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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

	Page.
<i>Freethought and Prejudice.—The Editor</i> - - - -	737
<i>Prayer.—J. T. Lloyd</i> - - - - -	738
<i>The Laureate of Secularism.—Mimnermus</i> - - - -	739
<i>Pagan and Christian Civilization.—W. Mann</i> - - - -	740
<i>Writers and Readers.—George Underwood</i> - - - -	741
<i>Historical Misnomers.—H. George Farmer</i> - - - -	746
<i>A Medicine Man in South Africa.—Searchlight</i> - - - -	747
<i>Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, Letters to the Editor, etc.</i>	

Views and Opinions.

Freethought and Prejudice.

Some time ago one of our lady correspondents wrote pointing out the amount of opposition encountered by her whenever she attempted to introduce among friends her Freethinking opinions. I was not surprised at her letter because one can easily meet with that sort of thing in almost any walk of life. The lowly and the highly placed often resent any attempt to place before them ideas about religion to which they are unaccustomed, and each will take it for granted that the fact of their having what they are pleased to call opinions about religion—often a name for the most stupid of prejudices—warrants them in warning all others off. One could overlook this if it were the product of a profound conviction as to the truth of religion. But it is not. It is often no more than a mere feeling that it is wrong to say anything that will run counter to another's religious beliefs, and that if one happens to disbelieve in religion it is one's duty to keep one's mouth closed. It is a species of intolerance without the excuse of convinced bigotry. It is bad form to attack a man's religious beliefs in the name of irreligion. On the other hand it is excusable if one attacks a special religious belief in the name of another religious belief. It almost looks as though it was believed that a certain amount of stupidity is essential to every human being, and that the Freethinker in attempting to diminish the amount current is believed to be striking at the foundations of social welfare. It is wisdom to leave a fool to his folly, says an old adage. It is probably held that the same thing applies to religion—which in a civilized society is, after all, only a special kind of unwisdom.

* * *

An Experience.

The letter somehow brought to my mind an experience I once had returning from a provincial lecture. My fellow travellers were two men of about sixty years of age. After a time we began to talk about a variety of subjects—the state of trade, the long time the world was in settling down after the war, etc. Suddenly one of my companions gave the conversation a new turn by remarking, "The truth is we have all fallen away from God." (I subsequently discovered they were going to London to attend a Church Congress.) I said nothing, merely raising my

eyebrows by way of surprise. "Don't you think that is the case?" was the next question. I very mildly remarked that I knew nothing about it. "But," persisted my companion, "don't you feel that you have fallen away from God?" I replied that I was not conscious of having fallen, and that if it had happened the descent must have been so gradual as to escape notice. In any case the question of whether I was falling away from God or getting nearer to him was not one that troubled me. That put the fat in the fire. My companions evidently moved in circles where this kind of fatuous conversation was taken with the utmost seriousness. They were astonished that anyone could treat the question so lightly. So they set to work to enlighten me, and in so doing assumed that air of superiority mixed with compassion which seems to come quite naturally to the believer bent upon plucking a brand from the burning. I was the poor benighted man low down in the depths; they were the enlightened ones seeking to lift me to their own level of spiritual excellence.

* * *

Rubbing It In.

As I am not quite destitute of a sense of humour I found the situation very amusing, although to have relieved myself by laughing openly would have spoiled everything. So after a time I excused my not taking Christianity seriously by observing that Christianity had always appeared to me such a poor kind of a belief. What did I mean? Well, I explained, it seemed to me so selfish and so narrow a creed, it was so weak morally, that I felt the less I had to do with it the better. By this time they were getting thoroughly puzzled. My conversation had shown that I was not exactly insane; in fact, before we had begun with religion my views of life had received their hearty approval. What was it I meant? I explained that when a religion made its motive power the salvation of one's own soul that was appealing to one's lower nature, and not one's higher possibilities. No man who had a soul worth saving ever bothered about its salvation. They suggested the sacrifice of Jesus. I passed that with the comment that I was not concerned with what he sacrificed but with the way other people accepted it and the use they made of it. It showed a peculiarly low type of character that could rejoice in getting something it hadn't earned and didn't deserve, and in any case the Churches were filled with quite a large proportion of small and mean characters—a circumstance admitted by nearly all Christians, of course, of each other. And I had never discovered in my passage through the world that the moral strength developed through belief in Christianity was so marked that one could pick out a Christian by the excellence of his behaviour.

* * *

A Question of Merit.

I was careful not to argue the case so much as to assume it. Instead of taking it for granted that it was the other man whose existence needed apologizing for, I quietly assumed that it was the Christian whose

existence needed defending. And this was a form of attack for which my companions were quite unprepared. They had heard of people attacking the truth of Christianity, but to find someone quietly assuming the moral inferiority of Christians and Christianity took them quite out of their depth. They were quite out of their element; and they gradually came down from their lofty moral altitude. They began by thinking there might be excellencies about other religions. That not bringing me down, one of them suggested that I was not better than they because I was not a Christian. I remarked that the point they had assumed was that I was, on that account, worse, and if I was as good the superiority of their religion remained unproved. Then, after some further fencing, they were driven to trying to prove that a Christian might be as good as anyone else. Finally, the climax was reached when, about two hours from the end of our journey, I had these two Church delegates trying to demonstrate that they were not of necessity worse than I because they happened to believe in Christianity. It was a curious experience, and it was worked out with a purpose. Of course, they never knew that they were travelling with a confirmed Atheist. That would have spoilt the whole performance. I was simply an ordinary man of the world who felt himself above Christianity.

* * *

The Modesty of Freethinkers.

I have said that the situation was worked with a purpose, and it connects with the letter from the lady correspondent with which I began these notes. Whatever may be the amount of genuine belief in the truth of current Christianity, there can be no question that it is a dwindling quantity. With large numbers of people a profession of Christianity is a convention, and with this is allied the belief—due to the lengthy prevalence of the Christian religion—that Christianity represents a superior type of teaching, and, by inference, the Christian is a very superior type of person. This belief falls quite into line with the egotism developed by Christianity, and with its encouragement of a disguised selfishness that has been one of the prominent features of historic Christianity. Finally, there is on the heretical side a number of people who do not like to be looked down upon, even by Christians, and who, to avoid this, deprecate attack by conceding to Christians a large measure of the excellence they claim. The consequence of all this is that, like my fellow travellers, it is never brought home to the average Christian that his assumed superiority is very much open to question. And the best way of making the Christian realize this is to play the same game on him that he so readily plays on others. Without making ourselves either a public or private nuisance Freethinkers need to be a great deal more assertive than they are. If there is any patronizing to be done in matters of opinion we may as well do it as the Christian, and the consequences on social life will be much healthier. It is always good for one to have one's opinions questioned even when they are held as a result of sincere conviction. But it is still more to the good when they represent no more than a miserable concession to a stupid convention. We Freethinkers are much too modest, too ready to grant a large part of the Christian's claim to rule the roost. The point raised by my lady correspondent is a very important one. It lies at the root of the question of the progress of Freethought. In substance the intellectual battle against Christianity has been won. The immediate issue is to gain as the result of that battle, freedom of expression and profession. And that will never be given by Christians. It must be demanded and taken by Freethinkers.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Prayer.

In the Bible prayer is represented as an essential condition of true life. It follows that we "ought always to pray," though we cannot pray unless we are Divinely taught to do so. Paul urged his converts to "pray without ceasing," and to "continue steadfastly in prayer, watching therein with thanksgiving." We are assured that prayer offered up to God in the name of the Saviour and by the help of the Holy Spirit shall be heard and answered, and the answer is said to far exceed the petition. In the *Christian World* of November 9 one of the leading articles is entitled "The Mystery of Prayer." It opens with an allusion to St. Bernard and his founding of the monastery at Clairvaux. When he left Citeaux he took twelve companions with him who were so impressed by his pious spirit that they felt as if the Saviour had come again in the flesh; and the writer hastens to declare that "Bernard's life was shaped at the forges of prayer." Those who are familiar with the famous saint's career know that his character had serious defects. Arnold of Brescia was an eminently orthodox divine and his conduct was above reproach; but he was an inveterate enemy of sacerdotalism, and denounced it with his vehement eloquence. He declared that it was the bounden duty of the wealthy clergy, from the Pope downwards, to give back all property and secular dominion to the state, and face the poverty and simplicity so becoming to the servants of Christ. Such teaching naturally caused terrible consternation, especially to bishops and abbots who made an ostentatious display of luxury and wealth. Among them, acting as their leader, was St. Bernard, whose hatred of Arnold knew no bounds. Wherever the poor man went he followed him with letters of bitter attack and condemnation. Once he said: "Arnold neither eats nor drinks, but with the devil hungers and thirsts after the blood of souls." After his condemnation by the Church Arnold became a fugitive, but several clergy of note offered him sympathy and shelter. To one of them, the papal legate, Cardinal Guido di Castello, Bernard wrote:—

Arnold of Brescia, whose words are as honey but whose doctrines are poison.....is reported to be with you. Either you know not the man, or hope to convert him. May this be so, but beware of the fatal poison of heresy; he who consorts with the suspected becomes liable to suspicion; he who favours one under the Papal excommunication, contravenes the Pope, and even the Lord God himself.

To the Bishop of Constance, in more abusive and lying terms still, he denounces Arnold as "the author of tumult and sedition, of insurrection against the clergy, even against the bishops, of arraying the laity against the spiritual power." Then he told the following lie: "His mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, and his feet swift to shed blood." Who can forget his unscrupulous and sinister persecution of Peter Abelard? The truth about St. Bernard is that it was his supreme delight to hunt down in the most cruel fashion the men he disliked. He was a past master in the foul art of "pious scurrility." Such was the saint's character as "shaped at the forges of prayer."

The writer of the article in the *Christian World* says that "there is no answer to the question how prayer is effectual"; but he forgets that there is a prior and vastly more important question, namely, has prayer any efficacy? We are firmly convinced that it has not, and never has had. It is easy enough to wax eloquent in praise of "the inner shrine or Holy of Holies, where life's fret and burden are taken away"; but it is the most difficult thing in the world to prove that anyone derives assistance or deliverance from outside in answer to prayer. That people may be

comforted by praying is true enough, and it is equally undeniable that many *imagine* that their prayers are occasionally answered from above; but no one has ever been able to establish by unquestionable evidence the efficacy of prayer. The Gospels tell us that Jesus went to the mountain and continued all night in prayer to his Father in heaven, but they do not inform us what benefit he realized from the exercise. We are aware, however, that the impassioned petition for deliverance offered up in the Garden of Gethsemane was not answered. In the article we find the following statement:—

Along with the wonder of the Sacrament, prayer is a profound deep in Christian experience, and the more it is sounded the vaster are the depths we find. Prayer is as much beyond our power to explain as is the being of God. That is because prayer is bound up with God and involves God. It is difficult to see how we can believe in God and not believe in prayer. But though we believe that God is, we know also that he is in himself past our searching and finding out; and so, with that converse of the soul with God, which is perhaps the best description of prayer, though we have a witness about it in our hearts, we feel that its essential nature and force are among the undisclosed secrets of the Eternal Love.

To us, of course, there is no unfathomable deep in the Eucharist, our only wonder being that any sane person can believe in it and imagine that it is a medium through which he receives any genuine benefit. The writer is careful in his choice of words. He does not say that we *know* God exists, being, no doubt, sensible of the fact that God is not an object of knowledge but of mere belief. So he contents himself with stating that we *believe* that God is and *know* that he is past our searching and finding out. It naturally follows that if a man believes that God is, and that he is his loving Heavenly Father it is theoretically reasonable for him to believe in prayer; but in any case there is no mystery in or about prayer. In fact prayer is the easiest thing in the world to understand. We admit that to the believer it signifies converse with God, and that it often ministers unspeakable joy to him. The very idea of talking with the omnipotent and omniscient Father of mankind is, to those who believe in him, most inspiring and enchanting; but even the most ardent believers occasionally experience moments of harrowing doubt, and wonder whether, after all, the religious life is not mere dream-life. In some instances such moments are of frequent occurrence and gradually become longer and longer. Many eminently pious people have, ere now, by critically examining the facts of their lives, discovered that prayer is an illusion, that God neither answers nor even hears it, and that probably there is no God at all. Once a person reaches this stage in his mental evolution he finds the step to Atheism inevitable and a quite easy one to take. We have come across numerous cases of that kind during the last twenty years. It is impossible to realize that God is an object of belief and not of knowledge without losing faith in him.

Prayer has never been the mightiest force in human life, though Christians blindly believe that it is. What has it ever done for the world? Generally speaking Christians are the most outrageous egotists in existence. They imagine that had it not been for them and their faith humanity would have been blotted out of existence through its own wickedness and corruption long ago. They claim to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world in all ages, without which the wicked would have filled up the measure of their iniquity and perished countless ages before to-day. But their claim is utterly false. Taking them on the average praying people are not one whit better than the non-praying. The distinction usually drawn

between the Church and the world is a purely artificial one. Indeed there has been a time when the Church was sunk much lower in moral turpitude than the State. Can anyone study the history of the Church, say from 904 to 955, as related by honest historians, such as Baronius, Möhler, Milman, and Schaff, without arriving at the conclusion that the Church was the most depraved and corrupt institution ever seen on earth?

The writer of the article under discussion completely ignores the facts and loses himself in an irresponsible emotional rhapsody. Listen:—

And there is a further reach of prayer to which men can attain. In this further reach it is as if the heavens opened. The world and its palaces dissolve. Symbols and words vanish, and what is left seems a mystic insight into the veiled realms. The lives of the saints contain many instances of this spiritual enlightenment, which is also the source of the prophet's vision and the poet's dreams. "As I mused the fire burned."

That extract contains in reality the most terrible indictment against prayer that one could formulate. Prayer, when seriously and unceasingly engaged in, produces a state of mind which the psychologist would describe as a species of insanity. The great saints never interested themselves in the grim realities of this world. They usually retired from society and lived in solitude, mortifying their bodies, forgetting that saintliness possesses no earthly value whatever, and that what they called the service of God meant disservice to society. True manhood consists not in imaginary converse with Heaven, but in devotion to the highest duties of social life; not in praying to God for spiritual blessings, but in helping our fellow-beings to work out their own salvation. J. T. LLOYD.

The Laureate of Secularism.

Alas poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio; a fellow of infinite jest; of most excellent fancy.

—Shakespeare, "Hamlet."

SOME time ago I purchased on a bookstall a soiled and well-worn copy of George Leslie Mackenzie's *Brimstone Ballads*, and it set me thinking of the personality of the man whose lively and witty verses were, years ago, one of the constant delights of readers of the *Freethinker*. The book was to me a veritable link with the past, for the name on the title-page was of one who was my familiar friend. I loved him well, and our meetings were festal days. If I were writing one of those chilly obituary notices, I could not make a great story of what he had done with his life. He was an architect employed in a Government department, and, in his leisure, he wrote verses. He was a minor writer, and not a famous author. Yet to those near to him he had the qualities which are quite as precious as those which make for fame and reputation. He had a merry heart and a kindly one. There was never a company not the merrier that he was in. Many are duller because he is dead. For he possessed that vagrant, potent thing which men call charm. No wonder that he took hold of one's mind as he took hold of one's hand, with a warm, affectionate grip that lasted.

Although a good speaker, Mackenzie was never at his happiest in the garish light of publicity. He suggested humorously that his unpopularity was owing to his lack of a throat made of leather, and lungs of brass. The real cause was that he was too literary. He loved better a few friends with whom he could talk metaphysics and literature, especially of the great French authors, for whom he had a real liking. He had the spirit of the idealist without the sharp edges

that sometimes makes the missionaries of ideas less attractive to the world than one might wish. He was, above all, sociable in his idealism. A most modest man, he preferred the position of a common soldier in the Army of Freethought. This is the kind of work which does a man honour, but brings him none. He would have sympathized with the modest Frenchman who, when Napoleon took him familiarly by the ear and offered him the Legion of Honour, answered, "Thank you, sire, but could not you give it to my father?"

Mackenzie's professional position would have made most men cautious, but timidity and cowardice were foreign to his nature. All his contributions to the Freethought Press were signed with his own name. It was in the scant leisure of a busy career that he composed his light-hearted verses, and he chose the metrical form of writing because it demanded a certain amount of skill in using words. He was under no illusion as to the literary merits of his verses. "I know too well what a poet ought to be," he once told me, "to imagine that I am one." For, in my impetuous way, I had dubbed him "the laureate of Secularism."

A part of his professional duties was the designing of churches, and this was an unflinching source of amusement to him. "An offended deity would have struck an Atheist architect dead," he declared with a smile. Mackenzie only published one book, but it was, to use Lord Morley's expressive phrase, "a thunderous engine of revolt." Within a couple of hundred pages *Brimstone Ballads* contained an astonishing amount of wit, satire, and argument. It was a happy idea on Mackenzie's part to commence his very profane book of verses with lines on "Genesis," and to finish with some verses on "Cremation." In this volume he proved himself the most uncompromising rhymester that ever attacked superstition in general and Christianity in particular. He showed the popular faith no sort of mercy, and his statement of his point of view is well worth reading. One set of verses, "God and the Kaiser," published at the time of Wilhelm's accession, was reprinted all over the English-speaking world, and even turned up again during the late war in an Australian newspaper.

Brimstone Ballads was published by Robert Forder, and, when he gave up business, copies were sold cheaply, and were often seen on the bookstalls. Forder's office was a very tiny room at the back of a small shop, and Mackenzie said that when he interviewed the publisher concerning his book Forder had to come out of the office in order for the visitor to go in. The little office was also so full of tobacco smoke that he felt as if he were in a scullery on washing day.

I first met Mackenzie on a South London tramcar. We fell into conversation, and I, with missionary intentions, offered him a copy of the *Freethinker*. He replied, "I not only read it, but I write for it." "Who are you?" I queried, and I recall his humorous smile as he answered jocularly, "Mackenzie," if it doesn't make any difference." My first impression was something of a shock. You could hardly imagine that this quiet, smiling, professional man could write a lyric, or turn a couplet against the orthodoxies of the world.

A thorough Freethinker, there was no shadow of turning, no trace of compromise about Mackenzie. It was this calm courage, even more than his ability, which earned for him the confidence and admiration of his friends of many years. I saw him for the last time at a popular seaside resort, and he then talked with difficulty, and I could not but admit that my dear old friend had then but a short time to live. Since then the fates have had their way with him. His name is with many other names, and the sight of

his little book has set me thinking of him. I can, in my mind's eye, see him now as he stood quietly watching the sun shining on the sea that stretched far away to the horizon. Now he is gathered to the quiet West, the sunset splendid and serene, of Death.

MIMNERMUS.

Pagan and Christian Civilization.

IX.

(Continued from page 725.)

Many writers seem to imply that family affection of any sort was as foreign to pre-Christian life as a knowledge of modern astronomy; whereas the evidence of all classical literature and of monumental inscriptions suffices to show that in this respect human nature was precisely the same two thousand years ago as it is to-day. The same evidence may be appealed to in disproof of the common assertion of a wide difference between the two periods in the relationship of husband and wife.....It is about as reasonable to judge of the age of the Antonines by the sole evidence of a satirist (Juvenal) as it would be to judge of our modern life solely by the light of our society journals or the chronicles of our divorce court. The Romans at all events looked back at a period of six hundred years during which there was no recorded case of divorce. In the worst times it was never more than the exception.—J. A. Farrer, "Paganism and Christianity," pp. 196-7.

If there is one claim made with more confidence than another by Christian apologists, it is the claim that Christianity raised immeasurably the position of woman, and rescued her from the degradation into which she had fallen. They illustrate that degradation by citing Ovid's *Art of Love*, and the satires of Martial and Petronius. But as Friedländer well observes:—

With the wholly different standards of decency among women, much was proper that is now impossible. Leibnitz [the Christian philosopher of the eighteenth century] even could send one of Hoffmannswaldau's most disgusting poems to Sophia (the widow of the Elector of Hanover, the mother of the first Queen of Prussia), and she could copy it out for the Dowager Duchess of Orleans (Elizabeth Charlotte), and every one was delighted with the "amorous" verses; thus Roman women might well read Martial and Petronius, and stand on a higher moral footing.¹

The criticism of women's dress comes from the "violent generalizations of such writers as Seneca and Pliny" who, as we have seen are very liable to exaggeration, and, as Friedländer further remarks:—

Similar complaints were raised all through the Middle Ages and in modern times, e.g., in the tenth, thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The transparency of female clothing under the *directoire*, with its Madame Tallien, and at Grodno under Stanislaus Augustus, with Marquise de Lulli, can hardly have been exceeded. Then, in Paris, an especially admired toilette, with all the cameos and gold, weighed only one pound.²

And to-day we hear exactly the same complaints and criticisms of the scantiness of women's dress.

During the Middle Ages, says Bebel:—

In all towns there were brothels, belonging to the Municipality, to the Sovereign, or even to the Church, the proceeds of which flowed into the treasury of the proprietor.

The prostitutes had a guild organization, enjoyed special protection from the authorities, and:—

The members of the guild had moreover the privilege of appearing in processions and at all festivities

¹ Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners*, Vol. I, p. 244.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 249.

in which other corporations took part, and they were not unfrequently guests at the tables of councillors and princes.³

The same writer tells us :—

Prostitutes were provided for guests of rank at the expense of the town. When King Ladislaus entered Vienna in 1452, the municipal government sent a deputation of public women to meet him, the beauty of whose forms was rather enhanced than concealed by their covering of gauze. The Emperor Charles II was saluted on his entry into Bruges by a deputation of perfectly naked women. Such cases were by no means unusual and no one considered them indecent.⁴

If this had happened under Pagan, instead of under Christian rule, how Christian moralists would have enlarged upon it as a sample of Pagan depravity !

Women under the Pagan Empire had attained to a position of great honour and freedom ; Christianity from the first deprived women of both honour and freedom, where it had the power. The Christian Fathers opened with a stream of unlimited abuse against women. Lecky says :—

Chrysostom only interpreted the general sentiment of the Fathers when he pronounced woman to be " a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic peril, a deadly fascination, and a painted ill." Doctor after doctor echoed the same lugubrious strain, ransacked the pages of history for illustration of the enormities of the sex, and marshalled the ecclesiastical testimonies on the subject with the most imperturbable earnestness and solemnity.⁵

Here are a few more choice flowers of speech, culled from the early Christian Fathers :—

St. Jerome called her " the demon's door, the road of iniquity, the scorpion's sting." Saint Chrysostom called her " a sovereign pest." " When you see a woman," said Saint Anthony, " be sure you have before you not a human being, not even a wild beast, but the Devil in person." Saint Augustine's insults were nearly as extravagant. Saint John of Damascus styled her " a child of lying, the advanced sentinel of the Devil," and " a malignant she-ass." Gregory the Great denied her " any moral sense." That is how Christianity restored the position of woman in society.⁶

Tertullian, addressing women, says :—

Do you not know that each one of you is an Eve ?You are the devil's gateway.....On account of your desert, that is, death, even the son of God had to die.⁷

Clement of Alexandria declared that to women " it brings shame even to reflect of what nature she is." Gregory Thaumaturgus asserts :—

Moreover, among all women I sought for chastity proper to them, and I found it in none.⁸

St. Maximus writes of woman as " a malicious evil beast." St. Anastasius, the Sinaite, roundly declared :—

She is a viper clothed with a shining skin, a comfort to the demon, a laboratory of devils, a flaming furnace, a javelin wherewith the heart is pierced, a storm by which houses are overthrown, a guide leading to darkness, and a teacher of all evil, an unbridled tongue speaking evil of the saints.⁹

Dr. James Donaldson, a doctor of Divinity, a classical scholar, an earnest Christian, and principal

³ August Bebel, *Woman: Past, Present, and Future*, p. 32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵ Lecky, *History of Rationalism*, Vol. I, p. 78.

⁶ G. W. Foote, *Christianity and Progress*, citing Thulié, *La Femme*, pp. 201-206.

⁷ Donaldson, *Woman*, pp. 182-183.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁹ Cited by Father Valny, S. J., *Directorium Sacerdotale*, 1898, p. 68.

of the University of St. Andrew's, made an exhaustive study of this subject, and published it under the title of *Woman; Her Position and Influence in Ancient Greece and Rome, and among the Early Christians*, 1907. The result of his investigation he gives as follows :—

The opinion has been continually expressed that woman owes her present high position to Christianity and the influences of the Teutonic mind. But an examination of the facts seems to me to show that there was no sign of this revolution in the first three centuries of the Christian era, and that the position of women among Christians was lower, and the notions in regard to them were more degraded than they were in the first (p. 148).

At the time when Christianity dawned on the world women had attained, as we have seen in our chapters on Roman women, great freedom, power, and influence in the Roman Empire. Tradition was in favour of restriction, but by a concurrence of circumstances women had been liberated from the enslaving fetters of the old legal forms, and they enjoyed freedom of intercourse in society; they walked and drove in the public thoroughfares with veils that did not conceal their faces, they dined in the company of men, they studied literature and philosophy, they took part in political movements, they were allowed to defend their own law cases if they liked, and they helped their husbands in the government of provinces and the writing of books. One would have imagined that Christianity would have favoured the extension of woman's freedom.

It did not, and the learned doctor tells us that :—

The highest post to which she rose was to be a doorkeeper and a message-woman, and even these functions were taken away from her during the Middle Ages (p. 167).

Even to this very day women are not allowed to preach by the Churches of Rome and England, and it is only very recently that a few have been allowed in some of the Nonconformist Churches. Those who wish for a more detailed account will find what they want in Mr. Chapman Cohen's excellent little work, *Woman and Christianity*. W. MANN.

(To be Continued.)

Writers and Readers.

A FRENCH MASTER OF THE SHORT STORY :
GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE.

I MUST confess that I have no sympathy with people who are always tumbling over themselves in their haste to assure the "unintelligent patriot" that all the things we do here in England are done ever so much better abroad. Such well-meant attempts to cheapen our purely English qualities and virtues are too often the outcome of mere laziness and ignorance. I am convinced that anyone who has given careful attention to the English novel from Fielding to Mr. Eden Phillpotts, and who has not been cursed with an overdose of intellect, will not be inclined to set Stendhal, Dostoevsky and Flaubert, when he comes to read them, above Thackeray, Dickens, and Meredith. Our critical representation of life as we know it, is not that of our European neighbours; but it is not necessarily an inadequate criticism because it leaves some of the fundamental facts to the imagination. The other day, an intelligent young friend of mine remarked to me, with all the assurance of light-hearted ignorance, that he was prepared to put M. Anatole France, as artist and thinker, above Mr. Thomas Hardy. I suggested, with my customary urbanity, that the critical judgment of my young friend was not strictly in accordance with the facts. I admitted that Mr. Hardy's touch was not light or flippant enough for what Remy de Gourmont calls the Voltairean "conte syphilitique," and that he was too serious to regard adultery as a mere social peccadillo. When I asked which of Mr. France's

novels he would think of comparing with *The Return of the Native*, or *Jude the Obscure*, in respect of their sheer beauty and power of tragic representation, my young friend was non-plussed. In fact, I imagine that he had read very little of Mr. Hardy and depended upon the reviewers of the English translations for what he knew of M. France.

However that may be, I am not too patriotic to admit that our friends on the other side of the Channel have the advantage over us in some vastly important things. They have, in the main, a healthy contempt for compromise in intellectual matters and the courage to say precisely what they think on subjects which we consider dangerous. A French biologist and philosopher, M. le Dantec, is not afraid to label himself an Atheist, and to write an exposition of his Atheism for a popular philosophico-scientific series. What is even more encouraging for the French freethinker is that so conspicuous an example of intellectual candour does not go unrewarded. Here in England we should imagine that the rationalist millennium had arrived if an accredited publisher printed an expository study of Atheism, and sold twenty thousand copies.

It might be expected, perhaps, that the man of science and philosopher would reach a higher level of intellectual emancipation; but in France these are not the only people who think and say what they think. Mental independence is not uncommon among men of letters, a class which here in England is noticeable for its habit of compromise. Most of my readers must know by this time the mordant qualities of M. Anatole France's dissolvent irony as applied to religious history and beliefs. Those who read French will find a pungent pleasure in the militant Free-thought of Laurent Tailhade, and in those magistral dissociations of ideas which will constitute no small part of the fame of Remy de Gourmont when he gets the readers he deserves.

My object in this place is not to praise M. France and the other emancipated artists I have mentioned, but to direct the attention of the reader to a volume of short stories just published at Paris and entitled *L'Hérésiarque et Cie.* They are by a fairly well-known writer, M. Guillaume Apollinaire, a native of Provence who came to Paris as a young man some twenty years ago. Apart from the excellent collection of short stories and fantasies now before me I know nothing about M. Apollinaire except that I have come across him in the *Mercur* de France, and that I have the pleasure and honour to share his profound respect for the critical genius of Gourmont. But really this fellow-feeling is not needed to make me kindly disposed to M. Apollinaire. A good short story is its own recommendation, and where there are added to it the ironic criticism of life in its religious aspects, and a restrained emotional appeal it comes to us doubly recommended.

The story which gives the title to the book is an ironic little study of an Italian priest, one Benedetto Orfei, who invents a new religion which he intends shall displace Romish Christianity. Ever since the great Arius the Catholic Church has not been troubled with any big competitors. Insignificant variations she has always treated with indifference. Of course her priests often leave the Romish communion, but they leave it on some question of ethics or personal discipline, and the majority are out-and-out unbelievers. They rarely aspire to the dignity of heresiarchs. M. Apollinaire seems to have come across one exception as late as the end of last century. This was an Italian priest who was both a learned theologian and an epicurean in the more popular meaning of the word, which implies a delicate sensualist in the pleasures of the table. In the earlier part of his career he stood well at the Papal Court where he represented one of the expelled orders and might have worn the scarlet of a cardinal. Unfortunately he was troubled with visions, and in one of these the truth was first revealed to him. The incarnation and redemption, he was taught by the spirit, were not confined to one person of the

Trinity, but to all the Three. The two robbers who are said to have suffered the extreme penalty with Jesus, were not common robbers. The one on the right was God the Father incarnate who died in order to experience the full force of his omnipotence, and in his humility was content to remain unknown and without a history. He suffered unjustly because he was too dignified a person to have disciples. The robber on the left was the Holy Ghost, or Eternal Love. In his human form he took on the disgraceful nature of love as we know it here below. He was a real scoundrel and suffered justly. His sympathy with mankind was so complete that he took upon himself all its vices. The first notorious escapade of the robber on the left hand was his adulterous union with Mary. Afterwards he became so completely human that his biography, as revealed by God to Father Benedetto Orfei and printed by him for the instruction of his flock, was suppressed by the Pope as too outrageously obscene even for monkish reading. For, as our author acutely remarks, the language dear to your mystic has often an unmistakably erotic flavour.

Orfei was, of course, promptly excommunicated by the Church whose infallibility he challenged, and retired to the country to spread his new teaching. He seems to have had a dozen or so followers when M. Apollinaire paid him a visit. He was delighted to find the outside world interested in his new doctrine of a triple incarnation, and all that was implied in so radical a change. The description of the Italian priest is full of human sympathy and critical detachment. Remy de Gourmont could not have done better. We see him in his comfortable armchair sipping a heady and sweet *vino santo*, and eating delicious ecclesiastical sweetmeats—a well-nourished, fat, easygoing man, intelligent and broad-minded, expressing himself in metaphors drawn from subjects that are not usually thought suitable for modest ears. A piece of cake goes down the wrong way; there is an explosion of released air, a fit of coughing, and the priest wipes the perspiration from his face, not with the usual large coloured handkerchief, but with a dainty confection of cambrie and fine lace. His discomposure had loosened his monkish robe, and revealed for a second or so an absolutely naked body bearing the marks of frequent flagellations, and other indescribable stigmata of mystic eroticism. A visit to the heresiarch's library helps M. Apollinaire to divine the complicated mental personality of the mystic. In fact, the whole thing is an exquisitely finished cameo, the workmanship of which becomes more amazing when you have examined it carefully. It equals Maupassant's *La Maison Tellier* as a brilliant study in religious psychology. The note of harshness is never present, and it might easily have entered into it. Benedetto Orfei has this in common with every one of us, for we are all both sinners and saints when we are not criminals and martyrs.

There are a number of stories in the volume, in addition to the one I have chosen for special praise, which are models of genial fantasy, good humoured cynicism, and caustic irony. One called *Infallibility* would have won the approval of that master of the ironic method, Prosper Mérimée. A French ecclesiastic has an audience with the Pope who listens patiently to an eloquent tirade against the evils of superstitious domination and mundane ambitions of the Papacy. A little while after the Roman Curia creates the bishopric of Fontainebleau, and the free-speaking and free-thinking French Abbé is translated to the new See. His Holiness and the College of Cardinals may be children in religious matters, but they have all the wisdom of the ages in their dealings with average humanity. A group of stories called *Three Stories of Divine Punishment* are amusing illustrations of the *lex talionis*—an eye for an eye, etc.—but I am afraid I cannot recommend them to anyone who is not acquainted with Petronius and the irreverent and scandalous story-tellers of the Middle Age. If the British public ever acquire a taste for wit and irony someone may give us these delightful stories in an English dress.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

Acid Drops.

A very curious point has just been decided by the Appellate Court of San Francisco. The Court has ruled that the Bible is a sectarian book. It appears that the purchase of a number of Bibles, out of public money, had been challenged and a lower Court had held that the purchase was justifiable because the Bible was the book of all Christians. Taken to a higher Court it was otherwise decided and the purchase declared invalid because the constitution of the State forbids the purchase of books of "sectarian, partizan, or denominational character." We congratulate the Court on the wisdom of the decision, even though the ground seems to have been that the Bible contains a number of Protestant doctrines and was therefore not inclusive of Catholics. But even so, the teachings of Roman Catholics and Protestants would still remain denominational teachings, for in the modern State, with its variety of religions and of no religions, Christianity itself is a denomination or sect, and only the supreme egotism of Christians prevents their recognizing this.

In commenting on this decision the *Christian World* regrets the judgment and hopes that the law will be speedily amended so as to re-admit the Bible, and thinks it possible for the heads of the Roman Catholics and Protestants to come to some agreement on the matter. So much for the Christian sense of justice. It is all a matter of whether Christians can agree. If they do agree to inflict an injustice on non-Christians it does not matter in the slightest. One would have thought that an elementary sense of fair-play would have led the *Christian World* to recognize that if Catholics are not permitted to teach with the money of Protestants their own peculiar doctrines, nor Protestants to plunder Catholics for the same purposes, it must be equally wrong for both of them combined to act in a similar manner towards the non-Christian members of the community. It is a striking illustration of how Christianity distorts and perverts both common-sense and social justice. Evidently our pious contemporary thinks that non-Christians ought to be quite satisfied if they are permitted to live. And perhaps even that concession is the subject of quiet regret.

Commenting on the San Francisco decision the *Record* (November 10) says: "The Bible is the one unifying influence of the Christian world." This is indeed a discovery which should be welcomed by the common household. We have heard it said that there are three hundred Protestant sects in England alone, and in U.S.A. their number reaches much larger proportions. Of Baptists alone there are fourteen different species. And every one of them can quote scripture by the yard in support of its own position. The Christadelphians, whose name denotes "Brothers in Christ," modestly maintain that the other sects are all more or less (mostly more) unscriptural.

The *Catholic Herald* (November 11) contains a report of the annual conference of the Catholic Evidence Guild held at the beginning of this month. We are informed that the Guild records great progress in every department of its work. The same issue of our contemporary contains an advertisement of the Catholic Truth Society, which announces that the membership has more than doubled during the present year. Though anything like vaunting or spiritual pride is utterly foreign to the heralds of the one true faith, we still think that those who are out for the conversion of England have a tough job before them. Nevertheless, Rome offers some attractive stimulants to the spiritual appetite. She understands both leadership and organization, and converts are proverbially enthusiastic. She gets a sympathetic hearing in the daily Press, and in mere worldly wealth her position is far from contemptible.

It is not easy to arrive at an exact estimate of Rome's claims in regard to her progress in Protestant countries.

One hears nothing of her losses, which are by no means a negligible quantity. At the same time Freethinkers cannot be too wide awake in regard to the Roman Catholic position. And when we say "position" we include in the term the Roman Catholic mentality and the activities of such bodies as the Catholic Evidence Guild and the Catholic Truth Society. The uncompromising attitude of Rome on the education question has caused, and is still causing, difficulty not only wherever the English language is spoken, but in many parts of the Continent of Europe. In England, too, she has the weighty support of many old aristocratic families, like the Norfolks, Denbighs, Cliffords, and others. The Roman Catholic Church, in a word, possesses a definite ecclesiastical heritage, and, unlike the Protestant communities, she is not openly disclaiming any part of the ancestral estate. She is far too proud of her achievement for any proceeding of that kind.

From Glasgow we receive a copy of a handbill announcing a lecture on "To Hell—and Back," delivered under the auspices of the International Bible Association.

"No collections except on Sundays" is a persuasive poster outside a Croydon Wesleyan Church. This reminds us of Mark Twain's jest that the only difference between a Church and a theatre was that you paid to go in one, and paid to get out of the other.

Mrs. Carter Harrison, wife of the ex-Mayor of Chicago, has just returned from Japan, and reports a conversation with a Belgian priest who is engaged there in missionary work. He said the Japanese were the most difficult people in the world to Christianize. "They will be nice to you, even friendly and courteous, but no amount of kindness or gratitude for it will bring them to you to be baptized. To receive the faith they must be convinced. Once convinced they are the finest Christians on earth. But the work is slow. So slow!" Naturally, the educated Japanese can see in Christianity nothing better than he has already got, and it contains elements that are much lower than are offered him by such philosophy as that of Buddhism. And the Japanese know the estimation in which Christianity is held by educated people in Europe. In addition there is the example of the practical results of Christianity in the life of the Western world. To take Christianity to an uncivilized people is one thing, to offer it to civilized folk is quite another matter.

A woman at Cobham was bound over to keep the peace after throwing a pear through the window of a house. Her excuse was that she wished to stop the wedding of a Mrs. Cox on the ground that she practised witchcraft. She should have reflected that the proper course in this case is, according to the Bible, to kill the woman, not to throw pears at her. But the incident helps to explain why it is so hard to kill Christianity. We are not so far removed from the savage as we should like to believe. And this pear-throwing lady will quite readily believe all that Christianity teaches. Nor is she far removed, mentally, from the mascot carrying members of the "upper" classes.

We commend the following blasphemous passage to the attention of the Home Secretary: "Jesus had an easy race with First Trinity.....To-day Third Trinity oppose Jesus." Now if that isn't calculated to outrage the feelings of Christians we do not know what will. On looking closer, however, we discover that it is merely a report in the *Westminster Gazette* of some Cambridge rowing competitions. So we breathe again.

The Rev. A. F. Garvie, says that the dearth of suitable candidates for the Congregational ministry is so serious that if it continues much longer it will be difficult to fill the pulpits. The churches are not getting enough pupils among those attending colleges and high schools, and

those that do offer their services are not the pick of the scholars. This sign of disease in the Church is a sign of health in the general community. It simply means that it is not possible to fill pulpits to minister to empty pews. The average professional soul-saver to-day is a curious combination of qualities. There is in him a certain measure of bombast masquerading as personal dignity, and just enough hypocrisy to enable him to restate, without doing too much violence to his conscience, the "fundamentals" of his faith. It is hoped that an abundant use of such phrases as "spiritual values" and "moral instincts" will continue to make an impression on a certain section of the English public. The dearth of suitable candidates for the soul-saving business simply expresses the attitude of healthy-minded Young England to that section of the public.

Public Opinion (November 10) reproduces the substance of some articles which recently appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *Century* on the spiritual condition of Europe. Mr. Glenn Frank, writing in the latter, thinks that morally and spiritually Europe is face to face with a crisis. Mr. Kenneth D. Miller says that the ability of the Churches to lead effectively in the spiritual regeneration of Europe is seriously challenged. Can the Church meet this challenge to-day? We have heard this question before. Indeed, neither of the articles to which we refer seems to us to indicate a very original turn of mind. At what period in her history has the Church ever met a challenge? When she had the power she crushed by sheer physical force all opposition to her claims and pretensions. Was this "meeting" the challenge of the times? Though that method of "proving" her spiritual authority is no longer available, we still have remnants of the same principle of apologetics in the Blasphemy Laws. Roman Catholics are now shouting frantically, "Back to the faith," and Protestants are proclaiming the near approach of the day of judgment. This is the moral condition of Christianity to-day. There is no mystery about it. It is one of the normal symptoms of dissolution. The Church is its own witness.

There is at least one minister of the Episcopalian Church in America with whom Bishop Browne—the author of *Communism and Christianity*—should feel on good terms. The Rev. Samuel Davis McConnell has written a book, *Confessions of an Old Priest*, in which he denies miracles and a whole number of Christian doctrines, and also claims that the Christian religion had its real origin in Pagan religious beliefs. None of these claims are, of course, new, but it is well to know that some ministers of the Church are standing up for them. We have not seen the book mentioned, and should be obliged if one of our American readers could supply us with a copy.

God was busy in the early part of the week. He does get to work sometimes. Chile, in South America, was the scene of his activities this time. An earthquake and tidal wave—they would be described in an insurance policy as "the act of God"—have completely devastated the provinces of Antofagasta, Atacama, and Coquimbo. At least a thousand persons have lost their lives, and many thousands have been rendered homeless and destitute. The effects of the tidal wave were felt over a distance of 1,200 miles, and at Coquimbo the entire waterfront has been inundated. It is a simple story of him who "doeth all things well." It might be made more circumstantial, but hardly more pathetic, by a column of details. On the occasion of the Great Messina earthquake a few years ago, a well-known English Nonconformist preacher said that his faith in God was quite strong enough to stand an occurrence of that kind. Of course it was. Those who see the finger of God in all things might again congratulate him on his appetite and his refined manner of appeasing it.

One of our leading dailies reported the earthquake and its ravages at some length. On the same page, in rather alarmist tones, the public was warned of "gathering

clouds in the Near East," and under the heading, "The Great Silence," were two columns of solemn gush on the armistice service in Westminster Abbey. Surely it was a flash of inspiration that led the editor, or whoever was responsible, to put all this matter close together on the one page. Or was it done by a theist with a sense of humour?

Messrs. J. W. Graves and H. Hinkins, representing the Browning Settlement, are appealing through the Press on behalf of the Christian minorities in Turkey and the Near East. They declare that "Christ, when on earth, was himself an Oriental." This reminds us of a remark we heard recently from one of our readers who hailed from Australia. He said that if Jesus Christ were alive to-day he would not be able, under the White Australia exclusion policy, to enter the Commonwealth. But one must remember that the Church is a spiritual society. If Jesus Christ came to London we doubt very much whether he would be able even to get a seat in the House of Lords.

The Christian Evidence Society held its annual meeting about a fortnight ago. The Bishop of Durham presided. He said that "outworn phases of Christian belief survive as obstacles to the acceptance of Christianity." His lordship apparently wants to retain only "fundamentals" as articles of belief. This word, however, is capable of a nice variety of interpretations. Does it include a local heaven and hell, a physical resurrection and belief in demonic possession and miracles?

We have several times referred to the "Healing Mission" that is being conducted in certain parts of South Africa by a man named Hickson, and the matter has also been dealt with by one of our South African correspondents, "Searchlight." It now appears that only about five per cent. of the cases treated profess to have benefited. That is a very small percentage, and quite as large a number, or even larger would have been benefited by any quack remedy that had been offered them. If this is all the Lord can do he comes out very poorly when contrasted with any patent medicine on the market. As everyone is aware there are a certain number of ailments that will always yield to treatment provided the patient has faith in the remedy offered. And that is as true of bread pills or bottles of coloured water as it is of the preaching of the Gospel.

Canon Gamble, of Bristol, says that we can no longer picture heaven and hell as places to which men are sent for punishment or reward. "We have," he says, "no reason to believe there are such places." Meanwhile Canon Gamble draws his salary for upholding a creed which teaches that such places are as real as Paris or London. Of course we Freethinkers know that the stories of such places are fables, but fancy a Bishop of the Established Church saying the same thing! And yet there are people who ask whether Freethought is making headway or not. We do not suppose the Canon realizes that his statement amounts to saying that the Church to which he belongs has right through the ages been teaching the people a lie. We could almost forgive it that, but the truth is that a large number have preached it knowing it to be a lie.

Near Rio de Janeiro I lived opposite to an old lady who kept screws to crush the fingers of her female slaves. I have stayed in a house where a young household mulatto, daily and hourly, was reviled, beaten and persecuted enough to break the spirit of the lowest animal. I have seen a little boy, six or seven years old, struck thrice with a horse-whip (before I could interfere) on his naked head, for having handed me a glass of water not quite clean! I saw his father tremble at a mere glance from his master's eye. These latter cruelties were witnessed by me in a Spanish colony, in which it has always been said that slaves are better treated than by the Portuguese, English or other European nations.—*Charles Darwin, "A Naturalist's Voyage Round the World."*

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

November 16, Weston-super-Mare; November 19, Plymouth; November 26, Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool; December 3, Stockport; December 6, Labour College, Earl's Court; December 10, Leicester; December 17, Watford.

To Correspondents.

O. OVERBECK.—We did not understand that the articles to which you referred had already appeared in print. Sorry we are unable to use them. Please send us your full address for return.

FREETHINKER.—Glad to learn that the Labour candidate for the Ladywood Division of Birmingham answered the questions on the Blasphemy Laws and Secular Education satisfactorily. We must make these questions living ones if we are going to make headway.

NOEL.—"God's Will" is never more than a name for ignorance and helplessness.

S. WARR.—We are afraid that the people who would take so stupid a book seriously would not be likely to read anything we might say about it, and there is no use writing on it for our own readers. Some are born to be Christians, and nothing can save them from their fate. That unfortunate type will doubtless be eliminated in the course of time.

F. W. LANGRIDGE.—The Sermon preached by Canon Barnes at the meeting of the British Association was published, if we remember rightly, by the *Church Times* a week or so following the delivery. The publishers of the paper would be able to supply you with a copy.

C. BAKER.—We have a Branch of the N.S.S. in West Africa, and we are sending out an increased quantity of literature. That is doubtless the ground the missionaries have for complaining that the work of the N.S.S. is thwarting their efforts. We are glad to hear it. Why not try to get the Freethinkers of South Africa into one or more Branches of the N.S.S. It would establish a living bond between you all, and might lead to very good results.

J. RATCLIFF.—*Freethinker* Sustentation Fund, 22s.

E. G. ELIOT.—Glad to know that Dr. Stancomb has promised to vote for the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws if elected to Parliament. They do serve to bring ridicule on the law. To be effective laws must command the respect of the people, and the Blasphemy Laws cannot be respected by any whose respect is worth having.

TAB CAN.—We should like to see, with you, the complete separation of Christianity from politics, but we are afraid that will only be done as people come to realize that it is not a matter of any consequence for them to believe in it. So long as a man sincerely believes Christianity to be of supreme importance we fail to see how he can leave it out of his political life. Christianity will always interfere in social life while it can, and always to the ultimate injury of the community.

T. GREEN.—There is no Branch of the N.S.S. at Bradford, but there ought to be one. The nearest Branch to you is Leeds. There is no reason why you should not join that one till one is formed in your own town.

H. R. WRIGHT.—We were quite aware of the purpose for which the hall was required. In such cases it is a matter of give and take, and fortunately we do not have a general election every year. We quite agree with you that Free-thought is as important as any question before the public. It lies at the base of most important questions, if people would only see it.

A. MARKS.—It was good propaganda to insist on having your questions answered. There is considerable ignorance as to the nature and scope of the Blasphemy Laws, and the more they are discussed in public the better.

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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.

To-day (November 19) Mr. Cohen will lecture twice at Plymouth. Up to the time of going to press we have not been informed of the name of the place of meeting, but there will be the usual advertising, and local friends will be better informed.

On Sunday next Mr. Cohen pays another visit to Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool. He will lecture on Materialism, and judging from his experience there—a pleasant one—the questions and discussion are likely to be more than usually interesting.

Mr. Cohen has had several requests to undertake a week's campaign in Scotland when he again goes North. He will do this provided arrangements can be made, but in order for him to leave London for more than a week-end he must know well in advance so as to arrange matters connected with the paper and with the office. The better plan would be to fix up two Sundays, with three or four of the intervening week-days. It might then be possible to get as far north as Aberdeen. We hope that those friends in Scotland who would wish a lecture in their district will write as soon as possible. Mr. Cohen will then see what can be done. Scotland is certainly ripe for a forward move.

Glasgow friends will please note that Mr. Joseph McCabe lectures to-day in their city—morning at 11.30 in the City Saloon, evening at 6.30 in the City Hall. The evening lecture is on "Man and the Ice Age," and will be illustrated with lantern slides. As the election fever will be over by the time the lectures are delivered, there should be nothing to stand in the way of good attendances.

We have received a number of letters containing replies given by candidates to the questions published in "Views and Opinions" of a couple of weeks ago. It is too late for the answers to be of use as a guide to voters, but we may summarise these later. In any case they will be kept for reference and possible use later. Meanwhile we thank very heartily all those who have put written and spoken questions, and they may rest assured that their work will have done good even from a propagandist point of view. They may even have the effect of educating the candidates and respective M.P.'s on the question of the Blasphemy Laws about which a large majority have shown the most deplorable ignorance. So that on one point the new House of Commons will be better instructed than it would have been had Freethinkers remained quiet.

The Discussion Circle met on November 7, when there was again a satisfactory attendance. The subject, "The Decay of Religious Belief, and National Decadence," allowed scope for considerable difference of opinion on some of the points raised by the various speakers. Next Tuesday, November 21, Mr. R. H. Rosetti will open a discussion on "How the Idea of God Arose."

It appears we were in error in referring to Julian Huxley in last week's "Views and Opinions" as the son of the Professor Huxley. He is a grandson. We are sorry for the error, although it has no bearing on the criticism offered on the peculiar plea urged for "God" in the name of "Rationalism." We should have enjoyed seeing the Professor Huxley tearing such intellectual shoddy into tatters.

Historical Misnomers.

THE HOLY ALLIANCE.

In spite of the laudation accorded the "pomp and circumstance of glorious war," and all the encomium urged in its defence as a necessity of progressive civilization, from the ancient Ælian to the modern Ruskin, mankind has recognized, at any rate periodically, the folly and uselessness of war. Schemes and plans for a perpetual peace meet us time after time in the pages of history, and yet, with the exception of the eloquent appeals of such disinterested men as William Penn (1693), Thomas Paine (1791), and Immanuel Kant (1795), most of these proposals might justly be considered to be mere verbal homage or pious regrets, wrung from both conqueror and conquered alike in the surfeit of war's hecatomb and wastage. It was the misery and jealousy bred by the Crusades which appear to have prompted the schemes of Pierre du Bois for a "congress of sovereign states" (1306). It was the Thirty Years' War that gave rise to the plans of perpetual peace which were enunciated by Cruce (1623), and Grotius (1625). It was the protracted struggle between Louis XIV and the Grand Alliance that primarily directed the pen of Saint Pierre on behalf of a "European Society" (1712). Similarly, it was the Napoleonic wars that led Alexander I to bring forward his Holy Alliance to "protect" the peace of Europe (1815).

It is remarkable, however, what little vitality these plans had, and what small effect they had on the political thought of the day. Not one of these schemes indeed, ever reached the stage of being seriously considered politically, until the idea of the Holy Alliance was launched. The factors against a "perpetual peace" were considerable. When Europe emerged from the Middle Ages, she had developed the idea of "nationality," and upon its foundation the modern centralized state arose, and with it the specious claims of dynastic and commercial interests. From the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) to the Treaty of Paris (1814) there was scarcely a war in Europe which was not due directly or indirectly to national, dynastic, or commercial interests. These factors certainly existed at the time of the Holy Alliance, but a great change had come over the political world. The French Revolution had come and gone. The Powers had crushed it as a movement, but the ideas which gave it birth still lived, and it was here that Europe saw its danger. If social and political stability were to be maintained, this revolutionary spirit had to be met, not only by force, but by such liberal reforms that would satisfy immediate needs. Peace was the "one thing needful" to accomplish this, and national, dynastic and commercial interests, for the time being, were placed on one side. It was during this period that the idea of the Holy Alliance was put forward as a scheme for "perpetual peace," and for the first time in history an attempt was made by European nations to secure its adoption. The Holy Alliance has therefore been claimed to be the first effort towards a League of Nations as we understand the phrase to-day. How far this is justifiable we shall see.

Ever since the Treaty of Chaumont (1814) the Quadruple Alliance (Great Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia) had guaranteed "the repose of Europe by the re-establishment of a just equilibrium," and specially provided to act "in concert as to measures for preserving the peace when established, and for mutual protection against any attack by France." The "contracting powers" agreed to supply an "auxiliary army" at the request of the "requiring power" in case of attack. This was ratified by the Congress of Vienna (1814-15). Then came Alexander I of Russia on the scene. As early as 1804 he had

petitioned Pitt on the question of a scheme for a "perpetual peace" which would be guaranteed by the Four Powers, who would hold "meetings at fixed periods" for the purpose of "consulting upon their common interests.....and for the maintenance of the peace of Europe." The Czar was, however, a man of dreamy, mystical nature, who had become influenced by the doctrines of Rousseau and a certain Baroness Krudener, and was now quite a religious fanatic. In 1815 he issued his scheme for universal peace by a European Confederation, known as the Holy Alliance. This "confederation" which was signed by Russia, Austria, and Prussia, has become quite a historical document, although it has received far more attention than its intrinsic merits deserve. Whilst Alexander firmly believed in, and adhered to, the "armed police" principles of the Quadruple Alliance, he felt that the principles of Christianity as laid down in his Holy Alliance would be a more potent force in maintaining the peace of the world. From start to finish the document of the Holy Alliance is as nebulous, however, as the mystic musings of its author, for it is only here and there, out of a jumble of pious phylacteries, can one distinguish the slightest basis for a real and practicable League of Nations.

In the preamble of the document of the Holy Alliance, the contracting powers were to base their "reciprocal relations" upon "the sublime truths which the Holy religion of our Saviour teaches." Further, "their sole guide" in justice, peace, and charity was to be the same authority. Such a declaration could not possibly make for the peace of Europe in its broadest sense. Neither the Pope nor the Sultan of Turkey were asked to be signatories, yet they were a power in Europe, and if they had been asked, how could the Pope, the Vicar of Christ, agree to accept the "truths" of Christianity as interpreted by heretics possibly? Again, what virtue had these "truths" for the infidel Turk? Clearly, the making of religion the basis for a "confederation" was a blunder. To-day the Covenant of the League of Nations contains no such strictures, whilst the International Court of Justice opened this year at the Hague replaced the religious oath by a formal declaration as a safeguard against religious differences.

In the first Article of the Holy Alliance the signatories were asked "conformably to the words of the Holy Scriptures" to consider "all men.....as brethren." Here was a "bone of contention" indeed! This was the very idea which the Powers, with the principles and results of the French Revolution vivid in their minds, were intent on sternly repressing, and Austria and Prussia, notwithstanding that they were signatories, were actually the foremost among the reactionary nations. It also stipulated that this spirit of "fraternity" should animate them to protect religion, peace, and justice. But, it could naturally be asked, "which religion?" Christianity, as a cry would scarcely bring Protestant Great Britain to protect "religion" if it meant Catholicism in Austria.

In Article II, we are told of "reciprocal service" between the contracting powers, as well as between these powers and their subjects, and of the "mutual affection with which they ought to be animated." At the same time, in spite of such excellent expressions as "brotherhood" and "fraternity," we are reminded of the Rights of Kings *dei gratia*, whom the protocol informs us were "delegated by Providence to govern." Whether the ruling classes agreed, it is certain that the people who had long ago rejected this principle, would offer objection. This, in substance, is all that there was in this much talked of Holy Alliance.

As a basis for a "confederation" to assure the peace of Europe it was a mere "scrap of paper." As

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for being in any sense a League of Nations, it was if anything the very opposite, and one historian has labelled it "a conspiracy of divine-right monarchs to employ their joint armed forces against their own political adversaries and against the nations."¹ Indeed, how useless and futile was this talk of "Christian Brotherhood," was very soon proved not only by the actions of the signatories but by those of the author himself, for when Alexander found his throne in danger, he became the most uncompromising reactionary. The Holy Alliance held no congresses, made no provision for the settlement of disputes, and made no rules of procedure. What principles it did lay down were the very negation of a League of Nations, since it bred religious intolerance, denied the self-determination of peoples, and took a stand against democracy. No League of Nations could succeed with such blots on its charter. Fortunately, the present Covenant of the League of Nations (1919) has no such blemishes.

In spite of the failure of the farcical Holy Alliance, yet the peace of Europe was kept. This was not by accident. The great controlling force was the Congress of Aix la Chapelle (1818), when the old Quadruple Alliance was converted into the Quintuple Alliance by the admission of France. This and subsequent congresses carried on the peace principles which had held the field since the Treaty of Chaumont (1814), and it was this and not the Holy Alliance that has any claim to be the forerunner to the present League of Nations. The declaration of the Congress of Aix la Chapelle said:—

The intimate union established among the monarchs, who are joint parties to the system, by their own principles, no less than by the interests of their people, offers to Europe the most sacred pledge of its future tranquillity. The object of the union is as simple as it is great and salutary. It does not tend to any new political combination—to any change in the relations sanctioned by existing treaties; calm and consistent in its proceedings, it has no other object than the maintenance of peace, and the guarantee of those transactions on which the peace was founded and consolidated.

Periodic congresses were arranged, and some were actually held, but soon the old factors for "war's alarum" began to make themselves felt. Britain had never agreed to certain "reciprocal guarantees" in the confederation, and further, Russia, Austria, and Prussia, were using the confederation as a lever against all liberal thought and reform. This took Britain to the side of America in support of the Monroe doctrine, which would not countenance any interference of Europe in the domestic affairs of Latin America, and by this, Britain came out of the confederation. The revolution of 1830 took France out of the group, since she could scarcely associate with the three remaining powers who were deeply pledged to the reaction. Soon the confederation fizzled out in a revival of the conflicting interests of nationality, dynasty, and commerce. Thus ended Europe's first effort to secure a League of Nations.

If the Holy Alliance was but a piece of visionary enthusiasm devoid of practicability, the protocols of the Congress of Aix la Chapelle were well devised schemes for a universal peace, at any rate in theory. So much so, that even the British minister Castlereagh, who had laughed at the Holy Alliance, hailed the "Confederation" as a "new discovery" in the art of government, "at once extinguishing the cobwebs with which diplomacy obscures the horizon....and giving to the counsels of the Great Powers the efficiency and almost the simplicity of a single state." Had the "confederation" followed its principles, the

world's peace might have been secured, but with the exception of Britain, the Powers merely used it as an instrument to preserve what they were pleased to call their "rights," which meant in the long run the denial of democracy, nationalism, and political freedom. And thus the dream of a lasting peace was not to be. Mankind had once more to learn in the horrors of the Great European War which convulsed the world in 1914, that if this civilization is to endure, some means must be found by which international disputes may be settled without resort to the sword. Out of the misery and desolation of this conflict there has fortunately arisen a great and noble monument in the Covenant of the League of Nations, which, profiting by the trials and experiences of its forerunners, may yet solve the problem of a "perpetual peace."

H. GEORGE FARMER.

A Medicine Man in South Africa.

EIGHT thousand persons, according to the *Rand Press*, have been treated by the Modern Miracle Worker, James Moore Hickson, at Johannesburg alone, and the scenes in the streets are said to have baffled description. The writer, who has been at some pains to investigate the phenomena in connection with the present wave of emotionalism and credulity which has overwhelmed so many sections of the South African population, has received some interesting communications from correspondents in different parts of the Union, and as the matter is one of interest to Freethinkers generally, it may serve a useful purpose to say a few words on the subject. One correspondent, writing from Natal, says:—

I am in receipt of your letter of the 14th inst. *re* the so-called "Healing Mission." I have not taken much interest in the matter as I regard it as merely a temporary phase which will soon pass away. I remember the stir which was made by "Leguah" in the old days; and I fail to see any difference between the man who called himself "Leguah" and the present Hickson. You may not perhaps remember Leguah. He travelled all round the world with a caravan, advertising and selling his remedies, principally for rheumatism. He used to be well boomed by the newspapers before arrival, and had his advance agents who made all the necessary arrangements for him. He was accompanied by a brass band. He used to extract teeth for nothing. I have seen the rheumatic cripples assisted painfully up the narrow steps to the platform of his caravan, seen him assist the cripple to a chair, talk to him encouragingly, rub him with embrocation, assure him that he was cured, sell him a few bottles of the wonderful mixture; and have witnessed the cripple fling his crutches away, get off the platform without assistance amidst the applause of the crowd; and learn that a day or two later the poor beggar was looking again for his crutches, though sometimes Leguah's methods effected a permanent cure....What in brief are the facts? Hickson does not need to spend any money in advertising. The newspapers do all that for him free and gratis; and not only do it, but on a much more stupendous scale than they ever did for Leguah, who paid for his advertisements. Hickson does not need to pay any advance agents like Leguah had to. All the work of advance agents is done for him by the clergy free of charge....they even do the advertising locally for him free of charge because he comes "in the name of the Lord." Hickson certainly has his head screwed on all right, and knows on which side his bread is buttered. Hickson does not have to pay hotel or living expenses as Leguah did, as the clergy or leading laymen are only too pleased to put this Man of God up free of charge. He lives practically without having to do any work, unless you can define as work his "laying on of hands," and the few words

¹ Duggan, S.P., *The League of Nations*, p. 35.

he addresses to the audiences at each place. He has notoriety which to many men is the breath of life. He travels all over the world to the acclamations of multitudes. He must make a very considerable sum of money out of his ministrations, though I expect you will find that he is cute enough to give a certain proportion to the Church to keep in their good books. In every way I can see that it is a very good thing for Hickson. It is probable that some of his cures may be permanent. Human beings are so constituted that if they believed that by visiting a circus and having a hearty laugh their maladies would be cured, a large proportion of them would receive distinct benefit, even if not be actually cured. Have you read "Lourdes" by Zola? There is an excellent English translation of it. It deals most realistically with the Annual Pilgrimage of the sick to be healed at the holy well of Lourdes, and throws a most interesting light on all such phenomena.....The plain truth of the matter is that the Church is booming him in the hope that some of the glory attached to the man may stick to the Church and help to bolster it up; but as it will naturally follow that most of the alleged cures will prove to be failures, the actual result will be to disgust people to think that they had false hopes aroused in them by the clergy.

This letter requires no comment, and in plain, straightforward language you have all the psychology necessary. I do remember Leguah touring South Africa many years ago but never saw him. He created a tremendous sensation at the time. In none of the provinces of the Union has Hickson escaped hostile criticism, not alone of rationalists. Some of the questions asked are very pertinent. Here are a few from Natal:—

1. What is the difference between the cures effected by Mr. Hickson and those of Dr. Bodie who was instrumental in effecting many wonderful cures of paralysis, etc.?
2. Why has Mr. Hickson's Mission been boomed by the Press and the Church, while the other man was denounced by the Medical Association?
3. Why are the Medical Association so quiet on this occasion?
4. Would the Church and the Press boom Dr. Bodie if he discarded the M.D. and donned the English Church surplice?
5. What has suddenly struck the Church just to have found Mr. Hickson since Mr. Hickson admits having carried out cures successfully for the past 22 years?
6. Was he at one time considered an impostor?
7. Why don't the Church have faith in themselves and be honest, thereby effecting the most wonderful cure of modern times?

Yes, it is a bit curious that the successors of the Apostles in the hierarchy of Anglicanism have to get a layman from overseas to work miracles for them. And it is indeed hard for the Church to be honest. After an innings of close to two thousand years it still requires a cure for a disease that has become chronic.

A medical man in Johannesburg who refrains from giving his name "for obvious reasons" asks a long string of awkward questions for the clergy to answer. At the same time he disclaims all "carping criticism and censure," professes to be in "full sympathy with Church work," and to be animated solely by a desire for "enlightenment in the public interest." He is not likely to get what he seeks for the clergy are adepts at camouflaging the real facts of the matter and covering up their own tracks. Honesty would spoil their game and deplete Mr. Hickson's pockets, besides tarnishing his fame. Here are the questions and the clerical replies:—

1. Has any enquiry been made into the proportion of permanent cures (i.e., one month old or more) of cases dealt with at Capetown? If so, with what result?

2. The figure of 5 per cent. is said to have been given in this connection by one of the leaders. Is this correct?

3. What do they estimate will be the percentage of permanent cures on the Rand?

4. Supposing the number to be 10 per cent. to 20 per cent., how does the Church propose to deal with the 80-90 per cent. remaining (out of 7,000)—in a condition of dreadful disappointment?

5. What has been the ordinary attitude of the healed towards the Christian Church, the Bible, and religion generally before and after the cure?

6. Is any attempt being made to get medical certificates with regard to the physical condition of those applying for spiritual treatment?

7. Are doctors allowed to examine cases before and after treatment?

8. Will Mr. Hickson leave anyone behind him to carry on the healing work?

And he adds, "I am sure that leaders will recognize the reasonableness of these questions and give us satisfactory answers at once."

Replying to this letter, the Rev. Maurice Ponsonby, Vicar of St. Mary's, says:—

I feel that the "Medico's" curious letter justifies me asking you for a little space in order to reply. His real concern seems to be in regard to what we are going to do with the disappointed. To this I would reply that all the 7,000 sick who are coming are people who are accustomed to disappointment. They have been to doctor after doctor, and are no better; they have given up hope. It may seem cruel to raise their hopes again, but:

1. Suppose only 5 per cent. are healed, through our lack of faith or ignorance, there will be 350 happy people. Isn't it worth while?

2. At St. Mary's we have the opportunity of speaking to from 300 to 700 people four times a week. I myself emphasize every time that all must try and make a complete surrender to Christ of spirit, soul and body, to long for the inrush of His Spirit. If they will do this I have no fear but that even if the body is incurable, the unconquerable Spirit of Jesus Christ will be sufficient to give them entirely new life and enable them to rise above the material sphere. This has been true to experience down all history; it has happened throughout Mr. Hickson's mission.

3. Will there be relapses? I think so; I have known it to happen. There will be some whose faith will heal them, but they will go away (like the nine lepers in the story) and forget God again; they will relapse into old Materialism, and it may be impossible to renew them again into salvation.

The writer would suggest a few questions on this reply. Mr. Hickson is reported to have healed Moslems and Brahmans who are quite incapable of making such a "surrender" as this cleric speaks of. From this it follows surely, that faith in Christ is quite unnecessary; faith in the missionary is all that is required for a cure. That the ways of medicine men are true to type down all history ought to be clear to the meanest intelligence.

Another correspondent writing from Maritzburg to the *Natal Witness* says:—

I neither wholly believe nor disbelieve current reports regarding cures during the healing mission. What we need is a body of such indubitable evidence as would satisfy an un-emotional jury of medical experts, or the juridical judgment of a Fitz-James Stephen. Meanwhile I make a suggestion. Does professional etiquette preclude one of our local medical practitioners from stating definitely, from personal knowledge, that in his belief this or that sufferer has been seriously and presumably permanently benefited? Such an affidavit under his hand and seal should be so easily available that an end might be put to the harassing doubts of those whose judgment may possibly have become unsteady by a wave of what may, with no thought of

irreverence, be characterized as a tidal wave of credulousness.

Considerations of space forbid me from quoting more than a mere fraction, but as this ubiquitous medicine man may not unlikely turn his toes shortly in the direction of the home shores, it is just as well that readers of the *Freethinker* should hear something of his activities on these, and the estimation in which they are held. Moreover, our light skirmishers in the ranks of the N.S.S. may welcome a little powder and shot of the right brand. The writer has already had a little light skirmishing with episcopal obscurantism in the columns of the Press, but matters have not reached the stage of a general action. The spiritual quackery of James Hickson commences in Bloemfontein on November 7, and will no doubt receive some attention from those who prefer the light of rationalism to the murk of supernaturalism.

I have not touched on faith-healing from the purely psychological side. Possibly the Editor may feel disposed to do so if he considers the matter of sufficient interest to his readers. The genesis, interpretation, and evolution of faith-healing has nothing obscure about it, and half an hour's study of Professor McDougall's articles on "Suggestion" and "Hypnotism," in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* should make it clear to the meanest intelligence. There seems to be some scope, too, for the Analytical Psychologist in the letters here quoted. The parallel between Leguah and Hickson is sufficiently close. Their method in obtaining results is the same; only the accessories differ. Leguah does not claim "supernaturalism" as his ally; Hickson does. The former employs a brass band and bombast; the latter all the trappings and stock-in-trade of clericalism.

SEARCHLIGHT.

Correspondence.

ENGLISH DIVORCE LAW.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—One hopes that Lord Buckmaster's letter to the *Times* on the 11th ult., which has been so widely commented on by the Press, will do something to rouse people from their incredible apathy and make them see the need for Divorce Law Reform. So much of our English law is a model to the world, that the few blots on it—the laws dealing with divorce worst of all—show up the more blackly. If judges could alter the law it would be different. Lord Buckmaster himself says that "practically every judge on whom a similar duty (trying suits for divorce) has devolved has urged an alteration of the law." But they cannot get past the definite text of the laws; that has to be altered by Act of Parliament. And it is time it should be. Many of us are so sick of politics that we try—perhaps too much—to keep out of them; but here is a plain piece of justice to be done, justice to the hundreds of thousands, rich and poor alike, who are either fast bound in a hideous mockery of what marriage should be, or else legally separated with no chance of a second marriage that might mean happiness for them, and new fine citizens for their country. It is difficult for the happy, even moderately happy, to realize the misery and cruelty of all this—the waste of good lives. If they did they would press for reform. A general election is with us; let those who care for justice and for clean and fair marriages, refuse to give their vote to any candidate who will not support Lord Buckmaster's or some similar Bill. This is not a party question. It should be a question for all decent and reasonable people.

N. M. MITCHISON.

THE LATE J. W. GOTT.

SIR,—Our thanks are due to you, Mr. President, for your excellent article in connection with the passing of poor Gott. There are various opinions regarding his methods of propaganda, but I think we are all in agreement with you as to his sincerity and unqualified devo-

tion to the Freethought Cause; this latter he set before everything, and I am sure that our Party owes a great deal to his reckless onslaughts upon Christianity for the nominal freedom which it enjoys to-day.

My personal acquaintance with him only dates back a few years. I think it was in 1916 (when we re-opened our active lecturing work in Manchester) that I was surprised to see Gott outside the hall with his now famous card of himself in the broad arrow uniform. I remember protesting against his appearance in view of our difficulties in securing lecture places, and he then left us after offering to buy all our copies of the *Freethinker*, and I have only seen him once since that time.

The tragedy of his life was undoubtedly the sudden death of his wife whilst he was serving one of his terms of imprisonment in Armley Gaol (December 1911). If I remember correctly the rest of his sentence was remitted by the Home Secretary, but undoubtedly his wife's demise and the break up of his house was the cause of his subsequent bitter and intensified attacks on priestcraft.

I well recollect my first copy of his *Jerusalem Star* and the amusement derived from his *One Hundred "Rib Ticklers."* The fact that he was prosecuted for such a lively publication only proves that the enemy carefully selects its victims, and had Gott availed himself earlier of the help of the N.S.S., recent Blasphemy prosecutions may well have been saved. At least, if we are to have any more victims I have hopes that a fight similar to the one last made on Gott's behalf will result in a final and successful effort for the removal of these iniquitous "Penalties upon Opinion." Foote's advice still holds good: "Any fool can get into prison, but it takes a wise person to keep out of it."

I trust your confidence in the Freethinkers of this country to do their utmost to help the removal of the Blasphemy Laws from the Statute Book will be justified. Notwithstanding his methods of attack, the Freethought movement will be the poorer for the loss of Gott, and I am hoping that each individual Freethinker who has our Cause at heart is doing his or her best to ventilate this question during the election, and that as the result of their work, you will be put in possession of a solid number of pledges that will form a nucleus in the new Parliament for a great effort when the occasion arises to bury this reproach on the English judicature and render all opinions upon religion equal before the law. The fight is still to come. Let us see to it that we are prepared.

H. BLACK.

THE BLASPHEMY LAWS.

SIR,—If Mr. Gott had been a man of wealth and influence the law would probably have left him alone. It is all of a piece in this respect with the Jacoby-True case, when they hanged a half-witted boy "by the neck till he was dead"—delicious formula of our civilized law!—because he was poor and unprotected, but spared True, who had rich and powerful connections.

The mean malevolence of it all! Who has published more pungent ridicule of the absurdities of the Christian creed than H. G. Wells? I recall certain unforgettable phrases in his preface to *God, the Invisible King*; but this is of course only one instance. Look at the incomparable irony of Anatole France when dealing with the Christian or any other religious creed. Mr. Gott simply did what these eminent writers and hundreds of others have done with impunity—only he did it in a cruder fashion—the intention is the same in all cases. Freethinkers will not forget his fine courage and steadfastness, and all will sympathize sincerely with the daughter of this victim of twentieth-century religious persecution.

C. M. RENTON.

The departure of the soul is not always voluntary. It may be extracted from the body against its will by ghosts, demons, or sorcerers. Hence, when a funeral is passing the house, the Karens of Burma tie their children with a special kind of string to a particular part of the house, lest the souls of the children should leave their bodies and go into the corpse which is passing. The children are kept tied in this way until the corpse is out of sight.—*Sir J. G. Frazer, "The Golden Bough."*

Obituary.

FUNERAL OF THE LATE J. W. GOTT.

The funeral of J. W. Gott, whose death at Blackpool was announced in last week's *Freethinker*, took place at Bradford on Wednesday, November 8. In the long cortege which followed the hearse to the cemetery were Mr. and Mrs. Emmerson (deceased's only daughter), the brothers of deceased, his brother-in-law, Mr. Peasgood, and many friends from various parts of the district. Those who came from Leeds included Messrs. Youngman, Goldberg, Holroyd, Schaffer, Ernest Pack, Mrs. Brown, and several others. Mr. A. D. McLaren read the secular burial service. He said that the principal facts connected with John William Gott's career were doubtless well known to most of those present. His own impression of Gott was that he possessed in a high degree both courage and sincerity—two essential elements of all worthy character. The shafts of vindictive hate were always directed against those who opposed vigorously the current religious creeds; but to the dead Freethinker to whom they were paying their last tribute of respect was meted out more than the ordinary measure of the hard blows of persecution. He (the speaker) had visited Gott twice in the Wormwood Scrubs Gaol, and on each occasion it was evident that his one great desire was to be again engaged in active Freethought work. Gott also related some of his previous prison experiences, but there was no trace of personal bitterness in his tone. He knew that the path he had chosen was not a smooth one. Indeed, its rugged nature materially shortened his life, for he had not yet attained his fifty-seventh year. His interest in our movement continued keen to the end, one of his last wishes being that he should have a secular funeral. When he had the means and the opportunity he was ever ready to extend a helping hand to fellow-workers in the cause, and this without any kind of ostentation. To his relatives and friends the general body of Secularists offered their sincere condolence; but the greatest consolation was the thought that Gott left behind him the memory of a loyal friend and an earnest Freethinker.—M.

It is with the deepest regret that we have to chronicle the death of one of the old guard of Scottish Freethinkers in the person of Robert Ralston. Mr. Ralston was himself the son of a very ardent Freethinker, John Ralston, a pioneer of our movement in the West of Scotland. His son, the subject of the present note, came to Glasgow some fifty years ago, joined the society, and became an earnest worker in the movement. He was a regular and familiar figure at all the meetings for years, and assisted with the violin at the musical entertainments given before the lectures and at the social entertainments. His memories of speakers went back to the early days of Bradlaugh in Scotland, to Mrs. Harriet Law, Messrs. Symes, Barker, and others who are mere names to the Freethinkers of the present generation. Scotch Freethinkers are often exceedingly loyal to the cause, but there are few who were more loyal than Robert Ralston. He was unflinching and uncompromising in his opinions, and never hesitated at making them known when necessary. For some years his health had been failing, and although an operation might have been attempted, his age—seventy years—made it rather too risky. He leaves behind him a wife, one son, and four daughters, to whom the sympathy of all will be tendered in their bereavement. They will have at least the comfort of carrying to the end the memory of a good life well lived. The funeral took place at Craigton Cemetery, an impressive address being delivered by Mr. T. Robertson.

With regret we announce the death of James Burgess Grant, at one time President of the Porth Branch of the N.S.S., who died on November 4 at the age of eighty. He was greatly respected by all who knew him, and at his request a Secular service was conducted over the grave. Austin Holyoake's burial service was read by Mr. Samuel Holman.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.—INDOOR.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (160 Great Portland Street, side entrance, W.1.): 8, Mr. Blady, "Auto-Suggestion."

N.S.S. DISCUSSION CIRCLE (62 Farringdon Street, E.C.4): Tuesday, November 21, at 7, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, "How the Idea of God Arose."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W.9, three minutes from Kennington Oval Tube Station and Kennington Gate): 7, Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe, "Social Injustice—Cause and Cure."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, John A. Hobson, M.A., "China in the Modern World."

COUNTRY.—INDOOR.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (City Hall, Saloon): 11.30, Mr. Joseph McCabe, "Religion and Reason in Modern Europe"; 6.30 (Grand Hall), "Man and the Great Ice Age." (Silver collection.)

LEEDS BRANCH N.S.S. (2 Central Road, Duncan Street, Shop Assistants' Rooms): 7, Councillor D. B. Foster, "Capitalism." Questions and discussion invited.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Right Hon. John M. Robertson, "The Social Riddle."

NEWCASTLE BRANCH N.S.S. DISCUSSION CIRCLE (Socialist Society's Rooms, 23 Royal Arcade): Tuesday, November 21, at 7.30, Mr. A. Bartram, "The Method of Science."

PLYMOUTH BRANCH N.S.S.—Mr. Chapman Cohen will lecture.

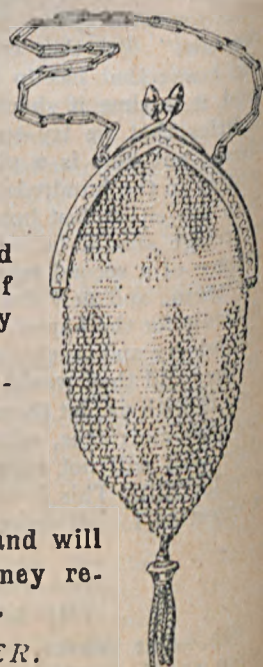
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