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Views and Opinions.

Facing the Facts.

In this paper we are not concerned with political parties as such, whether they be Conservative, Liberal, Socialist, or other. On the other hand, the purpose for which this journal exists concerns them all as it concerns all serious-minded men and women who care for the deeper things of life. And we are, therefore, concerned with any party when it touches some of these more fundamental questions. Chief among these questions is that of the intrusion of religion into social and political life. And I may commence by admitting that so long as any man takes his profession of religion seriously, and so long as religion assumes any of its historical forms, it can hardly be left out of political and social considerations. But that explains the situation, it does not alter it. It leaves untouched the larger issue of whether religion ought so to interfere. Honest and convinced politicians—and there are a few who come within that category—cannot and do not avoid bringing their religion to the front. The dishonest ones follow their example for obvious reasons, and have a stock of phrases with which they hope to quieten or placate a certain section of the electorate. And between the two are those who believe they show their astuteness by leaving, as they say, religion alone. Of course, they do not actually leave religion alone, for their policy resolves itself into helping religion by not resisting any of its pretensions and so far confirming it in its assumptions and its privileges. Nor are the religious folk so easily deceived. They are quite alive to the movements that threaten their position, and they will certainly not leave alone anything that threatens them. So in the long run the time-serving politician is driven to say something on the very subject on which he professes to remain silent. He is accused of being an Atheist, and that is an accusation which few public men have the courage to brave in a country where the moral cowardice of its publicists in matters of religion is widely recognized.

* * *

Can We Leave Religion Alone?

Two cuttings from the *Daily Herald* sent me by a lady reader bear very strongly upon what I have just said. One has to do with attacks upon Socialist Sunday-schools. Most of my readers will remember

the stories that have been going round the papers concerning these places. It was represented that children were being taught the duty of hating everyone but a revolutionary Socialist, they were being encouraged to believe that morality was an invention of the capitalist class, etc., etc. And if people went to one of these schools and found none of these things, that was only a proof of the devilish ingenuity of these Socialists who put them on one side when strangers were present. When we read these reports we smiled, because they were precisely the old stories about Free-thought, varied to suit the altered circumstances. The religious liar is not a very ingenious person. Perhaps the stupid public he caters for does not demand any very great amount of ingenuity. But the fact remains that he serves up the same lies generation after generation, and they serve as well as though they were brand-new. But the fact that the leaders of the Socialist Sunday-schools are busy issuing disclaimers, is evidence that you cannot leave religion alone. You must face it sooner or later. And we suggest to these people that it would have been just as well—certainly it would have shown greater moral courage—to have said to the Christian world quite plainly, "We are not Christians, and we are not concerned with Christianity. We are not teaching Christianity and do not intend to teach it. We believe that life can be profitably organized without religion, and intend training the children in our care in that belief." This would have been quite plain, and honesty is really the best policy, only because the opposite plan is that of the short-sighted fool.

* * *

Toning It Down.

The second cutting has to do with an election proceeding in South Wales, which is dealt with in an article in the *Herald* by Mr. George Lansbury. Here the cry of Atheism, among other things, has been raised against the Socialist candidate, and Mr. Lansbury does not like it. He does not say the candidate is not an Atheist. (I am quite unaware what his professed opinions on religion are.) He calls it silly nonsense, this game of calling a man a scoundrel if he is not a Christian. And with that I quite agree, but the fact that it is raised shows the foolishness of trying to disguise from genuine Christians the nature of a man's opinions by either not speaking about them, or toning them down by easily seen through apologies. Mr. Lansbury says that Liberals must know that the President of the National Liberal Federation, Mr. John M. Robertson, is a "Rationalist," and "one of the most determined and dangerous enemies of orthodox religion." Again there is the disinclination to come to grips with facts. Mr. Robertson is an Atheist, and has always, so far as I am aware, called himself one, and always during his connection with the fighting branch of the Freethought movement poured the utmost scorn on those who tried to hide their real opinions behind equivocal phrases. Neither is it a correct description of Mr. Robertson's position to say that he is a determined opponent of *orthodox* religion. He is a determined opponent of *all* religions, although

of late he has—very much to the regret of his admirers—spent his main energies in other directions. But Mr. Lansbury is correct when he says that if we are to impose religious tests, large numbers of Liberals and Conservatives will be driven from religious life. That would be correct, provided that they gave the correct answers to the enquiry, and also assuming that their answers made no alteration in the state of public feeling on the matter. But they would probably shelter themselves from the attack by professing some religion of humanism, or some ethical religion, or some phrase which would protect their back from the kicks that bolder ones risk getting. And it is just possible that, religion being so much a matter of convention, if these public men could screw their courage to the sticking point and say exactly what they thought about the Christian religion, the revelation of the number who have no faith in Christianity would work a startling change in the state of the public mind with relation to Freethought. Heresy rapidly becomes fashionable when it is professed by a large number of people.

* * *

The Dangers of Censorship.

There is a deal of psychological interest in the situation. It is obvious that the labour leaders in this country are trying to evade a situation that they will have to face sooner or later, and particularly if they wish to retain the respect of their keener-witted followers. It is quite idle to claim that they are standing apart from religion so long as they continue to use freely religious phrases, pour forth quite idiotic platitudes about a pure Christianity, and the example of Jesus Christ, while carefully excluding from their literature forms of thought that are opposed to the established religion of the country. It is always demoralizing to conduct a campaign with an anxious eye on this or that group for fear of giving offence. Under these conditions there will be little said that is worth the saying and little done that is worth the doing. A censorship of the Press or of public utterance is admittedly unhealthy, and when that censorship is vested in an unofficial body, or in what is vaguely called "public opinion" the demoralization has reached its highest point. In the Russia of the Czars, for example, the censorship worked with full force, but it did the minimum of mischief that such an institution is capable of. It was open and recognized, and when a man picked up a paper and saw lines blacked out, or blank spaces where there should have been reading matter, he knew that what the writer was permitted to say did not represent the whole of his opinions. The reader was thus put on his guard, and the writer was saved that loss of self-respect which inevitably comes from habitually repressing one's convictions. The unavowed censorship of the political world is in reality far more demoralizing than any recognized official censorship could be. And Mr. Lansbury must be aware that in regard to religion there is going on in the Labour movement in this country, no less than in the older political parties, a censorship of straightforward speech that must do harm to the better nature of all concerned. Multitudes are led to give a lip-service to a religion they inwardly despise, and so help to perpetuate the evils which its dominance involves.

* * *

Why Not Courage?

Now I suggest, not to the leaders of the Labour movement alone, but to the leaders of all the reform movements in the country, that it is time they came to grips with this question of religion in relation to the reforms in which they are interested. And there are two things they would do well to bear in mind—perhaps three. The first is that religion is too large a thing in life to be left alone. It permeates and sus-

tains a great many interests in the country, and is taken with too great seriousness by large numbers of people for the policy of letting it alone to be anything but a policy of timidity. In the next place the reform movements have in nearly every case been built up by the labours of Freethinkers, and if the Freethinkers were taken out of them to-day their motive power would be seriously weakened if not destroyed. The right to a free press and a free platform—without which nothing is of much value—was won for the people of this country by men who made no secret of their heretical opinions, and who realized that—to use Paine's language—the Rights of Man can only be firmly established so far as the Age of Reason is secured. And nothing is more disheartening—if not disgusting—than to come constantly into contact with people who call themselves reformers, and who yet appear to be living in a state of perpetual "funk" for fear Christians shall find out what their religious opinions really are. They seem to think that by so doing they are throwing dust in the eyes of the clergy and Christians generally, and will so convert them without their knowing it. It is a foolish and a mistaken policy. The average reforming parson is not in the reform camp from that cause. He is there because the labours of the more daring in earlier times have so educated public opinion that it is no longer safe or profitable for him to stay outside. They will work with reform movements just so long as the force of general opinion compels them to do so. And public opinion will only exercise that compulsive force so long as those who really see the truth have enough moral and intellectual courage to cease pandering to interests and convictions that it should be their constant aim to exhibit in their true light.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

False Postulates.

THE REV. J. W. G. WARD, pastor of New Court Congregational Church, Tollington Park, N., is an able and eloquent preacher who draws crowded congregations. A recent sermon, published in the *Christian World Pulpit* of July 13, is entitled, "The Courage Born of Conviction." Mr. Ward treats with scathing scorn the glib young critic who said to him one day, "Ministers do not believe one half they preach." "Were the statement true," he declares, "the pulpit would have lost not only its power, but its claim to the respect of honest men." But is it not true that the pulpit has lost its claim to the respect of honest men, except in exceedingly rare instances, of which the New Court pulpit may be one? Why are the overwhelming majority of churches so thinly attended if not because the pulpit has lost the confidence of the masses? And why has it lost their confidence if not because of the lack of that passionate belief which once swayed the multitudes? To believe indifferently, languidly, and spiritlessly is almost, if not quite, as ineffectual as not to believe at all; and it is a well-known fact that there are ministers who believe much less than one half of what they preach. Mr. Ward tacitly admits the existence of critical unbelief and regnant Materialism, and that they offer a menacing challenge which a lukewarm pulpit is powerless to take up. But has the reverend gentleman never faced the fact that if the Gospel were indeed the power of God unto the world's salvation, critical unbelief and regnant Materialism would be absolutely impossible? Our contention is that the Gospel itself is not true, and that consequently the Church is strong or weak in exact proportion to the strength or weakness of its faith. Everything depends upon supernatural belief, and in its absence the pulpit can do nothing. There

is a sense in which the following passage is perfectly true:—

Unless the Christian Church is certain of its Divine Commission, and unless it is building on the immovable rock of Christ's truth, not only can it not offer any shelter for the tempest-drenched souls of men, but it will be unable to withstand the fierce storms that threaten. The reason that the preaching of the Apostles was so effective was that they were absolutely sure of their Master and their message. The secret of the victories won by the early Church was that it felt the vivifying presence of the risen Christ. If we would play as valiant a part in the present day, we must recapture—if that be possible—the earnestness and enthusiasm, the confidence and courage of the first followers of our Lord.

Unhesitatingly we affirm that the recapture desired by the preacher is not within the bounds of possibility; and to those whose eyes are open the reason is self-evident. The Divine commission claimed by the Church is an empty dream of its own, a fact to which even Christendom is slowly awakening. Even the God, whose institution the Church pretends to be, is himself but the baseless fabric of a dream. And yet Mr. Ward says that "religion turns the world-weary eyes of man to the glorious revelation of God as the Creator of the universe." It is true, that religion endeavours to do that; but what religion calls a glorious revelation is found, on careful examination, to be but a mere conjecture, at once unverified and unverifiable. Science is totally ignorant of either creation or creator. The universe is infinite with neither beginning nor end. The preacher uses high-sounding metaphors, comparing the universe to "an ancient missal, adorned with initials of gleaming gold and as delightful to the eye as it is informing to the mind." He tells us that "when we look at the star-spangled dome of the midnight sky, or note how the monarch of day, returning to his throne arrayed in garments of amber and gold, is greeted by the thousand songsters in the glade, our souls are thrilled with the solemn beauty of it all," or that "when we look at the rock-ribbed hills through the eyes of Wordsworth, or walk prosaic paths with Ruskin, the loveliness of life is manifest." To us, as to him, that description is both true and beautiful; but surely it has no conceivable bearing whatever upon the gratuitous statement that the universe is the creation of a Supreme Being. Such a statement is based upon ignorance, and, at best, only believed, never known, to be true. Mr. Ward's reasoning is wholly fallacious. It is an obvious fallacy to assert that because "intelligence, purpose, and will can be traced in the effect," they must of necessity be present in the cause also. That is a theological notion which contradicts, and, if true, would render at once laughably absurd and impossible the long process of evolution. It is an unpardonable mistake to say that "what science calls the great First Cause, we call God." Science, treating Nature as both infinite and eternal, would be guilty of high treason against itself if it ever spoke of "a great First Cause." A beginning is scientifically as inconceivable as an end, the only thing about the universe known to us being the fact that it has completely changed its form innumerable times, and is still undergoing such a process.

Equally unscientific is Mr. Ward's conception of Man as "God's insurgent son." Some fifteen years ago Sir E. Ray Lankester published a work entitled *The Kingdom of Man*, the first chapter in which considers man as "Nature's insurgent son," which is an entirely rational idea. Mr. Ward's treatment of man is the very opposite to rational. It is not true that the sense of kinship with God is implanted in man's heart. Even the belief in God's existence is a pure product of education. This is frankly admitted by the theologians whenever they give expression to their

bitter opposition to the policy of secular education. "Dismiss religion from the schools," they vehemently exclaim, "and our boys and girls will grow up blatant Atheists." As Christian apologetists, on the contrary, they teach that man is by nature religious, and that he has an instinctive craving for fellowship with the Supreme Being. In their hatred of secular education they speak the truth; but in their defence of Theism they build on wholly baseless assumptions. The truth is that in the absence of religious training no child possesses the God idea, never experiences any sense of relationship with supernatural beings, nor feels the need of supernatural aid in tackling the grave problems of life. Besides, even those who have been most religiously brought up, who hear innumerable discourses on the duties, obligations, and privileges of the Christian life, and who conscientiously take part in endless private devotions, are yet constantly aware of the active presence within them of an almost irresistible tendency to forget God and discontinue all religious exercises. Of course the clergy describe that tendency as a subtle temptation of the Devil; but we prefer to characterize it as a purely natural protest against unnatural and denaturalizing beliefs and practices.

Having thus repudiated the postulates of God as the creator of the universe and of man as his insurgent son, we are logically compelled to reject the postulate of Christ as the world's Redeemer. Mr. Ward experiences no difficulty whatever in accepting and teaching the inexplicable dogma of man's fall and consequent sinfulness. Man, though made by God, is now in a fallen and sinful condition because his Maker inconsiderately endowed him with the perilous faculty of free-will.

He is consciously free to choose his own path, and he does. His ways are not God's ways. They are directed to the gratification of appetites and desires that, no matter how he seeks to satisfy them, remain unsatisfied. He is aware of a higher law to which he often denies obedience, and sometimes, after bitter experiences and long wanderings, he comes to himself. Then he feels how utterly hopeless is his condition. He has bartered his birthright away, or has wasted his soul's substance in riotous living. Estranged, exiled, degraded, and despairing, he has no heart to seek the heart of the Father. He is lost. He is without hope because without God.

Now that contemptible and pernicious doctrine of man was invented for the sole purpose of engendering the sense of utter lostness and need of salvation. Had it not been for the artificial growth and development of this sense of lostness Christianity would never have been heard of, and there would have been no Church as we know it. Christ came to redeem a fallen, sinful world; but even he could do nothing except through the Church which he was said to have founded for that purpose. Ere long the belief arose that outside of the Church Salvation was impossible, out of which belief grew the papacy with its hateful priestcraft and dehumanizing practices, of the baneful influences of which all historians are fully aware.

In the concluding paragraphs of his sermon Mr. Ward pronounces an eloquent eulogium upon faith. Of course, from the Christian pulpit he can do nothing else. He unsuccessfully endeavours to prove that faith is belief, on no valid evidence whatever, in a historically discredited Redeemer. It is the steadily growing discredit befalling Christ and Christianity that accounts for the inefficiency of the Church, and this discredit is the outcome of the advancing conviction that the supernatural is a figment of the human imagination, which is equivalent to saying that the Church is founded upon a lie. Has Mr. Ward the courage to state that God and Christ are objective realities actually exerting a wholesome, uplifting, and ennobling influence upon mankind? Can he honestly

assure us that we are living in a redeemed world? If not, then we are justified in holding the view that the Christian faith is credulity of the worst kind, and that the Christian pulpit has no claim to the respect of honest men.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Men in Lawn Sleeves.

Of what use are the Bishops in the House of Lords?

—Lord Shaftesbury.

Clericalism! There is the enemy.

—Gambetta.

A LEADING London newspaper editor denies fiercely, and in large type, that the clergy are opposed to democratic aspirations. The occasion of the outburst was the publication of a letter from M. Karakhan, Assistant Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, at Moscow, to the Archbishop of Canterbury. The English ecclesiastic had asked the Russian Government to permit a clerical deputation to visit Russia to ascertain the truth of certain charges made by priests of the Greek Church.

The Russian Government's reply is dignified. It declines to allow an inquiry from foreigners because the reports themselves emanate from sources which do not merit confidence. It further adds that the solidarity of the various great Churches of Christendom is too well known, and also that the antipathy of the higher ecclesiastics towards democracy is notorious. To the London newspaper editor the reply of the Russian Government is "the emptiest of nonsense." But there is no reason why the Soviet Administration should make nonsensical statements, and it is to be presumed that the Russians know their own business quite as well as the gentleman in Fleet Street, or the princely tenant of Lambeth Palace.

The bare facts of the case are that the Greek Church ecclesiastics no longer enjoy the privileged position they had for so long under the Czardom. They have lost the position of a State-supported Church, and now have to rely upon their own efforts. Apparently, they have forfeited the regard of the working-classes, and they are now in a parlous condition. Doubtless, to such men the suggestion that they should earn their own living is an atrocious insult. Like the old tramp in the comedy, they say: "Work is for workmen!" Men of God are not as other men, and they sigh for the *ancien régime* and all its privileges.

Priests know which side their bread is buttered. Whether they wear the *lingerie* of the Greek, Roman Catholic, or Anglican Church, is a matter of little consequence. They all act alike. In France, for over a century, the Republic has had to fight for its existence against the Black Army of priests. In Italy and the United States, the clericals are a constant menace. In Spain and Portugal, the cassock is synonymous with reaction. For the Russian Government to have permitted the Greek Church to have enjoyed all the ancient privileges of the bad, old days would have been equivalent to committing suicide.

Even in our own country the Church is not above severe criticism. The Established Church has been consistently anti-democratic. This is not a prejudiced statement. It can be proved from the votes of the Bishops in the House of Lords, and the record is sufficient to make a bronze statue blush. Every measure of reform has been opposed, or ignored, by these lawn-sleeved legislators, from small measures, such as the provision of seats for shop-girls, to Reform Bills which sought to enfranchise large sections of the nation. The bishops voted against admitting Free Churchmen to university degrees, and against removing the civil disabilities of Roman Catholics, Jews, and Freethinkers. They opposed the introduction of free education, and voted against the admission of women to

London Borough Councils. None voted for the abolition of flogging women in public, flogging women in prison, or the use of the lash in the Army and Navy. Scores of measures for the bettering of the conditions of the working classes have been opposed by these ecclesiastics, who control a Church which has been termed grimly, "a branch of the Civil Service."

In the political struggles of the past hundred years the Bench of Bishops has always stood with the Peers against the People. These men, of boasted piety, could not be got to see that it was wrong in a civilized country to underpay and starve people. Tolerant in speech, all their actions showed that they regarded all persons who shut themselves out of the fold of the Government Church as being less than human beings. Their condemnation is written for all time in the pages of *Hansard* and in the *House of Lords' Journal*. Years ago Lord Shaftesbury was amazed at the hostility of the Bishops to the Factory Acts. He asked the question: "Of what use are the Bishops in the House of Lords?" The really astonishing record of the Bishops in the Upper House is the sufficient answer. The Church of England is as much opposed to Democracy as the Greek Church, and the sooner it is disestablished and disendowed the better.

MIMNERMUS.

The International Movement.

THE FREETHOUGHT SITUATION IN POLAND TO-DAY.

The following article is a contribution to our enterprising and vigorous Belgian contemporary, *La Pensée* (July 2, 1922). It is from the pen of a distinguished Polish publicist and ardent Freethinker, Dr. Z. Mierzynski. The notes are those of the translator who takes the liberty to correct M. Mierzynski in a few points of comparative importance.

THROUGHOUT the whole of the sixteenth century Poland was known as a certain refuge for all heretical sects, even to the most advanced like those of the Socinians and Arians, who denied the dogma of the Trinity and the divine nature of Jesus.¹ The advent of the Jesuits² effected a remarkable change in this state of things. In fifty years gross ignorance and superstition had invaded the country, and religious intolerance took a firm hold of men's minds. The Arians were driven out of the country by a decree of the Diet of 1658. Yet we have to admit that the bonfires of the Inquisition never illuminated Poland with their ill-omened glare.

Fortunately the continuous and close relations of France and Poland favoured the spread of the ideas of the great French philosophers of the eighteenth century in our country. Their upshot was the Polish constitution of May, 1791, which was the legacy of the old aristocratic and anarchic Poland to a Poland that ought to have been reborn as a democracy. These efforts of our Polish patriots were not crowned with success. The country lost its independence, and the three neighbouring autocracies were the gainers.

Napoleon, in creating the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, imposed upon it his Civil Code with its abolition of every form of serfdom, complete liberty of conscience, severe but equal justice for all, and enfranchisement of the laity from the yoke of the clerics, more especially as regards family life. The Poles of the Grand Duchy

¹ Sigismund I (D. 1548) issued the most severe edicts against heresy in every shape and form, and infringements of these edicts were attended with vigorous penalties. In his reign there were frequent hangings of heretics, or dissidents as they came to be called.

² The Jesuits were introduced by Sigismund II in 1565 and did much to redeem the Church from the reproach of the neglect of education. The charge of religious intolerance lay, if anywhere, at the door of the dissidents, who failed to square their own differences.

regarded the Napoleonic Code as the palladium of their liberties. When, by a decision of the Congress of Vienna, in 1815, the greater part of the Grand Duchy, under the name of the Kingdom of Poland, was given to the Russian Tsars, and when the new rulers, moved by hatred of the French Revolution, attacked the Civil Code, the Polish Diet resisted obstinately. It was only after the complete subjection of the nation in 1831 that Nicholas I suppressed the Polish Civil Code in what concerned domestic affairs, and directed against our unhappy country his Ukase of 1836, which delivered the whole nation, in so far as the family is concerned, into the hands of the priests. This Ukase is still compulsory law in that part of "Free" Poland which was under Russian subjection. Thus every Polish citizen (up to 1921 we used the word "subject") is considered to be part and parcel of some confessional community; Freethinkers are not recognized at law; the Constitution of 1921 does not mention them. Births are registered by the clergy of Christian forms of religion. They issue certificates for which baptism is the necessary qualification. In this way, baptism is compulsory, although legally it is not necessary. This is our wonderful liberty of conscience, guaranteed by the amazing Constitution of 1921. However, Jewish birth certificates are issued by civil magistrates.

Marriage ceremonies being performed by a minister of religion, who is also a registrar, false Christians also become religious. They must be married in a church; Catholics must also confess before the ceremony. The priest issues a certificate of confession, without which the celebrant would refuse to register the marriage.

Should married life become insupportable, and husband and wife wish to separate, divorce not being recognized by the Church of Rome, the case is removed to an ecclesiastical tribunal, the Consistory Court, which may grant a separation of the body; but this does not permit the parties to marry again. The procedure is that of the Inquisition; witnesses are questioned *in camera* by a priest, who acts as an examining magistrate.

For those who are able and willing to pay, there is a declaration of the nullity of the marriage-deed through a legal flaw. This is an arrangement which is intended to line the vast pockets of the clergy, and also that of the Holy Roman See. The Holy See also makes a large income out of the fees of the Supreme Court of Appeal for divorce suits.

The impossibility of divorce is the cause of many domestic tragedies, especially at the present time, when a world-war has added infinitely to the causes of unhappiness. The inability to escape from the conjugal yoke is often responsible for murderous actions. Criminal statistics are eloquent on this point.

Then comes the question of death. If the "deceased" has been a "bad" Catholic his corpse travels from cemetery to cemetery, in order to find some confessional community (usually reformed or dissident) that will consent to lay it at rest. If he happens to be a "bad" Jew, uncircumcised, the Hebrew community requires, before the ultimate rights are performed, that the body be circumcised, for otherwise "at the last day the Lord would not be able to recognize his own" (the actual words of a written decision by a Rabbi of Lodz). If the family of the deceased will not agree to a "post mortem" circumcision, the body is buried somewhere in private ground.

What was Prussian Poland, however, enjoys all the religious liberties peculiar to Germany. Registration of births, deaths and marriages is a civil function. German law recognizes the existence of Freethinkers. With few exceptions, Austrian legislation, valid in Galicia, follows the same course. The result is an amazing confusion. Magistrates in Russian Poland

contest the validity of civil marriages contracted in Prussian or Austrian Poland. A wife may have a legal status in Cracow and in Warsaw be regarded as a concubine.

Such a state of things cannot go on for ever. There is in the Polish Diet a committee whose work it is to codify the different methods of legislation throughout the country and to elaborate a new civil code. It is a pity that its work is surrounded by an atmosphere of mystery; we are completely ignorant of the general direction and the progress of its exertions. There are disturbing rumours as to the tendency of this committee; it is said to be in favour of curbing what were Prussian and Austrian Poland with the yoke invented by Nicholas I with his famous Ukase of 1836, that is, to deprive them of all the benefits of modern legislation in domestic matters. It is not outside the range of possibility. In our Diet there are more than thirty Roman Catholic priests, and many ministers of other forms of religion, the majority being made up of small burgesses and and peasants of extremely deficient intelligence.

It is my intention to make the subjects of future communications such important questions as the permanent encroachment of the clergy on primary education, its tendency to supervise the orthodoxy of scholars and school teachers, the oath in the law courts, and Jewish clericalism, which is even more repugnant than the Christian form.

In order to counter the maleficent work of the professional cleric which tends to compromise the future of our nation, and which, we remember, once contributed powerfully to our political slavery, we have founded a league of Polish Freethinkers. We are, as yet, only at the beginning. Our battalion, if compact enough, is but a small one, but we do not despair of the future.

It is with the greatest pleasure that we salute our comrades in Freethought throughout the world.

Z. MIERZYNSKI.

Englished by GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

Inspirations.

THE other Sunday while the devout were singing in the churches "I to the hills will lift mine eyes," I went there in person. An old impulse revived a fading enthusiasm, a wholesome, inevitable urge and with the happy sequel, in a somewhat sad world, that one could "smile and hope and live again at last," and more than that as may appear: I went away in the rain and came back in the sunshine. The bracing wind on the hill top was noisy and strong, hissing in the grasses and tugging at my coat tails as I rebuilt the cairn with stones from the old fort. Two splintered fragments of stone at the top gave the cairn a pointed, mitred appearance, other exhumed and earthy stones, with bits of gnarled whin stems, gave the tapering pile a grotesque and ancient look; to the sentimental and scientific muse a thing of Awe in that solitude, so strange and wide and still, of the eternal hills. I left my old copy of the *Freethinker* in the little excavation I had made—and where, had I dug a little further, I might have come upon some traces of wall or implement of earlier man. The soil was loose and friable, the stones below untouched for centuries, were strangely mottled with mysterious little dark cavities between them and beneath them. But as the garrulous old Scotchwoman said: "That's no' what a was gaun to tell ye." Sun and wind had dried the heather lower down, and I had a soft bed among the rocks and hummocks and heather birns. Why should I hurry away from happiness and the scents of Araby? A whaup (curléw) was complaining over-

head and I awakened from a semi-dozed to see a beautiful young bird, with black head and prettily mottled body, standing alert but motionless before my eyes. It was a very pretty and pleasing ocular illusion, and turned out to be only a twisted and blackened bit of heather stem, but no less part of the enchanted atmosphere. Most reluctantly descending further I came to the pretty rivulet at the edge of the moor, which, after collecting its mossy stores from the shaggy watershed, gleams and glistens smilingly under a thorn edge, thence descending in a tinkling cataract amid green, mossy stones to a dim grotto under the hazels. There, in the shade, depending from mossy root and soil and boulder, hung the loveliest of ferns, with many other fresh and beautiful forms of plant life:—

Here, here was all, at last, that life could give,
Or mad ambition pass unheeded by;
Here, here, methought, one happy hour I'll live;
Here, all I've sought for, found; here let me die.

While the militarist and the religionist, in Ireland and elsewhere, are fighting for phantoms, wading through slaughter to dusty death, here was the smile of peace and love and beauty and order, of reason and reality, eternal in the hills. While the thousand horse-power aeroplane—with its 4,000 lb. bombs of gas and germs—is preparing, under the patronage of the Christian Church, in the leading Christian countries. Here will I sit, even if I miss the "Socialist meeting" (as a change from the sermon) on the shore; even the Free-thought meeting, if happily such there were; here would I sit till I was thoroughly saturated with the spirit of natural beauty, natural morality and reason; of merely non-ethical, non-rational tranquillity and happiness. Rising at length, and by the roadside seeing the wild grasses waving in the wind, their curved and seeded heads gleaming in the sun like tawny silvered crest of savage chief or "civilized" king (same thing); a little later, filled and thrilled with the vision of the wild places, let psychologists say how it came about, seated at supper, and thinking of the Socialist meeting, the great words, of a great book, out of my own dim past, rose up in my mind: *And I saw a man clothed in rags with a great burden upon his back.* Bunyan's wholly imaginary burden, but which he sincerely believed in, and which to-day the Salvation Army idealists invite us to get rid of in the familiar and touching refrain: "Lay it down, lay thy weary burden down, down at Jesus' feet." Leave it there, and though you sink under oppression's or poverty's load you can exultantly sing: "It is well, it is well with my soul." The repertoire is unlimited. It is a far cry from primitive origins to the ornate ritual of to-day, but the savage origin is unmistakably obvious in the "civilized" creed. To return to our text: I saw a man clothed in rags, with a great burden upon his back. This accurately, and with more reason, describes the man the Socialist is out to save. But the Church says, no, that is not the burden at all, it is Sin: and this purely imaginary load has stupefied and bewildered the human race, and made its members hate and curse and crucify one another for thousands of years, back to the time when primitive man felt the first tremor of superstitious fear. From such a simple local superstition, and from nothing else under the sun, has grown by well defined evolutionary stages the world wide stupidity we know as Christianity.

On the Monday evening following I went out to mingle with the holiday crowd and passed a forlorn group of Salvationists. The ancient village bellman in cracked and husky tones led the "singing"—who would deprive the grey-haired ancient, traucheled, impoverished, shaftcheled and down at heel, of the stupefying anodyne that beguiled him of his woes? Further along the minstrels were inanely amusing the crowd, and one could not but reflect how bored and

vacuous must be the average mind that finds such amusement necessary—the same vacuity fills the churches. What sadness in those holidays! Coming away, I met with something sadder still, that touched once for all, among much that was otherwise, all that was best and noblest in my nature, the true sheet anchor of my soul. A little fellow was hurrying home among the rest, but pitifully handicapped. His feet were bare, and dirty, and too large for a child. One of his legs had "forgot to grow," and was a mere shank which he assisted painfully with right hand as he stooped and limped along. The Salvationists were intent on heaven, the others on God knows what; only the Atheist, I think, noticed the little cripple, or thought of the poet's lines:—

The angels Thou hast sent to haunt the street
Are hunger and distortion and decay.

Instead of being lovingly and tenderly cared for by the State, those unfortunates are left to "the Lord, to luck and charity," while the nations engage in the luxury of an £8,000,000,000 war, which multiplies the number and makes more distressing the lot of God's misfits. It is all so glaringly obvious.

A. MILLAR.

EARTH TO EARTH.

Where the region grows without a lord,
Between the thickets emerald-stoled,
In the woodland bottom the virgin sward,
The cream of the earth, through depths of mould
O'erflowing wells from secret cells,
While the moon and the sun keep watch and ward,
And the ancient world is never old.

Here, alone, by the grass-green hearth
Tarry a little: the mood will come!
Feel your body a part of earth;
Rest and quicken your thought at home;
Take your ease with the brooding trees;
Join in their deep-down silent mirth
The crumbling rock and the fertile loam.

Listen and watch! The wind will sing;
And the day go out by the western gate;
The night come up on her darkling wing;
And the stars with flaming torches wait.
Listen and see! And love and be
The day and the night and the world-wide thing
Of strength and hope you contemplate.

No lofty Patron of Nature! No;
Nor a callous devotee of Art!
But the friend and the mate of the high and the low,
And the pal to take the vermin's part,
Your inmost thought divinely wrought,
In the grey earth of your brain aglow
With the red earth burning in your heart.

—John Davidson.

COUNSEL.

It takes us such long time to understand
That God is God, and man can be but man.
We live and labour for a little span;
We wait, and watch, and fertilize our land,—
And all for what?—that war's all-wasting brand
May spread its dearth according to God's plan;
And still we vainly strive beneath the ban,
And think against this God to set our hand.
Oh, all my brothers, rest a space from strife,—
Let each one with no murmur live his life.
Will ye make glad our tyrant's eyes and ears,
By sound of sighs and sight of bitter tears?
Not so; but rather spite the God on high,
By showing Him how men can live and die.

—Philip Bourke Marston.

Acid Drops.

Mr. Robert Blatchford is writing away on behalf of Spiritualism, and is doing so with an air of suppressed wisdom that may well impose upon the uninformed. His method is delightfully ingenuous. He writes to certain Spiritualists for their account of things, and appears to be under the impression that having got their account of what they say happened he must either accept it at its face value, offer another explanation, or call the gentlemen he has written liars and rogues. The difficulty of getting an exact statement of what does occur, doesn't seem to strike him, and his conclusion that if one can't explain what is said to have occurred then it must be the work of "spirits" is in line with the policy of religious humbuggery from the earliest times onward. It is the appeal to ignorance, the substitution of a set of phrases for an explanation, however carefully one may disguise the fact.

There is a good illustration of what has been said in Mr. Blatchford's way of handling telepathy. As a means of confounding the assumption that telepathy may explain much that goes on at the Spiritualist meeting, he says that a test as to whether it is a fact might be put in this way: Tell the medium "Now I am going to think about my uncle Tom from Devizes, what he was like, what he wore, and what were his favourite amusements, and I want you to read my thoughts, and utter them aloud before a company to whom I have already revealed them in secret." How many mediums could pass the test? Now we are not championing telepathy, which may or may not be true, but we do say that a man who can gravely propound the above as a test of the truth of telepathy demonstrates that he has not come within a reasonable distance of understanding the A.B.C. of the subject. It is like the man who confounds the idealism of Berkeley by kicking the earth. Mr. Blatchford is, we should say, splendid material for the Spiritualist to operate on. For ourselves, we would suggest that while it is obviously not absolutely necessary to understand a subject before writing on it, a little knowledge concerning it might at times be found very useful.

Some of the local clergy at Grimsby and New Brighton have been complaining, with some vehemence, of women bathers strolling about in scant costume, and of boys "from nine to ten years of age" bathing "without a vestige of clothing." As usual, the strong arm of the law is invoked to "deal with bathers without coverings." The human body has always been a more or less unclean thing to the Christian eye. The serious influence of this attitude on the æsthetic and moral life of Christendom has perhaps received less attention than the subject deserves. It blunted the "sense" of the beauty of the human body which the Greeks bequeathed to the world, and gave us monkery or Puritanism. Ugliness was a source of protection against the sins of the flesh, and consequently a sort of virtue. "You Greeks are always young," said a visitor to ancient Athens. In modern England a town council is asked by an official guardian of the national sanctuary to prohibit ten-year-old boys from bathing naked.

Punch, when giving charwomen, costermongers, and the lower orders a reprieve from what passes for wit in the clubland, had better be careful. It jokes feebly over the Papal Bull of Appointments, yet this levity is rendered possible by brave men who have been to prison for writing and speaking truth—for having the courage to laugh at solemn twaddle and smash a few mental windows to let fresh air into a hothouse managed by priests.

In a letter to the *Daily Herald* (July 15) on "Socialists and Religion," Mr. W. G. Sillitoe says that Socialist Sunday-schools are simply non-religious. The teacher takes for his field "all men's religions," and the pupils are exhorted to respect them all. As far as our English Socialists are concerned, we are convinced that there is

a great deal of truth in Mr. Sillitoe's statement of their attitude to religion.

The people of Basle were recently asked to express an opinion as to whether religious instruction should be given in the elementary schools. The result was that 11,484 voted in favour of the instruction being given, and 6,291 against. We are surprised that a larger vote in favour of religious instruction was not given, for one knows that the clergy would be very active in getting their congregations to vote in favour of the religious lesson. The majority of the people of Basle evidently do not care much one way or the other, but there are over 6,000 who do not believe that religion should be taught in the State schools, and they are on the side of justice and common-sense.

It is difficult, of course, to get this question of secular v. religious instruction settled without an appeal to the vote, but we submit that to put it, "Shall we or shall we not have religion in the schools?" is not the right way to raise it. If that question were put to the people of this country in the same way, we are not at all doubtful but that the affirmative would be carried by a very large majority. It gives custom, conservatism, and prejudice its full measure of influence. The valid way of raising the issue is whether the State has a right to teach religion, or is it not one of those subjects which should be left to individuals to see to at their own expense and in their own way. And here there is no question whatever that the whole trend of modern social development is for the State to hold itself strictly neutral in matters of religion. The secularization of the State is one of those processes that is always going on, and which no man or party can hope to do more than obstruct. The victory of the advocates of the neutrality may be delayed, but it cannot be prevented.

Several speeches were made at the Methodist Conference at Birmingham deploring the breakdown of missionary campaigns. The Rev. F. B. Turner, a missionary in China for thirty years, said "the condition of things was tragic. In North China four missionary houses were empty. What would happen to the work in a few years when the seniors were gone? The thought of the position was simply a nightmare." If the Chinese, who are a cultured race don't worry, why does the English Church? We suspect that it is because the missionaries are afraid of losing their job.

The bishops of the Episcopal Church of Scotland have, apparently, been shocked by recent declarations of "modern" churchmen. They have addressed an important letter to their clergy pointing out that the papers read at the Girton Conference contained a challenge "mainly directed towards the central truth of the Christian faith, the truth as the Church has received, maintained, and taught it, of the Person and work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Many other pious statements are made in the letter, and, of course, the now thread-bare Nicene Creed is dragged in. "For it is not only that the Creed, by which the Church has, since the fourth century guarded the sacred mystery of Christ's Person, is called in question; the challenge reaches to the day of Pentecost," they exclaim. No doubt the modern churchmen are an eyesore to the bishops, but after all Freethought is the greatest danger to the Church, and it is Freethought which will triumph.

A discussion has been going on for some time as to whether the law ought to force a doctor to divulge information concerning his patients gained in the course of his professional attendance. We wholly agree with those who say he should not. A very great deal depends upon the confidence a patient places in his doctor, and a doctor in the house should be regarded in the light of a confidant. And whatever good may be done by a doctor telling what he knows to the outside public will certainly be more than counterbalanced by the harm done. We

dislike the whole thing for another reason. It is an exhibition of the fondness of present day governments for converting every man into a spy on his neighbour. The specious plea of duty to the State ought not to hide the sinister nature of this tendency. The occupation of a spy has generally been looked down on as something dishonourable, and we hope it will continue to rank as such. Confidence between men is the essence of fair play, and confidence is impossible where spying is general, whether the spying be done with the sanction of the State or otherwise.

There was an Orange celebration at Manchester Cathedral on July 16, and some of the banners in the procession bore the open Bible and others the skull and cross-bones. The conjunction seems peculiarly appropriate. The latter, as our readers know, is the symbol of piracy, and it is probable that more piracy has been committed under the shadow of the Bible than any other ægis carried by a professed pirate in any age. Of course, the piracy might have gone on without the Bible, but it is well to remember that it went on briskly with it, and often enough provided that moral justification for piracy without which the profession would not have persisted so long.

For when we have put on one side all the numberless fine phrases, the fact remains that for several centuries the Christian nations of the world have all been engaged on piratical enterprises all over the globe. There is not a single exception to this. Everywhere the natives have been dispossessed of their lands and rights in the interests of their Christian civilizers, and this had not been done always in the honest and straightforward way of the Captain Kidd type, but always in the name of civilization, of morality, and in order to take the natives the benefits of the gospel. The "good" people at home have fitted out the expedition and pocketed the profits, much as the pious people in the Elizabethan age fitted out a few pirate ships and took their share of the plunder. And this has been done the more easily because the religion professed provided just that moral gloss which always makes scoundrelism so easy to practise in the interest of virtue.

The *Scarborough Evening News* (July 11) reports the hearing of a charge brought against Frederick Mason for obstructing the highway at Walworth on a Sunday morning:

A constable said he found the prisoner selling racing tips within twenty yards of a church at which a service was in progress.

Mr. Rooth (the magistrate): The church was empty, I suppose, in consequence?

Constable: Probably.

Mr. Rooth: The racing tipster was more attractive than the clergyman's discourse.

Constable: There was a crowd of 400 persons around him.

Mr. Rooth (to prisoner): We have all got to pay for popularity in this world. Twenty shillings, please!

The gist of the charge appears to have been the fact that Mason's discourse was more attractive than the parson's, as the magistrate clearly recognized. It has always been the policy of the clergy and their official friends to suppress rival claimants of this kind. Yet the tipster at least offered his flock a run for their money at a known locality and a definite time.

An agricultural labourer, fined at Alton, Hants, for not sending his children to school, said he was the father of thirteen, and worked in the fields for twenty-two shillings a week. The Bishop of Exeter is asked to take a note of this case.

Fourteen persons were killed and twenty injured as a result of the collapse of the dome surmounting the Abuelela Mosque, Cairo. The pulpit was also destroyed. Allah is as indifferent as Jehovah to the safety of his worshippers.

On July 13, at a conference held in Sheffield by the local Congregational Association, it was stated that at least 400 students should always be in college if the

pulpits were to be kept supplied with trained ministers. In 1900 there were 375 students, in 1921 only 245. The quality of the ministry, it was declared at the conference, largely determined the quality of the Church. The Anglican Church is confronted with the same problem. Mr. George Arbuthnot, in the *Guardian* for July 21, pleads for a frank recognition of the Church calling as a professional one, instead of insistence upon "feeling a vocation" for the ministry. At the university he knew "honest fellows" who hunted, played cards, gave "wines," and used strong language, yet were going to be ordained, "because the Church provided them with a profession." "Let the Church continue to be a profession, on a par with the Bar and Medicine."

We owe a great debt to Mr. Arbuthnot for his frankness. The sophists were wise men in their day and generation, and they made no bones about accepting pay for their teaching. Besides, even Paul became "all things to all men," and it may be that along similar lines our latter-day soul-savers will find common ground at last. Mr. Arbuthnot, we think, has made a study of the English character as well as the national Church.

In the case of the legal and medical professions the public is protected to some extent from quackery, and a low order of talent does not usually command striking success. It is in the clerical profession, above all others, that frauds of all kinds impose upon the public. Witness the recent exposures of soul-saving "M.A.'s" and "D.D.'s" who bought their degrees from American institutions. It is precisely because the circle of intelligence and independent thinking is expanding in the so-called "lower" classes, that the average pulpiteer to-day no longer secures a congregation, and a modicum of self-respect restrains the better type in the middle classes from encouraging their sons to enter a profession in which the intellectual currency has been depreciated even below the level of the German mark.

There are four Greek Churches in England, and it has now been decided by headquarters in Greece that the permanent residence of the Patriarchal Exarch of Western and Central Europe shall be in London. We have here in England now a superabundance of soul-saving institutions. The Roman Catholics are working hard for the conversion of our people, the Protestant sects are restating "fundamentals," and even the Mohammedans have their Mosque at Woking.

Men who know modern Greece well, and have travelled in the country, have often assured us that the superstition in the mass of the people is of the densest kind. The contrast with the classical Hellas of antiquity is striking, and provides a concrete answer to those who ask what Secularism has to offer in place of Christianity. We see what the latter has actually set up in the places where Democritus, Archimedes, Hippocrates, and others were laying the foundations of natural science. However disinclined the student of history may be to accept all that is said and written in regard to so-called "degenerate" races, he cannot fail to see in the contrast between the Hellas of "Euripides, the human," and the Greece of "orthodox" Christianity, a tragic object lesson exemplifying at least one of the achievements of the faith.

We have referred on several occasions recently to the very noticeable reactionary forces at work in Australia and New Zealand. Australasian files just to hand bring further confirmation of this retrograde trend. This is particularly in evidence in the activities of the Sabatarians in these Dominions and the support which they are receiving from official quarters. In Victoria and New Zealand the kill-joys have been most energetic. There is, however, some little compensation to this renewed exhibition of Christian intolerance in these two States. In Victoria there has been outspoken protest by the *Age*, the leading organ of public opinion, and in New Zealand the influential Socialist organizations are showing much less inclination to denounce those who are "only kicking a dead horse."

To Correspondents.

R. ATKINSON.—We note your letter, but we have not heard of any doubts in the direction expressed, and the reports in these columns should be enough. Probably the conversation to which you refer was no more than an excuse for inactivity. And these are never wanting when people are so inclined.

L. N.—Mr. Cohen will probably visit Tyneside this autumn if arrangements can be made.

H. A. JACKSON.—We quite agree with your indignation at the thrashing of children. Mostly it is due to the inefficiency or laziness of those in charge. Good teachers seldom resort to it. But, as you say, we live in a Christian country.

T. R.—We do not see anything in Blatchford's article on Spiritualism that calls for a reply. It is essentially an appeal to the ignorance of people in favour of a belief without the least foundation in verifiable fact. Always be suspicious of the man who tries to silence your criticism by dwelling upon how little we know and how wonderful certain things are. That is the trick of the religionist in all ages. The first step is to impress man with his helplessness and ignorance. That once done it is much easier to drive home whatever wild and improbable theory of another world you have in hand. We do not think that Mr. Blatchford is at all likely to impress any decently read man or woman with an understanding of the subject.

R. CLARK.—We do not know anything of the gentleman who says he answered all Mr. Foote's criticisms of the Bible, and did it so well that Mr. Foote acknowledged he was wrong. We suggest that this wonderful man should buy a copy of the just issued *Bible Romances* and judge the effect his disproof had on Mr. Foote. It seems a wonderfully easy job—on paper—to silence prominent Freethinkers.

R. MORRIS.—We should say that Dean Swift's religion was of a very doubtful character. The man who wrote the *Battle of the Books* could not have had a very profound trust in the value of religion.

H. I. BAYFORD.—The only way to be sure of avoiding delay in the appearance of such communications is to send them direct to the *Freethinker* on a post-card.

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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.

Mr. Cohen had the misfortune to slip and badly sprain his ankle over a week ago, and in consequence some things were not dealt with that ought to have been. Tuesday's letters had to be sent to his home, and they could not be got back to the office in time for the day's paper. Among these delayed items was a report from Mr. Whitehead of his lectures in the North of England. His lectures, being delivered in the open, have had to

fight against the very bad weather, but they appear to be making an impression upon the inhabitants of the places visited, and that is all that one can expect in propagandist work. Freethinkers are not made in a hurry, or if they are, they are usually not worth the keeping. And Freethought advocacy must always bear that fact in mind if one is to pursue the work with a good courage.

Another letter that should have received notice last week was a report from Mr. Moss of his attendance at the Birth Control Conference, and at the public dinner. At the latter function Mr. Moss replied to the toast of "The Pioneers of Birth Control," and took occasion to dwell on the efforts of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant in this direction. There are no two people to whom the movement owes more, but now that it is getting "respectable" there is a tendency in many quarters to ignore them for fear of exciting religious prejudice. That is the usual course of things in this country, and Mr. Moss did well to bring this feature to the front. There is, indeed, hardly a reform movement in the country that does not owe much—sometimes everything—to the small body of avowed Freethinkers, although always their work is buried as soon as possible, and timid men and women who are reaping the benefits of their work imagine they are serving the cause in which they are interested by remaining silent and pandering to the religious crowd. Perhaps it will be recognised one day that there is nothing of such supreme importance in the world's affairs as intellectual fearlessness. If we had had more of that quality during the past seven or eight years the world would hardly be in the state it is to-day.

One of our friends in Ireland, one to whose opinion we always listen with respect, even when we do not agree with it writes:—

Seeing that the *Freethinker* is an absolutely non-political journal and devoted to a strenuous attack on the Christian religion, why does it not take advantage of the present situation in Ireland to emphasize the fact that the whole of the trouble arises from the Christian religion, inasmuch as her children, from the cradle to the grave, have for many, many generations been nurtured in its faith and doctrines whether Roman Catholic or Protestant. We now have before us in Ireland a ghastly demonstration of the result of such nurture.

The fact is that this nurture has so twisted and biased the mentality of these rising generations that we now find ourselves in the presence of numbers of persons—male and female—who are not only quite unfit for self-government, but quite unfit to control themselves as individuals. This is surely evident.

My point is that the *Freethinker* might, if it chose to do so, take great advantage of the present situation in Ireland to make plain the evil of the teaching of the Christian religion. I make no distinction between Roman Catholics and Protestants. My conviction is that the Christian religion in all its forms is the most harmful.

We quite agree with what is said above, and have time after time, in articles and paragraphs dwelt upon this aspect of Irish affairs. We do not know what more we can do, save to work up our circulation among Irish readers. In that matter we are largely in the hands of what readers we have on the other side of the channel. And we can help them in the same way that we help our other friends—by sending parcels of back numbers of the paper for distribution among likely readers. This is a capital way of helping the paper and the cause it serves. We may also add that when the political situation is eased in Ireland there should be a capital chance for a little intensive Freethought propaganda.

At the Discussion Class held by the Manchester Branch last Sunday, Mr. Seferian gave a succinct summary of the points which called for special emphasis. The next meeting will be held at Mr. Bailey's residence, 8 Oxford Grove, Whitworth Park, on August 20, and Mr. Greenall will be the class leader. Members intending to be present are asked to notify Mr. Bailey to this effect.

Games were in full swing in some of the London parks

last Sunday. Brockwell Park in particular presented a lively appearance, and there was a general atmosphere of cheerfulness in spite of the somewhat untoward weather. This is precisely what our violent denouncers of the "Continental Sunday" dread and dislike. They are seriously apprehensive of the importation of our Gallic neighbour's *joie de vivre* on the Sabbath. In this respect they cannot claim to be good free-traders.

The Glasgow "saints" will ramble to Mearns Castle on Sunday, July 30. They are requested to meet at Rouken Glen Park Gate at 12 o'clock punctually.

There was an old maxim that where there were three doctors one would be sure to find two Atheists. This saying had its origin in the days when all scientific men were in more or less veiled hostility to the Church, and the Church did not hesitate to speak of the Atheistic tendency of science. Nowadays the Church is more cautious, but we still fancy that if medical men were to say openly what their opinions are on matters of religion a great many would be surprised. The more credit is due to such as in the midst of a busy life, and with all the temptations to remain outwardly conventional, still find time to put in a stroke for the Freethought cause. If what they do will induce others to be equally outspoken, their frankness may help to cure their patients of diseases other than physical ones.

We took up with the greater appreciation a volume by Dr. Macleod Yearsley, for whom we have a feeling of respect on other grounds, and which has been upon our table for several weeks waiting for public, but not personal recognition. Dr. Yearsley calls his book *The Story of the Bible*, and the only quarrel we have with the work is that the title does not do it justice. It is true that it does deal with both the origin and nature of the Old and New Testaments, but the book as a whole is of much wider scope than its title implies. It is actually an outline of religion using the Bible as a text, or using the history of religion in order to illustrate the nature of the Bible. And the work moves along the right lines inasmuch as it constantly uses anthropological data by which to interpret biblical stories. Chapters 3, 4, and 6 are excellent illustrations of this. Two other chapters, one on the Origin of Christianity, the other on the lives of Great Teachers and their legacy to mankind, deserve special mention. On the whole, we congratulate the author on finding time, in the midst of busy West End medical practice, and on having produced so useful a work. The book is issued by Messrs. Watts & Co., at 7s. 6d. We hope it will have the circulation it richly deserves.

Mr. R. Clark writes: "Permit me to add my small voice to the chorus of praise of your *Theism or Atheism?* Let's hope the demand exceeds the supply." We have still a good supply on hand, as the edition printed was not a small one. And we are pleased to add that, in spite of bad trade, the book sells steadily. Mr. Cohen hopes to issue another work some time during the autumn. Several new works will also be issued by the Pioneer Press. So far as our resources will permit we intend to keep this branch of our propaganda to the front. There is nothing quite so effective as the circulation of Freethought literature.

Christianizing the Heathen, by Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner (Watts & Co., 3s. 6d.), provides a good survey of the work and influence of the different missionary agencies in various parts of the world. To the Christian reader a deal of the indictment will be discounted because it has been derived from those who are not believers in missionary work, or in the creed which the missionary preaches. But those with an open mind will agree that so much evidence from so many responsible people all over the world provides a serious indictment of the whole movement. We suggest to Mrs. Bonner that the first-named class of readers could be met by the policy pursued

by Mr. Cohen some years ago in his little book on *Foreign Missions*, which pursued the line of analysing the reports issued by the Missionary Societies and showing their misleading, and sometimes fraudulent character. That is a form of attack to which there is really no reply. Still, Mrs. Bonner has put an immense amount of work into her book, and to the general reader it provides material that cannot be easily got elsewhere. We hope the book will have a wide circulation.

While we are on this subject, we should like to express the wish that someone would carefully examine the extent and nature of the various trading agencies carried on by the missionaries in different parts of the world. They operate as tea-planters, and as large employers of native labour, and from facts that have come within our knowledge, their operations appear to be open to charges of sweating, and profiteering in some of the worst forms. The dupes who supply the money for the initial venture are not always aware of the uses to which it is put. And a careful examination of these trading operations might throw a strong light on the attitude of missionaries to certain native questions.

On the Safe Side.

"EVEN if I am wrong I am as well off as you in the long run." In the Christian's armoury of "anti-Infidel arguments" this contention long held a place of high honour. It was often brought in as a clincher at the end of the list. The roots of the plea strike deep into the soil of all religious belief, and however clearly the more dignified defenders of the faith may themselves perceive its real character, their policy is to foster in the rank and file the spirit that underlies it.

Every authoritative religion, of course, offers the same assured gift, so that the only absolutely safe course must be found in acceptance of them all. Had any guiding principle in life been better calculated to hold men aloof from fearless effort to penetrate Nature's secrets, organized religion would have discovered it long ago. Safety—this is its watchword, and the goal is conspicuously kept in sight by a generous supply of promises and threats concerning the future, as well as by various kinds of appropriate persuasion in regard to the present. It is safer to accept the current creed, not only in the long run but in the beginning. The latter, however, is the right place to take hold of it. Most "infidels" I have met admit this. They have had convincing proof of it. Secularists may protest as much as they like that a lie is a lie, and that this world counts for something even to them; but the Christian has his ready-made answer—"I am on the safe side."

The highest expression of the safe disciple is the Christian that is satisfied with his faith because it has been already agreed upon—signed, sealed, and delivered, as the lawyers say—and has suitable rewards and penalties attached to it. His own merit consists in accepting a good thing when it is offered to him. He rightly views his religion as essentially a scheme of salvation, and says to himself, "God has given his pledge, I must give mine." He suspects any argument, even for the faith, unless it is drawn from authority—either from revelation or from the Church. He has settled convictions; God never meant him to waste his time looking for them. Besides, he knows others that tried the experiment of exercising their own judgment in matters of faith.

In its offer of a definite, formulated creed which secures adherents against all mental disquiet, the Roman Catholic Church has most successfully exploited this type of man and woman. As long as her proffered "certitude" is accepted by the flock she

will continue to do so. But precisely the same idea of security permeated the Protestant sects as long as the authority of the Bible could be maintained. "The One Thing Needful," or something similar, was a favourite title for the millions of tracts distributed in the English-speaking world, and the propounders of the Gospel drew a truly dark picture of the lot in store for "strangers from the covenants of promise." Some of them recounted, not without a certain relish of self-satisfaction, lurid stories of infidel death-beds, with which, of course, was contrasted the joyous leave-taking of the "elect." Only those who stand on the lowest rung of the apologetic ladder expect to make any impression in this way in the days of a progressive revelation. But they are degenerate days for the law and the prophets, and if God no longer shows his old concern for souls of the second or third grade, the signs of the times would seem to point to the speedy coming of Antichrist.

Religion is not the only subject on which the utterances of the majority of men and women are characterized by a pitiful timidity. In the grooves and ruts of protective mimicry most souls perhaps feel supremely safe. It is in the domain of religion, however, that the voice of "safety" has made itself invincibly audible. It is pre-eminently in this sphere that men count the cost. That is why the religiously "secure" individual is so full of personal hostility to the "dangerous" ones that would destroy his peace of mind.

Below the ideal votary there are various types of witnesses to the influence of safety. In the higher ranks of the assessors of spiritual values to-day one hears a good deal about "religious experience." In the nature of things experience cannot be much of a guide where such doctrines as the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection are concerned. From their elevation doubtless the advocates of experience as a safe guide distinguish more clearly than their fellow-Christians between the fundamental and the non-essential. There is besides in England a large middle-class which feels the practical need of protective colouration in religion as much as in any other department of life. Its members apprehend vaguely that something will result if Christianity vanishes. They are probably right, though they cannot agree as to what the "something" will be. They detest risky paths, and still more, the spirit that seeks them. Every such venture is an affront to the general welfare. Deeply imbued with this notion, they support religion in the schools, in the ceremonies associated with births, marriages, and deaths, and in the administration of an oath. They are convinced that the current sanctions of religion helped to produce them and their class. This conviction, too, may be well-grounded.

The effect of such an attitude of mind on conduct, more particularly in the treatment of "dangerous" innovators, is written indelibly on the face of Christendom. This was inevitable. The "safer" a religion, the more justified it is in making others "safe." But personal character has also suffered, and still suffers, grievously from the appeal to safety. Demoralizing as is the influence of this appeal on the flock, the taught, those that teach and cultivate such "security" are even more warped morally, if not intellectually. They become "spiritually" interested in keeping their raw material submissive to their own efforts. There results a twofold degradation of the natural man. First, the idea that spiritual degeneracy might ensue from delight in intellectual pursuits is essentially hostile to the spirit of free inquiry. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit." What encouragement here to recognize, and rely on, one's own merits? Secondly, all these "assured" promises, consolations and threats act as

a poisonous blight on the emotional life. Their victim becomes either the mean-spirited dupe of his own and others' timidity, or a conceited "child of God." If one's eternal welfare depended upon accepting such conditions, it would still be the moral duty of a freedom-loving man to spurn the offer and defy the consequences.

It is often said that one of the saddest sights in the world is the slave embracing his chains. Does not every real slave do this? Here, what holds in the physical realm has certain analogies in the sphere of mind. Mental slavery, however it may have varied with the religious and social conditions of each age, is intimately associated with "safe" religious beliefs. On the other hand, mental freedom has never been so insecure as when Christianity was at the summit of its power and influence.

The world is full of problems. They bring profound dismay to some worthy folk who see clearly enough the danger of going forward and yet cannot go back. At this moment adherents of the Church which has always claimed universal sway in the religious domain, are pleading that a new lease of power will enable a world-wide "spiritual" corporation to frustrate any effort to establish the "servile state." The idea is not new, but the ground given for advocating it anew deserves honourable mention. The devotees of a religious system whose object is to put the stencil-plate over the world's collective mind, have peculiar facilities for estimating the advantages and disadvantages of the "servile state." Another "spiritual" corporation is now revising Articles which were legalized and made "safe" by Act of Parliament long ago, while those who pinned their faith to an inspired revelation are issuing re-statements of "fundamentals." They are equally available for salvation, and we infidels have not the slightest objection to their votaries going to heaven. It is the proper place for them. But when they want to take others with them, it is time to protest, in the words of Arthur Hugh Clough, that some people do not desire to be dragged to heaven in a bath-chair.

A. D. McLAREN.

Pictures and "The" Pictures.

IN the great age of pictorial art, it was the custom to select a story familiar to the great majority of the people and to depict it with the utmost skill which the artist possessed. Practically all the pictures representing the middle ages which are to be found in the Public Galleries are story pictures. They endeavour to express by the representation of an incident, a whole story, or at least to suggest that story to the minds of the people who were in those times well acquainted with it.

Similar stories are not told by the most progressive of modern pictorial artists, but the place of pictorial narrative art has been taken by the drama of the kinema. The kinema is nothing more or less than a series of pictures of incidents which it is left to the imagination of the audience to connect up. "The" pictures are merely an extension into a more complete story of the incidents which the medieval artist selected so carefully.

In this semi-educated age, few people care for words. They cannot be "bothered" to read descriptive matter. The development of the popular novel is dependent not upon the ability of words to tell a story, but upon the desire for a continuous narrative of the incidents included in the story. Such a continuous narration was quite impossible to the pictorial artist, and consequently, as people began to learn to read, so developed the popular story.

The development of the drama, which was of an

earlier date than the novel, was based upon a similar desire. When stories were passed along from one person to another by word of mouth, it was natural for them to be accompanied by a good deal of gesture, and they became even more illuminating if the various parts were taken by different people who accompanied their speeches by a relative action. The rise of the drama appears to have originated in a natural desire to see the people doing those things which the story related.

In modern times the novel has degenerated from its standard of sequence of action into a succession of psychological situations dependent for their presentation less upon the actions of the individuals than their mental reactions to one another.

Similarly the drama has developed from the drama of action into the drama of inaction, the didactic and literary drama.

In the picture galleries the contention that what interests people is a narrative picture, a picture of an incident which will suggest to them a series of incidents comprising a story, is supported by all the evidence. In one room in the National Gallery, Frith's "Derby Day" was at one time hung beside Whistler's "Nocturne in Blue and Silver." The "Derby Day" immediately attracted a crowd of people, in fact it attracts a succession of crowds, while Whistler's "Nocturne" is more or less neglected.

In art, action in life makes the normal appeal to the great majority of people. Human life is largely action, and human beings naturally, therefore, love action to be represented by the artists. They are more interested in their fellow man than in any other subject. They like to see art devoted to experiences which they can understand, and which it is probable that they themselves have undergone. They are not interested in abstractions, that is why the medieval artist is acclaimed as such a great man, quite apart from the technique and execution of his work, and indeed the reason for narrative pictorial art is the same to-day in "the pictures" as it was in the middle ages in pictures.

The modern method of presentation of a story in the kinema, however, might find some instruction if it were to regard the composition and arrangement which the masters of art in the middle ages achieved. It would be incredible if anyone were to assume that the composition and arrangement, speaking pictorially, of the cinematograph drama, were to be compared with the composition and arrangement of the single moment of their incident shown in medieval pictures.

It must, of course, be admitted that it is more difficult to show a rapid succession of pictures having an equally high standard of composition and technical perfection, than it is to arrange the subject matter of one picture only and to spend many weeks on its perfection. It must be admitted that the medieval artist was in a position to idealize his models and to use the most beautiful pigments which his palette afforded.

The exact representation produced by a photograph gives no possibility of idealizing the models who are the actors in the drama.

It is not therefore difficult to account for the comparative lack of interest which the great public display in pictorial art in these modern days. Art, generally speaking, that is art as apart from cinematograph art, has degenerated from its popular standard. Painters no longer devote themselves to narrative art any more than do the novelists or the dramatists. The whole tendency of modern art is towards the abstract, it is essentially concerned with something else than telling a story, and even if it were, modern people are not limited to the few stories which were passed about in medieval times and with which the great majority of people were quite well acquainted, but they have in their possession an infinite variety of fiction, so that

the choice of a subject for a narrative picture which shall be popular is not only difficult but almost impossible.

The medieval appeal of pictorial art was to people comparatively simple. People who possessed a much more limited variety of experience than even the least of moderns. Their interest in pictures was perhaps more an interest in the story than an interest in the art of the artist. That is a thing which it is very doubtful whether more than a very few people understood at any one time. To-day the kinema provides the interest of a pictorial story. It makes an appeal which is identical with the appeal of the stories in medieval pictorial art, while appreciation of the arrangement of the dramatic picture and its composition is still confined to a few perhaps hypercritical people.

G. E. FUSSELL.

The Vicar's Dream.

THE vicar was tired, and hot, and decidedly angry. There was no doubt about it; the day had been a very bad one for the vicar. First of all, he had risen rather late, and in the process of shaving had cut himself. Now, vicars are only human, and he had given expression to a very naughty word; which would not, perhaps, have mattered so much had not the servant heard it, and smiled and said, "Beg pardon, sir!" Then he had spent an hour composing his sermon; that is, he had tried to compose it but had only succeeded in discomposing himself. "Why was it," he had wondered, "that every text he selected seemed so—he hardly dare say the word, but there was nothing else for it—why did they all seem so—'trashy'?" He must be plain with himself. There was evidently a shortage of suitable texts, and—profane thought—he would certainly have found it far easier to construct a sermon from, say, *Julius Cæsar* or *Macbeth*.

There was only one thing for it. He would follow the example of that hard-headed, clear-thinking man who had just found the light and was now engaged in reflecting it in the Sunday papers—he would leave the job to his sub-mind. But there was something else to account for the vicar's wrath. In the quiet and tranquil village of Mudborough a bombshell had fallen. That very day an address had been delivered in the local hall by—horror of horrors—an Atheist, and the vicar, supreme in his contempt, had attended the meeting for the express purpose of tearing the arguments of the infidel to rags—and he had failed to do so. Not only had he failed, but he had been laughed at by members of his own congregation; but he would certainly punish those backsliders; he would call out their names in church before their very facesif they ever came to church again. "What was it the Atheist had said?"

"There is no doubt that if the nursery rhyme 'Jack and Jill' had been incorporated in the Bible by some chance, there would have been scores of parsons ready and willing to testify to its inspired nature and to discover hidden moral meanings in every line of it." Ridiculous! Moral meanings in a nursery rhyme! What moral could be found in "Jack and Jill" by any sane man?

Why, he had almost forgotten how the rhyme went "Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water. Jack and Jill went up the hill.....Jack.....andJill....." And the vicar, being hot, and tired, and angry, slept.

The little Mudborough church was crowded. The congregation, mouths agape, waited expectantly for the entrance of the vicar.

All was excitement, for had not the vicar announced

that a new book had been discovered which was, according to the best theologians, an inspired document? And had not the vicar decided to base his sermon upon a text from that book?

As the vicar opened the book, which, strange to say, was unlike most books used in churches, gaily coloured, having printed upon its covers a picture of an elephant wearing trousers and smoking a pipe and the magic words "Nursery Rhymes"; profound silence reigned. The text was announced: "Brethren, I shall preach this morning from the text—

Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water;
Jack fell down and broke his crown
And Jill came tumbling after—

the second book of nursery rhymes, chapter two, verses one and two.

"Our attention, dearly beloved brethren, is first of all drawn to the rhythmic swing and poetic beauty of these verses. But more important by far is the profound spiritual lesson which can be learnt from them. Just as Jack, and his partner Jill, ascended the toilsome path for the purpose of drawing water from the well, so must we traverse the toilsome path of study and research, that in the end we may draw sustenance from the well of truth. As is well illustrated in these verses, the path is not easy. Verily, we may fall upon the way and sustain hard blows to our self-esteem just as Jack did. We may meet high-way robbers upon the way, as he did—'er that is to say, as he may have done had it been so willed; robbers who will attempt to convince us that theology is plausible lunacy, and that our spiritual guides, the clergy, are parasites and men of feeble intellect. Perhaps, at first sight, this may appear to be the case, but we must have faith, brethren, and follow the truth up hill and down, just as Jill followed Jack—each collecting his modicum of truth that in the end they may be mingled together as the water from Jack's pail was mingled with that of Jill's when finally they reached the foot of the hill together. We must—"

With a start, the vicar awoke. What had he been dreaming?

The words of that confounded Atheist orator were jingling in his ears. Moral meanings from nursery rhymes!

Was ever absurdity carried to such extremes?

A.

Correspondence.

A CORRECTION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Permit me space to correct an unfortunate misprint in my letter on "The Outline of Science," printed in your issue of June 4. I write of being "bullied into a sense of false security" through the seductiveness of the text. This should obviously read *lulled*, as it would appear otherwise that I were disposed to controversial petulance. I agree to genially differ from Prof. Thomson, my criticism being mainly directed against the commercialized instincts which prompt the inclusion of spiritualistic special pleading in a publication purporting to discover to the masses the results of disinterested scientific investigation.

E. A. McDONALD.

Johannesburg.

SIR,—With reference to Mr. Charles Baker's suggestion for the formation of a Correspondence Branch (published on p. 378 of the *Freethinker*), I would strongly recommend the formation of such a branch as it will greatly benefit Freethinkers all over the world by getting into touch with each other, as well as by the exchange of ideas and opinions.

The names and addresses of such Freethinkers as are willing to correspond may be published in the *Freethinker* from time to time.

K. SAMUEL.

Allahabad, India.

Grave and Gay.

It is a fine generosity which prompts Christians to send missionaries to civilize savages abroad when there is so much work and so great a need for them in their own churches. Out of so great poverty to give so much.

God made man in his own image. That may have been intended for a compliment. But man afterwards made God in his own image. And that was a disaster.

There is nothing so destructive in the world as truth. It threatens the existence of fifty per cent. of our institutions and seventy-five per cent. of our theories.

In diplomacy an accepted method of deception is to tell the truth. The religions of the world never accepted this maxim and they are now paying the penalty of being found out.

The saying that God's ways are not our ways is not a complaint, it is a compliment that man pays himself.

Christians who are blessed with a fair comprehension of themselves, when thanking Jesus because he died for them, must also thank their fortune that the beneficial event took place a long time ago—before he had a chance of seeing them. In that case it might never have happened.

There is only one really good husband in the world—and the other woman married him.

The only permanent thing in the universe is change. Nothing stands still—least of all man. For him to stand still is impossible. Either he must go forward or backward. If he does not move absolutely he moves relatively, becoming less advanced in relation to other groups.

It makes all the difference in the world whether a professed patriotism is based upon a genuine love of one's own country, or upon nothing more than a hatred of outsiders.

There is nothing absurd in the doctrine of the Trinity—if one can understand it. Neither is there in a six-sided square—if one can understand it.

Conservatives are the makers of revolutions. Revolutionists only carry them out.

A worn-out institution resembles a potato—the only useful part of it is underground.

There is no advance in the universe, there is only transformation. The only end in nature is the idea of an end, and that once realized is only a step towards another end, and so without ceasing.

It is sometimes said that what one gets for nothing is worth the price paid for it. That is not true. In fact, the reverse of it is more often the truth. Indeed, it may be said that only that which a man gets for nothing is worth the having. All the little civilities of life, and which make life worth living, we get for nothing and are impossible of payment. The man who gives only that which is in his bond is neither a servant nor a master on whom one places much value. The public servant who carries out only the letter of his duty departs without being missed. In all the relations of life it is the hundred and one small things that one does not pay for and which cannot be paid for that are of real and permanent importance.

PETER SIMPLE.

Creeds.

I.

MEN build rough high walls
Along straight narrow lines
And call them—Creeds.

Men carve distorted shapes
Upon the rough high walls
And call them—Truth.

Men put fantastic rags
On these distorted shapes
And call them—Beauty.

Men keep, forever,
Within those rough high walls
And call it—Right.

Men manacle their minds,
Fearful lest they scale the rough
high walls
And be free.

Men blind their eyes,
Fearful lest they see the mysterious
world
And be wise.

Men deafen their ears,
Fearful lest they hear
Enthralling music calling them
beyond
And go.

Men creep onward
Between those rough high walls,
Those grotesque walls, those queer-
decked walls,
And call themselves saved.

II.

I am not saved,
But, friend, weep not my lot;
For I was born of sun and earth,
And the stars are relatives of mine.

I am brother to the wind,
And the sea is a sister of mine.

I am kinsman to the wolf,
And the lamb is a cousin of mine.

The blood of the eagle is part of me,
Part of me is blood of the dove.
The blood of the lark flows through
my veins,
And the venomous blood of the snake.

My mother nestles the pine,
The columbine, aster and rose.

My mother fosters the oak,
And the violet suckles her.

My mother gives life to the palm,
And the poppy grows red at her breast.

Yes, and nothing trammels me—
Save men, my most beloved fools.

Men would deafen my ears, blinder
my eyes,
Manacle my mind!

Ah, my kindred, I'll have no walls
around me!—

No rough high walls, no queer-decked
walls.

JOHN H. GAVIN.

From *Poetry*.

Such a blockhead Idol and miserable Mumbojumbo, fashioned out of deciduous sticks and cast clothes, out of extinct cants and modern sentimentalisms, as that which they sing litanies to at Exeter Hall and extensively elsewhere, was perhaps never set up by human folly before. Unhappy creatures! That is not the Maker of the Universe—not that; look one moment at the universe and see!—*Thomas Carlyle, "Latter-day Pamphlets."*

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.

THE "LAURIE" DISCUSSION CIRCLE: Every Thursday at the Laurie Arms Hotel, Crawford Place, W. Social reunion at 7.30 p.m. Chair taken 8 p.m.

OUTDOOR.

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

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Regent's Park): 6.30, Mr. A. D. McLaren, "The Old Faith and the New."

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

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY: Ramble from Caterham to Godstone; conducted by Mr. F. M. Overy. Train from Charing Cross 10.20, London Bridge (S.E. & C. Ry.) 10.29. Cheap return ticket to Caterham 3s. Bring lunch. Tea at Godstone.

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