note the relentless questionings in the following lines addressed to Christ:—

The nineteenth wave of the ages rolls
Now deathward since thy death and birth;
Hast thou fed full men's starved-out souls?
Hast thou brought Freedom upon earth?
Or are there less oppressions done
In this wild world under the sun?

Swinburne dips his pen in flame in his *Song in Time of Order*:—

We have done with the kisses that sting,
The thief's mouth red from the feast,
The blood on the hands of the king,
And the lie at the lips of the priest.

What fearful derision is expressed in the *Hymn of Man*:—

O Thou the Lord God of our tyrants, they call thee,
their God, by thy name,
By thy name that in hell-fire was written, and burned at
the point of thy sword,
Thou art smitten, thou God, thou art smitten; thy death
is upon thee, O Lord.
And the love-song of earth as thou diest resounds through
the wind of her wings—
Glory to man in the Highest! for man is the master of
things.

Swinburne regarded prayer as folly, and he vents his scorn in music:—

Behold there is no grief like this,
The barren blossom of thy prayer;
Thou shalt find out how sweet it is
O fools and blind, what seek ye there,
High up in the air?

Ye must have gods, the friends of men,
Merciful gods, compassionate,
And these shall answer you again,
Will ye beat always at the gate,
Ye fools of fate?

For full fifty years Swinburne expressed Freethought ideas in his poetry and prose, and his constancy is proved from the publication of *Atalanta in Calydon*, the work of his early manhood, to the august utterances of his later years. No one can doubt for an instant his passionate sincerity. To the confusion of the Belgian professor, and such as he, listen to the lyrical cry which burst from Swinburne in his *Mater Triumphalis*, one of the noblest poems in the language addressed to Liberty:—

I am the trumpet at thy lips, thy clarion,
Full of thy cry, sonorous with thy breath.

I shall burn up before thee, pass and perish,
Like haze in the sunrise on the red sea-line;
But thou from dawn to sunset shalt cherish
The thoughts that led and souls that lighted mine.

MIMNERMUS.

Shelley's Atheism.

On July 8 it will be one hundred years since Shelley, in his little *Ariel*, set sail upon his last voyage. On July 7 at the Haymarket Theatre "conspicuous admirers of the poet" will deliver brief addresses, and "distinguished actors" will recite some of his poems. Mr. J. S. Little and Mr. J. J. Robinson, honorary secretaries of the Shelley Centenary Memorial Fund, are appealing through the Press for the establishment of a Shelley Library and Museum on the lines suggested at the Horsham celebration in August, 1892. On that occasion the officiating "high pontiff," as G. W. Foote called him, struck the key-note of the proceedings when he declared that Shelley, "more than any other poet of the age, saw God in everything." Instinctively some of the other celebrants recognized that note. The honour of Shelley and of English Christianity was safe in their hands. Will there be enough Christianity and hypocrisy left in this country, in 2022, to inflict the same fate upon Swinburne or Meredith? One asks the question because contemporary opinion in 1822 was not at all hazy concerning Shelley's Atheism, and contemporary Christian taste followed closely in the wake of that opinion.

Those who are eager to embrace the poet while keeping the Atheist at arm's length, contend that the Shelley of *The Necessity of Atheism* and *Queen Mab*, associated himself with the prevailing revolt against all the established orthodoxies, but that the maturer Shelley passionately proclaimed the existence of a Supreme Spirit, and may have gradually developed into a good Christian. This last contention could not be put forward by any intelligent student who is out for the facts, though it would require a volume to quote all the passages that refute it.

In May, 1812, Daniel Isaac Eaton was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment in Newgate, and to stand two hours in the pillory, for publishing the Third Part of Paine's *Age of Reason*—"a blasphemous libel." This savage sentence made a deep impression on Shelley. He refers to it in the *Notes to Queen Mab*, and in June, 1812, he addressed his

stirring protest to the judge who tried Eaton. This *Letter to Lord Ellenborough* reads as fresh and apposite to-day as if it had been written in 1922 and addressed to Mr. Justice Avory.

If the law *de hæretico comburendo* had not been formally repealed, I conceive that, from the promise held out by your lordship's zeal, we need not despair of beholding the flames of persecution rekindled in Smithfield. Even now the lash that drove Descartes and Voltaire from their native country, the chains which bound Galileo, the flames which burned Vanini, again resound. And where? In a nation that presumptuously calls itself the sanctuary of freedom.

The Revolt of Islam (1817-1818) cannot be regarded as a product of the poet's immature period, yet it is saturated with the spirit of antagonism to all forms of religion and theism. Through the whole poem like a blood-red vein pulses the idea that God exists only as the reflection of man's mind and mood, and that faith in him and his priests is one of "a ghastly brood, conceived of Lethe's sullen water."

What then is God? Some moon-struck sophist stood
Watching the shade from his own soul upthrown
Fill heaven and darken earth, and in such mood
The Form he saw and worshipped was his own,
His likeness in the world's vast mirror shewn;
And 'twere an innocent dream, but that a faith
Nursed by fear's dew of poison, grows thereon,
And that men say, God has appointed Death
On all who scorn his will to wreak immortal wrath.

When "each raging votary" of the world's faiths exclaims "Our God alone is God!" one fiendish voice is heard above the rest:—

He was a Christian Priest from whom it came,
A zealous man, who led the legions west
With words which faith and pride had steeped in flame,
To quell the rebel Atheists; a dire guest
Even to his friends was he, for in his breast
Did hate and guile lie watchful, intertwined,
Twin serpents in one deep and winding nest;
He loathed all faith beside his own, and pined
To wreak his fear of God in vengeance on mankind.

Prometheus Unbound (1820) does not belong to the poet's immature period. From what is Prometheus "unbound," if not from religion and its myriad scourges, from the terror that "survives the ruin it has gorged"? Æschylus could reconcile the victim, impaled and bleeding, with "the Oppressor of mankind." Not so Shelley.

The moral interest of the fable, which is so powerfully sustained by the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus, would be annihilated if we could conceive of him as unsaying his high language and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary. (*Preface.*)

Francis Thompson characterizes the poem as "the greatest and most prodigal exhibition of Shelley's powers, this amazing lyric world." But it is much more. It is faith in the ultimate triumph of a human type such as the poet conceived that it might be—a triumph over fear, hypocrisy and custom, which make the minds of even "the loftiest"

The fanes of many a worship now outworn.

The Man is there all the time, struggling to be "free, uncircumscribed," and at last shakes off the sway exercised over his mind and heart by the frown of Jove.

From the dust of creeds outworn,
From the tyrant's banner torn,
Gathering round me, onward borne,

came a mingled cry of Freedom, Hope, Death, and Victory. But one note was heard above them all,

One sound beneath, around, above,
Was moving; 'twas the soul of love.

In a letter written at Pisa on April 11, 1822, Shelley expresses agreement with Moore's repudiation of "the doctrines of the French, and Material Philosophy"; but even these "are better than Christianity." In

another letter, dated June 29 of the same year, he writes:—

The destiny of man can scarcely be so degraded that he was born only to die; and if such should be the case, delusions, especially the gross and preposterous ones of the existing religion, can scarcely be supposed to exalt it. If every man said what he thought, it could not subsist a day.

Where, in his prose writings, Shelley seems to look toward a possible future life, there is nearly always some qualifying statement similar to that just cited. "I hope, but my hopes are not unmixed with fear, for what may befall this inestimable spirit when we appear to die." Even in his poetry this hope is "the desire of the moth for the star," not a settled conviction. It is Virgil's *lacrimæ rerum*, the tears that belong to all things human and well up from the very sense of mortality.

When the lamp is shattered,
The light in the dust lies dead—
When the cloud is scattered,
The rainbow's glory is shed.

Adonais, written in memory of Keats, has provided the majority of texts for those who assure us—often very seriously—that Shelley was no materialist. Not for the world would I grudge any lover of the poet this source of overflowing gratification. Shelley himself described *Adonais* as "a highly-wrought piece of art." Francis Thompson preferred it to *Lycidas*, which alone among English threnodies, competes with it. "Only one thing," he says, "prevents *Adonais* from being ideally perfect: its lack of Christian hope." It is all to the good that a Roman Catholic poet should feel this. Others see in the radiant majesty of the poem Shelley's unwavering belief in the unity underlying all things, in that Nature which, like the West Wind, "moving everywhere," is "destroyer and preserver." She may be interpreted now as Power, now as Spirit; but she is One—eternal, self-existing, uncreated. VIATOR.

Fried Souls.

WHO has not heard of fried sole? It is one of the greatest delicacies. But a great deal depends on the cooking. A heavy hand may dry it up to insipidity, or soften it with fat into nascousness. When, however, it is cooked to a turn, and nicely sprinkled with lemon juice, it is a dish for the gods, and might be washed down with ambrosia.

Freethought readers will not blame us for this little excursion into gastronomy. It is only the asceticism of religion that makes a man ashamed of taste in eating. When the greatest and healthiest poet in the world devised a toast for a banquet, he wrote, "May good digestion wait on appetite, and health on both." We have not the slightest doubt that Shakespeare enjoyed a good dinner; it is also a thousand to one that he was a connoisseur in wines; though we imagine he knew when to refrain, and did not make the "good creature" an "enemy to steal away his brains."

Some people have no objection to good eating and drinking, but a mortal objection to puns. "Sir," said Dr. Johnson, "a man who would make a pun would pick a pocket." He would have modified this dictum if he had known Tom Hood. Perhaps the ponderous sage of Fleet Street—"Old Dread-Devil," as Cobbett called him—had been pestered by small punsters, always lying in wait for mere verbal analogies. Such punsters are the bane of society. They should be heavily taxed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. But everyone is entitled to a certain allowance of weakness; and, for the sake of the "fried," at least, we hope our most relentless critics

will pardon us for the pun in "souls." Anyhow, a bad, bold editor will sacrifice his soul (there we are again, but it was an accident) for a "fetching" title. And having made this admission, we put on a brave front, and defy all our censors.

After this classical exordium, which, if it were imitated in sermons, might help to keep congregations awake, we proceed to tackle our thesis, in the hope that we may furnish more hints to the pulpiteers of Christendom.

Human beings have been fried in this world, generally by the friends of heaven, for the glory and honour of God. At the stake they were *roasted*, and in hot oil they were *boiled*, but on an iron frame they were *fried*. Their souls, however—presuming they had souls—were only tortured indirectly, through the agony of their bodies. Human, and even ecclesiastical, malice was incapable of reaching their "glassy essence." But the Grand Inquisitor of the universe is able to burn "both body and soul in hell." And he has sworn that he will do it, and the oath of a god, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, is irreversible. Righteous or otherwise makes no difference. It is a question of consistency. As old Shylock says:—

An oath, an oath, I have an oath in heaven!
Shall I lay perjury upon my soul?
No, not for Venice.

Jehovah, the Bible god, that is, the Christian god, has a nose for a "sweet savour." He does not eat the fried souls, which are his special and registered delicacy. He only smells them, and therefore they are eternally cooked without ever being done. The steam of their cooking ascendeth for ever and ever. And all the angels in heaven share in this spiritual repast. There is a great gulf between the upper circles and the pit, the dining room and the kitchen; but the distance is not beyond vision and hearing; witness the parable of Dives and Lazarus. St. John, or the author of Revelation, being temporarily admitted into glory, held his nostrils over the reek of the damned, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Many of the old preachers, also, contended that a great part of the happiness of the saved in heaven consisted in viewing the torments of the damned in hell, and that it would be a reflection on God's justice if he deprived them of this treat, as the relish of any pleasure is always heightened by a sight of the opposite misery. It may be concluded, therefore, that while manna is "angels' food," and sustains their corporeal structure, their more ethereal part is nourished by the "sweet savour" of fried souls.

The *chef* in Jehovah's kitchen is the Devil. His wages are nothing a year, paid quarterly. He was once a member of the celestial aristocracy, but, being disaffected towards the throne, he was cast down amongst the wretched democracy, where he is doomed to preside over

that immortal fry
Of almost everybody born to die.

Lord Byron, whose verse this is, expected to join the "fry" himself, if there were any truth in the Scripture. And the reader will observe that he did not use "fry" simply through the exigency of rhyme. It was exactly the right word for the occasion. His lordship evidently had the very idea which we are seeking to convey. He is at one with us—or we are at one with him—as to the *frying*.

Robert Burns, the immortal poet and blasphemer of Scotland, whose lusty manhood offended the hypocrites as his strong intelligence frightened the godly—Robert Burns did not speak of *frying* in Hades, but he used another term of cookery. In one of his two masterpieces, he exclaims:—

O Tam, O Tam, thou'lt get thy fairin';
In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin'.

Yet, in this sense, the roasting is so much like frying, that we may almost regard the terms as synonymous. Burns and Byron would have shaken hands over the difference, and a chat between them on the subject would have been worth listening to. Oh the mirth, the wit, the satire, the devilish abandon of such a conversation! Jehovah himself, and all his holy angels, might have listened at the keyhole, and found a joyous relief from the horrible monotony of heaven.

Bless the poets, the true ones, whose hearts were too big for the vile absurdities of religion. How refreshing it is to turn to them after a strong dose of divinity. Happily their tenderness has leavened the lump of humanity, and the frightful doctrine of hell-fire and everlasting torment is rapidly perishing. With it will go—it is only a question of time—all the rest of what Shelley called "the bloody faith." It is no longer conceivable to any sane intelligence that men will be the everlasting victims of their creator. We have heard the death-knell of Jehovah, the old savage god who delighted in the smell of burnt offerings, and mocked at human calamities. And once free from the awful nightmare, we can laugh at what terrified us. Yes, the monstrous apparition has sunk into a lighted turnip, and we pelt it with stones.

G. W. FOOTE.

Acid Drops.

An inter-denominational crusade is being conducted at Deptford to prove to the people that the only thing that will remedy the after-the-war effects is the "spirit of Jesus Christ." It is quite affecting to find the clergy of all denominations agreed upon this. It is true there is a nothing-like-leather atmosphere about it, and that may cause the thoughtful onlooker to smile. He may also reflect that from 1914 to 1919 these same clergy were also united in preaching that the only way to carry on the war was by this same "spirit of Jesus Christ." It does for anything, and no matter what is afoot the clergy come forward with the same remedy. It suits the most varied complaints. A parson preaching religion is like the average militarist preaching war or preparations for war. In the vast majority of cases neither would command attention on intellectual grounds, and they are bound to preach the only thing they can supply as a condition of keeping themselves before the public.

Catering for a peculiar public *John O' London's Weekly* has two columns on "Aphorisms." One aphorism of Mr. G. K. Chesterton's is as follows:—"Reason is itself a matter of faith. It is an act of faith to assert that our thoughts have any relation to reality at all." This may pass for wisdom with those who can see so much in a bit of bread, and in the past burned or beheaded people who did not possess the same vision. We think that water wets and fire burns, and our thoughts have enough relation to reality to prevent us getting wet or burned. To ascribe them to an act of faith is to play to a religious obscurantism that is already sufficiently dangerous.

The "balance of power" theory has reduced Europe to the state of a china shop after a visit by a bull. General N. Golovin and Admiral A. D. Bubnov, with the sublimity of wooden-headed asses now recommend this "balance of power" cure for all as "the best guarantee for the preservation of the present compromises in the Pacific." Disarmament might make the slaughter industry less busy and throw these gentlemen out of employment; as it is we may yet find our gallant lads in the Sandwich Islands defending their homes in Tooting.

The University of Oxford conferred the degree of D.D. on "General" Booth the First. The latest recipient of the degree is Cardinal Bourne, our latter-day Rhadamanthus. We live in an age of titles and honours, graded to

meet all sorts and conditions of ambition. They supply, a very real inspiration to our English *Kultur*.

The first wedding ceremony performed by a real woman in an English place of worship has just been recorded at a Maida Vale church. Previously, many such ceremonies were performed by individuals that looked like women.

The Rev. Thomas Phillips, B.A., ex-president of the Baptist Union, declares that "the introduction of Sunday games will demoralize our Sunday schools and weaken the last hold which the Churches have upon the democracy of London." This objection is at least honest. But it is something more. It is a valuable comment on the plea for a close Sunday in the interests of the "toiling masses," and an indication of the Churches' inability to compete, in a fair field, with secular pursuits and attractions.

The Bishop of Exeter, in his idiotic advice for the production of more children, will be pleased to know on the authority of the *Times Literary Supplement* that, according to a review dealing with the German War Ministry, "the cry for more men began directly war was declared." Without going abroad to prove that this gentleman is talking through his hat—or his nose—he might look at the list of suicides by those who cannot find work in this victorious country. But the habit of carelessness has been well developed by theologians because they are never compelled by their sheep to prove anything, not even to produce their God of whom they prate so much, nor give us the chemical formula of the Trinity.

If it were possible to begin at the beginning with a man like the Bishop of Exeter it would be worth while to note that this gentleman's estimation of mankind is low, base, and contemptible, and thoroughly Christian, and a logical conclusion derived from the downward and negative theory of the fall of man. How man can rise by slaughtering his kind in thousands is beyond the comprehension of anyone not a bishop who is foremost in the march towards the end of civilization.

It is to be hoped that all the community who disagree with Trade Unionism will modify their views now that it has been demonstrated that its aim is essentially at one with Christian teaching. Mr. Walter H. Armstrong, the author, has the assistance of Arthur Henderson, M.P., in a preface to his booklet *Christianity and Trade Unionism*. Mediocrity is sure of a bone from the rich man's table if it will pay lip-service to Christianity and assist in the game of pointing to the promised land for the working man; the leading lights of Christianity and Trade Unionism wallow in emotionalism which passes for thought.

The conference of evangelicals at Coleshill, Birmingham, is of the unanimous opinion that the "desperate need of the world was to make Christ known," etc. As ordinary citizens of the world, and fastening our collar at the front, we thought the desperate need of the world was to make it less of a menagerie, to build houses, to supply good food and clothing in abundance to all, even to protect Royalty from the Press—but it seems that we are mistaken. The Birmingham mist gulpers will have none of it, and this contempt of theirs for the real issues of life will make more Bolsheviks than Lenin and Trotsky put together.

Accepting the statement that two caterpillars went into the Ark, does it not seem somewhat blasphemous that an aeroplane is now used to kill these insects that do no more useful service to society than organized Christianity? God made two caterpillars, and man made an aeroplane (temporarily not on active service) to kill their progeny. Having stated the question, we toss it to the debating societies that gather round churches. Wedded to their *a priori* theories on God we have no doubt that

he will be acquitted, and, as serious men of the world, we trust that steam hammers for nut-cracking will soon be found in every home. It only requires the Press to popularize the idea!

The *Times* last week said that Englishmen fear to manifest emotion, and that "the religious life of many suffers from this dread of feeling." As a piece of psychological analysis, this is indeed a gem of the purest water. We are often told that the Englishman does not wear his emotions, and particularly his religious emotions, on his sleeve. Yet at nearly every available street corner one can hear men and women pouring forth disgusting emotional gush, and see them swaying to and fro under the influence of equally disgusting "hymns." And it is blasphemy to laugh at them! It may hurt their feelings.

It is some years ago since Christ was supposed to ride on an ass—but don't his professional followers ride on asses' backs?—and the sight of one of his enthusiasts bawling in Burton-on-Trent market place on a hot Sunday was somewhat pathetic. Leather-lunged, he was holding forth to a few tired men and children; the words "love of God" and "power of Jesus Christ" reached the passer-by what time the smoke and steam were belching from the brewery chimneys. This apostle was holding forth from a fine motor-van, and it seemed that "massed production" of Christians was the aim of this follower of the humble carpenter, who, according to the Ebionites, never made anything but little birds of mud and a lot of trouble.

At a recent meeting at the Albert Hall, Judge Rutherford, who hails from the Great Republic, predicted that in 1925 the dead will rise, and undertakers will put up their shutters. Life-insurance companies will be more interested than ever, but will turn their attention to annuities only. From Australasian files we gather that similar expositors of Holy Writ have been attracting crowds of eager listeners in Australia and New Zealand.

These apostles of culture come from America. It must be admitted, however, that they find little difficulty in plumbing the depths of the English mind. Mr. S. K. Ratcliffe, writing in the July *Contemporary*, frames a scathing indictment both of intellectual conditions, and of free thought generally, in the U.S.A. The new America, some of her own citizens deplore, "has ceased to care for any kind of freedom." In the educational life, obscurantism is rife, and the ruling class is bent upon holding back "the irresistible tide of knowledge." There has been an unmistakable wave of Second Advent sensationalism. Many of the Baptist ministers demand specific adhesion to "fundamentals," and they put the Second Advent among the foremost of these. It is a repulsive picture, but only one such in the history of the Bible as a character-builder.

In the House of Commons during a recent division on an amendment to the land laws, a number of Labour members sang: "God Made the Land for the People." We should like to know how these M.P.'s discovered God's intention, and why he does not give effect to it? We are credibly informed that there are among our Labour members varying degrees both of intelligence and of devotion.

"My religion," says Lord Leverhulme, "is one of joy and happiness." He likes a little sunlight in his spiritual provender.

In a picturesque account of the Solomon Islands an Australian writer says: "Most of the worthy citizens would trade you a wife for a stick of tobacco." Does this indicate that the islands are happily named?

A London newspaper is distributing tickets for the Calcutta Sweepstake, and informs its readers that in

applying they should mention whether "from Mr., Mrs., Miss, Rev., Very Rev., or Right Rev." The last three titles comprise the bulk of the clergy in this country. Probably there are not enough archbishops to deserve mention.

The Rev. R. H. Shepherd thinks it impossible the Church should have progressed had it been founded on a lie. It all depends upon what one means by a lie. No one is absurd enough to believe that every follower of the Christian Church *knew* that his religion was based upon either a lie or a myth. That would be an absurdity. The chief thing for a Church such as Christianity to persist is, not that it should be based upon a conscious lie, but that the vast majority of those who follow it should believe it to be based on truth. And all history proves that there is no absurdity and no falsehood that cannot command the allegiance of vast numbers of people. When, only a few years ago, Horatio Bottomley and the Bishop of London told the people of England the lie about the angel of Mons, there were not wanting numbers who were prepared to believe it. Belief is one thing, verification is another. And a glance through the records of any lunatic asylum will not fail to prove that the most sincere conviction is not incompatible with the most foolish and the most false of teachings.

And, after all, Mr. Shepherd does not seem to be quite clear of the charge of misleading his followers. When he puts forward his plea, he must know—unless he is more stupid than we think—that his congregation will take it that he accepts the biblical stories in all their glaring absurdity. Would he say quite honestly that he believes, as a statement of actual historic and objective fact that a man once arose from the dead, that he did actually walk over the waves, that he was born without the aid of a human father, and that he performed the miracle of turning water into wine, etc. If he will say as much quite plainly he will be acting honestly towards those who follow him. Otherwise he is simply misleading them under cover of a few shallow generalisations that are of no value, save as an aid to keep a stupid superstition alive.

Missionary workers, says Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, are needed in heaven. We should be happy to compile a list of some home missionaries whom we should much like to see where they are so much needed. He also says that Christ is seen by the occupants of the "spheres," once. He has never heard of anyone seeing him more than once. We wonder whether evidence of identification was asked for or produced. But Sir Arthur's record is easily beaten by some on earth. There are plenty here who have seen him more than once. Some of these are dead, but some are living—either in or out of an asylum.

The *Church Times* suggests that the National Anthem should be played before a performance instead of at the end. Its reason is that at the end people go home without paying attention; at the beginning they would be able to treat it with "becoming reverence." But no one is compelled to go home before the orchestra has finished grinding out the stereotyped verse, and if people wish to display reverence no one will prevent them. Reverence at the whip's end does not seem worth much. We suggest that a more effective way would be to compel every person before witnessing a performance to sing a verse of the National Anthem through the booking office window. It would be worth quite as much as a "reverence" displayed because people can see no chance of dodging it.

From an American paper we learn that the Russian Government has exempted the treasures in Roman Catholic Churches, from the measures taken against the other Churches. This alliance of Sovietism with Roman Catholicism is one of the ugliest features of the situation. We are still wondering at the silence of the Communists in England on this matter. Perhaps they have had orders not to speak.

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.

G. BAKER.—Glad to know that you are pegging away. Judging from the South African papers that reach us, a dose of Freethought of more than the usual strength. It is a pity that the *Freethinker* has not a wider circulation in South Africa. We have many readers there, but its circulation would prove an antidote to much of the religious nonsense that is current.

INDEPENDENT.—We do not know anything of the person whose letter you enclose.

ELECTRON.—Dr. Batten may be quite an authority on Röntgen Rays, and in any case he is in talking about that subject, dealing with a matter on which something is known. But when he says that "life must be something apart from the material universe, a separate creation," he is talking absolute nonsense. It is noticeable that his "must" comes in just where knowledge breaks down. An adequate answer is to state the exact reverse. One statement is quite as good as the other.

J. REID (Lanark).—We congratulate both yourself and ourselves on your having secured six new readers. Such help is timely and welcome. We hope that your example will inspire others. There are thousands of readers waiting if we will only make up our minds to get them.

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

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Sugar Plums.

The Shelley centenary is already showing well above the surface in the English Press. Last week Mr. R. C. Trevelyan contributed to the *New Statesman* a long review of *Epipsychidion* under the well-chosen title of "The Poetry of Ecstasy." The *Nation's* article, "Cor Cordium," is a fine study of the poet's personality. Reference is made to interesting contemporary estimates by those who knew Shelley at different periods of his life. Hogg, the friend of his youth, said that the vigour of Shelley's genius was "almost celestial," and the "purity and sanctity of his life most conspicuous." Trelawny said that "Shelley loved everything better than himself." "The least worldly-minded person I ever met," was Byron's summing-up of the character of his brother poet.

The late G. W. Foote loved his poets with a big and generous love, but perhaps to none of them did he open

his heart more freely than to Shelley. Those who heard his lecture on the poet in September, 1908, when he reviewed an article by Francis Thompson that had just appeared in the *Dublin Review*, will remember it for a long time. There is a pathetic interest in noting, too, especially at a moment when the Blasphemy law still claims its victims, that Foote wrote from Holloway Gaol on May 24, 1883: "I have been reading my beloved Shelley, the radiant seraph of our mundane heaven."

At a recent sale, a letter from Shelley mentioning *The Necessity of Atheism* fetched £142. This is not an advertisement for the "selected prose writings" of the poet in these pages, but merely a record of what is paid for a little of the dust of a great man who cannot be measured by the yard-stick of a Primitive Methodist—nor the price paid for the letter.

We feel that we cannot avoid congratulating the speakers at the dinner of the Rationalist Press Association, a report of whose speeches appears in the *Literary Guide*. It was only natural that each of the speakers should refer to the latest prosecution for blasphemy and the need for repealing the Blasphemy Laws. All the same the careful manner in which all mention of the N.S.S. and the *Freethinker*, both responsible for the defence, for the spending of over £400 in fighting the case, for the publicity given to the prosecution, and without which the prosecution would have gone its course practically unnoticed—the careful way in which all mention of this paper and the N.S.S. was avoided by the speakers, rouses admiration. That, we suppose, is the penalty one pays for representing the fighting Freethinkers of Britain.

It may be added to the above that the N.S.S. and the *Freethinker* have never failed to fight single-handed every blasphemy prosecution, where fighting was possible, and have spent many hundreds of pounds in the fighting. It is this constant warfare that has kept the crime of the blasphemy laws before the public, and which will be one of the principal causes of their ultimate repeal, just as the action of the same bodies—for in this matter the Secular Society Limited is identical with the N.S.S.—fought and won for all Freethinkers the right to receive requests for the advancement of their cause. Fighting Freethinkers are, naturally, the most obnoxious to Christians. The latter would have things pretty much their own way otherwise.

The Right Honourable Edward Shortt, Secretary of State for Home Affairs, having granted the N.S.S. the right to nominate a representative to visit Mr. J. W. Gott "for the purposes of moral assistance and guidance," Mr. A. D. McLaren undertook this duty. He saw the prisoner in the Wormwood Scrubs gaol on June 29. Mr. Gott is in the gaol hospital and is in excellent spirits. He speaks very highly of the general treatment he has received. The monotony of prison life is relieved somewhat by a first-class lecture or concert every three or four weeks, and by access to a well-stocked library. On the door of each cell is a card giving certain personal particulars concerning the occupant. In Mr. Gott's case the word "Atheist" in red letters announces his "religion," and he sometimes hears the passengers in the corridor asking what an Atheist is. He is the only one in the institution. All the rest are quite religious. We Freethinkers do not get anything like value for the money we spend on keeping up prisons. It practically all goes in providing hospitality for Christians. And they haven't the decency to thank us for what we do. They ought to be more grateful. Mr. Gott sends his goodwill to all inquiring friends.

Commenting on his half-hour in the gaol, Mr. McLaren said that the sight of a fellow creature, placarded with a number, wearing the garb of the broad arrow, and undergoing incarceration for what is called blasphemy, was a convincing proof of the close connection in England between "crime" and punishment. It would not, he told us, be among his most cherished experiences, but it had its lasting lesson of real value. He thought of other times

and occasions. A similar visit might show some of the nation's latter-day apostles of "sweetness and light" how much that is essentially Christian still flourishes in their midst.

For some weeks we have been sold out of Bishop Montgomery Brown's *Communism and Christianity*. A fresh supply has now been received from America, and all orders that have been received will now be discharged. As the book is over 200 pages (illustrated) and is sold at 1s., postage extra, it need hardly be said that the book is sold as a purely propagandist effort on the part of the writer. It is a drastic criticism of Christianity from the point of view of Marxism and Darwinism. The author is a Bishop of the American Episcopal Church, and as he has not given up his "orders," despite his avowed Atheism, there was talk, a little time ago, of the Church authorities bringing him to trial. There was also an agitation in certain papers in favour of his being prosecuted under the civil law for blasphemy. But neither charge has yet materialized.

We regret to hear from Mrs. Brown that her husband met with an accident lately in which he broke both his legs just above the ankles. We sincerely hope that he will have a speedy return to complete health, although one would think that at best the illness would be a lengthy one. Anyway he has our good wishes. We could better spare some other bishop.

We have received from Mr. Whitehead an account of his northern tour, but as we had already received and had in type a report from Mr. Fothergill, we must content ourselves with merely adding Mr. Whitehead's testimony to the general success of the meetings, and his thanks to Messrs. Bartram, Bates, and Fothergill, and the Misses Peacock and Armstrong for services rendered. We can quite believe that Tyneside is an excellent place for work, and doubtless the local friends will take steps to consolidate the work done. Other parts of the country that would like to avail themselves of Mr. Whitehead's services should apply to the Secretary, Miss Vance, as early as possible. All that the Executive asks is for local friends to undertake the necessary arrangements. The financial side of the visits are attended to from headquarters.

We are glad to see a lengthy letter in the *South London Observer* from Mr. A. B. Moss criticising the paper's description of Thomas Paine as an "Agnostic." Paine was, of course, a Deist, but we imagine the editor thought he was behaving handsomely to Paine in calling him an Agnostic in place of the usual misdescription of him as an Atheist. In Paine's day the Agnostic had not been born. Not to be a Christian was to be outside the area of respectability, and there was nothing for it but to either believe in God, or to disbelieve in him and to be an Atheist. "Agnostic" belongs to a much later date, and has been of great comfort to those who do not like to feel that the Christian is throwing bricks at them. To those who trouble little whether the Christian thinks well or ill of them "Atheist," clear-cut, uncompromising, and defiant, still serves. Mr. Moss concludes his letter by saying that "when Englishmen view his life without passion or prejudice they will be bound to come to the conclusion that Thomas Paine was one of the greatest men this country has produced." And with that we quite agree.

The Glasgow Branch of the N.S.S. hold their next ramble (the fifth) to-day, July 9, when they will visit "Cadder Wilderness." Members and friends who intend to be present will please meet at Lambhill car terminus, bringing their own refreshments. Tea will be provided.

We are asked to announce that a Neo-Malthusian Conference is arranged to take place at the Kingsway Hall from July 11 to 14. There will also be a public meeting in connection with the conference in the evening of the 13th, in the same hall, at 8. Tickets 2s. 6d. and 1s.

Literature During the Great War.

In writing on literature, especially that of a given period, the first essential is to possess a sense of mental detachment from the many points of view which serve the purpose and stimulate the energies of those who aspire to the art of writing as the means whereby they present to us their conception of the cosmic scheme and the strange and peculiar position assigned therein to man.

This sense of isolation is a distinct advantage, as it enables one to look out on the world and its conflicting opinions with a feeling of irresponsibility and comparative calm, and, though the first stage of this intellectual aloofness may tend to a cynical frame of mind, fuller knowledge does much to awaken a feeling of sympathy for those who are the victims of a "Babel of tongues," and must of necessity go through life with incessant chattering in their ears.

When the war started it was only natural for such a person to seek seclusion and safety from the various elements which endangered one's life, and now, in the breathing and breeding spaces that must ensue before we may have another Great Slaughter it will be interesting and perhaps curious to learn what the great "literary minds" have thought about it, and whether any of them have guessed the true inwardness of the fearful struggle between the nations unparalleled in the history of the world. It will be only necessary to deal with the works of special authors who write for posterity, with the guns booming, and every opportunity afforded them for a close survey of the fight at close quarters, including the grim sequels to be seen in the field hospitals, and the fitting punishment meted out to the shattered cathedrals wherein blessings were called down for the success of the rival armies in their eager haste to meet in the eternal home of their Heavenly Father.

We will now open a war-book, written by H. G. Wells, entitled *Mr. Britling Sees it Through*, and if we are to judge by the verdict of "big sales" and popular favour, surely here we have the gifted oracle who possesses the keen insight into the motives of men and nations. On reading it we find it is an account of the Great War, written at fever heat, vinegar bandages round the head, publisher's telegrams demanding express speed, yelling, vulgar news-boys, and telephones all over the house. An Englishman, a German and an American stagger and bluster through its pages. They are all noble fellows, the "salt of the earth," in fact, and they traverse the volume in typical American "quick lunch" time.

The unfortunate reader of this description of the Great War is bumped and jolted along in a perfect frenzy, and if he happens to be a Britisher he will visibly expand with self-satisfaction at the inflation of greatness pumped into him by Mr. Wells.

"Oh, but we are a mighty people," snorts from every page, and in the end we are told that "God's Purpose in this World had been achieved through this murderous agency."

Mr. Britling sympathizes with his German friend, Herr Heinrich in the loss of his son, seeing that he had lost one of his own who had gone out for the same purpose of mutual destruction. This is the only bit of real humour in the book. But still it is refreshing to learn from H. G. Wells that he can see the working of a "Divine Purpose" in the fact that the son of Mr. Britling "was shot through the eye, and the bullet ploughed through his brain." Perhaps he meant that the bullet reached the right billet, and Mr. Wells has only written so that intelligent posterity can perfectly understand him.

However, we may be too dense to discover his meaning, but one has to come to the conclusion that the

vision of Mr. Wells has been dimmed by poring over medical statistics at the London hospitals, and that it would be well for him to cease writing in a back-yard as the horizon is limited, and there is a world beyond, which is even larger than the British Empire.

A humorous book, entitled *Bindle*, by Herbert Jenkins, seemed to be in great demand, and the same glorification of the British spirit is found in every page. Nothing could hurt *Bindle*. He could fall out of an aeroplane from any height and walk away unconcerned. His explanation was that "he was of the bulldog breed." *Bindle* was a lucky fellow. Herbert Jenkins wrote him up, and the same Herbert published him. A man is in luck when he can publish his own books and get his chief character to go into the street catching German bombs during an air raid on the back of his neck. He does not tell us quite so much, but that must have been *Bindle's* intention.

Such a book should not have appeared at a time of national mourning, though money might be made out of the impossible antics of a cockney clown. The book might be funny, but so would the situation be if the broker's men called at a house and found an undertaker measuring the tenant who owed the rent.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton in his volume, entitled the *Superstition of Divorce* deals with a phase of domestic warfare, and tells us how divorce will destroy our liberty, our freedom, and reduce us all to slavery. Mr. Chesterton is a Roman Catholic, and is only competent to deal with the last item he has mentioned. He writes of marriage as being the last home of liberty, thus proving his childish acceptance of the restraining influence imposed upon him by Mother Church. His mental and vocal range is strictly limited, his vision is not his own, and when he looks out on the world it is with a fettered intellect, which is an insult to those who are mentally free, and a weapon of presumption cunningly utilized by the Church that belongs to him. It is a common error to state that an individual belongs to a certain religious persuasion, and that is the reason why I wish to establish the real side of the ownership as regards Mr. Chesterton. As an antidote to this kind of thing one's thoughts naturally fly to George Bernard Shaw, and with a merry twinkle in the eyes one looks about for the literary contributions of the Modern Quixote, during the eventful period under review. But, Alas!!!

One finds the output strangely limited. His opportunities were tremendous, and the World was waiting to hear him scream. He led off with sarcastic gibes which jarred on the nerves of Patriotism. Some friend of his wisely hinted that patriots could shoot straight, even at the keeper of an intellectual "lunatic asylum," so he trimmed his beard and sought safety in silence "for the duration."

The *Outspoken Essays* of the Gloomy Dean of Saint Paul's make good reading. He can probe the depths of Materialism, and he must often dream that King Demos is in power and has allotted him the uncongenial task of cabbage-planting.

He seems to yearn for something akin to the German jack-boot for the people of this country, and he will never be seen in sackcloth and ashes.

They say that Christ "wept over Jerusalem" when his followers were only simple illiterate fishermen. If he could come along now and observe the "educated" band of men who exploit him we should hear such a howling as would make the Salvation Army sound quite respectable in comparison. In this connection it is a great pity that the *Life of General Booth*, by Harold Begbie, ever saw the light. One takes the volume with much misgiving. He pictures to himself the Christ who took "no heed of the morrow," and who spoke with such beautiful language of the "lilies of the field." The man who was hated by the "Gloomy Deans" of his day, and voiced the judgment

that silenced them. "Let him that is without stain cast the first stone." The man who played with little children, and was to them as a gentle upgrown brother. What a great pity it is that he did not walk the shores of Galilee with a soft-eyed maiden on his arm, live out the full life of a man, and pass on like thousands of others who dedicate their lives to nature, and have no time or inclination to add to the brain-storm of the world which has always been the objective of the "Great ones" of the earth. One cannot help thinking that, had he spent his time whispering "sweet nothings" to some fair one under the placid light of the moon, we might have been spared the gruesome recital of man torturing his fellow-man, with scaffolds raised on high, and fire and sword vying with each other in the attempt to "purify" this unfortunate world "IN HIS NAME."

What a relief it would have been if we had never known of those fanatical Puritans who garbed him in the conception of their own hideous mentality to the accompaniment of frenzied shrieks and howls on the fate of the "sinner" if he refuses to be "saved."

In his book *Begbie* quotes a letter from the "General" to his wife which shows this peculiar trend of mind:—

I want a sermon on the Flood, one on Jonah, and one on the Judgment. Send me some bare thoughts; some clear, startling outlines. Nothing moves the people like the terrific. They must have hell-fire flashed before their eyes or they will not move. Last night I preached a sermon on Christ weeping over sinners, and only one came forward, although several confessed to much holy feeling and influence.

What a comforting thought for the Freethinker that, bad as the Christians may be, they have provided us with a glorious alternative in the refined seclusion of a hell as compared with the horrors of a heaven inhabited by men like Booth and others of that ilk, who are staking claims in that illusory "land beyond the skies."

AGNES WEEDON.

(To be Concluded.)

The People of Half-Way House.

A FABLE.

The world is full of doleful creatures, who move about demanding our sympathy. I have nothing to offer them but doses of logic, and stern commands to move on or fall back. Catholics in distress about Infallibility; Protestants devoting themselves to the dismal task of paring down the dimensions of this miracle, and reducing the credibility of that one.....sentimental sceptics, who, after labouring to demolish what they call the chimera of superstition, fall to weeping as they remember they have now no lies to teach their children. —*Augustine Birrell.*

FOR many moons I dwelt in Half-way House; and although I am by nature kindly, and although the Timid Folk—who, as you know, dwell there—always treated me with great hospitality, I am going to be so indiscreet as to reveal a little of their lives to you; and I shall do this, not from any selfish motive, but, as I believe, in the interests of the Timid Folk themselves.

Half-way House is built on the hillside of Doubt, half-way (as the name implies) between the valley of Superstition and the mountain tops of Reason; it is built of make-believe and is founded on the sands of expediency. Its inhabitants are, for the most part, well-meaning folk—at least so I found them—more to be pitied than blamed; and although I have little sympathy with them now, I realize that many of them had spent much time in the valley of Superstition, and had only reached the doubtful security of Half-way House after a long and bitter struggle. Some of them still bore the scars of the conflict, and these would sometimes sit and gaze down at the valley below (especially those who had left loved ones behind) and shudder.

Such is the amazing mentality of the people who live in Half-way House that some would *look longingly back* as if half sorry they had left the poisonous valley (just as a dog might lick the hand that beat it), and would fain have returned had it not been for the gibes of others, and the merry wit and soothing counsel of that stout-hearted fellow, Common Sense, who was always cheering us by drawing alluring pictures of Mount Reason, which he said we might reach if we would but try.

Moderation! Avoid extremes! These were the mottoes of the Timid Folk; and they prided themselves on their tolerance, their open-mindedness. I prided myself, too, fool that I was. I failed to see that intellectual compromise was a dangerous policy, that convictions must be pushed to their logical conclusions, that there must be no sitting on the fence.

Now there was a common notion among the Timid Folk that they were all seeking for Truth; at least, everyone said they were, and no one questioned the sincerity of his neighbour. Day in, day out, they would scan the adjacent hills, looking first in this direction and then in that, always looking for Truth, and—as I found out later—many of them *praying that they'd never find him*; others hoping that He would be acceptable, and fit in with their own ideas of what Truth should be.

And one day Truth knocked upon the door! What consternation was there! What a mingling of shouts and screams! And all the time Truth beat upon the door, and the Timid Folk looked out of the windows and called to him and questioned him, and did everything but let him in. Then did he beckon them to follow him; and Common Sense put the staff of knowledge in my hand and bade me follow, and bade the others follow, too. But some said they dare not brave the winds of Public Opinion and Social Ostracism, others questioned if he *was* Truth saying—in order to still their beating hearts—"Truth has many facets," but they knew in their hearts he *was* Truth. And there were some who shrieked "Blasphemy!" But I squared my shoulders, and with the staff of knowledge in my hand followed upward and onward in the wake of Truth.

Oh! Foolish people who still inhabit the Half-way House, think ye 'tis the journey's end? Think ye that you can dwell for ever in the Half-way House on the hillside of Doubt? Do not temporize. Do not compromise. Have done with the foolish notion that moderation in matters of belief is a virtue. I cannot rescue you if I would, for it is written that every man must work out his own salvation. Take courage! Do not let the "native hue of resolution" be "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," but leave the false security of Half-way House and come with us to dwell "on wind-washed heights of simple truth."

VINCENT J. HANDS.

RELIGION AND ARCHITECTURE.

No, a thousand times no; good architecture has always been the work of the commonalty, not of the clergy. What, you say, those glorious cathedrals—the pride of Europe—did their builders not form Gothic architecture? No; the corrupted Gothic architecture. Gothic was formed in the baron's castle, and the burgher's street. It was formed by the thoughts, and hands, and powers of labouring citizens and warrior king. By the monk it was used as an aid for his superstition; when that superstition became a beautiful madness, and the best hearts of Europe vainly dreamed and pined in the cloister, and vainly raged and perished in the crusade,—through that fury of perverted faith and wasted war, the Gothic rose also to its loveliest, most fantastic, and finally, most foolish dreams; and in those dreams was lost.

John Ruskin, "The Crown of Wild Olive."

A Blood-Thirsty Creed.

THE Christian religion rests upon a foundation of blood. Blood is a slippery thing to stand on, and it will in time cause the Christian religion to fall; it is sliding and slipping already.

The theory of this religion is, that long ago there was a bloodthirsty, vengeful deity who was angry at the failure and frailty of his own handiwork, Man. This deity was not a vegetarian; on the contrary, he revelled in the smell of the burning flesh of goats, kids, lambs, and other animals; it was a "sweet savour" to his nostrils. Roast lamb was his favourite dish, and he did not even require mint sauce and new potatoes with it.

In order, therefore, to appease the senseless wrath of this deity, Man offered up sacrifices of animals to him, splashing their blood upon altars, and upon doorways. Sometimes Man even went the length of offering human sacrifices. But still this blood-thirsty deity was not satisfied. He grew tired of such a monotonous diet as roast lamb and human beings. He had, it seems, a son, an only son; why he had not other sons and daughters, too, is not quite clear. However, it occurred to him that if this son took on the form of a human being and in that form were offered up as a sacrifice, his blood-lust would be satisfied. So he sent his son down on earth to become a man, by being born of a woman, and in due course this god-man was sacrificed in a very cruel manner, and his blood was spilt. This, apparently, appeased the wrath and anger of the deity, as he has ever since let Man severely alone.

The people who believe all this are called Christians, after the name of the son, god-man, Christ. These Christians seem to take after their father-which-art-in-heaven, for they have always been a blood-thirsty lot, even to this day. Recently they have been indulging in a big war among themselves, blowing each other to pieces and shedding each other's blood, just to show the "poor heathen," Pagans, Buddhists, Mahommedans, Hindus, etc., how much they "love one another." And now, in one little green isle of the West, Christians are wallowing in such a drunken orgy of murder and bloodshed as never was heard of before, killing men, women, and even little children, in their beds and in the streets! What a sight, what an example for the "poor heathen!" Well may they, of whatever race or colour, stand aghast and appalled at such deeds.

But after all, what can we expect of the "children" of such a blood-thirsty father-in-heaven? They have been brought up on a diet and doctrine of blood all their lives. They have been taught to sing hymns about drinking blood, and being "washed in blood." And so these Christians will go on to the end of their lives, shedding each others blood, until, like the famous Kilkenny Cats of the old rhyme, there is nothing left of them, "exceptin' their nails and the tips o' their tails"; and the world will be all the better for their riddance, and the Dawn of Peace and a blood-free, humane and sane religion will be at hand.

A. W. MALCOLMSON.

AN ALL-SEEING EYE.

It was the first vaudeville performance the old coloured lady had ever seen, and she was particularly excited over the marvellous feats of the magician. But when he covered a newspaper with a heavy flannel cloth and read the print through it, she grew a little nervous. He then doubled the cloth and again read the letters accurately.

This was more than she could stand, and rising in her seat, she said:—

"I'm goin' home. This ain't no place for a lady in a thin calico dress!"

Writers and Readers.

A NOTE ON SHELLEY'S VIEW OF POETRY.

Every Freethinker, whether unlettered or lettered, experiences a feeling of cardiac expansion whenever he hears the name of Shelley, the one authentic poet of that period of our literature known as the "Romantic Revolt," a movement which, on one of its sides, was the reaction of imaginative and emotional natures from a conventional, brutal and commercialized social system. Shelley was, and I believe is, pre-eminently the poet of radicalism and Freethought. *Queen Mab*, in one of its innumerable cheap editions, and *Prometheus Unbound* had their place of honour on the intelligent proletarian's bookshelf alongside of Paine's *Age of Reason*, Godwin's *Political Justice*, and Owen's *New Views on Society*. These poems were not there for show, for the radical Freethinker of the early part of last century had fewer books than he has now; they were read again and again, and we may take it that the diatribes against tyranny, superstition and commercialism were often declaimed with vigour and conviction. But it is pretty certain that the real Shelley included his would-be admirers then even as he does now. The imaginative atmosphere in which the poet breathed must have been for many uncomfortably tenuous, the rhythm of his verse exasperatingly vague, the emotionalized thought too often escaping like iridescent vapour into luminous space.

Those who travelled any distance with Shelley must have been pulled up frequently by his aptitude for expressing the abstract in terms of concrete, his acceptance of a vague form of theism. If they really loved poetry they turned with a feeling of relief to Byron and Wordsworth, and were content to leave Shelley to those who hold, as I do, that when poetry is fully satisfying as sound the thought cannot be far wrong. They might have been put on the right path if they had known the poet's *Defence of Poetry* which, although written in the early part of 1821, did not see the light until his prose was collected by Lady Shelley. But, I am afraid that its fragmentary nature and dithyrambic eloquence would have puzzled even the sworn partisans of poetry. They would have found something more to their taste in the essay which called for the Shelley's *Defence*. This was Thomas Love Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry*—a lively article which appeared in the first and last number of *Ollier's Literary Miscellany*, 1820. Peacock, as some of my readers will remember, was a delightful critic of the intellectual vagaries of the early nineteenth century, a Voltairean sceptic, a scholar and poet, and, as Shelley avers, a declared opponent of every form of superstition. Peacock's essay is now reprinted with Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* in an excellent edition just published by Mr. Blackwell of Oxford (*Percy Reprints*, No. 3, 4s. 6d. net), and edited in a scholarly fashion by Mr. Brett-Smith. The volume which, by the way, includes Browning's sympathetic study of Shelley, should be in the hands of every intelligent reader of the poet.

Peacock amuses himself and us by playing the part of the devil's advocate, prompted thereto partly by the exaggerated claim of poets from the earliest times to reverence, renown, and reward, and partly by his own want of success in imaginative verse. He lays it down that poetry, like the world, has four ages, the first age being the age of iron; the second, of gold; the third, of silver; and the fourth, of brass. The first age is that in which rude poets celebrate in rough verses the exploits of ruder chiefs:

In these days the only trades flourishing (besides that of the priest, which flourishes always) are those of the king, thief, and beggar; the beggar king for the most part a king deject, and the thief a king expectant. The first question asked of a stranger is whether he is a beggar or a thief; the stranger, in reply, usually assumes the first and awaits a convenient opportunity to prove his claim to the second appellation.

The immortal bard, the son of the Muses, is merely an advertising agent for the robber who has had enough

luck to get himself made a chief or a king. The poets have it all their own way, because they have all the intellect going at the time; thus they are the sole chroniclers of their time, the only depositaries of its knowledge. They are theologians, moralist law-givers, "delivering their oracles *ex cathedra*, and being often themselves (as Orpheus and Amphion) regarded as portions and emanations of divinity, building cities with a song and leading brutes with a symphony, which are only metaphors for the faculty of leading multitudes by the nose."

The golden age begins when poetry looks back with reverence to the age that has gone by, when the man of action gives place to the man of thought, and the system of civil policy is much extended. The poet, who in an earlier age set no limit of decency to his adulation, finds now that indirect flattery will better fill his purse and stomach, and accordingly sets about praising the king as a worthy descendant of a mythic founder of the State. Poetry is now traditional and national; it becomes an art of consummate intricacy, absorbing what there may be of the other arts. We have Homer and the great lyric and tragic poets of Greece. Finally there come speculations and disputes on the nature of man and of mind, on ethics and politics, which draw away the minds of men from the idle vagaries of religion.

Then enters the silver age; the highly civilized and sceptical age of Menander and Virgil, of Horace and Juvenal. The poetry which is either original or imitative is characterized by exquisite harmony and the utmost care in the selection of words, but passion and feeling are not uppermost, and the age being pre-eminently rational its highest achievement must be looked for in prose. The silver age gives place to the age of brass, which marks a return to the picturesque barbarity of remote ages, and a rejection of the polish and learning of the silver age.

Peacock then proceeds to apply the theory of four periods to modern poetry. To the age of brass of the ancient world succeeded the "dark ages, in which the light of the Gospel began to spread over Europe, and in which, by a mysterious and inscrutable dispensation, the darkness thickened with the progress of the light." The smiling scepticism of our author prepares us for a picture of medieval conditions as true to type as anything in M. Anatole France. Shakespeare and Ariosto represent the golden age, which blended the elements of the iron age with those of the new learning, the result being the greatest freedom of imagination. Milton stands between the ages of gold and silver, the latter beginning with Dryden and ending with Gray. Then followed the age of brass, which was precisely the age that produced Byron, Coleridge, Scott, Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley.

The upshot of all is that the poet in our time is a "semi-barbarian in a civilized community." I know a number of intelligent Freethinkers who are in absolute agreement with Peacock at this point, although, if taxed, they would not make it clear that they despised the poet's art. To such I commend *The Four Ages*, for it will strengthen their prejudice and confirm them in their belief that the "march of the poet's intellect is like that of the crab, backward," and that the day is not far distant when it will be recognised that

poetry was the mental rattle that awakened the attention of intellect in the infancy of society; and that for the maturity of mind to make a serious business of the playthings of its childhood, is as absurd as for a full-grown man to rub his gums with coral, and cry to be charmed to sleep by the jingle of silver bells.

I do not suppose for a moment that Peacock was serious throughout, as we know that he made an exception of the poetry of his friend Shelley, and what is more, his printed opinions on Byron and Wordsworth leave no doubt as to his acknowledgment of their greatness. But Peacock was not only witty, he was also humorous. Shelley, with all his great qualities, had no humour. He took himself and his art too seriously, and to be always and everywhere serious is simply to be stupid.

He could neither enjoy his friend's sprightly banter and humorous overstatement, nor understand his criticism of serious poetry as a sort of intellectual retrogression in an age of reason. Shelley, when Peacock's diatribe reached him had been studying the greatest poetry of all ages. He had "bathed in the light and odour of the starry autos" of Calderon; he had turned from the elemental passion of "Lear" to the lyric complexity and profound cynicism of *Faust*, and especially had he lost himself in the metaphysical undergrowth of the Platonic philosophy. He was naturally in the right mood for vindicating the art which he loved and practised. "Poetry," he says in words that vibrate in the memory—

poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar; it reproduces all that it represents, and the impersonations clothed in the Elysian light stand henceforward in the minds of those who have once contemplated them as memorials of that gentle and exalted content which extends itself over all thoughts and actions with which it co-exists.....A man to be greatly good must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must be his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause..... Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb.

This passage indicates the high plane from which Shelley begins to reply to the anathemas of his witty friend. He seldom condescends to argue, he refutes by eloquent contradiction, and gives the impression at times of a broad-minded believer dealing courteously with a veteran master of persiflage. He talks about the poetry of the doctrines of Jesus Christ, tells us that it is an error to impute the ignorance of the dark ages to the Christian doctrines, and that Christianity, in its abstract purity, was the poetry and wisdom of antiquity made manifest. We notice the stress Shelley lays on the importance of the imagination. This is intended to counter Peacock's praise of reason. Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, who had been praised as benefactors of the race are brushed to one side by Shelley as "mere reasoners," and we are told that the moral and intellectual condition of the world would be pretty much the same as it is now if they had never existed. We have to remember that Shelley was irritated by Peacock's witty denial of worth to poetry, and naturally went to the extreme of rebuttal. But the wonderful passages of verbal music in praise and justification of his art vibrate and live in our memory, and will live and vibrate in the memories of those who come after us until the day arrives when economic pressure and natural science shall wipe out all the "trivial and fond records" registered by the imagination and the emotions.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON
JUNE 29, 1922.

The President, Mr. C. Cohen, in the chair. Also present: Messrs. McLaren, Moss, Rosetti, Silverstein, Miss Kough, and the Secretary.

New members were received for Derwent, Newcastle, South London, the Parent Society and the Plymouth Branch which, following Mr. Whitehead's successful visit, had been re-organized and new officers appointed.

The invitation of the Neo-Malthusian League for a representative of the N.S.S. to attend the forthcoming Conference of the League was accepted, and Miss Kough appointed.

It was reported that the Home Secretary, having given permission for a representative of the Society to visit J. W. Gott for the purpose of moral consolation, Mr. A. D. McLaren had seen him that day and found him in fair health and good spirits.

Instructions were given for enquiries to be made as to likely halls for winter lectures.

Several items of correspondence were dealt with, and the meeting adjourned.

E. M. VANCE,
General Secretary.

Freethought on Tyneside.

WE have had a stirring campaign on Tyneside these last two weeks by Mr. George Whitehead. It has had a disturbing effect on some of our Christian friends, but the campaign has served to show us also that the superstition of Christianity is still strongly entrenched, and that very much remains to be done. And while our ultimate aim is a constructive one, the campaign has shown how necessary the destructive side of our work is. Those who do not see the necessity for this have not yet grasped either the nature of our work or the importance of our message. Our first and immediate aim is liberty. That is the prelude to all else, for until mental liberty is achieved any efforts in social reform must fail in either achievement or in result. What Socrates said twenty-five centuries ago still holds good of our work:—

In me you have a stimulating critic, persistently urging you with persuasion and reproaches, persistently testing your opinions and trying to show you that you are really ignorant of what you suppose you know. Daily discussion of the matters about which you hear me conversing is the highest good for man. Life that is not tested by such discussion is not worth living.

These are words Freethinkers should bear in mind, and we have growing opportunities for setting up our ideas before the public. The Press is more open to us than it was, and there is a marked growth among the general public of sympathy with our views. If Freethinkers on Tyneside will only unite as they should and do what they ought, there is now a good chance of our placing the movement on a better footing than it has been of recent years.

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, "Contemporary Superstition."

OUTDOOR.

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

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

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

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

FINEST QUALITY ART JUMPER SILK, 4s. 6d. per 4 oz. hank. All shades. Postage 3d. per hank; 3 or 4 hanks, 7d.—F. P. WALTER, 69 Valkyrie Road, Westcliffe-on-Sea, Essex.

WHITTEWAY SUMMER SCHOOL (in the Cotswolds). An Educational Venture (of special interest to Freethinkers) purporting to stimulate the newly dawning spirit of willingness and search out realities, to the end that life may be built upon durable foundations. To further this object we offer—from July 8 until August 26, 1922—a mentally and physically health promoting environment. Programme to include: Series of Lectures on General Science (with practical demonstrations), Biology, Botany and Nature Study, Psychology (Psycho-Analysis), Sociology (non political), Political Theory, Rhythm, Colour and Harmony, Philosophy and Literature. Also Art Exhibitions, Musical Recitals, and Organized Excursions.—Write to STORMONT MURRAY, White-way Colony, nr. Stroud, Glos., for Prospectus and any further information.

BRADLAUGH.—Bronze Bust on a Black Moulded Pedestal, total height 16 ins., including 2 vols. George Jacob Holyoake's Autobiography. Price £5 5s.—B. CARSWELL, 210 City Road, London, E.C.1.

Modern Materialism

A Candid Examination

By **WALTER MANN**

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CONTENTS :

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