

# The FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions.

### Mr. Seymour Hicks and the Atheist.

I have enjoyed many an hour in the company of Mr. Seymour Hicks, the well-known actor, although he has been one side of the footlights and I the other. That, however, did not detract from the enjoyment, perhaps it added to it, for I have lately made a discovery which leads me to believe that as an other-side-of-the-fireplace conversationalist Mr. Hicks would not be nearly so entertaining. He might even be positively depressing. Mr. Hicks wearing the motley helps to drive away care; Mr. Hicks as a philosopher is very dull—except to such as enjoy a display of weakness in their fellows. All this in consequence of reading a theatre programme. For it appears that Mr. Hicks has written a book bearing the title, *If I were Your Father*, and the programme in question has a page nearly filled with quotations from the work. This would be of no interest whatever to our readers, but Mr. Hicks has something to say about Atheism, and this is considered so telling, and so important—unless it be the only assumed important thing in the book—that the editor of the programme lets loose Mr. Hicks' reflections upon Atheism on the theatre-going world. I am not, I hasten to say, censuring Mr. Hicks for talking about Atheism. Every man has a perfect right to write or talk about any matter he pleases—subject to the one consideration that he shall know something of the theme which he selects; but I regret to say that Mr. Hicks does not offer that justification. For if the quotations given are reliable, and if Mr. Hicks is not pulling the leg of the orthodox, then his conception of Atheism is so childish that not even the proverbial sucking curate would care to father it. I do not know how the rest of Mr. Hicks' progeny regard their parent, but this one has every right to be ashamed of its progenitor.

### A Lesson in Logic.

Let me say quite frankly that I know no more of Mr. Hicks' book than is given in the lengthy quotation before me, and after reading it I do not care to invest, in these lean times, even the modest 3s. 6d. required for its closer acquaintance. But here is a

little to lead off with. It is headed "The Hereafter":—

You ask me: Is there a hereafter?—I hope so.  
Can I prove to you there is?—No!  
Can you prove to me there isn't?—No!  
Then why not believe?

Exit the Atheist! But let us try the same air with different words:—

You ask me: Has Mr. Hicks ever stolen a watch?—I hope not.  
Can you prove he has?—No!  
Can you prove he hasn't?—No!  
Then why not believe he has?

Now if Mr. Hicks says this is stupid I shall cordially agree with him, but it is exactly on all fours with his own effort. The reasoning is "horrid." The tone of it is worse. It assumes that you are entitled to believe anything you care to believe provided it cannot be proved to be false. And if that rule were followed in the courts there are few who are arrested that would escape conviction. Evidently Mr. Hicks has not the faintest conception that a belief is a positive thing and should rest upon some sort of evidence. He is not alone in this, but everyone does not rush into print to publish his want of apprehension in these matters.

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### What God Gives the Atheist.

One suspects that Mr. Hicks has been ransacking some ancient tracts for material for his book, for it is almost incredible that so many specimens of anti-cultural religious stupidities could have been independently evolved by one man in the year 1923. Thus with the heading, "The Impudent Atheist":—

When you hear the Atheist talk and you are tempted to agree—for he is one to whom Heaven, with its infinite sense of humour, has given remarkable reasoning powers—cast your thoughts ahead of his and think of him on his death-bed, and wonder if in that hour he will be as brave in his pyjamas as he is in his dress-clothes.

I am not quite sure whether the remark about the Atheist being favoured with remarkable reasoning powers indicates envy on the part of Mr. Hicks, or astonishment at Heaven not keeping the Atheist religious by properly limiting his mental capacity. Perhaps it indicates benevolence, and Mr. Hicks may think that if Heaven protected him from becoming an Atheist, why did it not also shield others from the awful responsibility of being born with strong common-sense. It may come as a piece of news to Mr. Hicks, and it will so far support his implied thesis that there is a risk of Atheism with unusually strong mental capacity, that among the weak-minded non-religion is extremely rare, while among the insane Atheism is unknown. It may also be pointed out that among primitive peoples the insane and the mentally ill-balanced are believed to be in a very peculiar measure under the special influence of the deity. All this offers some sort of support to the theory that Atheism and mental capacity are apt to run together, although I must admit that had I been in Mr. Hicks' place I

do not think I should have emphasized it. At any rate, judging human nature from that point of view, Mr. Hicks is not likely to run much risk of being taken for an Atheist.

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#### A Very Ancient Tale.

The rigmarole about the death-bed almost persuades one of the truth of the supposition that Mr. Hicks has been ransacking some old religious tracts. For that is so terribly out-of-date! Even modern tract distributors have almost given it up. For Atheists are not now so uncommon. They are known, and, like Christians and comedians, they die; and they have no fear when they are dying because there is nothing for them to fear. A Christian of the orthodox type has plenty of room for fear. He can never be quite sure of where he is going—whether it means eternal bliss or everlasting blisters; and the death-bed scenes that actually have transpired are those of believers doubtful as to their destination, not those of Atheists whose minds have not been terrified by pictures of the future and morbidly weakened by dwelling upon religious absurdities. As a matter of fact, a man will be as brave in his pyjamas as he is in his dress-clothes whatever his opinions may be. The brave man will die but once, and he will face that with the same amount of courage that he faced other things. But the coward will die a score of deaths, and his little stock of courage will weaken with each death. Mr. Hicks is quite evidently unaware that the fear of death is the product of the very belief he is upholding. The promise of a future life does not remove it, it creates it. Natural man does not fear death so much as he dislikes it. At any rate it never dawns upon anyone but Christians and their kind that a man will not say farewell to his friends and they to him, with the sadness that properly accompanies the breaking of a valued tie, but with none of the terror that has been created in minds weakened by one of the most poisonous of superstitions.

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#### The Church and the World.

Mr. Hicks is almost as amusing in his excursions into theology as he is on the stage. The following, for example, really deserves recognition:—

You may hear in restaurants that the Bible is only a series of well-written fairy tales, but go elsewhere and you will be told otherwise. Why believe, then, more in what you hear in a café than you learn in a Church?

Well, for one thing, the average man is fully aware that what he hears in a church is part of a prepared plea, that the pleader is paid on the understanding that he will repeat it and go on repeating it. The man in the café has no obvious interest in saying what he does. He does not get paid anything for saying it, he can reap no advantage from saying it, he may be placed at considerable disadvantage because he says it. All these things are not proof of accuracy, but they are some evidence of honesty and sincerity; and the man in the café will be apt to say what he thinks—the man in the church will say only what he thinks it is good for you to hear. That is the disadvantage to-day of being a Christian clergyman. He suffers under a *prima facie* suspicion of being either dishonest or ignorant. Had people believed what they were taught in a church in preference to what they heard outside we should still be believing in a flat earth, in witchcraft, in a red-hot hell, and in a thousand and one other absurdities. It is because we have listened to the man outside the church that we have come to understand things. They have even taught us about religion. For the men who have enabled us to understand the meaning and the nature of religious beliefs are those who have left the church alone. All this may be news to Mr. Hicks,

but the world is larger to-day than the one covered by the collection of old tracts from which Mr. Hicks has made so many amusing excerpts.

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#### Is It a Joke?

Mr. Hicks provides his readers with a great deal of what is called in the profession "sob-stuff," and he has doubtless before him the effect it has on a theatre audience. But there is a deal of difference between listening to things in a theatre and reading them in a book. In a theatre one readily forgives a dose of the improbable or even the impossible, and one does not look for philosophy in an actor who has to cater for a popular audience. Of course it may be that the whole thing is a hoax, and Mr. Hicks may not mean what he says. Mr. Hicks may have other things in view. When the late Wilson Barrett found the public not so appreciative nor so open-handed as it might have been he resolved to try a new move. He had no belief in Christianity, but he put the "Sign of the Cross" on the stage, and by placing before the public a travesty of history, and playing the Sunday-school conception of the primitive Christian, he managed to draw the clergy to his theatre, received testimonials from the bishops and other members of the "dignified clergy" and did very well. It paid, and many others find the same thing pays. Heaven, with "its infinite sense of humour" has not given "remarkable reasoning power" to the majority, the dull ones outnumber them enormously, and whether one is running a church or a theatre or putting a book before the public, it is the majority that tells. It may be that Mr. Hicks intends placing a religious drama on the stage with himself in the principal part. I do not know, but that would explain—even if it did not excuse—reprinting this re-hash of out-of-date tracts; and even then one would like to know why Mr. Charles B. Cochran inflicted on his audience as part of the programme this selection of religious imbecilities.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

#### THE HOLY BIBLE.

No one thinks of going to the Bible to-day for his science, for his conceptions of the universe, for his knowledge as to how and when the worlds came into being. No one thinks of going to it for astronomy. No one thinks of accepting its story in regard to the relation of the earth to the other heavenly bodies. Again, no one thinks of taking the Bible as ultimate authority in history. It tells, indeed, its story of the origins of nations; but it is not the story which the intelligent world of to-day believes. It tells its story in regard to the origin of languages; but the account that it gives the world recognises as only the childish tradition of the childhood world. No one thinks of taking the Bible as authority in political economy. Even among the principles of political economy which Jesus himself enunciated there is not a single political economist in the Church to-day, or out of it, who would advocate them as generally practical. No one thinks of going to the Bible as ultimate authority in medicine, in regard to the nature, origin, and cure of disease. The New Testament gives specific, definite, apparently authoritative directions as to what shall be done in case of the illness of Christians. There is not a Christian on earth to-day who thinks of carrying out these directions or making them practical. Then in regard to the ethics of the Bible—are they regarded still as final, finished, complete? The ethical teaching of the early part of the Bible is regarded as belonging to and naturally springing out of a barbaric age, part of it long ago outgrown. Even the ethical teachings of Jesus are not all accepted by the civilized world to-day. They are quietly laid by. No one says in open terms that they are rejected; but practically they are not regarded as authority. They are not included in treatises on ethics. No one tries to live them out, and if we did try, some of us believe that the progress of society would be hindered rather than helped.—*Rev. Minot J. Savage.*

## God's Methods.

ONE of the most remarkable books ever published is *The Mystery of the Ages*, by the Rev. B. N. Switzer, M.A., Vicar of St. Luke's, Stepney. Its publisher is Elliot Stock, 7 Paternoster Row, London, and its price 3s. It is a volume of nearly three hundred pages, and in the preface to the cheap edition issued in the year 1918, the author pronounces it "a book exactly fitting the times we live in." It is a work incapable of improvement. It first appeared in 1899, and the cheap edition came out almost twenty years later, in the preface to which we are assured that:—

Not one sentence written in the text of this work requires alteration. The plan was so carefully thought out and elaborated from the Bible itself, and then so carefully tested by the *ipsissima verba* of Scripture that lapse of time makes no difference whatever to the real value of the book; rather do the events of the years as they come and go prove and testify loudly that the entire contents of this volume may be absolutely trusted because it is founded and built up upon the Eternal Truth of the Word of God Himself.

Not every author of a book has the courage thus to describe it after the lapse of twenty years; but, then, Mr. Switzer is an ultra-orthodox theologian. He regards himself as "one of the stewards of the Mysteries of God," and to him the Bible is verbally inerrant and historically true from beginning to end. Adam was created in the year 4004 B.C. For him the Bible is a direct revelation from God to man, and to those who have fulfilled the Divine conditions for Christian discipleship it is everywhere intelligible. In his views of the Bible he is in practical agreement with the Fundamentalists of America though, unlike them, he accepts the theory of evolution. On this point he has a theory of his own which he lays down as follows:—

I desire to state as emphatically as I can that in dating the *Human Creation* from Adam B.C. 4004 I am in no wise traversing the contentions of modern geologists and others with reference to the existence of *prehistoric man*. I may say that I believe that a race of sentient beings existed on this globe prior to the creation of Adam, and prior to everything related in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis *after verse one*; these, for want of a better expression, I would call "Pre-Adamite Man." I hold that the existence of such a race is deducible from the Bible, *which does more than hint at it*. But this is certain, that it was a former creation of God's, and that it had died out and disappeared (*corporeally*) long before Adam was created and placed in the Garden of Eden.....Evolutionists do not go back far enough, neither do geologists. They should start with God, the great First Cause of all things.....Geologists, perhaps, little realize that the crumbling remains of a pre-historic race, which they love to work amongst, are the relics of creatures far more degenerate than ourselves, fallen from a high estate and now disembodied and, mayhap, gloating over these earthly studies, and longing for a chance to be given them of entering once more into flesh that they may work wickedness as in times long gone by.

That amazing theory is resorted to purely in the interest of Bibliolatry. The truth of the Biblical story of the creation of man must be defended at all cost. The fundamentalists do so by rejecting evolution altogether, while Mr. Switzer does so in the manner described in that extract. We are of opinion that Mr. Bryan, the famous American politician and journalist, is a much more consistent Bibliolater. It is to us utterly inconceivable how any person of intelligence can be a Christian at all, or how anyone, being a Christian, can make any concession whatever to

modern knowledge. If Christianity is true the doctrine of evolution is of necessity false; but if, on the other hand, evolution is true, Christianity is a house built upon the sand and it is bound to fall. We readily give Mr. Switzer the credit of being a thoroughly sincere believer in the verbal inspiration and infallibility of the Bible; but why on earth does he bother his head about geology? In our judgment, men like Dean Inge and Canon Barnes have no moral right to be ministers of the Cross, for they have taken away the very foundation upon which Christianity has stood through all the ages. Bishop Gore denounces such men as guilty of immorality, and we share his conviction.

Let us now glance at history as seen by a man who interprets the Bible literally. According to this interpretation history is divided into three dispensations, the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Christian. The Patriarchal dispensation commenced "when Adam stood a culprit before his Maker, listening to the solemnly delivered sentence: 'Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat of the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread until thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.'" This curse fell upon poor Adam as punishment for the sin of partaking of the fruit of the forbidden tree. And yet, as a result of eating it, he attained to the ripe age of nine hundred and thirty years, and the virtue of that fruit kept on working in his descendants, one of them reaching the astonishing age of 969 years. It was the tree of knowledge that was forbidden to Adam and Eve, and they were really turned out of the Garden, not because they had eaten of it, but lest they should partake of the tree of life and become immortal like the Gods. Mr. Switzer believes that all this is strictly historical. In Genesis vi, 1, 2, we read: "And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all that they chose." Many Christian scholars there are who treat the first ten chapters of Genesis as unhistorical, but Mr. Switzer is not one of them. By "the sons of God" he understand the angels, and in this case evil spirits. He says:—

We interpret Genesis vi, 2, as follows: The fallen angels mingled visibly with men in general, and entered into the partnership of unhallowed marriage with womankind in particular, from whence sprung that bastard race called "mighty men which were of old—men of renown." This bastard race may, I think, be easily identified with the ancient classical heroes, and its *fathers* are without doubt the originals of the Grecian and Roman Gods.

Now mark, the Patriarchal was a Divine dispensation, and yet the men and women of this period were excessively wicked. At one stage they fell so low that Jehovah had to abandon them completely. Seeing that their wickedness was great, and that every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually, he withdrew all restraints and allowed them to do just exactly what they pleased.

Thus we are bound to admit that God's method of dealing with mankind in the Patriarchal period was a dismal failure. The second dispensation was the Mosaic. God's method of dealing with mankind in general having come to a disastrous end, he resolved to confine his redeeming scheme to one small tribe, which he treated as a chosen people. He showered favours upon them and led them to a land flowing with milk and honey. He gave them the Law, and undertook himself the task of leading, educating, and disciplining them; but all was in vain. The chosen

nation rebelled against their Lord and refused to walk in his ways. The second plan failed like the first, "on account of man's hideous sin." Mr. Switzer admits that "the world was not reclaimed by the chosen nation—far otherwise; for that nation heaped upon itself shame and sank to a level even lower than that of the Gentiles. It forfeited all further consideration at the hands of the Almighty. Thenceforth its peculiar privileges ceased, and its name became a by-word in the earth."

We now come to the Gospel dispensation, which has been in force for nineteen centuries. Has this been a success? J. T. LLOYD.

(To be Concluded.)

## Away From the Limelight.

We think our civilization near its meridian, but we are yet only at the cock-crowing and the morning-star.

—Emerson.

THE Church likes to have her finger in every pie. She buried doubting Thomas Huxley in the sure and certain hope of a Saviour he did not believe in. She mumbled her mythological nonsense over the grave of Algernon Swinburne, one of the most irreligious of poets. She interred Richard Burton with the full rites of a Church he despised with every drop of his blood. Hence it was not expected that the death of Sir Herbert Tree would escape exploitation. For he was one of the foremost actors of his generation, and the Church is famous as a body-snatcher.

Although Tree was quite unorthodox, a memorial service was held in London, at which the Bishop of Birmingham preached. In the course of his sermon, with unusual candour, the Bishop said that he would not enter into the question of Tree's religious opinions. In this matter he acted after his kind, for a full and frank explanation of the great actor's views would have made the congregation think furiously. Fortunately, Tree did not bury his thoughts in his bosom, but committed them to paper, and any person may consult *Thoughts and After Thoughts* (Cassell) and read a fascinating revelation of a picturesque personality.

Tree wrote almost as well as he acted, and in almost every line the man himself is revealed. One expression of it is of special importance at present, when the whole world is slowly recovering from a war which threatened civilization with disaster. After speaking of "the wonderful strides which science has made in the past fifty years," Tree goes on:—

Is it not possible that the peoples of the earth will arise in the might of a new-born religion, and will knock at the gate of the world's conscience, singing in union the hymn of humanity, and crying: "Thou shalt do no murder—even for the divine right of kings"; when frontiers shall be swept away, and there shall be one brotherhood of man, one flag, one language, and one religion—the Religion of Humanity; when the people shall be generalised by the dreamers, the poets, the philosophers, the seers and singers, the artists of the world?

This is somewhat unexpected from a man who "made himself a motley to the view." But Tree had other facets to his genius beside his gifts of theatrical representation. He was an excellent raconteur, and there are many anecdotes worth preservation in his book. Here is a little story of Tennyson, who was visiting a country house where many local bigwigs had been invited to meet the Poet Laureate:—

He was asked by his host after dinner whether he would like to look at the stars. The great poet took up the telescope, and, forgetting himself and others, gazed for twenty minutes at the wonders of the

heavens. "Well, what do you think, sir?" inquired his host. "I don't think much of our county families," replied Tennyson.

There is a good story of Swinburne:—

He and William Morris were friends in youth. "At that time," said he, "William Morris was a Tory of the bluest blood, while I was a red-hot Republican. Now," he sighed, "Morris addresses Socialists in Trafalgar Square, and I write for the *St. James's Gazette*."

Tree had a pretty knack of writing epigrams. Here are some: "Philosophy is a folly got by Common Sense out of Misfortune"; "Gentility is our watch-word; we chorus the hymn of respectability"; "A gentleman is one who does not care a button whether he is one or not."

The Foreword to the book shows something of its quality:—

To mine enemy I dedicate the faults of this book; to my friend I dedicate what virtue it may have, hoping thus to give pleasure to both.

The book is one worth reading, and it is also one worth keeping. It has an important and unusual quality which was emphasized by a popular actor who was also a popular author:—

To thine own self be true.

MIMNERMUS.

## The Passing of Religion.

II.

(Concluded from page 38.)

The God of traditional Christianity is supposed to spend much time counting hairs on the heads of His people and watching sparrows fall to the ground. Sceptics are reverently asking: Why does He not keep the sparrows from falling? Why does He not let the hairs remain unnumbered, until He has put a stop to wars and promoted good will among men to a degree which will render it impossible that the world should any longer be cursed by them?.....The prime of my life has been wasted in preaching as truths the dogmas of the Christian theology, the representations of which I now believe, with the overwhelming majority of educated people, to be at best so many symbols and at worst superstitions.—*Ex-Bishop W. M. Brown, "Communism and Christianity,"* pp. 148-149.

OUR previous article dealt with the popular idea of "The Sovereignty of God" and how it has been shattered by the non-interference, or masterly inactivity of God during the Great War, as set forth by the Rev. Scott Lidgett, one of the leading lights of Nonconformity, who has been president of the "Free Church Council," of the "Wesleyan Conference," and editor of the *Methodist Times*. As we have seen, the reverend gentleman attributes the damage sustained by the idea of God to the crude and anthropomorphic popular idea that God ought to have intervened and prevented the war, whereas, he explains, God's office is not to interfere in material affairs but only in spiritual matters. An explanation which will not do much to console those believers who were bereaved by the war, or restore confidence in a God whose conduct the common-sense of the people regards as due either to helplessness, criminal indolence, or heartless indifference.

In the new *Hibbert Journal* (January 1923) Mr. Edmond G. A. Holmes, in an article entitled "The Idea of Evolution and the Idea of God," shows how the modern scientific ideas are playing havoc with the idea of God. He says:—

Slowly but surely the idea of evolution is undermining the foundations of orthodox Christian theology. For a static conception of the universe was the cement in which those foundations were laid;

and as the idea of evolution makes headway and the static conception falls into disrepute, the foundations of the orthodox theology, which have long shown signs of instability, will become more and more unstable, and at last, in the fulness of time, the whole structure will totter to its fall.

A static body, of course, is a body at rest or in equilibrium. The Bible writers believed the earth to be a static body. "Where wast thou," demands God of his servant Job, "when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job xxxviii, 4.) The psalmist sings praises to the God "who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever" (Psalms civ, 5). The Rev. W. L. Bevan, who contributed the article "Earth" to Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, tells us in that article that:—

With regard to the earth's body, the Hebrews conceived its surface to be an immense disc, supported like the flat roof of an Eastern house by pillars, which rested in solid foundations, but where those foundations were on which the "sockets" of the pillars rested none could tell.

It was Copernicus and Galileo in the sixteenth century who destroyed this idea of a fixed earth. Since then we have learned that our earth is an insignificant planet spinning like a top at the rate of a thousand miles an hour, while travelling round an insignificant sun at the rate of eighteen and a half miles a second; the sun itself, with its accompanying planets, travelling at the rate of twelve miles a second, to some unknown destination, in the direction of the constellation Lyra. That the stars, which appear to be mere points of light, are in reality suns, some of them immensely larger than ours, and now known to number at the very least a thousand million. Modern science confirms the majestic lines of Shelley:—

Worlds on worlds are rolling ever  
From creation to decay,  
Like the bubbles on a river,  
Sparkling, bursting, borne away.

Instead of the universe being created magically—as the conjurer produces the rabbit from the hat, or the eggs from nowhere—the process of Nature is eternal, without beginning and without end. There is no place for God in the whole process. Even if we could imagine a being great and powerful enough to launch a million suns into existence, how could we expect such a being to take an interest in the races of mankind crawling upon the surface of this speck of earth, revolving round a minor star, lost in the immensities of time and space, to say nothing of answering the prayer or praise of any individual man or woman? Professor Huxley, when dining out, was once asked by his neighbour, a lady, if he was not afraid of the consequences of his unbelief. He replied that he was not vain enough to suppose that the Creator of so many million suns would trouble himself as to what opinions he held. And every intelligent person, knowing the facts, and not bursting with vanity and self-importance, must be of a similar opinion.

Mr. Holmes, in the article previously quoted, proceeds:—

My thesis is that the idea of evolution is undermining the foundations of supernatural religion. This it was predestined to do, for when those foundations were laid, the static view of things had no rival, and creation through evolution had not been dreamed of. The consequence of this had been that the theology of supernaturalism, having never had to reckon with the idea of evolution, cannot now assimilate it except by transforming itself beyond recognition. Attempts to compromise with the idea have been made by Protestant theologians. But no compromise is possible between two such incompatible ideas, and any concession to the one involves a betrayal of the other.

"The idea of evolution is working silently and unobtrusively in our minds," says the same writer, but he does not think there will be any violent reaction such as there was at the Reformation against the orthodox theology:—

Men will turn away from it half unconsciously, turn away from it in thought and feeling and action, and ignore it and pass it by. They are doing so to-day. They have been doing it for some time past, and they will continue to do it till the revolution has run its course.....For growth, as a disruptive agency, is relentless and irresistible; and the human spirit, by the force of its own natural expansion, will break the bonds, whatever they may be, that seek to fetter its growth.

He thinks the way will be clear then for a "truer and deeper conception of Divine transcendence."

Why Mr. Holmes should think that the idea of "Divine transcendence" will replace the idea of Divine creation, we are unable to say, for there is no more evidence for the one than for the other, nor does Mr. Holmes bring forward a shred of evidence to support his belief, unless he regards as evidence the dogmatic statement that the belief will come about—

through the development of man's higher nature, the nature with which God has endowed him, and in the unfolding of which God is at work in his soul.

Quietly assuming the existence of God and the soul, the very points in dispute which, as he has shown, modern thought is rapidly discarding. But this is the invariable ending of *Hibbert Journal* articles; they always seem to be attached to the God idea by a piece of elastic which, however far they may stray away, always eventually draws them back. Perhaps it is a condition of their acceptance. However, it is some gain to have the subject openly ventilated.

Another article in the same number of the *Hibbert Journal* is entitled "The Idea of Creation," by Professor J. S. Mackenzie, LL.D., which conclusively bears out the statements of Mr. Holmes as to the inroads made by modern science upon the domain of religious belief. The Professor observes:—

The idea of creation is seldom entertained by serious thinkers on the fundamental problems of the universe; or at least, when it is entertained at all, it is held in some form very different from that which is commonly suggested by the term. It no longer means the calling up of something out of nothing, but rather some process more nearly akin to the Aristotelian conception of the realization of a potentiality. The thought of an original Being summoning up by a simple feat of His will a world entirely distinct from Himself, which thereupon subsists in its own independent right, has perhaps always been repugnant to men of any speculative depth; but in modern times at least it has not only been discredited by scientific research, but has also been scornfully rejected by mystical poets like Goethe and by all those idealists who deny the substantial reality of time.

Which is rather advanced for a Doctor of Laws. When the present writer was a boy the doctor would have been hounded down as an Atheist.

*The Times Literary Supplement* for January 4, 1923, reviewing this number of the *Hibbert Journal*, makes some remarks which fully bear out our own criticism of the articles appearing in that journal. The writer says:—

It is inevitable, we suppose, that the articles in a quarterly review which deals with the subjects detailed in the title of the *Hibbert* should often, however great the ability with which they are written, seem to leave the reader very much where he was at starting. The professors of those subjects too frequently acquire an excessive literary facility. It produces what—we hope without offence—we may compare to some soft comestible which gives no

serious work either to the teeth or the digestion. The metaphor is suggested by the first two articles by writers so distinguished as Professor J. S. Mackenzie and Mr. Edmond Holmes. The former, in seventeen pages on the Idea of Creation, arrives at the conclusion that all we can hope for here is "to gain enough insight to enable us to realize that the riddle of the universe need not be supposed to be forever insoluble." The latter expounds the thesis that what God transcends is his own immanence in Nature and in man, and those who have read Mr. Holmes's frequent disquisitions on the Religion of the universe may find it worth while to discover what this means.

Perhaps it may, but for our part we should class it with those things which, as Lord Dundreary would say, "No fellah can understand." However it is encouraging to find a Nonconformist journal like the *Contemporary Review*, and a religious journal like the *Hibbert* allowing the fundamentals of religion to be discussed. It shows that the ancient boycott is at last breaking down.

Believers are very busy discussing the much-vexed question why people do not come to church. Dr. Lyttelton complains that "whilst church services have been modified in the last twenty years with the object of enticing people to church, the opposite is the result," although

Great efforts have been made by the ministers of all denominations to adapt the church services to the popular taste. Everything has been shortened and "brightened"; the pill has been gilded, but the medicine is shunned (*Westminster Gazette*, January 2, 1923).

The answer is simple, people no longer believe and therefore have no use for the churches. W. MANN.

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### Angels versus Fairies.

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To some readers the above heading might suggest a "Grand Aerial Football Match" organized by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, but it is actually suggested by a letter to the editor in one of our leading dailies from "Two Christians," commenting pathetically upon the present day belief in "Fairies" boldly asserting that "angels" are "on record." The particular "record" is not stated, but it can hardly be doubted from the signature that the Bible is referred to, and that to the "Two Christians" it constitutes an infallible record in the matter of angels and no doubt other quaint conceits. It is recorded of Gibbon, the historian of Rome, that he expressed surprise that his criticism of the Christian religion should have been looked upon with disfavour in his own day.

What then would have been his amazement in this year of (dare we say) grace 1923 to find that such a dry bone of contention as the claim to authenticity between angels and fairies should be considered fit for publication by an up-to-date newspaper.

The identity of the "Two Christians" is not revealed, but we incline to the belief that they belong to the historical family of "Tweedledum and Tweedledee." If we except the "Myths of the Middle Ages" the only other "record" of a recent date with regard to angels is that of the "Mons Angels," which the British public was invited to swallow a few years ago as having intervened between the contending armies. This particular myth had a somewhat butterfly existence in spite of a good deal of "propping" by influential people, journalists and others, but it may still be and most probably is a cherished legacy from the Great War to the "Two Christians" who are out to champion the cause of the angels. Or can it be that these "Two Christians" are attached to the War

Office and have access to an official record of the "Mons Angels"? Such a record would prove invaluable to their cause, and we challenge them to produce it for all the world to see.

Whatever may be the belief of "Tweedledum and Tweedledee" as to the authenticity of biblical records we, as Freethinkers, cannot bind ourselves to the acceptance of such records except after the most searching scrutiny, and so far the results of such scrutiny have been in the highest degree unfavourable to the Bible as an authentic record.

In spite of all clerical pandering to science, and we regret to say scientists pandering to clericism, we boldly assert that the claim of angels to credibility is no more entitled to our serious consideration than that of fairy tales, and as a matter of utility either from a recreative or educational standpoint the fairy tales have it. We should earnestly advise our "Two Christians" to lay their heads together again, whether on one pillow or not is perhaps immaterial, and carefully compare these records of theirs with actual facts. Fairies, being "airy nothings" and elusive to a degree, will no doubt be able (like Puck and Ariel) to take care of themselves. JOHN COOPER.

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### Acid Drops.

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"There is nothing like leather," said the cobbler, and on the same principle the average parson finds nothing so good as prayer. Thus, the Rev. Frank Price, of Bolton, cannot see why the local town council does not open its proceedings with prayer. He says that if the proceedings were opened with a prayer asking for wisdom and patience in their discussions it would help the town. We do not see in what way. If the councillors already have wisdom and patience they will exercise it, and if they have not we do not see that prayer will give it. To give a man brains by praying for it, is not a bit better than trying to get rain by the same method. Of course, if it could be done it would be well, and in that case we should become warm advocates of all the clergy spending the next month or so repeating the same petition. But it will not, and we are strongly of opinion that when man has reached the point of praying to God to give him intelligence we should say that he has reached the stage of being incapable of using it; and it is not very complimentary either to himself or to the deity. It implies that the Lord has sent him into the world badly equipped with one of the essentials to success.

The parsons seem to be getting their hands on the wireless concerts. At the beginning the Sunday concerts started at 6 or 6.30. For the past two weeks they have not started till 8.30. This seems to mean that in addition to the short sermons which have been broadcasted, the clergy have induced the Broadcasting Company not to start broadcasting during church time. One may trust the clergy to act where their professional interests are concerned. Naturally they are afraid that many will prefer to hear a good concert at home to going to church. But it is a pity the Broadcasting Company did not tell these men to attend to their own affairs in their own buildings. The moral is as usual—we shall never be safe till we have made enough active Freethinkers to check the activity of the "Black Army."

The Vicar of Bournemouth complains that people do not support the Church as they ought, and says it is a solemn farce of giving to God what is his due and is not an offering at all. He says that what is given represents a miserably inadequate return "for the provision which we expect to be made for us in the form of a prepared service, choir, cushions, light, warmth, etc." The trouble is that we are not quite sure God wants these things. In any case when things are given to God they travel *via* the parsons, and the Lord only knows how

much of it arrives at headquarters. Besides the notion of a God who sits up aloft waiting for people to pay him vocal and other homage is rather too ridiculous for comment. When all is said and done the money required by the Churches is mainly to pay the salaries of those engaged in that particular industry. We quite agree that those who want the things provided in the churches ought to pay for them, including the salaries of all engaged. But it would be just as well to put the whole matter plainly and sensibly.

Before the Leeds Council decided not to permit games in the parks it received a deputation headed by a number of clergymen protesting against Sunday games. The vicar presented all the usual rubbish about games on Sunday leading to Sunday labour, as though they would involve anything like the labour that opening the churches does. At the same time a petition was presented by sixteen of the leading medical men of the City asking for Sunday games on behalf of the moral and physical health of the people. But the parsons could pull the strings and the medical men couldn't. So the incorruptible Councillors of Leeds satisfied the ones that represented the larger number of active voters. Well, well, there is only one way to make sure that these Christians will not try and regulate life in the interests of their churches, and that is to go on making Freethinkers. That is the moral of the situation every time and all the time. Not to merely broaden Christianity, but to kill. The only gods that do no harm are the dead ones.

We have been very glad to see an active correspondence in some of the South African papers of late, putting the Freethought case, and controverting the Christian one. In particular we may note a very long letter from Mr. H. Ellis, which puts a spoke in the wheel of those who are busy trying to prove that the Labour programme is quite Christian, and that only Christianity can solve social problems. This newspaper correspondence is excellent work. It helps to keep the egotism of Christians within bounds, and at the same time lets the rest of the world know that there is a very strong opinion in existence which is quite opposed to Christian claims and Christian opinions; and it is very often the unfamiliar which is dreaded. Once let it be seen that an opinion is fairly common and half the battle is won.

Dr. Percy S. Grant, of the Church of Ascension, Fifth Avenue, New York, has been called upon by his bishop to resign for asserting that few clergymen educated in the larger universities believe that Jesus had the power of God, and for saying that the consecration of churches was a relic of the ages of witchcraft and magic. We cannot tell how far Dr. Grant is correct as to what the clergy believe, but one may say with confidence that there are very few clergymen of ability and education who believe all they are expected to believe. The trouble is that they do not say what they do believe. We have reached a position when no one is surprised at a clergyman believing one thing because no one expects the same degree of mental rectitude of people in the pulpit that is looked for in other walks of life.

But we are certain that the consecration of churches is a relic of the days of magic. What else can the meaning of sprinkling holy water, or mumbling prayers, which are in the nature of charms, over a building be? It is an appeal to supernatural powers to protect the building against other supernatural powers. That is the inner meaning of the legends that have come down to us of people who have been choked when eating the consecrated wafer because they have told a lie or committed a crime. The notion that there is any virtue in mumbling a charm when a new building is opened, or reconsecrating it when someone has committed suicide within it, is intellectually on the level of a savage. That people do not recognize this is not proof that what we say is wrong; it only proves that the last people in the world to understand a religion are those who believe in it.

We see that the Roman Catholic population of England and Wales is now given at 1,965,000. That shows a considerable increase, if the figures are reliable, and in any case it is noteworthy that the Roman Catholics are now becoming much more aggressive in their propaganda and are acquiring much property in all parts of the country. This is only what we might expect. The growth of Freethought saps the strength of all forms of superstition, but while it takes the mentally strongest from the Protestants and also from the Roman Church, it drives the weaker ones back to the most logical form of the Christian superstition and the one which relieves its followers of the greatest mental responsibility. Roman Catholicism is a force with which we have always to reckon, and it may well be that the old prophecy will be fulfilled and that our last great fight will be against the oldest of the Christian Churches.

"Artifex" (Canon Peter Green), of the *Manchester Guardian*, says that "The Secularists of the third quarter of the last century used to look forward to the day when man, having freed himself from all belief in the supernatural and the miraculous, would enjoy the moral fruits of religion without its dogmatic basis." Canon Green is mistaken. The Secularists were not looking to enjoy the moral fruits of religion for the reason that they never believed morality came from religion or that religion had ever had any other relations to morality save those of distortion and obstruction. For the rest they still look forward to the time when man will be sufficiently civilized to understand the conditions of the moral life well enough to do what is right without troubling his head with whether there is a god or not. We agree that this day is a long way off, but it is approaching. Religion has had too long an innings to be easily or quickly removed.

Canon Green begins to get warm, as the children say, when he says that "Morals are the outcome of various relationships. A man alone on a desert island would have no duties." That is so, and it is a truth on which we have often insisted. But when Canon Green goes on to add, "So then as a first step we want a recognition of duty to God, duty to one's neighbour, duty to the community," one wonders what God has to do with it. Man's duty to his neighbour and to the community is plain and obvious. That can be measured because we are dealing with known things that are capable of verification, and the consequences of our actions can be tested. But God? That is an unknown, probably a non-existent, thing. Our actions cannot affect him, if he exists. They can make him neither better nor worse; and man cannot have duties to anyone or to anything that cannot be affected by what he does. The idea of duty to God is an absurdity. If there is a God he has a duty to man, and the way in which he discharges it is seen in the present and past state of the world.

Writing in *John Bull*, the Rev. R. J. Campbell defines religion as "a reverent recognition of the mystery and sublimity of life." The reverend gentleman ought really to refresh his memory and re-read the thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England as by law established. We are sorely afraid that he is moving back to the New Theology.

A Leeds curate, the Rev. G. Jackson, was found dead at his home with the gas-taps turned full on. Having gone from his Church at Hampton Hill, Middlesex, to the Vicarage to procure bread for the communion service, the Rev. R. C. Pryor fell dead. The men-of-God, despite their boastfulness, are but as other men.

In the correspondence that has been going on in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* one of the defenders of Sunday games objects to the comparison of the times of Charles I with those of the Commonwealth and appears to accept the customary picture of the latter as a period of purity and the former as one of debauchery. We are not at all inclined to accept this standardization estimate, at least,

without serious qualification. To begin with a people that have been leading a "pure" life do not suddenly break out into wild debauchery. Where such apparent cases occur examination will show that the difference is one between vice concealed and vice exposed. Next, the vice depicted is that of the Court, and the manners of a Court are not the best index of the life of the people, except for such ardent democrats who pore over the court columns of a newspaper and are dreadfully interested in the fact of a royal engagement or the King's attendance at church. Finally, it must always be borne in mind that our history—for popular consumption—is written with the intention of saying nothing that will detract from the popular estimate of Christianity; and it follows that the Commonwealth is depicted as one of the Christian periods of English history, there is a very plain reason for exaggeration and falsification in its favour.

What is quite plain, when one compares the England of the Restoration with that of the Commonwealth, is that in very many respects the former was far superior. There was less religious cant. We do not mean here cant from the point of view of the Freethinker only, but from that of the Christian also. Even Green has to admit that "it was impossible to distinguish between the saint and the hypocrite so long as godliness became profitable. Even amongst the really earnest Puritans prosperity disclosed a pride, a worldliness, a selfish hardness which had been hidden in the hour of persecution." There was plenty of religious persecution, superstition increased enormously, drunkenness began to gain ground, there was steadfast opposition to scientific studies, and there was imported into English life that air of religious cant, and the sanctimonious hypocrisy which succeeding generations have not been able to eradicate. Green is not far wrong when he says that there is a great gulf fixed between Ante-Restoration England, "whose chief forces are industry and science, the love of popular freedom and of law, an England which presses steadily forward to a larger social justice and equality, and which tends more and more to bring every custom and tradition, religious, intellectual, and political, to the test of pure reason," and the narrow, sour, theology soaked atmosphere of Puritan England. The harm that the reign of the saints did has never yet been estimated. The little good it did has been enormously exaggerated. But the way the Christian has always written history has been to lie about his own creed and the creed of others; and the perpetual lying in the same direction has an advertising value that every charlatan recognizes. Whether the article be good or bad, adequate advertising will establish it.

The Rev. J. R. Evans, of Caerphilly, Wales, declares that money derived from dances and whist-drives is accursed. One is less surprised at the intolerance of this parson than at the tolerance of his congregation.

Cardinal Bourne has been employing strong language about Dean Inge for his attitude on the question of divorce. In the days of Faith, the dean would have been "butchered to make a Roman holiday."

A fire which originated through the falling of a lighted candle before a shrine in a house in Youghal, County Cork, caused the death of a woman and destroyed two shops. It will make no difference to the sale of candles among the Faithful.

The Bishops of the Church of South Africa have issued a pronouncement in which they say that they see no harm in Sunday games provided it does not interfere with Sunday worship. Which, being translated, means that they will tolerate Sunday games so long as their own particular business interests do not suffer thereby. That is very generous, but what we should like to know is the grounds of reason or justice on which these people, not content with being permitted to spend their Sunday as they see fit, cannot rest unless they prevent others spend-

ing their Sunday in any harmless way they choose. The insolence of it is almost unbelievable—or would be so in a country that was thoroughly civilized.

A poor woman who had hurried to mass at St. Patrick's Church, Leeds, collapsed suddenly and died while the service was proceeding. At prayers or not, there seems no particular difference in the way in which nature deals with us. A sound heart and weak religion is a far better asset than strong religion with a weak heart. And there is not a Christian in the country who would not prefer the latter combination to the former one.

A "Christian Socialist," writing in the *Leeds Mercury*, warns employers that if they try to force their will on the workers, and it is in opposition to God's will, they must abide the consequences. And he asks indignantly, "Is God dead? Does He not know what is taking place in this little island of ours. Assuredly He does." Now if we had been "Christian Socialist" we fancy we should have left that last sentence out. Many have wondered whether God was dead, or even whether he had ever been alive; and many more had wondered what on earth he was doing, or whether he knew all that was being done. We did see a suggestion some time ago about God seeing through the medium of our Press what was taking place, but if he places no more faith in the Press than we do, he may not pay much attention to what is there; and there is then left only the medium of prayer through which he may learn what is going on. But, again, if he knows the character of many of those who pray, and so is acquainted with their character for inexactitude, he may probably pay no attention to them. So we are left considerably in the dark on this point, where, we are afraid, we shall have to remain. But there still remains the question of the value of a God who watches while all sorts of things are being done that ought not to be done, and only comes in at the close of the last scene, like the detective in an old-fashioned drama, to arrest the wrongdoer. This is very dramatic but it is ethically unsatisfactory. It is like regarding the punishment of Germany as quite adequate compensation for all the evil done by the war. God only interferes some time after the damage is done, and even of that we are not certain. Altogether it would seem as though the hypothesis of God is not very much help to anyone or anything.

The *Times* asks whether it is not possible that we have atavistic memories as we have atavistic organs. The answer is in the affirmative. Our religion is simply a mass of atavistic memories. The belief in God is one of them, the belief in a soul is another, and both appear to be born of the savages' conception of a wandering double, born of the impression left by dreams and enforced by the experience of disease and abnormal mental states. The parson is an atavistic memory of the medicine-man; the king is an atavistic memory of the combined priest and leader. Our lives are honeycombed with atavistic memories of institutions, some good, some bad, and some harmless. We have, as Winwood Reade put it, tailed minds; and the recognition of that fact, and of the way in which these atavisms have become incarnated in institutions is one of the first steps towards genuine social reform.

Dean Welldon says that if Jesus Christ were to come again to-day there is no place in which he would feel himself so much at home as in a hospital. We cannot say as to whether that is correct or not; he would certainly miss the only medicine with which he appears to have been acquainted—that of faith. But we have not the slightest doubt that if he did come again, and behaved himself as the New Testament reports, he would soon find himself in the mental ward of one of our medical institutions.

The rational universe is to be considered as a great undying Individual, which is incessantly producing that which it must, and thereby makes itself lord over even the accidental.—Goethe.



**To Correspondents.**

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

**E. PORTER.**—It is quite impossible for us to answer your question with anything like accuracy, as in addition to the Public Libraries to which we send copies of the *Freethinker* there are others that get the paper through other channels. We get notes from correspondents every now and again which show that where the paper is placed on the reading tables it is usually well-read.

**"SEARCHLIGHT."**—We hope that your holiday will do you good. The card of membership, etc., has been sent on. The correspondence that you and other friends have been conducting in the South African papers will be certain to do good.

**H. IRVING.**—Glad you enjoyed the visit to Manchester. We quite agree with what you say on the other matter. Freethought is with us more than a mere hobby, and the larger purpose should always be kept in view by those who properly appreciate the nature and the value of the work, and we have not the time to bother with others.

**N.S.S. BENEVOLENT FUND.**—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges: H. J. V. Templeman, £1; W. G. Walter, £1; W. H. Fletcher, 5s.

**F. W. LLOYD.**—We fancy the letter is genuine. Dickens' Christianity was of a rather vague and uncertain type, but we think it would be correct to say that he believed in some kind of a religion, although he humanised it very much.

**R. TWINKY.**—We are glad you liked our notes on war, but it did not come within the scope of our intentions to discuss the economic factors that run through modern wars; and it is inadvisable to confuse a perfectly clear case by introducing other and debatable matter which may only serve to distract attention from the main point that one has in view.

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

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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.

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

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**Sugar Plums.**

Mr. Cohen visits Glasgow to-day (January 28) and will lecture in the evening at 6.30 in the City Hall on "What Humanity Has Gained from Unbelief." The Hall seats over 2,000, and if former meetings are a guide it will be well filled; but there is here a capital opportunity for Glasgow Freethinkers to bring along some of their Christian friends and acquaintances, and we hope they

will do so. In the morning, at 11.30, Mr. Cohen will lecture in the City Hall (Saloon) on "Words, Just Words!"

On Thursday February 1, Mr. Cohen will pay another visit to Weston-super-Mare, and will lecture in the Town Hall at 7.30 on "Humanity's Gain from Unbelief." Judging from the previous visit a good attendance is certain. It is hoped that some of the local clergy, who have been so courageous in attacking Freethought from the pulpit, will follow up their attack in a more suitable place.

To-day (January 28) Mr. Clifford Williams will lecture in the Brassworkers' Hall, 70 Lionel Street, Birmingham, at 7, on "Pioneers of Freethought." We trust that the local "saints" will do what they can to see that the lecture is made known among their friends. The lecture is certain to be interesting, and the lecturer is well worthy of a really good attendance.

The resumption of the London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, after an interval of seven years, proved a complete success. The attendance was quite up to the average, and although one missed some of the old faces that used to be present—mostly those whom death has removed from the scene—there were a refreshing number of new and young ones present that argues well for the future of our movement. The number of ladies present was another promising indication of advance. We were glad to see Mr. G. Alward, of Grimsby, present with his wife. Mr. Alward at eighty-four was the father of the assembly, although looking at him one would not feel inclined to count him as such; but there are some who appear to bid time defiance and treat the passing of the years with a cheerful disdain. We hope to see both Mr. and Mrs. Alward present on many similar occasions.

Unfortunately Mr. Lloyd was prevented from attending by an attack of bronchitis, and although better at the time, it was not judged advisable for him to be out in the night air. The speaking was left to the Chairman, to Mr. A. B. Moss, who gave the toast of the National Secular Society, which was responded to by Mr. R. H. Rosetti, to Miss Vance who gave in a very neat speech the toast of the visitors, and to Mr. Harry Snell, M.P., who responded; with a final speech from a newcomer, Mr. George Smith, whose remarks were fresh and to the point and were appreciated by all. The musical part of the programme—provided by Mr. Will Kings, Miss Elsa Cameron, Mr. Sebastian King, Mr. George Royle, and Miss E. Pritchard—was greatly enjoyed by all. Finally, it must be noted that the whole arrangements of the dinner went with exceptional smoothness and ease. For that we have to thank Miss Vance and Miss Koughl, with whom these rested and who worked like Trojans to achieve success; and only those who have had in hand the arrangements for a large dinner can appreciate what this means. They were, however, repaid by the satisfaction expressed by all present. We print a fuller report of the dinner elsewhere.

Last Sunday evening at the North London Branch of the N.S.S., Mr. A. D. McLaren spoke on "Science and the Workers," a brisk discussion following his remarks. This evening (January 28) Mr. C. G. Forbes, of the Y.M.C.A., will speak on "Suggestion," presumably from the point of view of a Christian. This should afford an excellent opportunity for both Freethinkers and Christians to provide North Londoners with an interesting discussion.

No wonder that Horace Smith was often stopped in the streets and asked whether Shelley were really guilty of all the enormities laid to his charge. "Of course," writes Smith, "I assert their utter falsehood; but the good Christians never stick at confirming one another's lies against a common enemy, as they consider you."—Edward Dowden, "The Life of Shelley."

## Why Do They Do It?

This is the gospel according to Mark, whose other name was T'wain.

Tom Canty used the Great Seal of England to crack nuts with.

MISTAKES will occur, even when full directions are given on the box. From a lack of training, or from pure cussedness, we put many things to uses not strictly legitimate. Instance razors and psychology. Setting razors aside, take psychology. What will it not do? Almost everything but wash clothes. Carpentier, the pugilist, won all his battles with it, until he applied it to Dempsey. He made a mistake in the voltage. Later, he had the temerity to try it on a descendant of the great Psiki family, and bit the dust for an infringement of their copyright. For some reason or other, Charles Platt, M.D., Ph.D., has departed from the purely scientific mode in a work entitled, *The Psychology of Social Life*, and his sops to theologians demand some notice from the Free-thought standpoint. The book is published by George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., and is well within the reach of all who can afford it, being only twelve shillings and sixpence per copy. I got it honestly; dear old Santa Claus put it in my stocking. Mixed with roast turkey, plum pudding and Turkish delight, it helped me to pass the Nativity Week most enjoyably. For psychology is not a "dry" subject—see introductory. The general drift is confessedly materialistic but ends on a note of faith. The author, however, is candid enough to tell us that faith and trust are not scientific conceptions, but he says:—

In the experience of a considerable life, I have found but few men of science, but few seekers of God's laws, who do not possess faith and trust abundantly.

Well, when a writer precedes a statement like that with this one:

We can at least claim to have attained to one of wisdom's attributes, and that is to *doubt*. Doubt is our chief acquisition to the present,

we quite realize that if we set birdlime to catch him he would easily hop on to another twig out of harm's way. Dr. Platt's agility in this respect is most dazzling. He is Yea, and Nay, and Perhaps. In some pages he is a six-cylinder, forty-horse power doubter, and like Potiphar's wife, above suspicion; then all at once he sheers right round and hands out the same sort of cordial one is accustomed to get from the grey whiskered leader of a Sunday-school class. Let us listen to him:—

Fear is the psychological impulse towards religion. Christianity has nothing to do with the fear element, but then Christianity is just beginning to be recognized. It is still purely nominal in our Churches. It is founded on love and parental relation.

Signs, portents, sin, salvation, delusions, devils, punishments, ignorance, poverty and filth, these represent the Christianity that was founded on love and parental relation, crushing them almost out of existence by its weight. Now that the rotten structure is crumbling away, what it crippled is being recognized as a good thing. But we must remind the doctor that he must not confound these human qualities with Christianity now that they flourish when relieved of the incubus.

Dealing with witchcraft Dr. Platt says:—

It is a sickening record of human imbecility, and unforgivable until you remember that witches were facts in those days and that there was no doubt as to man's duty to exterminate them—the Bible had so commanded.

Further on he would have us believe that:—

Religion is the mainstay of the people, of men and of nations. There is no more ominous sign to-day than of its seemingly lessening hold. Flippant youth's prevailing attitude towards religion is a sad enough feature of modern life. May it be only a transient one.

Again:—

There can be no substitute for the Church. There is nothing that can replace it as an agent for good.

Dr. Platt writes thus, forgetting that he has given us a chronicle of follies, delusions, and imbecilities fostered by this very Church, of reeking crimes that only this Church could perpetrate.

There is much of this sort of thing, a blow with the left, a sop with the right, but we must forbear quoting further examples. What we have to do now is to find out why so many scientific gentlemen do these things. For Dr. Platt is not alone in pandering to religion, and he has some justification for his statement that he knows but few men of science who do not possess faith and trust abundantly. Many such have been pilloried in the *Freethinker*. Nietzsche denounced this class as "positively indecent," for said he, "they know." Nietzsche thundered, but he went near the mark in saying he found the theological instinct everywhere:—

Whoever has the blood of theologians in his veins stands from the start in a false and dishonest position to all things.

Here we are on the track of a reasonable interpretation of the attitude of these sceptical but conventional scientists.

For the influence of beliefs that have been long held does not end with the intellectual perception of their falsity.

Mr. C. Cohen wrote that in his *Religion and Sex*, a work Dr. Platt would find invaluable if he contemplates a second edition of his interesting study. The same writer shows how primitive instincts and superstitions have bitten deep into our social life, that they are perpetuated in our institutions, that we are moulded by these institutions, and although we do to-day enjoy some measure of freedom, we act as do those who have become free after a lifetime of slavery. The fear of the whip has become part of our nature. It is not surprising to find that Dr. Platt, in the materialistic portion of his studies, comes to the same conclusion. He shows that man is to-day an organism with the inherited tendencies of the savage; that his "brain and nerve patterns" are the offspring of patterns chiselled, so to speak, in the brains and nerves of his arboreal ancestors. The "intellectual patterns" of modern civilization are mere scratches compared with the ruts of the ages preceding them. The intellectual patterns, he argues, are consequently more transient and are always in danger of being subdued by the older ones.

Now we know why they do it, and we sympathise with Dr. Platt when he writes:—

Most of us have a common feeling with Don Quixote, especially those of us who live in America, when he says, "Though more good come to a man by the praise of a few wise men than hurt by the scoffs of a number of fools, yet would I not willingly subject myself to the confused judgment of the senseless vulgar."

It is all a fight between Ariel and Caliban, with the odds in favour of Caliban. Intellectual emancipation is the lucky lot of the veriest handful, and their existence hangs in the balance.

Christ is slain, but his ghost flourishes. Samuel Butler of "Erewhon" said that society would never

develop safely and comfortably until Jesus Christ's ghost was laid. Perhaps he spoke truer than he was aware. The ghost lived before the man Christ. It lives yet, and is ripe for mischief. It has wrecked two civilizations in two thousand years. Signs are not wanting that a third is in danger. H. IRVING.

## Islam and Freethought; The Law.

[We regret that owing to unfavourable circumstances Mr. Malcolmson has been unable to reply before this to the article by Mr. Kwhaja Kamal-ud-din, some weeks ago, but the matter is sufficiently independent and interesting in itself to justify publication now. The last article appeared in the *Freethinker* for October 22, 1922.—EDITOR.]

HAVING failed to impress me with his idea of a Great, Unseen, Mysterious Power and the many suits of clothes with which he so generously covers its nakedness—all made to measure but not guaranteed to wash or keep their colour if exposed to the sunlight of Nature or the X-rays of Freethought—Mr. Kamal-ud-din has placed that doll or idol on the shelf, and has opened the cupboard of his brain and trotted out two more marionettes to dance before my astonished and wondering gaze. One he calls "The Law," and the other "The Great Mind." These do seem terrible bogies at first sight, with their capital initials, like Guardsmen's bearskins, to add to their terrifying appearance. But let us turn on the limelight and see what we can make of them.

First, as to the Law. "Everything in Nature," Mr. Kamal-ud-din tells us, "is obedient to law," which (like Rider Haggard's "She") must be obeyed. Granted. Our every thought, word and deed, has a cause behind it and is the inevitable result of law. The laws of heredity, temperament and environment govern our thoughts, our actions and our careers throughout life, just as the course of a ball sent rolling down an incline is governed by the size, weight, and composition of the ball, and the environment it meets with, plus the amount of force with which it was started.

"Matter," says Mr. Kamal-ud-din, "has been rejected as the First Cause." Now, it is useless to talk about or to seek a *first* cause, since it brings us no nearer to a solution of the mystery of the universe and how it came to be; it only brings us to the question, "What was the cause of the first cause?" We can no more get down to a first cause than we can confine, define, or circumscribe an infinity of space. Has it ever occurred to Mr. Kamal-ud-din that there is no such thing as *time*, that there is nothing but the *everlasting now*, and that past, present and future are all one? Eternity extends both ways, having no beginning, no ending; therefore, there never was and never could be a first cause.

Mr. Kamal-ud-din says that the moment an organism or even an inorganic entity ceases to be subject to the Law, it begins to wither and become decomposed; yet, according to his own statement, everything in Nature is obedient to the Law; therefore nothing can cease to be subject to the Law. The leaf of a tree, when it has fulfilled its purpose, withers and becomes decomposed—not because it has ceased to be subject to the Law, but because it is obeying and fulfilling the Law. Mr. Kamal-ud-din tells me that like every other human being, I am a chained slave of the Law, that for my very life I cannot do otherwise than obey it, but must, like himself, bow my reluctant head to it; all of which I readily admit—except the bowing of my head, if by that he means worship. Like the leaf on the tree, I shall in due course begin to wither and become decomposed, thereby fulfilling Nature's law of birth, growth, decay and death, which is the fate of gods as well as men, for even gods are subject to the Law.

That favourite hymn with Christians, "Abide With Me," is a doleful one, both in words and tune; "Change and decay in all around I see," it wails. Yes, change and decay is a law of Nature, and it applies to nations and empires, gods and religions, as well as to animals and plants and the leaves on the trees. The gods who are still more or less alive in men's imaginations will grow old and feeble, and in due course will become dead, and will be buried in the archives of mythology, or preserved like mummies in a museum of theology, taking their place in those groups of myths "produced from that craving to know causes and reasons which ever besets mankind," as Sir E. B. Tylor puts it in his book, *Primitive Culture*. Allah, Yahveh, Zeus, Jupiter, Jove, Brahma, Vishnu, and all the rest of the pantheon, are but vain imaginings, man-made images, idols, dressed up and painted to strut upon the stage of human beliefs for perhaps a few thousand years (such puppet-shows, with priests and parsons to pull the strings, are very popular) until their lights grow dim and flicker out. And all the while the sun, the real origin of this earth and the giver and preserver of all life upon it, goes on for millions of years gazing calmly on man's mental and physical struggles and strifes, pouring out its beneficent beams on all alike without discrimination, shining equally on war and peace, on saint and sinner, on Jew, Christian, Muslim, and Infidel!

Though I am subject to the Law, I do not worship the Law. I may obey the law of England, but I do not worship it; on the contrary I criticise it. Some of the English laws ought to be abolished or drastically reformed, such as the blasphemy laws, the capital punishment law, the marriage and divorce laws, the land laws, the poor laws, the vagrancy laws, and the income-tax laws. Similarly, I do not worship Nature's laws, nor do I worship any mind that may or may not have conceived them and put them in operation. Nature's laws are unkind, inconsiderate, pitiless and cruel in the extreme; there is no mercy or compassion or discrimination in them. Nature's laws fall equally on the good and the bad, the old and the young, the deserving and the undeserving. A chimney-stack, in obedience to the Law, may be blown down by a gale of wind and fall upon and kill an innocent babe lying asleep in its cot. Nature's law has no more consideration for mankind than for the mites in the cheese. If, according to the teaching of Islam, we learn the attributes of Allah from the laws of Nature revealed by science, then the inference is obvious.

W. E. Burnett, D.D., a minister of the Episcopal Church, U.S.A., says (*vide the Freethinker*, January 7, page 3) that "Nature is orderly," and that "man is in the order, and a very important part of it." In thinking so, man deceives himself; he may appear to be very important in his own conceited estimation of himself, but he is of no importance to Nature; he is no more than a parasite on the face of this earth. Nature existed millions of years before ever man appeared, and would continue to do so even if man were to disappear entirely and become as extinct as the dodo. Nature's laws contain contradictions to any set purpose. We find one law in opposition to another. In Nature there appear to be two opposing forces, one constructive and the other destructive. How can such a state of affairs be consistent with or reconciled to the idea of one mind alone, which is at the same time omniscient and omnipotent? Either there are two great powers or forces in opposition to each other, or the one "Great Mind" is like a child playing with its box of bricks, building up and knocking down again. The former supposition would seem the more plausible and more consistent with facts; and if Mr. Kamal-ud-din would care to adopt them I will make him a present of the two great powers, and he can call one the Great, Unseen, Mysterious *Constructive*

Power (Limited), and the other the Great, Unseen, Mysterious Destructive Power (Société Anonyme), and he can personify and deify them, "clothe them with attributes," and bend his knees and bow his head and bump his forehead on the ground in worship of them to his heart's content; and let him not be sparing with his cloth and trimmings, but give them plenty of gold lace and brass buttons, for the more resplendently he clothes them the better they will look. "Clothes make the man," says the old saw; and clothes make the god, likewise.

In my next article I shall deal more particularly with the "Great Mind." A. W. MALCOLMSON.

(To be Continued.)

## Listening In and Out.

OUTSIDE a large Dissenting Chapel in Peckham the enterprising people who run that show are constantly vying with the local picture palaces by hanging out large posters with sensational announcements. A few weeks ago the religious folk of Peckham were urged in large letters to "make life happy by counting God in" and helping to swell the congregation of this rather up-to-date House of God. Now there is a fresh attraction. The people of Peckham are solemnly informed that "God has a message for Peckham," and the people of the neighbourhood, young and old, rich and poor have the question put before them in the following attractive form: "Are You Listening In? Revelations Continuous." Personally I have not "walked inside" to hear what messages their pastors allege that they are receiving, but I have asked a friend who is better acquainted with wireless telegraphy than I to do a little listening in for me where messages are broadcasted and see whether he can hear anything in the nature of a divine message in the process. First of all he objected that he would not be able to recognise a *divine voice* if he heard one, and I had to confess that I was equally without experience on that subject, but I begged of him that if he heard a voice that resembled that of a bishop or a curate, or a combination of both, to report faithfully what he heard. He solemnly informs me that though he has "listened in" on several occasions, so far he has heard only a few selections from well-known operas, such as "La Bohème," and "The Magic Flute," as given by the fine company of English artists of the British Opera Company at Covent Garden, and selections from the old songs, sung by "veterans" at the Palladium, who were at the top of their form between thirty and forty years ago. For instance, he heard Tom Costello sing his old song, "At Trinity Church I Met My Doom," and "I'll Stick to the Ship Lads"; and Arthur Roberts give one of the rather naughty songs he used to warble at the old London Pavilion, but he has heard nothing that has in the slightest degree resembled the voice of the Bishop of London or any of his numerous curates; and though the messages are alleged to be continuous, the divine message has not been heard up to the time of our going to press, as editors are apt to say under pressing circumstances. Failing the receipt of Divine messages by "listening in" for broadcast wireless communications, my friend suggested that I might do a little "listening out" by attending some of the performances of the Nativity Play at "the Old Vic," entitled "The Hope of the World." Accordingly, a few weeks ago I took my seat among "the gods" at "The Vic" and sat out a performance of a play with the above named title by the Rev. Father Andrew, S.D.C. The play was in five scenes dealing with the miraculous birth of Jesus, and quite

a large number of characters took part in the performance. There were, for example, Mary and Joseph, a respectable married couple who were to have their domestic happiness seriously disturbed by the lady being mysteriously conceived of a child of which her husband was not the father; for dramatic purposes there was also a lady introduced with the name of Mara, a young person of loose morals and loose language, for she called some of the characters disreputable *swine* and other offensive epithets with remarkable glibness. In addition there were soldiers and shepherds and magi, the Angel Gabriel, Herod the King and two or three other characters to make up the crowd; but so far as the plot of the play was concerned most of the characters were what is called *cargo* and might easily have been dispensed with altogether. The wise men were on their way to Bethlehem, attracted in that direction by the appearance of a star. On a clear night they looked up into the heavens and saw this particular star, shining with such refulgence that they followed it, first to Jerusalem then to Herod's palace, and finally to Bethlehem. When they came into the presence of Herod the king, who appears to have been the villain of the piece, they mentioned the little matter of the star, and instead of laughing at them for their childish superstition the irate monarch at the mere mention of the word *star* began to rave like a madman. But nothing happened. Later on he gave instructions to have two prisoners crucified, but as the crucifixion took place off the stage, the audience was spared a big sensational scene. At length the Angel Gabriel informed Joseph that the condition of his wife was quite all right, that the child to be born was of the Holy Ghost, and the wise men having nothing else to do continued to follow the star till they reached Bethlehem where they were directed to an inn, and as all the rooms were occupied, poor Mary had to put up with unpleasant and uncomfortable apartments, and the divine child was born in a manger. Then we got the message in the form of a carol "Peace on Earth and Good-will to All Men," which was beautifully sung by a well-trained choir. This religious drama was played by the very efficient company of "The Old Vic" and was well received by a large audience, though the theme and sentiments expressed therein belonged to a bygone age. It was a real pleasure to me at all events to have as an after piece such a sterling melodrama as "The Cricket on the Hearth," an adaptation from the story by Charles Dickens which kept the audience interested and amused to the end. But when we came out of the theatre instead of finding that "peace on earth and good-will to all men" was the order of the day or night, we learned from the papers that the French had resolved to march into Ruhr and demand reparations by taking over the coalfields, and that the Turks were making preparations for another war. Thus alas the Christians of Europe must recognize that "The Hope of the World" is not likely to be realized yet awhile.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

## FINDING OUT THE TRUTH.

The preacher was Scotch, he believed in hell and preached to beat it. This is how he brought a particularly fiery discourse to a triumphant close:—

"And on the last day there ye'll be, all ye wickut sinners, up to your necks in the sea of brimstone, and the flames'll be roarin' around ye, and ye'll no have a drap o' water tae wet yer parched throats, and there'll be wailin' and gnashin' of teeth and ye'll be cryin' out unto the Lord, 'Oh, Lor-rd, we did na' ken—we did na' ken!' And the good Lord, in the infinite maircy and compassion of his good and loving hear-rt, will say, 'Weel! ye ken noo a' richt!'"—From the "Chicago Daily Tribune."

## The N.S.S. Annual Dinner.

THE twenty-sixth Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society took place at the Midland Grand Hotel on Tuesday evening, 16th inst. There were about a hundred and twenty guests present, including: Mr. and Mrs. G. Alward, of Grimsby, Mr. and Mrs. Quinton, Mr. and Mrs. Neate, Mr. and Miss Clifton, Mr. Friedman, of Manchester, Mr. R. D. Side and family, Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Fincken and family, Mr. Harry Snell, M.P., L.C.C., Mr. and Mrs. Collette Jones, Mr. and Mrs. George Bedborough, Mr. and Mrs. Royle, Mr. A. W. G. Betts, Mr. W. G. Walter, Mr. and Mrs. Streimer, Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Walter, Mr. and Mrs. Butler, Mr. Gartrell, of Penzance, Mr. Fawn and friend, Mr. A. J. Marriott, Mr. E. A. Lameda, Mrs. King and party, of Syresham, George Wood and party, Mr. C. W. Marshall, Mr. and Mrs. Rudd, Mr. R. P. Dayton, Mr. F. C. C. Watts, Mr. G. J. Finch, Messrs. A. H. Robertson, H. Silverstein, J. Hartgill, A. Ladenburg, H. B. Doughty, Mr. Erle D. Side and party, Mr. and Mrs. Ash, Mr. and Mrs. Vaughan, Mr. George Underwood, Mr. A. Wey, Mr. T. Thurlow, Mr. and Mrs. F. P. Corrigan, Mr. G. Rolf, Mr. T. H. Elstob, Miss E. M. Crooke, Miss Mabel Jones, Miss Pritchard, Miss Perkins, Mr. Grant, Mr. and Mrs. R. H. Rosetti, Miss M. Pankhurst, Mr. C. Quinton (junr.), and Mr. A. B. Moss and party.

MR. COHEN (the President) said he thought they should all be congratulated on the resumption of that interesting function, after a lapse of seven years. They would all regret the absence of several old friends, among whom was Mr. J. T. Lloyd. Unfortunately Mr. Lloyd was suffering from a severe attack of bronchitis.

The N.S.S. had passed a very strenuous time since the last Annual Dinner, but it was very gratifying to find a movement such as theirs still fresh and youthful. Being founded on a trustworthy and solid basis it could never grow old. During the last seven years much had happened affecting the Freethought movement. The Bowman case had been fought and won, establishing the legal right of any society devoted to the spread of anti-theological views, and the outcome of one of them was a decision to get introduced into Parliament a Bill for the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws. No doubt, when the Bill came forward many members who would like to vote against it would be ashamed to do so.

While not wishing to introduce a sad note on an occasion like the present, Mr. Cohen said he could not refrain from mentioning that many would be thinking of one who was no longer with them, who had been their President and brought to the Freethought cause one of the clearest brains and one of the most graceful and forceful pens that movement had ever possessed. The death of such a leader as G. W. Foote and such a brilliant leader as Charles Bradlaugh was a great blow to the Freethought cause; but, after all, the success of their movement rested, not on the personality of this or that man—it sets out such unselfish and noble ideals that it is bound to attract the strongest and best characters. One often heard people remark that such and such a man sacrificed himself for the Freethought cause, but he (Mr. Cohen) would rather put it that that man was realizing himself. One must not measure the success of a movement by the number of its adherents or the extent of the Society's funds—although the latter, he was pleased to say were larger than they had been at any time in the history of the Society. (Cheers.)

MR. A. B. MOSS, in proposing the toast of the National Secular Society, said he had at home a certificate signed by the illustrious Charles Bradlaugh making him a member of the Society in the year 1876. He was delighted to think he had had the privilege of working, not altogether obscurely, for the success of that great movement. Years ago Freethinkers could not sue for debt. Charles Bradlaugh made it his business to understand the law. He got into Parliament and succeeded in getting passed the Oaths Act, which allowed anyone to affirm instead of take an oath. He (Mr. Moss) was the first man holding a public position to take advantage of that law, and for some twenty-five years of his public career he was the only public officer in the world to affirm. Then

they had to contend with the Blasphemy Laws, under which anyone delivering a lecture entitled "Is the Bible True?" was liable to be indicted for blasphemy, and the Society's second great President suffered bitterly under that law. Now they had an equally wonderful man as President, a man of fine intellectual power, a man of fine zeal, and one who had helped as much as anybody to get the Blasphemy Laws repealed—Mr. Chapman Cohen. (Cheers.)

MR. R. H. ROSETTI said he had been asked to step into the breach occasioned by the absence of Mr. Lloyd. He was quite unable to respond to the toast as Mr. Lloyd would have done, but he had the same keen interest in the cause. The N.S.S. had not a hefty bank balance, but it had a brilliant President, fine leaders, and a devoted band of supporters, and he believed their path in the future would be much smoother than in the past.

MISS EDITH M. VANCE, in proposing the toast of "The Visitors," said she felt very much like the young bridegroom who was not used to public speaking. When called upon to make a speech at the wedding breakfast, he stuttered and stammered, and putting his hand on his wife's shoulder, he said: "L-a-d-i-e-s and g-e-n-t-l-e-m-e-n, believe me, this thing was forced upon me." (Laughter.) She had only two faults to find with the selection of herself to propose the toast—one was that she was not a public speaker, and the other was that the toast was such an important one that she could not do justice to it. She was once a visitor, so was their President, and so was Mr. Harry Snell, when he came up to see her, and she asked him to become a speaker for the cause. Mr. Snell said, "Well, if you will press me, you must put up with the consequences." He turned out to be one of their best speakers, and she was only sorry he was not twins. (Laughter.) The real success of their movement lay with the women. Although she could not see them, she knew there were many ladies present, and she extended to them a very hearty welcome. (Cheers.)

MR. HARRY SNELL, M.P., responding for the "visitors," said reference had been made to the smallness of the Society in point of numbers, but it was great in its influence. He was recently in America on a speaking tour, and he learned there that the National Secular Society loomed up as a society of real importance. The name of its President was well-known, and the work it was doing this side was much respected. Mr. Moss had referred to the old days when to be a Freethinker meant social ostracism—their work was then attack all along the line. If ever a movement had triumphed it was the Freethought movement. If only the old fighting Freethinkers could be with them now they would regard the change as a revolution. Christianity now stood for a sort of cosmic emotion, a mere mushy sentimentality. They had now to fight a new battle. The various sects were crouching for a spring on the liberties of the people—on religious equality. Mr. Cohen stated that when the Bill for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws came before the House of Commons many would be ashamed to vote against it; but he (Mr. Snell) thought it would be a very difficult matter to carry through anything which gave extra intellectual liberty to the people. There would, however, no doubt be a bigger minority standing for the right, and there would at least be one voice which would ring true to the new ideals. (Cheers.)

MR. GEORGE SMITH, who also responded for the toast of "The Visitors," said this was the first time he had attended a meeting of the National Secular Society, but he had been a Freethinker since childhood. He had known all the Freethought leaders for the last forty years, and remembered, when attending a lecture by Mrs. Annie Besant at Stepney, that he was almost spell-bound by her eloquence, by her logic, and by her clear reasoning. Later, he heard Bradlaugh at St. James' Hall, when the Rev. Guinness Rogers and Morley were present. The meeting was very flat until Bradlaugh got up to second the resolution, but instantly he aroused all the latent energy of Radicalism, and the whole gathering was soon worked up into a high pitch of enthusiasm.

The speeches were interlarded with songs and humorous selections, and special mention should be made of the very fine singing of Miss Elsa Cameron, who rendered "Caller Herrin," and "I Shot an Arrow," with exquisite feeling and gained great applause.

## Correspondence.

SUNDAY GAMES IN THE PARKS.  
TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—With all due deference to those who object to restrictions on playing in the public parks on the one weekly rest-day as "Sabbatarianism," it seems to me that, quite apart from religious scruples, there is a sufficiently strong case to be made out for prohibition on secular and ethical grounds alone. After all, the majority of citizens do not play either football or cricket, but use the parks as places of rest and leisure. It is not very nice for quiet and peaceable persons to be liable at any moment to be struck by a muddy or dangerous ball, and such rough play will also practically mean the exclusion of children too. There is another objection, namely, that this constant trampling forms huge, unsightly, patches on the lawns, so spoiling the beauty which is the chief attraction of a park. Grounds composed of gravel should be provided for gamesters, and the parks reserved for their proper use as a promenade and pleasure. The most effective way to get rid of the religious objection would be to adopt, say, a ten-day week, like the French revolutionists, but even the most un-Christian would hardly agree to this.

EVACUSTES A. PHIPSON.

[Our correspondent overlooks the fact that games are only permitted on spaces set apart for that purpose, and therefore cannot interfere with the pleasure of the general public in other parts of the grounds.—EDITOR.]

## Obituary.

The death occurred on January 6, 1923, of Mrs. Helvia Warren after a long and wearisome illness. The deceased lady had been a life long attender of the Failsworth Secular Sunday-school and an ardent worker for its interests. She was highly respected and has left behind a host of sorrowing friends and relatives. She was interred at Failsworth Cemetery on Wednesday, the 10th inst. The Secular Burial Service was impressively conducted by Mr. Henry Taylor.

The death of Mr. Henry Taylor occurred with tragic suddenness early on the morning of the 12th inst. The deceased had been ailing for some time, but up to the evening prior to his death had gone about in his usual manner, and had conducted the service above mentioned two days before his death. Mr. Taylor also had been a life long attender of, and worker in, our school. He had held every office of importance connected therewith, and was to the last treasurer to the school trustees. He had been a prominent member of the Dramatic Committee, being himself a player of no mean ability. He leaves a void that will be hard to fill. Deceased was sixty-five years of age. Mr. James Pollitt conducted the funeral ceremony on Tuesday, January 16, at Failsworth Cemetery in a most impressive manner. The sympathies of the officials and congregation of the school are extended to the relatives of both the above.—J. SMITH, *President Failsworth Secular School.*

## PIONEER LEAFLETS.

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## 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.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, Mr. C. G. Forbes, "Suggestion."

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, Debate, "What Religion has done for Humanity." Mr. L. B. Augusto v. Mr. A. D. McLaren.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., "Social Sciences and the Individual."

## COUNTRY.

## INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Brassworkers' Hall, 70 Lionel Street): 7, Mr. E. Clifford Williams, "Pioneers of Free-thought."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY.—Mr. Chapman Cohen, 11.30, City Hall (Saloon), "Words, Just Words"; 6.30, Grand City Hall, "What Humanity has Gained from Unbelief."

LEEDS BRANCH N.S.S. (2 Central Road, Duncan Street, Shop Assistants' Rooms): 6.45, Mr. Richard Turley, "Child Life" with limelight. Miss S. Fineberg will render solos. Please be prompt. Members please note: February 4, General Meeting, election of new officers. Please keep Sunday, February 4, evening free and attend.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, The Hon. Bertrand A. W. Russell, F.R.S., M.A., "The Prospects of Industrial Civilization."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S.—Discussion Circle meets at Mr. C. B. Turner's, 18 Darlington Road, Withington, at 6.30 p.m. Mr. Bayford will open on the last three chapters of the "Evolution of the Idea of God." Everyone attending should alight at the "White Lion."

STOCKPORT BRANCH N.S.S. (191 Higher Hillgate): Thursday, February 1, at 7.30, Open Discussion, "Determinism or Free-Will?" Opener, Mr. George Ambler. Members and friends are urged to attend to make the meeting as much a success as possible.

WESTON-SUPER-MARE (Town Hall): Thursday, February 1, at 7.30, Mr. Chapman Cohen, "Humanity's Gain from Unbelief."

**FOR SALE.**—Violin and Outfit, complete in every detail, including a parcel of Music. Price £3.—J. WILLIAMS, 76 Portland Road, W.11.

## Where to Obtain the "Freethinker."

The following is not a complete list of newsagents who supply the "Freethinker," and we shall be obliged for other addresses for publication. The "Freethinker" may be obtained on order from any newsagent or railway bookstall.

## LONDON.

E.—E. T. Pendrill, 26 Bushfield Street, Bishopsgate. M. Papier, 86 Commercial Street. B. Ruderman, 71 Hanbury Street, Spitalfields. J. Knight & Co., 3 Ripple Road, Barking. W. H. Smith & Son, Seven Kings Railway Station Bookstall.

E.C.—W. S. Dexter, 6 Byward Street. Rose & Co., 133 Clerkenwell Road. Mr. Siveridge, 88 Fenchurch Street. J. J. Joques, 191 Old Street.

N.—C. Walker & Son, 84 Grove Road, Holloway. Mr. Keogh, Seven Sisters Road (near Finsbury Park). Mr. West, New Road, Lower Edmonton. T. Perry, 17 Fore Street, Edmonton. H. Hampton, 80 Holloway Road.

N.W.—W. L. Tarbart, 316 Kentish Town Road. W. Lloyd, 5, Falkland Road, Kentish Town.

S.E.—J. H. Vullick, 1 Tyler Street, East Greenwich. Mr. Clayton, High Street, Woodside, South Norwood. W. T. Andrews, 35 Meetinghouse Lane, Peckham. W. Law, 19 Avondale Road, Peckham.

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