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Views and Opinions.

The Public and the Churches.

It was mentioned last week that an invitation had been received from the Rev. B. G. Bouchier to send a representative to take part in a discussion on the way in which laymen would run a Church. Having no desire to run a Church, unless it be to run it off the earth, I replied to the invitation with the suggestion that if a discussion were arranged on the subject of why people have ceased to attend Church I should be pleased to take part in it. To that Mr. Bouchier replied that he liked the suggestion and hoped to arrange for it to take place. There the matter rests for the time. I have only to add that if Mr. Bouchier would care to take this journal as the vehicle for the discussion its columns are open. I am quite sure that the topic would be interesting, and it would enable both sides to study the question quietly and dispassionately. But I wrote Mr. Bouchier as I did because, in my opinion, these discussions as usually arranged are little better than elaborate farces. They represent the opinions of everyone save the ones that really matter. We have had discussions as to the relations of science and religion, but the ones invited have been those who were known to believe in a religion of some kind, or those who are too timid to let their real opinions on religion be known. Everything is discussed but the real issue. There is usually method in this. It distracts attention from the real question, which is not the falling off of church attendance, but the decline of religious belief. That is kept in the background. The laity must be encouraged in the belief that "true" religion is as vigorous as ever. To be quite candid, it is the game of the average clergyman to let his congregation know only such aspects of things as will suit the policy of the Churches.

Laity and Clergy.

* * *

Somebody once defined a clever man as one who convinces people that they cannot do without him. If that definition be accepted, and if we count intentions only, it must be admitted that the clergy deserve to be called clever. For in every discussion arranged by them that is taken for granted. In effect they say: "You may dispense with anything you please, with kings or parliaments, with aristocracy or democracy, but you must not think of dispensing with us. We are indispensable." And they have repeated this so

often, and in so many different ways, that it has been taken for granted. Hence the inability to see the humour of calling a conference of laymen to discuss with the clergy how to run a church—in the interests of the clergy. It never strikes them that such a gathering differs in no essential way from a trade conference called by any trade organization. But a trades conference is just a trades conference. It never dawns upon the minds of grocers or tailors, when trade is slack to call a meeting of probable customers for them to discuss how the business of these particular men may be improved. And yet this is what Mr. Bouchier and other clergymen are doing. The strict analogy would be a congress of chickens called to discuss by what means they could be induced to show greater partiality for the society of foxes. The clergy do not want the laity to discuss whether church-going is of real use to anyone, any more than the foxes would wish the chickens to discuss whether cultivating the society of foxes would be healthy for the farmyard. The important thing to the parson is that the people are losing the habit of attending church, and he invites them to come and say how they can be induced to come, as though it were a matter of importance to them. The situation is not without its humorous side if one looks at it from the proper angle.

* * *

The Gospel as Second Fiddle.

Now as there are a considerable number of people who only desire to pass Sunday in an agreeable manner and who have no inclination to pay attention to other issues involved, I have no doubt that if the churches are made attractive enough they may be filled. If churches enter into serious competition with places of amusement there should be no greater trouble in filling them than there is in filling a concert hall or a picture palace. Only it must be rather depressing to the genuine believer in Christianity to find his "glorious gospel" playing second fiddle to a band, a cinematograph, or a handful of vocalists. After all that has been written and spoken about the "tremendous drama of Calvary" it may be questioned whether God Almighty came to earth to be crucified on two sticks in order to provide a Sunday afternoon's entertainment. Nor can it be inspiring to a clergyman to know that people will come to church provided that the sermon be very short and the concert of a good quality. What strikes one most here is the naked professionalism of the thing. What the people come to church for is not so important as that they shall come. There is the building, and there is the performer; what is required is the audience. And the position of the average parson appears to be that what they come for is a matter of secondary consideration. Meantime the significant fact that when people come to church on account of the attractions held out they have already ceased to have any real belief in Christianity is either not seen or carefully ignored.

* * *

An Old Story.

A reference to the pages of Lucian will show an analogous feature in the history of Paganism. In one

of his dialogues Lucian introduces a council of the gods called to discuss the decline of church service. Various reasons are suggested, and at last one of the minor gods, addressing the chief deity, says:—

Let us be candid. All that we have really cared about is a steady altar service. And now men are opening their eyes. They perceive that whether they pray or don't pray, go to church, or don't go to church, makes no difference to them. And we are receiving our deserts. Our advocates are silenced. If you wish mankind to reverence again you must remove the cause of their disbelief.

That is the position to-day. The slump in church-attendance is universal. It is too widespread to be accounted for by dissatisfaction with a particular parson, or because a particular building is ugly or uncomfortable. Religious belief takes no count of beauty or comfort where the belief is living. In genuine religious organizations the priest is the central figure, and when men and women cease to pay attention to him it is because faith in his function and his doctrine is dead or nearly so. I do not mean by this that some clergymen may not have sensible counsel to offer, or that they may not receive a measure of deference. But when this is the case they are on the same level as others. Disease no longer drives a man to the priest, but to the doctor. One who is going on a voyage no longer consults the Oracles, but looks out the fastest and safest lines with the lowest rates. There are no avenues of enlightenment open to the priest that are not open to others. Everyone knows that for reliable information on art, or science, or politics, there is not the smallest advantage in attending church. The best that can be got there is a more or less distorted version of what can be obtained outside. The whole of the priesthood represents to-day in social structure what rudimentary organs do in the bodily organism. They are reminiscent of a lower and earlier stage of civilization.

The Final Issue. * * *

If Lucian were alive to-day he could but repeat the advice he gave the Pagan priests of his time: "If you wish mankind to reverence you must remove the cause of their disbelief." But how can that be done to-day? Disbelief is not a matter that has come about in a haphazard way. It is not a matter of chance that the Christian priest has become as discredited as Pagan Augur. The disbelief with which the priest has to deal is not confined to a few. It is universal in extent and indestructible in substance. It permeates our literature, it is implied in the best of our teaching, it is becoming embodied in many of our institutions. In Lucian's day unbelief was mainly confined to certain circles, the mass of the people were still wedded to their old beliefs, and when the Christian Church established itself it did so by taking over these beliefs and so carrying the people with them. To-day we have the people as a whole able to follow all that the past hundred years have taught us concerning the origin and nature of religious beliefs. Those results are embodied in thousands of volumes, the complete destruction of which would involve the wiping out of our civilization. There is no longer a chance of some revived Christian Church coming along and reestablishing itself on the ruins of old civilization. That tragedy occurred once, and the result was Christian supremacy and the downfall of the civilization of antiquity. And yet if the clergy are to restore belief it is civilization that must be destroyed. They must somehow teach people to ignore most that modern science has taught us. In this matter it is fundamentally a question of the Christian Church versus modern science. In antiquity the Church fought its battle and conquered, but that is a victory it cannot hope to repeat.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Cross.

WE are often assured that the Cross is the symbol of the Christian faith, but it is seldom admitted by its champions that the symbolic use of the Cross antedates Christianity by several millenniums. Even Firmicus, a fourth century Latin writer, being aware of the pre-Christian religious significance of the Cross, puts the blame for its invention upon the Devil, who did everything in his power to destroy human souls. Assuming the active existence and malevolent designs of his Satanic Majesty he must have had exceptionally busy times long before Christ appeared, for we learn that among Carthaginians and Phœnicians the Cross was in use as an instrument of sacrifice to the Deity. In Egypt, India, Scandinavia, and Italy it had its mystic and religious interpretations. Even in Mexico it was called the "Tree of Our Life," and employed as a help in the worship of the Rain-God. A dough image of the God was made, raised on a cross, and then thrown down and broken into bits, which were eaten with delight by the worshippers, in the belief that they possessed healing and nourishing virtue. Thus we see that the Christians were by no means the first to attach a religious significance to the Cross. Beholding it in use as a sacred symbol among the Pagans round about them, they openly borrowed it, and then with adaptation dedicated it to the service of their own religion, ignoring or firmly denying their indebtedness to the outside world.

Recently the Rev. Canon De Candole, of Westminster Abbey, preached a sermon based upon Paul's famous phrase: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." This discourse was published in the *Christian World Pulpit* of July 26. To the Canon the Cross of Christ is absolutely unique. He says:—

The Cross is something all by itself. It is the peculiar property of the Gospel. Search for it in other faiths and you will not find it. It is the one faith in all the world that holds up before all mankind a strange figure of One dying in agony. What is the meaning of it all? In St. Paul's days there were many mystery Gospels preached. The doctrines of sacrifice and redemption were preached, but there was no personal Redeemer behind them. They were the creations of fancy and of myth. But behind the Gospel of the Christian missionary there was always the historical figure of the Redeemer, dying on Calvary for the sins of men, and reconciling them to their Father from whom they had gone astray.

But he is fundamentally mistaken, and cannot possibly establish his case except by sheer dogmatism. The facts are all dead against him. Even Plato (*Republic*, 362) speaks impressively of the ideal "Just or Righteous Man" who "shall be scourged, tortured, bound, his eyes burnt out, and, after suffering every evil, shall be impaled or crucified." Mr. De Candole has no right to characterize Pagan Redeemers as "the creations of fancy and of myth," while he pronounces Jesus Christ a thoroughly historical personage. He cannot but know that to those who believed in them, Osiris, Adonis, Attis, and Mithra were fully as real as Jesus Christ is to him, and there is no possibility of getting away from the fact that to millions of people in Christendom the Christ of the Church possesses no objective reality whatever. Our contention, however, is that Jesus Christ is in no sense unique. There were Gnostic sects everywhere before Christ was ever heard of, and the Saviour in whom they trusted was an object of clear belief to great multitudes. Their Redeemer was adored because he did exactly what Jesus Christ is reported to have done. You cannot read the Pauline Epistles, especially those to the Colossians and the Ephesians, without discovering that the writer was

much influenced by Gnostic teachings. In fact, as Professor Gilbert Murray puts it, he is constantly using their very language. Such being the case, what proof is there that the Christian Redeemer is an historical character, while Osiris, or Mithra was only a myth?

Let us now look at history for a moment and endeavour to judge the Christian Gospel by its fruits or lack of fruits. Assuming the historicity of the Apostle Paul and the genuineness of his first Epistle to the Corinthians, he repaired to the famous city determined to know nothing there save Jesus Christ and him crucified. After stupendously hard work he succeeded in founding a Church which turned out to be, not a nest of pure, noble, and saintly men and women, but the headquarters of undesirable, wicked, and degraded characters among whom drunkenness, worldliness, contention, and querulousness flourished in amazing abundance. In the small society there were three or four positively irreconcilable factions, which found their greatest pleasure in endless bickerings. Writing to them he brought serious charges against them, saying among other things: "While there exist among you jealousy and party feeling, is it not true that you are worldly, and are acting merely as other men do?" Later on he complains thus: "There is a wide-spread report respecting a case of immorality among you, and that, too, of a kind that does not occur even among the Gentiles." Of what benefit, then, was the Cross to the Corinthian converts? The Apostle himself was obliged to confess with unspeakable sorrow that they were not one whit better, and in some instances much worse, than the surrounding Pagans.

Now, take any period you like between the Apostolic age and our own, and you will not find the Church setting a good example in exalted moral conduct to the world. Indeed, as a matter of indubitable fact, in two or three different periods the Church was notoriously on a much lower ethical plane than the world, such as the tenth century, under Pornocracy, and the close of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries, under Pope Alexander VI. Canon De Candole knows perfectly well that all this is unfortunately true. He cannot forget that for over four years four Christian nations were engaged, by means of the most destructive agencies modern science could devise, in killing one another. What was the Cross doing during that most horrible period in history? There are signs on all hands that Christian Europe is about to plunge itself into an infinitely greater and more devastating war than the last. And yet, in spite of all these deplorable and humiliating facts, the Canon has the audacity to declare that "when the world in its wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching of a crucified man, to save them that believed, and that so it must always be. The Cross will always be the most surprising thing in the world, the least expected way for redeeming mankind." Surely, this is evangelicism run mad. And the worst is yet to come; for, realizing the apparent unreasonableness of his strange utterances, he says:—

But then it is God's way, and God himself is always a surprise. If God is God, he must do unexpected things, and here in the Cross he has done the most unexpected thing of all, saving the world by a dying man.

We have now reached the acme not only of the foolishness of preaching, but also of the utter irresponsibility of the preacher. Who in his senses can honestly say, looking the world in the face, that here in the Cross God has done the most unexpected thing of saving the world by a dying man? What on earth does the Canon mean by salvation? Can he seriously maintain that London, for example, is in a state of

salvation? Can he visit districts not far from the Abbey, contemplate the poverty, wretchedness, and crime to be found therein, and still assert that by means of the Cross Christ has redeemed them?

Of course there is a cowardly method of overcoming the difficulty suggested by the above questions, and the Canon adopts it:—

Do not let us talk lightly of sin, shut our eyes to it, say that there is no such thing. To-day perhaps we are all beginning to think there is something the matter with us. Things do not get right as we hoped they would have done. The world is still at sixes and sevens. We must go further than that. There is something wrong; there is a heart that rebels against the highest things of all, against a holy and loving God. Therefore the Cross must stand in the centre of human life, because it is the only thing that tells us what is the real matter with humanity to-day.

After assuring us that God has saved the world by means of the Cross, the preacher reluctantly admits, in the above passage, that such is not actually the case. The wicked human heart is capable of thwarting the Divine plan of salvation and of rendering the Cross of no effect. This admission implies that God has not really done the most unexpected thing of all because man has prevented him. In other words sin has been stronger than grace, and the human will has prevailed against the Saviour's. Of course, this explanation of the failure of the Cross is unspeakably absurd, the truth being that the Christian Cross possesses no saving efficacy whatever, as is amply proved by the present unsaved condition of human society. Consequently, no verse can be emptier of any real meaning than the following:—

In the Cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.

Canon De Candole's sermon, read from beginning to end, is its own refutation. Its extravagant claims are justified by no facts known to us. Mankind has never taken kindly to it, and at present the majority of people live as if it did not exist at all, and are no worse off than those who profess to believe in it and to have been redeemed by its gracious power.

J. T. LLOYD.

A Theological Tag.

A god whose ghost in arch and aisle
Yet haunts his temple and his tomb;
But follows in a little while
Odin and Zeus to equal doom.

—William Watson.

How popular conceptions of religion are changing in this country is illustrated by the disappearance of the old remark, "God willing." Writing on the old coaching days on the Bath Road, Mr. Tristram notes that in Charles the Second's time the stage-coaches were advertised to do the distance between London and Bath in three days "if God permit"; but in 1780 the time had come down to two days, and the pious saving clause was omitted. "God permit," according to Grose, the antiquary, was a regular slang term for the old stage-coach, and readers of Scott will remember what another antiquary said about it. A contemporary story has come down to us of the village carrier who, upon being asked when he would be at Aberdeen, replied: "I'll be in on Monday, God willing and weather permitting, and on Tuesday whether or no."

"D.V." are initials that have dropped out of public notices, except in the case of small religious communities that are mere survivals of the past. "Deo

Volente" is the proviso, "God willing." But the men and women of to-day do not trouble to put such a proviso in ordinary announcements as to future events, and order their dinners and go journeys without the addition of "D.V.," and without preference to any gods in the Pantheon.

The clergy, naturally, still insist on the willingness and interference of their particular God. A story goes that in South Carolina, some years ago, a parson was prompted, in the midst of a drought, to offer up prayers for rain. Shortly after rain fell in such enormous quantity that crops were ruined, business was suspended, and floods were caused. A deputation of citizens waited on the parson and told him to stop it or he would lose his job.

This yarn shows the resentment men would feel nowadays were things to happen as they are said to have done in the old happy-go-lucky Bible days. For, according to the legends, the prophets were for ever doing things far more troublesome to the mass of men than merely asking for rain and getting it. They are said to have foretold the onslaught of Assyria, the triumph of other nations from the west, and were for ever poking their sacred noses into many things. Statesmen and rulers of those times may have been forgiven for supposing that they were a public nuisance.

Fortunately for us the present day is the twilight of the gods. Our fifty thousand petticoated priests no longer call benefits or evil out of the sky beyond asking for fine or wet weather, or calling blessings on individual members of the Royal Family, and invoking victory to the national arms. The priests are alert enough to know that they could never succeed in praying for or prophesying anything that pleased all. The majority would restrain them with injunctions, or the minority would have them locked up. The old, old conception of a paternal deity has nearly gone, and the majority of men no longer believe in a limited-liability god, and that such a being could be swayed by the sweet smell of sacrifice, or the stimulus of entreaty.

The late world-war was a real object lesson to all men capable of thought. According to the clergy, the Christian God was still the Lord of Hosts and the God of Battles. Yet these self-same priests, who actually consecrated the banners of war, and christened battle-ships, were themselves exempted from fighting. Presuming on the docility of their dupes, they dared to prate that God was a loving father and that men were his children. What absurdity, and what hypocrisy! It was the same throughout Europe. The German soldiers marched to battle with "God with us" on their uniforms. The priests of the Greek Church urged on the Russian soldiers with the promise "God cannot desert his children." Austrian, French, and Italian priests used similar language. The Common Prayer Book of the Church of England contains the same ideas, tempered by British patriotism. "Give peace in our time, O Lord," said the preacher. "Because there is none other that fighteth for us but only Thou, O God!" responded the congregation. It was the same story in the United States, in Canada, Australia, and South Africa. The priests of all the nations involved in the awful struggle blessed the standards of murder which were to float over scenes of carnage, and invoked their deity for victory. And, as all did not win, what about God? When the priests fail, God should undergo the same criticism as the priests; for what is he but a "magnified, non-natural man," this spectre of theirs, this dreary deity of their insolence. If the peoples were wise, this god would be dethroned for ever. Then the people would no longer require priests, who would find their occupation gone.

MIMNERMUS.

Who Was Shakespeare?

WHEN the mere layman goes meandering through the long winding (I nearly wrote winded) road known as the Shakespearean Controversy it can raise no wonder or even a smile if he soon finds himself completely lost in a maze of astonishing suppositions, theories, and so-called solutions. That it is becoming increasingly hard to believe that the man William Shakespeare of Stratford should have or could have written the plays which go under his name, must be the lot of nearly every simple-minded student who takes a course of, let us say, Guppy, Delia Bacon, Ignatius Donnelly and even Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence. What can he make of the wonderful cryptograms which so conclusively prove that Bacon (at least it's Francis Bacon till the other claimants appear) not only wrote the whole of the plays of Shakespeare but all the works of the other extraordinary Elizabethan luminaries as well—not even excepting the Authorized Version of the Bible? How is he going to test the wonderful coincidences of magic Rosicrucian numbers which—so he is told—fill the First Folio? What explanation has he to offer those who point out to him the strange symbolism found in the illustrations which form the title pages of so many of Bacon's published works? And the puzzling thing is that if you do count a certain magic number of words or pages you do come to the word pig, or bacon, or hog—or at least you do not come to the word Shakespeare or Shakestaff. As for the "parallelisms," most of them—not all—are enough to take the breath away from the student, who ought by this time to be a convinced Baconian. Alas, not Sir Sidney Lee's most persuasive arguments in the *Life of Shakespeare*, nor even that "thunderous engine of revolt" Mr. J. M. Robertson's *The Baconian Heresy*, quite removes the lingering scepticism so strongly aroused by the heretics.

It is when the other claimants appear that the real trouble begins. Obviously the plays of Shakespeare must have been written (more or less) by someone and the difficulty now is to find out who that someone is. It may be Bacon, or Rutland, or Derby, or Oxford—and some marvellous arguments can be adduced for any single one of them. How is the student to tell? Consider for instance the claims of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford so ably championed by Mr. J. Thomas Looney in *Shakespeare Identified* and supported by Colonel B. R. Ward, C.M.G., in the *Mystery of "Mr. W. H."* That Colonel Ward does succeed in elucidating the mystery of the mysterious "Mr. W. H." of the *Sonnets* must be obvious even to the most biased reader. That he gives some extraordinary coincidences of dates in the life of Oxford and the publication of the plays must also be admitted. But that he does away with the magic numbers, and the cryptograms, and the parallelisms of Bacon, can in no wise be allowed.

And here—rather hesitatingly—steps in the mere layman. It has always seemed to me that there must be far more behind the portrait affixed to the First Folio engraved by Martin Droeshout, than appears on the surface or explained by Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence as a "doubly left-armed dummy, surmounted by a ridiculous putty-faced mask." I have never been able to see any likeness between it and the "traditional" portraits of Shakespeare. It is not—in my opinion—like the famous Stratford Bust which so many people seem to consider the veritable likeness.

We are forced then to come back to the famous portrait by Martin Droeshout and to ask ourselves the question—what direction would Messrs. Heminge and Condell give to the designer when it was commissioned? Hundreds of people must have known the

actor, William Shakespeare, by sight and it would be asking too much to believe that something unlike him could be affixed (such as a ridiculous mask) to a collection of his plays without strong protest from his friends. Either then the engraving was a good likeness of the actor-author, easily recognizable by all his friends or it was recognized as a good likeness of the author of the plays writing under the name of Shakespeare, a secret shared by all the actors of the plays, including the editors themselves and Ben Jonson. Now how did Droeshout get his materials? Was there a likeness of the actor William Shakespeare in existence? If there was, it is unknown to every critic and commentator Shakespeare ever had. Did Droeshout draw his likeness from descriptions given by the friends of the dead actor? Or did he actually make his design from a portrait, not of William Shakespeare the actor, but of the veritable author of the plays which may have been in existence? How does the Droeshout portrait compare then with Bacon's, with Rutland's, with Derby's, with Oxford's?

As luck would have it Colonel Ward gives us as a frontispiece to his book, a reproduction of the portrait of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, painted at the age of twenty-five, and I unhesitatingly claim that this was the picture that Martin Droeshout based his own famous First Folio engraving upon. Put them side by side and examine them critically and without bias. But first take a few points into consideration. Oxford in the painting was only twenty-five years of age. The engraving must necessarily represent that of a man of over fifty. The two pictures face opposite ways, but Droeshout's actual work must have faced the same way as the painted portrait, on the original brass or copper, whichever it was engraved upon. Take away Oxford's coquettish Elizabethan cap, his delightful feather and frills, and if you were going to give us a man of over fifty years of age, how would you proceed? Is not Oxford's left cheek practically the same as Droeshout's engraving (remember this is reversed in the print)? Is not the shape of the nose on both identical? The eyes look the same way, the peculiar shadow or puffiness on both portraits under the eyes is the same, the moustache is the same, and even the shape of the mouth. If a line-engraver had to reproduce the modelling of the shadows on the painted portrait, would he not proceed exactly as does Droeshout? Look at the way and the places in which the high lights are left out, on the forehead and right cheek in particular. Examine the curious ear or rather the lobe of the ear.

Down the centre of the Droeshout engraving you will find buttons exactly the same shape and design as those on the Oxford portrait, especially on the cap. Can these really be merely a coincidence? How would a Baconian explain it? Over Oxford's left arm is, I suppose, a cloak on which there is a clear design which again is reproduced by Droeshout much as a line-engraver would produce it on the curious coat of Shakespeare. And Oxford's right arm juts out much as we can imagine the Droeshout would do if completed. Of course, I have but a small half-tone reproduction to go by, but I hope now we shall have the actual painted portrait of the Earl of Oxford and a perfect reproduction of the Droeshout engraving carefully compared by artists and other experts. If my theory will be found true, and the two portraits are as identical as an oil-painting and a line engraving can be, it will be interesting to know where we stand with regard to the Stratfordian actor, William Shakespeare. Did all the people responsible for the First Folio know where Martin Droeshout got his likeness? Did the public at large know? And are we any nearer the solution of the great Shakespearean problem?

Whatever be the result, there can be no doubt that

the latest works on this extraordinary literary controversy must have stimulated, not only the inquiry, as to who was Shakespeare, but also helped people to go to the great works themselves, and that is, at all events, always a "consummation devoutly to be wished."

H. CUTNER.

Christianity To-day.

My friends, the war has taught men a never-to-be-forgotten lesson. Every day Freethinkers are flocking back to the Church and resuming their religious duties with an earnestness and conviction which have never before been equalled. Freethought is doomed. Christianity is daily growing stronger and stronger, and the joy which can only be found in Christ is filling men's hearts and spurring them on to better lives and to drive out sin. Soon Atheism will be a thing of the past—to be spoken of with derision and scorn. The Cross has triumphed!

At least, so we are told, or rather *were* told. You could read the above kind of stuff by the yard in any religious journal, and if you went to church I daresay you would be treated to another dose of it there. Yet during the last few weeks it seems to have been ostensibly dropped. Pondering over this, I came to the decision that the clergy had come to the belated conclusion that it is useless to hide the true religious situation to-day. My deduction was proved in a very unexpected way the other day by the appearance of a news article in the *Daily News*. On the following day a contributor to the *Daily Chronicle*, although refraining from mentioning the tell-tale figures which the other journal had given, made a slight and obviously half-hearted attempt to reassure the good Christians who must have been considerably startled by the daring revelations of the *Daily News*.

The *Daily News* article opened as follows:—

The Bishops, it is stated in well-informed Church circles, possess facts and figures concerning the electors on the parochial rolls in the whole of the English dioceses, which they refuse to publish because of their disquieting character. Some of the Bishops desire publicity, but the majority refuse. Meanwhile there exists much confusion as to the situation that will be created when the returns are announced.

Now the only three conditions of getting on the electoral roll are that members must be of eighteen years of age or over, that they must have been baptized, and that they must declare themselves to be members of the Church of England. These being the only three conditions, therefore, the returns of ten dioceses collected by the organ of the "Cocoa Press" will come as a considerable surprise to the majority of Christians, which speak for themselves and cannot be easily explained away. To say that most Christians do not trouble to get enrolled will not answer. The clergy, I believe, see to it that their congregations are placed on the roll.

Let us take the case of London. The population of the diocese of London (which does not, of course, include a large part of the Metropolis which is included in the Southwark and Chelmsford dioceses), is 3,811,827; the number on the electoral roll of the Church is 122,070. The reason for the Christians' surprise is therefore apparent. Out of nearly four million people only 122,000 are on the roll of the State Church! The adjoining diocese of Southwark includes 2,235,352 persons; the recent census reveals the fact that only 136,683 are on the roll.

These proportions, it will be seen, work out roughly to one in thirty and one in eighteen respectively. The

proportions in the case of the other eight dioceses, however, are not quite so serious, especially in Manchester and Liverpool, where the rate is about one in sixteen; but I think that when the other returns are collected and analysed it will be found that the average proportion is somewhere in the neighbourhood of one in twenty-two.

I have not the pre-war figures to hand, but I think that the proportion was then about one in seven (or one in six). Compare the two, and you will get a further idea of the Christian's shock. And yet since the war we have been constantly told that "wanderers" were flocking back to the Church!

"Taking the great dioceses of London and Southwark together, including a population of over six millions, the Anglican Church can only muster 258,753 electors," emphasizes the *Daily News*, which points out that the first effect of the enormous falling off in church-goers will be that the number of members of the House of Laity will be reduced to 14 instead of 39 in the case of London, and from 23 to 16 in the case of Southwark.

Not one of the great journals which support the Church let even a word appear in connection with these remarkable figures, and the religious journals, of course, rigidly ignore them. And no wonder, for there has been nothing published which illustrates the decline of Christianity more clearly or definitely since I can remember, not even the wailing (unauthorized by the bishops, of course) of some parsons last year on the "strange and perverse" falling off in Church attendance. These statistics do not denote the desertion of Anglicans in favour of Nonconformity or Romanism, for only a couple of months ago we read of the closing down of a large number of chapels, while on the other hand the Roman Catholic Church cannot produce any facts to show that the number of members has increased to any degree.

"Truth will out," and the truth in this case is unsavoury in the eyes of the Christian Church, and that is why it is being suppressed. For it means that thinking men and women are at last growing weary of the barbaric dogmas served up in the disguise of Christianity, and it means that Freethought is becoming more and more widespread, although not "popular" in the strict meaning of the word.

Religionists have always clung fondly to dreams of universal power, and they have never been equalled and never can be equalled in their attempts to clothe the truth with a veil of bombastic declamation. I have on my desk a copy of the *Times Literary Supplement* for February 15 of this year, and its leading article, which appears on the front page, and which I think was written by the late Thomas Secombe, begins in the following strain:—

In troublous times men always turn to what are called the consolations of religion. The war has dealt a severe blow to secularism, whether it expresses itself in complacent satisfaction with the present or in apocalyptic hopes for the near future. Bereavement has turned the minds of almost every family to think of what may come after death.

The truth of the first sentence is certainly true in the case of *Christians*, but the next statement is merely faintly ridiculous. Who has not noticed the vast increase in the numbers of Freethinkers? Ask your friends if you have not.

During the past few years the philosophy of most people has undergone an important change. Some Christians have grown more bigoted and narrow minded than ever; others have fallen into Modernism, but a vast number, comparatively speaking, have dropped Christianity for good. This change of mental vision is merely a step in the evolution of the mind, at once progressive and apparent in the case of the

deserters. And this change marks the most important step in the crumbling of the religious structure. The Christian sects must ultimately unite or quickly perish; the recent panicky reorganization of and negotiations between some of the branches of the Non-conformists, and also the present Anglo-Catholic Congress, point clearly and ominously toward the beginning of the merging of Christian forces.

As for the last statement in the above quoted paragraph, I think that the sudden interest during the war in spiritualism was a direct result of the hundreds of thousands of bereavements; yet spiritualism is now tottering and seems about to expire altogether. And, somewhat paradoxically, although the war occasioned a return of many to religion, the majority of people forsook the Churches toward the end of the war and grew sceptic of the powers of the Christian joss, although some returned to "Mother Church" at the Armistice.

The thoughts of those who had left the Church did not proceed quite logically, as I wrote a year or so ago, and their doubts might best be expressed in the question, "Is there a God who would allow such a catastrophe as this war? Is there any god who could allow us to suffer as we have done?" They said it was impossible, and then proceeded to consider the more important and scientific arguments against religion. Nevertheless, there are many thousands who, although they have left the Church have not troubled to reason their way into Freethought. It is this class of person that Freethinkers must tackle; one should either accept or renounce Christianity. There can be no halfway philosophy. To say that one "hasn't bothered," or "can't decide so shall not trouble," cannot be entertained. It smacks of cowardice to face reality.

That is the duty of Freethinkers to-day, to convince those who have left the Church but have not yet adopted Freethought that they should come to some decision in the matter, either to return to a primitive survival or to follow science. Even the man who says honestly that he cannot really decide, and although he is leaving the fight for liberty to others rather than take part in it, is infinitely more sincere than he who complains that "one shirks giving up the idea of God altogether; I don't know what to do." The latter is a coward and must be treated as such.

J. E. TRUBY.

THE SURVIVAL OF THE APE.

When an ape is attacked, or is about to attack, it bares its teeth in a hideous grin and clenches its fists. When man is attacked or is about to attack he does the same. So far man is only repeating actions that were hammered out for him in the pre-human stage. But man has elaborated this menacing attitude and perpetuated it in times when there is no direct threat of attack. In times of peace he forms and arms large bodies of men with no other purpose than that of being ready for a fight whenever it comes. And following the preparation the thing for which we prepare comes periodically. Man has thus elaborated the instinct of the ape without creating any substantial alteration of it. The armies of the world make up the grin which civilization turns to the world to indicate that there is still much of the ape left in human nature.—*Simple Simon*.

Asses are long-eared animals, patient and humble, and the true models to be imitated by all good Christians, who like them, must allow themselves to be saddled with their burdens and carry their cross. Jesus was mounted on an ass which did not belong to him when he entered into Jerusalem, by which action he intended to proclaim to all whom it might concern that the priests should thenceforward enjoy the right of riding on the backs of Christians to the end of time.—*Voltaire*.

Acid Drops.

There is considerable psychological interest in the way in which the public mind is being directed in relation to war. From 1914 to 1918 there was constant talk of the war that was to end war. Everyone was encouraged to go on with the war by the hope that when it was all over things would be arranged on a saner basis. Immediately after 1918 armies and navies were only to exist during the cleaning up of the havoc made by the war. Then, once more, commenced the weighing up of the relative strengths of the various nations, and talk of the need of each country having a force large enough to protect itself against some other country, which always means large enough to go to war with the other country should it be so inclined. At present we have it settled as an article of faith with large sections of the public that there will be another war at no very distant date, and that we must prepare for it in the usual way. We are back again exactly where we were before the war, and so far as civilization is concerned the four years of agony were lived in vain, and every soldier who died did so only to perpetuate the conditions to which he owed his death.

Here, for example, is Sir Sidney Low writing in the *Weekly Dispatch* with that air of wisdom which usually covers the most invincible silliness, that what we must have, in order to keep peace, is "an invincible air fleet unsurpassed either in *personnel* or material." Was ever greater stupidity than this? We are to maintain peace by having an air force stronger than that of any other country. They will keep peace by having a force stronger than us, for if the rule holds with one country it will with another. Each one is to be stronger than the other—either singly or in combination with other countries. That is exactly what was being done for years before the war—and the war was the consequence. If these men had the courage or the common-sense to put into plain English their ideas (assuming that they really have ideas) what they would say would be this: "The peace of the world is only to be secured when we have a force sufficiently strong—and unapproachably so—to hold all the rest of the world in subjection. When all the rest of the world is content to sit still while one country holds its command unsurpassed in either *personnel* or material, the era of war will have come to an end." And that, in analysis, is virtually a theory of universal conquest. That was exactly what Germany was accused of desiring—universal control, of holding the rest of the world in subjection through possessing an army "unsurpassed in *personnel* or material."

The late Bishop of Chelmsford, who was the only Anglican bishop with a moustache, said: "God had his politics." A few minutes' perusal of the Book of Common Prayer will show what shade of politics is favoured by Omnipotence.

W. J. Bryan is still carrying on his campaign in the United States on behalf of a literal interpretation of the Bible and the destruction of the teaching of evolution. The support he gets makes one wonder at the low standard of intelligence of large sections of the "land of the free." We may, it is true, have quite as large a number of undeveloped minds in this country, but somehow or the other they do not come so prominently before the public. In America they show up as a marked phase of thought, and the seriousness with which such absurdities as those championed by cave man Bryan are accepted is a phenomenon which gives rise to very serious reflections in the mind of the thoughtful observer of social phenomena.

One good result of this controversy is that some of the newspapers are publishing criticisms of Bryan which involve public attacks on Christianity. Thus the *Chicago Tribune* published over a column of questions from the pen of Mr. C. S. Darrow, put to Mr. Bryan, which read as though lifted from some Freethought paper of fifty years

ago. We do not mean that Mr. Darrow has "lifted" them from this source, we give the illustration only as an indication of the kind of question that is put, and we may take it that the publication of these questions, which bring before the public the absurdities of the Bible teaching on the origin of language, the age of man, miracles, etc., will cause many to do a little thinking on the absurdities which lie at the foundations of the Christian creed.

Mr. Bryan does not reply to Mr. Darrow because he says Mr. Darrow is an Atheist, and he is only concerned with Christians who believe they can harmonize the Bible with evolution. And of them he says, "Theistic evolution lulls Christians to sleep. It is an anaesthetic which deadens pain while religion is being removed." We quite agree with that, and have said the same thing many times. As we have also said, in this controversy between the liberal Christian and the narrow minded believer all the logic, and a large amount of the honesty involved, are on the side of the ignorant. That is what we should expect. To-day complete honesty in Christian belief is only compatible with an almost invincible ignorance.

Take as an illustration the following from one of Mr. Bryan's religious critics—the Rev. E. D. Soper. Mr. Soper says, "The statement that God created the earth out of nothing means nothing, for we cannot conceive what it means to create a world out of nothing. The nearest we can come to an understanding is to say that God is somehow the force, ground or explanation of everything." That is very interesting, but we quite fail to see in what way the latter statement is an advance on the first. That God is somehow the force, ground, or explanation of everything, is quite as meaningless as to say that God made the world out of nothing. Neither are expressions of ideas, both are mere words. The Bryanite statement has the merit of being the orthodox one, but the other generally indicates a want of courage to face the fact that the religious theory is useless or absurd.

The other day a clerical correspondent of a morning paper was moved to relieve his outraged feelings by protesting against what he called fictitious representations of the clergy. He began by confessing that he was more amused with than annoyed by the cleric as he exists in the imagination of the writers of melodrama and their patrons—the stalwart parson who, as soon as the villain makes his appearance exclaims slowly (to soft music): "You are a wicked man: I can see it in your eyes"; or the absurdly foolish and guileless man of God of the type made familiar in that radiant farce "The Private Secretary." Such delightfully ridiculous figures are the hallowed conventions of our popular drama. They share this distinction with the heartless Hebrew money-lender, the stage Irishman, the impossibly virtuous seamstress, and the cynical and wicked baronet. These popular characters are good examples of the tendency to the over simplification of human nature, of an inability to grasp the complexity of even the average mind. But if the parson of our melodrama is far too simple to be real, he is not at heart a bad sort of fellow; he is not a blatant vulgar revivalist like the Rev. William A. Sunday, D.D., or a politician masked as a religious mystic like the late editor of the *British Weekly*. Indeed our dramatists for the people have been too kind to the parsons; they have made them fools and simpletons, and forgotten to add a spice of hypocrisy and knavery.

The modern novelist with his interest in the abnormal is more inclined to bring out the more unpleasant aspect of clerical human nature, or to represent as a mixture of good and bad with a certain leaning to the vicious side. Clerical intolerance and ignorance give him a solid foundation for a recognizable type of man, and an elementary study of the inconsistency and vagaries of modern belief helps him to make the type psychologically veracious. But nowadays, the cleric is not taken as seriously as he was in the Mid-Victorian period, when everyone, orthodox or heterodox, was more or less a preacher. We

do not share their interest in the type. In Mr. Galsworthy's novels the parson-type is noticeable by its absence. When to complete his survey of modern life he has to introduce a clergyman he is frankly unsympathetic, giving us as a type what the devout believer will tell us is a flagrant abnormality. Still Mr. Galsworthy is not wholly unsympathetic. He has a pathetic account of an old country parson reduced by poverty to stealing a loaf that has dropped out of a baker's cart. He joyfully described the windfall as "Manna," and then added: "Hungry—Gods elect—to the manna born!" We are assured by a clerical friend that the pun is sadly out of character. But is it? The poor old fellow was better than the God in whose image he was made, for he was not above a joke.

Now we have no reasonable cause to doubt that such a thing as poverty does exist among the clergy, although those we have happened to come across look sleek and comfortable enough. If some of them haven't as much money as they think they ought to have, they all enjoy more than the average share of good health. We have before us a table giving the index figures of the "Comparative mortality in different occupational groups for three periods (1890-92, 1900-2, 1910-12) from which we may observe that working for the Almighty is a much less dangerous business than any form of social service. Perhaps it is that the Lord takes special care of his own, and leaves the doctors, the dock labourers and brewers to the Devil. Or it may be that working only one day in the week is more conducive to a vigorous constitution. We are assured by the philosophers from Fontenelle to M. Jules de Gaultier that the vital instinct and the intellectual instinct are in eternal conflict. Nature loads the dice against the thinking man, and if he sometimes wins in this game it is by a lucky hazard. She bestows her favours upon the clergy, and gives them long life, and comparative freedom from disease on condition that they renounce all intellectual curiosity.

An astounding instance of sweating was revealed at the National Assembly of the Church of England. Adult clerks have been employed by the Missionary Board at salaries of £65 a year. The Bishop of Durham, whose income is £7,000 yearly, denied that there was any intention of sweating. "Oh! the sorry trade!"

In *Truth*, of July 18, it is stated that out of every pound subscribed to an East End Mission, in response to advertisements, the local poor people get 12s. and the newspapers 8s. It comes to this: Newspapers are among the charitable objects catered for by this mission.

Sir Thomas Inskip, the Solicitor-General, speaking at Westbourne Park Chapel, said that science "had never dissected the soul." Scientists might retort that believers have never even discovered it.

Miss Christabel Pankhurst has now joined the ranks of the prophecy mongers. She is quite convinced, according to a report in the *Daily News*, that the signs of the times "point irresistibly to the truth that Christ is coming, and coming soon." She says that she first realized Christ was coming in 1918. Miss Pankhurst is cautious. She does not make the mistake of dating the second coming of Christ, and if the second is going to lead to as much trouble as did the first the outlook is not at all promising.

"London has no conscience," declares the Bishop of Kingston. What on earth is the matter with the bishop? Perhaps the church collections are lower than they ought to be at this time of the year, or, maybe, there are too many brace-buttons in the alms-bags.

The *Church Times* has some very peculiar views and is in the habit of treating with the utmost gravity such fantastic absurdities as the importance of the Sacrament,

the right kind of surplice to be worn by clergymen, or the right kind of candles to be burned in Church. So we are all the more pleased to record its publishing of some genuine common-sense. The following, for example is from one of its staff:—

The astonishing thing to me is the number of apparently earnest religious people who conspire to prevent others taking reasonable pleasure on the one day when they are free to do so. I do not know how many thousands of people, "representing many religious organizations," signed petitions praying the London County Council to withdraw its countenance from Sunday games in the parks. The debate in the Council Chamber when the matter came up was an occasion of such strong words, an atmosphere so tense, and galleries so packed, that a stranger from another planet might have supposed the destinies of the people of London to be at stake. There have been debates of many sorts among the London County Council. There was, for example, one turning on the slum dwellings of London, but I do not remember that thousands of people, "representing many religious denominations" and headed by their leaders, made petition to the London County Council that the iniquity of slum dwellings, of baby boys and girls never seeing the sunlight save through the fœtid murk of the hideous alley, must be swept away.

That hits the nail on the head, and it is another indication of the way in which our views, once condemned by all Christians, are now endorsed by many.

Mr. Austin Fryars says in the *Evening News* that the freak flowers of the horticultural shows are robbing us of the old English garden, "God's most beautiful gift." If Mr. Fryars looks into the matter he will find that the flowers of our gardens, particularly the rose, which he names, are not God's gift at all, but man's. "God" only gave us the simple wild flower; it is due to Man that our gardens became stocked with the choicer and better varieties. And if man leaves the flowers alone they soon revert to the simpler and cruder and generally, less beautiful forms.

Lady Astor wishes to thank the churches for the way in which they supported her Temperance Bill "by their work and prayers." We daresay the work of the Churches helped her, but we are quite sure that if they, and she, had trusted to prayer it would not have got very far. In any case God knew all about the drink before ever Lady Astor came along, and it surely did not need her "nagging" to get him to do what he could in the matter. Nor are we aware that when on a famous occasion "He" turned water into wine for a wedding party that had already had plenty to drink that he enquired whether all on the premises were under eighteen.

How to Help.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

J. M. GIMSON.—We were in error, but quoted the lines from memory. It is a reminder that one should always check one's references however certain one feels. Mr. G. Charles also writes us to the same effect. One can't take chances with *Freethinker* readers.

H. OVERHILL.—We are much obliged for cutting.

A. ALDWINCKLE.—Pleased to have your appreciation of the definition of a Freethinker. It forms the basis of one of the chapters of Mr. Cohen's *Grammar of Freethought*.

F. SUTHERLAND.—We have not yet read the book, but it appears to be one of the many attempts to present a life of Christ in terms of the writer's emotional prepossessions, and not at all a theological conversion. But the Churches are to-day in such straits that they will snap at anyone who uses the customary phrases, careless of what he means by them.

N.S.S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges: R. C. Proctor, 10s.

ROBSON PAGE.—Yes, it was wise of Miss Pankhurst not to date the second coming of "Our Lord." That is a wise precaution where prophecy is concerned.

CHURCHMAN.—Thanks for pointing out the correct version of the Martin Elginbrod lines. We agree with you as to the existence of the ether never being more than an hypothesis. We have pointed this out on more than one occasion, but we cannot correct every expression on the part of writers who write in a different strain.

T. ROBERTS.—There is no President's Fund in existence. We have therefore put the balance of your order (3s. 3d.) to the *Freethinker* Sustentation Fund. Thanks.

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

The Secular Society, Limited, office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The "*Freethinker*" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—
One year 15s.; half year, 7. 6d.; three months, 3s. 9d.

Sugar Plums.

We hear from a Spennymoor reader that he had for some time a difficulty in getting his copy of the *Freethinker* from the local newsagent. He then informed his newsagent that he wanted no other books or papers delivering if the *Freethinker* was not included. Since then his paper had been delivered regularly. We wish that all our readers would adopt this plan. There is a steady plan on foot in some directions to prevent a regular supply of the *Freethinker*, and we can only break down this boycott with the help of our friends. There is no excuse

whatever for anyone not supplying the *Freethinker* with the same regularity as other papers. It is sent to the wholesale agents every Wednesday and should be delivered all over the country on Friday at latest, and in most places on Thursday. May we beg our friends to do what they can to assist us in breaking down this mean and cowardly form of attack.

Meantime may we again call attention to the fact that we are prepared to send the paper for as many weeks to any address that is sent us on receipt of postage for same—that is, one halfpenny per copy. We have gained many new readers in that way, and the subscription has often been accompanied by orders for books and pamphlets.

One of our readers, Mr. Leonard Mason, suggests as a means of improving the circulation of this paper that someone in each district of London and elsewhere should make it his or her business to see that all *Freethinkers* were visited and that they subscribed to the *Freethinker*, also to get new subscribers wherever possible. If that could be done we should see a marked improvement in our sales, but we do not know how far we could get friends to carry out the idea. We have asked before for each reader to make up his mind to get a new one within, say, a month, and that is a simple task for each one to accomplish. Mr. Mason also suggests that lapsed readers could be looked up. Unfortunately there is no register that would show who these were. The paper goes mainly through trade channels, and the copies pass from our hands into those of the wholesale agents. Who gets them after that we cannot say. Still, we thank Mr. Mason for his suggestion, and if any reader cares to set about the task we will give whatever help we can.

Draper's *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* is a well-known classic, one of the most important works on the subject issued and is well known all over the world. It is a book that every *Freethinker* should have in his possession, and is an armoury from which weapons may be taken at will for use in the fight against Christianity. Messrs. Routledge and Co. are the holders of the copyright, and the published price of the work is 7s. 6d. By special arrangement with Messrs. Routledge the Pioneer Press will publish some time this year a new edition of the book at the low price of 3s. 6d. As the work extends to about 350 pages it will be seen that in these days of high printing costs the price is a remarkable one. But it is being published for propaganda, not for profit. We look forward to a large sale of this work.

The Manchester Branch of the N.S.S. was well represented at the "No More War" demonstration, although the rain kept many people away who would otherwise have been present. Each of the N.S.S. members wore the Freethought emblem, the pansy, and the expenses attendant on organizing was more than met by a special subscription, leaving a balance which will be put to the General Fund. A resolution protesting against war, calling upon the Government to take the initiative in making proposals for general disarmament, and for the working together of the peoples of the various countries through a perfected and all-inclusive League of Nations was carried unanimously. We should like to say that we hope the Government will do something of the kind, but we are not very sanguine. However, it is quite obvious that public opinion must be educated along these lines if the world is to be saved from the horrors of another war.

We referred a couple of weeks ago to the fact that the Poplar Council had referred back to the Library a suggestion that the *Freethinker* should be placed on the tables of the Free Libraries. The motion that the paper be displayed was made by Mrs. Mackay. We are glad to say that the proposal has been adopted, and the *Freethinker* can be seen side by side with such chaste journals

as the *Daily Mail* or the *Christian Herald*. We are obliged to Mrs. Mackay for her efforts in the matter.

To-day Mr. Whitehead concludes his sojourn in Preston, where, after a three weeks' campaign, we have the gratification of announcing that a branch of earnest workers has been formed with every prospect of success. Each week's meetings have proved more successful than the last. The crowd has awaited the lecturer's arrival and continued the discussion long after his departure. There has been, truly, a Freethought revival in Preston, and all concerned have our congratulations. By special request Mr. Whitehead returns to Nelson for the coming week and then goes to Birmingham. For information as to times and places, see "Guide Notice."

The address which Dr. Higginson gave at the cremation of Mr. F. W. Walsh has been reprinted "For Private Circulation." We have read this well-wordsed speech with considerable pleasure, and we cite the following as giving the spirit of the whole address:—

Here, then, all these brave years, he has lain, a unique figure; a great soul, blazing forth all the brighter because of the wreck of the body, deeply affecting all of us who were privileged to see its beacon-light; a permanent example of those, who from pain, sickness, paralysis, make up by the power of the spirit a human influence capable of inspiring with his own example of gracious heroism the many who have been brought within his reach.

This, therefore, is surely not a life of failure. Rather it seems to me to be, on account of its extraordinary distinction, a life of substantial success and victory—hard saying though this may seem. Any of us would gladly have given much to prevent the accident that crippled him; and this is a right feeling. But since the accident did indeed irrevocably occur—to what noble spiritual uses has it been turned, not only by our brother himself, but also by those whom he has influenced for life!

The Passing of the Soul.

The question has been asked, "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" And we may with equal propriety ask: What shall it profit a man to be told or believe that he shall receive a thousand million pounds sterling if he has no proof that he will ever receive it? It has one effect; it cruelly makes him the victim of painful anxiety, of conflicting desires and apprehensions, unable to compose his mind upon a most important question until it is verified, and liable to become insane respecting it. The pleasure we feel in being informed that a great fortune has been left to us is no proof whatever that the statement is true; and it is similar with all unprovable assertions and promises of eternal happiness. "The desire of a future existence is merely a pampered habit of mind, founded upon the instinct of self-preservation. It is a longing, and those who have it are like drinkers or children" Atkinson and Martineau, *Man's Nature* p. 185). The desire to obtain something for nothing is as great in the saint as in the sinner, in the Salvationist as in the betting and gambling fraternity.—Gore, "The Scientific Basis of Morality," p. 311.

MANY Rationalists are dismayed by the boom in Spiritualism; they look upon it as a falling away from rationalism and a return to superstition. This is not the case, the vast majority of those who have gone over to the spiritualists' camp are deserters from the Christian army. The Bible, upon which they had been brought up, and upon which their religious beliefs were based, had been discredited by science, but they still retained the habits of thought in which they had been trained, and looked round for something to fill its place. They had escaped from the dreadful Jehovah who had once flooded the earth, and from his more dreadful son, who promised to punish the majority of the human race for all eternity, and they were not seeking any more. What they wanted was, not the mawkish insipid Christian heaven, where there was to

be no more "cakes and ale," or laughter and fun, and certainly not the fiery hell. What they wanted was some assurance of a continuance of their present life after they were dead, and this is what the spiritualists provided.

In the future—according to the mediums—the spirits preserved their personal appearance and even wore the same clothes as they did in the earthly life. They also talked—much more stupidly certainly—but then one couldn't expect to have everything; they still existed, that was the main thing. Like King Saul, who, when he thought himself forsaken of God, sought the Witch of Endor, so the Christian deprived of his Bible grasps—like the drowning man at a straw—at spiritualism.

And in truth he feels much more comfortable in his new Bethel. Many of the spiritualists, like Hudson Tuttle, have discarded God altogether, others are Agnostics, and those who have a God scarcely ever mention him, and never allow him to intrude into the séance room. As Mr. G. B. Shaw once truly remarked: "Most people believe in God because they are afraid that he will strike them dead if they do not." Therefore they are not at all sorry to be rid of the encumbrance. If people became convinced that there was no future life, nothing to gain and nothing to fear after death, they would not care twopence whether there is a God or not. It is the hopes and, more especially, the fears attached to the future life, that have supplied the driving force of Christianity, without which it would have made no progress whatever. To-day it is the idea of a continuance of the present life, without the punitive threat of a Judgment Day that provides the attraction in Spiritualism.

Heine, in mockingly describing one of his latest conversions—and he boxed the compass on all the varieties of religion from Catholicism to Atheism—says that he returned to God like the Prodigal Son, after having herded swine with the Hegelians. He says, a sort of heavenly home sickness fell upon him and drove him forth across the dizzy mountain paths of dialectic. On the way he found the God of the Pantheists, interpenetrated with the world and imprisoned in it, who yawned at him will-less and impotent. "During my whole life," he says, "I have been strolling through the festive halls of philosophy. I have participated in all the orgies of the intellect, I have coquetted with every possible system, without being satisfied, like Messalina after a riotous night."¹ Only at last to find himself on the same platform with poor dusky Uncle Tom, Bible in hand. "It is true," he maliciously adds, "that poor Uncle Tom appears to see in the holy book more profound things than I, who am not yet quite clear, especially in regard to the second part." Having accepted the major propositions of religion:—

The immortality of the soul, our permanence after death, will then be given us into the bargain, like the fine marrow-bone which the (Parisian) butcher, when he is contented with his customers, throws gratis into the basket. Such a fine marrow-bone is termed in French *la réjouissance*, and the most excellent strengthening broths are made therewith, which are also very soothing for a poor pining sick man. That I did not reject such a *réjouissance*, and rather took it to heart with comfort, every feeling man must approve.²

It is the marrow-bone of immortality that the believer is after all the time. The late Canon Liddon of St. Paul's, one of the most orthodox and unbending preachers of his time, declared:—

If belief in our personal spirits is essential to religion, and belief in the immediate creation of the

¹ Passages from the Prose Writings of Heine, p. 306-307.

² Sharp, *Life of Heine*, p. 178.

soul by God is stimulating to it, belief in the soul's immortality is of yet higher religious importance. The relation between God and the soul, in which religion consists, would be little more to us than a sentiment or a literary taste, if we were persuaded that we should have taken leave of it, as we shall have taken leave of our clothes and of our books when we are laid in our coffins. Would religion be worth our attention as serious men, would it be anything more than a plaything if all really ended at death?

That is a plain and straightforward confession that the Christian's only motive for prayer and praise and worship is the assurance that he will thereby gain eternal life. If this inducement were withdrawn, or proved to the satisfaction of Christians to be false, then religion would fall like a house of cards; which proves that it is not belief in God that is the vital point in religion. The vital point is belief in a future life, and it is this that Spiritualism caters for, and forms its great attraction for those who find they can no longer believe in the teachings of Church and Chapel. But science, which has exploded the supernatural claims of the Bible, will also explode this myth of a future life. It has done so already for multitudes, and the coming generation will follow.

In an article in the July (1923) *Hibbert Journal* by Mr. Archibald Weir, M.A., entitled "The Sainthood of Marcus Aurelius," in which Mr. Weir expresses some surprise that Marcus Aurelius leant upon the belief in a rational universe and belief in the Gods, which Mr. Weir considers renders belief in a future life "well-nigh inevitable."

Yet he (Marcus Aurelius) the autocrat of the civilized world, did not feel it so. He, the blameless, wistful soul, did not even desire it. Firm in the self-sufficiency of his personality, accepted the limits of the life he saw, and disdained to palter with the hopes from one he might imagine. This attitude has hitherto been a puzzle to his admirers and commentators. Now, however, we can see that in this respect he was closely akin to a very modern type of character. Among those whom we regard as the salt of the earth, many seem to be indifferent to immortality in precise proportion to their apparent fitness for eternal life. The prospect of such a fate often appears to be occasion for dismay rather than congratulation. Marcus of the second century has had indeed to wait till the twentieth for appreciation of his curious reluctance to claim what intermediate generations have valued as a dazzling heritage.

What a change is here! We have been told, times without number, indeed it is a commonplace of pulpit eloquence, that the man who does not believe in a future life was little better than a criminal. That he was a base materialist, a low grovelling creature, dead to all the finer feelings. We were compared to the man with the muckrake, grubbing in the dirt, with our eyes averted from heaven. Now we are told that many who reject immortality are regarded as "the salt of the earth," to whom the prospect of a future life "often appears to be occasion for dismay rather than congratulation."

The belief in a future life is not a natural, it is a cultivated one. If this belief ceased to be taught for a single generation it would become extinct. John Addington Symonds, that fine scholar, in a letter to Henry Sidgwick, voiced the modern intellectual mind in this matter, when he said:—

Until that immortality of the individual is irrefragably demonstrated, the sweet, the immeasurably precious hope of ending life, the ache and languor of existence, remains open to burdened human personalities.

W. MANN.

About the Holy Bible.

It is alleged that the Old Testament was written nearly two thousand years before the invention of printing. There were but few copies, and these were in the keeping of those whose interest might have prompted interpolations, and whose ignorance might have led to mistakes.

The written Hebrew was composed entirely of consonants, without any points or marks standing for vowels, so that anything like accuracy was impossible. Anyone can test this for himself by writing an English sentence, leaving out the vowels. It will take far more inspiration to read than to write a book with consonants alone.

The books composing the Old Testament were not divided into chapters or verses, and no system of punctuation was known. Think of this a moment and you will see how difficult it must be to read such a book.

It is not certainly known who in fact wrote any of the books of the Old Testament. For instance, it is now generally conceded that Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch.

Other books, not now in existence, are referred to in the Old Testament as of equal authority, such as the books of Jasher, Nathan, Ahijah, Iddo, Jehu, Sayings of the Seers.

Whatever there was of the Old Testament seems to have been lost from the time of Moses until the days of Josiah, and it is probable that nothing like the Bible existed in any permanent form among the Jews until a few hundred years before Christ. It is said that Ezra gave the Pentateuch to the Jews, but whether he found or originated it is unknown. So it is claimed that Nehemiah gathered up the manuscripts about the kings and prophets, while the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, and some others were either collected or written long after. The Jews themselves did not agree as to what books were really inspired.

In the Old Testament we find several contradictory laws about the same thing, and contradictory accounts of the same occurrences. In the twentieth chapter of Exodus we find the first account of the giving of the Ten Commandments. In the thirty-fourth chapter another account is given. These two accounts could never have been written by the same person. Read these two accounts and you will be forced to admit that one of them cannot be true. So there are two histories of the creation, of the flood, and of the manner in which Saul became king.

If a revelation from God was actually necessary to the happiness of man here and to his salvation hereafter, it is not easy to see why such revelation was not given to all the nations of the earth. Why were the millions of Asia, Egypt, and America left to the insufficient light of Nature? Why was not a written, or what is still better, a printed revelation given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? And why were the Jews themselves without a Bible until the days of Ezra the scribe? Why was Nature not so made that it would give light enough? Why did God make men and leave them in darkness—a darkness that he knew would fill the world with want and crime, and crowd with damned souls the dungeons of his hell? Were the Jews the only people who needed a revelation? It may be said that God had no time to waste with other nations, and gave the Bible to the Jews that other nations through them might learn of his existence and his will. If he wished other nations to be informed, and revealed himself to but one, why did he not choose a people that mingled with others? Why did he give the message to those who had no commerce, who were obscure and unknown, and who regarded other nations with the hatred born of bigotry and weakness? What would we now think of a God who made his will known to the South Sea Islanders for the benefit of the civilized world? If it was of such vast importance for man to know that there is a God, why did not God make himself known? This fact could have been revealed by an infinite being instantly to all, and there certainly was no necessity of telling it alone to the Jews, and allowing millions for thousands of years to die in utter ignorance.

If the Bible is the foundation of all civilization, of all just ideas of right and wrong, of our duties to God and each other, why did God not give to each nation at least

¹ H. P. Liddon, *Some Elements of Religion*, p. 117.

one copy to start with? He must have known that no nation could get along successfully without a Bible, and he also knew that man could not make one for himself. Why, then, were not the books furnished? He must have known that the light of Nature was not sufficient to reveal the scheme of the atonement, the necessity of baptism, the immaculate conception, transubstantiation, the arithmetic of the Trinity, nor the resurrection of the dead.

The idea that the universe was made in six days, and is but about six thousand years old, is too absurd for serious refutation. Neither will it do to say that the six days were six periods, because this does away with the Sabbath, and is in direct violation of the text.

Neither is it reasonable that this God made man out of dust, and woman out of one of the ribs of the man; that this pair were put in a garden; that they were deceived by a snake that had the power of speech; that they were turned out of this garden to prevent them from eating the tree of life and becoming immortal; that God himself made them clothes; that the sons of God intermarried with the daughters of men; that to destroy all life upon the earth a flood was sent that covered the highest mountains; that Noah and his sons built an ark and saved some of all animals as well as themselves; that the people tried to build a tower that would reach to heaven; that God confounded their language, and in this way frustrated their design.

It is hard to believe that God talked to Abraham as one man talks to another; that he gave him land that he pointed out; that he agreed to give him land that he never did; that he ordered him to murder his own son; that angels were in the habit of walking about the earth eating veal dressed with butter and milk, and making bargains about the destruction of cities.

Neither is it probable that God really wrestled with Jacob and put his thigh out of joint, and that for that reason the Jews refused "to eat the sinew that shrank," as recounted in the thirty-second chapter of Genesis; that God in the likeness of a flame inhabited a bush; that he amused himself by changing the rod of Moses into a serpent, and making his hand leprous as snow.

One can scarcely be blamed for hesitating to believe that God met Moses at a hotel and tried to kill him;¹ that afterwards he made this same Moses a god to Pharaoh, and gave him his brother Aaron for a prophet;² that he turned all the ponds and pools and streams and all the rivers into blood,³ and all the water in vessels of wood and stone; that the rivers thereupon brought forth frogs;⁴ that the frogs covered the whole land of Egypt; that he changed dust into lice, so that all the men, women, children, and animals were covered with them;⁵ that he sent swarms of flies upon the Egyptians;⁶ that he destroyed the innocent cattle with painful diseases; that he covered man and beast with blains and boils;⁷ that he so covered the magicians of Egypt with boils that they could not stand before Moses for the purpose of performing the same feat;⁸ that he destroyed every beast and every man that was in the fields, and every herb, and broke every tree with storm of hail and fire;⁹ that he sent locusts that devoured every herb that escaped the hail, and devoured every tree that grew;¹⁰ that he caused thick darkness over the land and put lights in the houses of the Jews;¹¹ that he destroyed all the first-born of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh upon the throne to the first-born of the maidservant that sat behind the mill,¹² together with the first-born of all beasts, so that there was not a house in which the dead were not.¹³

It seems cruel to punish a man for ever for denying that God went before the Jews by day "in a pillar of a cloud to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light to go by day and night," or for denying that Pharaoh pursued the Jews with six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and that the six hundred thousand men of war of the Jews were sore afraid when they saw the pursuing hosts. It does

seem strange that after all the water in a country had been turned to blood—after it had been overrun with frogs and devoured with flies; after all the cattle had died with the murrain, and the rest had been killed by the fire and hail and the remainder had suffered with boils, and the first-born of all that were left had died; that after locusts had devoured every herb and eaten up every tree of the field, and the first-born had died, from the first-born of the king on the throne to the first-born of the captive in the dungeon; that after three millions of people had left, carrying with them the jewels of silver and gold and the raiment of their oppressors, the Egyptians still had enough soldiers and chariots and horses left to pursue and destroy an army of six hundred thousand men, if God had not interfered.

Certainly one ought to be permitted to doubt that twelve wells of water were sufficient for three millions of people, together with their flocks and herds,¹⁵ and to inquire a little into the nature of manna that was cooked by baking and seething and yet would melt in the sun,¹⁶ and that would swell or shrink so as to make an exact omer, no matter how much or how little there really was.¹⁷ Certainly it is not a crime to say that water cannot be manufactured by striking a rock with a stick, and that the fate of battle cannot be decided by lifting one hand up or letting it fall.¹⁸ Must we admit that God really did come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people; that he commanded that all who should go up into the Mount or touch the border of it should be put to death, and that even the beasts that came near it should be killed?¹⁹ Is it wrong to laugh at this? Is it sinful to say that God never spoke from the top of a mountain covered with clouds these words to Moses, "Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish; and let the priests also, which come near to the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them?"²⁰ Can it be that an infinite intelligence takes delight in scaring savages, and that he is happy only when somebody trembles? Is it reasonable to suppose that God surrounded himself with thunderings and lightnings and thick darkness to tell the priests that they should not make altars of hewn stones, nor with stairs?²¹ And that this God at the same time he gave the Ten Commandments ordered the Jews to break the most of them?

R. G. INGERSOLL.

(To be Continued.)

Correspondence.

FREETHOUGHT IN PRESTON.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—May I, through your columns, pay a tribute to the heroic efforts now being made in this town of Preston by Mr. George Whitehead to tear from the blinded eyes of its inhabitants the bandages of superstitious beliefs.

As he unfolds his lectures, one listens amazed at the brilliancy of his reasoning, the profound knowledge exhibited, the eloquence of his delivery, the presentation of the high ideals he is striving to inculcate—unbelievable to most men in their conception of an Atheist—his enthusiasm and his courage.

All his meetings have been well attended, as they deserve to be, for I imagine that it would be difficult to find a better champion of Secularism than he. His many opponents have accepted the "knock-out" without scoring a single point.

Mr. Whitehead's efforts to found a branch of the Secularist Society met with its reward when, on Sunday last, the Preston Branch was inaugurated. Fifteen members were enrolled, and additional numbers are expected to join before our lecturer leaves for another district.

Mr. Whitehead has been greatly assisted in his campaign by Mr. Walter Gordon and a small band of helpers.

ARTHUR ROGERS.

¹ Ex. iv, 24.

² Ex. vii, 1.

³ Ex. viii, 19.

⁴ Ex. viii, 3.

⁵ Ex. viii, 16, 17.

⁶ Ex. viii, 21.

⁷ Ex. ix, 9.

⁸ Ex. ix, 11.

⁹ Ex. ix, 25.

¹⁰ Ex. x, 15.

¹¹ Ex. x, 22, 23.

¹² Ex. xi, 5.

¹³ Ex. xii, 29.

¹⁵ Ex. xv, 27.

¹⁶ Ex. xvi, 23, 21.

¹⁷ Ex. xix, 12.

¹⁸ Ex. xvii, 11, 12.

¹⁹ Ex. xix, 12, 13.

²⁰ Ex. xix, 21, 22.

²¹ Ex. xix, 25, 26.

South African Jottings.

THE farce of sending missionaries to convert the aboriginals of Central East Africa to the Christian Faith goes merrily on, and now that the white race are fast turning a deaf ear to the "Old, old Story," the clergy of all denominations are making desperate efforts to fill up the gaps in the ranks of their adherents by seeking "fresh fields and pastures new" in the Dark Continent.

The Wesleyan Methodists of South Africa have lately been holding their Centenary Conference, and columns of Press reports have informed the general public on the subject of their deliberations. The most momentous decision arrived at, at least in their own estimation, seems to have been the sending of two missionaries to convert the teeming millions of natives in the Tanganyika region of East Central Africa, numbering somewhere about fifty millions. It seems that like the old Hebrew filibusters, of whom the Pentateuch tells, they had previously, in 1920, sent out two spies to spy out the land, who, unlike their Hebrew prototypes, brought back a report that the region in question was ripe for the harvest. But alas! the labourers were few, and the conference of the following year had to turn down the proposal to commence operations. This year, however two volunteers have come forward, and Conference by formal vote has decided on this great adventure. From the *Friend* report we learn that Brother F. Lutz, the new lay treasurer of the Missionary Society, put forward the claims of East Africa. He said that in the territory of which he was thinking there were 8,000,000 unevangelized heathens, and in the adjacent territory 40,000,000. They were still missionary at heart, and that position must appeal to them. Let them get the missionary view in the head as a logical proposition. They had sent men to fight there for the Empire, could they not also send men to fight the powers of darkness? They had been asked in Durban last year, and in King William's Town this, why they had not gone into that country. Surely it was a call from God! Two men were willing to offer themselves, and one was prepared to go without any financial guarantee. They must appeal to and use the youth of the Church. Professor James had said: "You must find for the youth of the world some moral equivalent for war." He pleaded for vision and Divine approval.

The Rev. Wilkinson Rider considered it imperative that they as a Church should take up the work. He regretted that he was too old to go.

The Rev. C. S. Lucas said it was a very solemn and momentous hour. He was not a pessimist and not unduly an optimist, but thought this work should be undertaken. He spoke of the Mohammedan menace. The tide had set in from the north and had reached towards the South. At Durban at the present time a number of young men were being trained as Mohammedan priests. It was the duty of the Church to evangelize East Africa before Islam got a strong hold on the people.

Mr. Newcombe of Nanaga urged the claims of East Africa. They talked of being in need of men and money, but they never knew a time when the Methodist Conference was overflowing with men and money. Both would come if they went forward. He thought the two brethren who opposed the scheme were turning in its favour, but they were a little "weak-kneed."

Others speakers urged the claims of Tanganyika territory. They felt the time was now and the means would be found.

The President, in closing the debate, thought this was a most fitting way of celebrating the Centenary Conference. It was a forward movement. He spoke of the difficulties and hardships the brethren would have. He had passed through such experiences in his missionary days, sleeping and eating in native huts and telling the stories of Jesus to the people. He was delighted to find such a fine missionary spirit.

When the matter was put to the vote the Conference decided that the two men should be set aside for this special work. It rejoiced that it begins the new century by sending out messengers of the Gospel to conquer new lands. It was felt to be a great venture which would certainly be rewarded.

According to Mr. Lutz, the "moral equivalent for war" is to be found in Wesleyan propaganda in "heathen" lands, but this is mere sophistry and subterfuge. And in substituting missionary propaganda for military service he is only replacing one form of militarism by another. In taking service under the banner of the Church Militant "our youth" are "to fight the powers of darkness," "to conquer new lands," and raise the Cross against the Crescent in Central Africa. These reverend brethren and subalterns of the Prince of Peace were not long since doing their bit, in pulpit and on recruiting committees, to sacrifice the flower of their race to the God of War. To their Christian efforts many a bereaved home owes the loss of breadwinner, of husband, son or brother; and now with the cant phrases of militarism still on their lips they point to the conquest of "heathen" tribes. In sending two specimens of the miserable mentality that characterizes them to the natives of Tanganyika they would replace one savage creed by another equally primitive in its savagery. And it will be the burden of future generations to experience the evil of their handiwork and repair the damage they have wrought. In the words of their Gospel, they are "blind leaders of the blind."

Mr. Lutz said the Wesleyans were "still missionary at heart" but their missionary ardour does not strike us as being of a very high order when only two volunteers will fill the breach after several years haggling over the matter. The Conference no doubt, agreed with Mr. Lutz that the missionary proposition was logical enough, but they were evidently far from feeling convinced that it was going to be profitable, and in this conviction we share.

The evil effects of missionary propaganda are beginning to disturb the general community, and an outcry is being raised in some municipalities in the O.F.S. against the multiplication of sects in native locations; and it has been proposed that the Churches recognized should be only the more orthodox under European control. In the small native location of Harrismith, numbering a few hundred natives, it is reported that there are no less than fifteen Churches. This is the *modus operandi* under which these get established: A native gets a bit of land, erects a tin shanty, and founds a Church. Like a certain Scriptural character, he then sits at the receipt of customs, and rakes in the shekels. Christians are beginning to recognize at last the limitations and disadvantages attendant on an indiscriminate circulation of the Bible and its doctrines, for sects are springing up like mushrooms all over the country, many of which are hostile to the whites as well as profoundly unorthodox. What else could be expected from such a propaganda? The Bible contains within itself all the fuel necessary to sustain a dozen savage rites and superstitions. Here you have justification for human sacrifice, witchcraft, idolatry and polygamy; and the uneducated native who can just read and no more is not likely to make fine distinctions. He will do as the missionary does, use what suits him and reject the rest. When the South African native becomes a convert to Christianity his original superstitions are superadded to those of the Church of his adoption. He still consults the witch-doctor in time of trouble and sickness, and believes in the ancestral practices and tribal customs. The desire to attain to the level of the white and obtain an improved social status is at the bottom of many native conversions. In many respects, European missionaries meet with much embarrassment in the field of their activities. One lay missionary of the Wesleyan persuasion, who is still telling "the stories of Jesus" to the aboriginals, had a unique experience some years ago. He had a native evangelist on his farm to assist in the job, and on a certain occasion was approached by the dusky cleric, who in due form requested the hand of his daughter in marriage. On its being explained that his suit could not be entertained, the rejected one demanded the reason. "Oh, you are black and she is white," was the reply. "But you tell us we are equal before God," replied the suitor. His pleading, however, was unsuccessful, and he had to recognize that in the matter of social conventions "God" did not enter at all.

One native criminal, of a notorious type, was the founder of the dangerous Ninevite Gang. This is a secret society which exists among the native criminals especially

in the Transvaal, and has ritual murder included in its rites. The originator of the sect who was "doing time" received from the chaplain of the gaol a Bible, and in the seclusion of the gaol precincts developed the Ninevite organization from it, putting it in full swing on his release. It has since become a serious danger to life and property. The "A.M.E." is a dangerous sect, whose gospel is hatred of the White, and desire for his final extinction.

Ardent advocates of the missionary claim that at least in teaching the natives handicrafts and in the work of education they have been pioneers of progress and civilization. The extent to which this claim is justified is an extremely debatable question, and whatever may have been the case in the past the "mission school" education afforded to-day is approved by neither black nor white. Speaking on the Native Affairs Bill in May, 1920, General Smuts spoke most emphatically in condemnation of the system. In his opinion it was "entirely unsuited to native needs and positively pernicious, leading the native to a dead wall over which he is unable to rise." One native Teachers' Association in asking for School Boards, said that the "mission-school education should be relegated to oblivion."

Under the heading of "Abolishing a Beaver," the *Durban Guardian* announces:—

The ridiculous Blasphemy Laws, which have been the cause of so much injustice in recent years, will be abolished if a Bill, introduced by Mr. Harry Snell, M.P. for Woolwich, finds its way to the Statute Book. The Bill, which is very brief, provides that no criminal proceedings shall be instituted in any court against any person for schism, heresy, blasphemy, blasphemous libel or atheism. Among the supporters of the Bill is the Rev. Herbert Dunnico, M.P. for Cousett.

SEARCHLIGHT.

Harrismith, O.F.S., South Africa.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON
JULY 26, 1923.

The President, Mr. C. Cohen, in the chair. Also present: Messrs. Clifton, Corrigan, Quinton, Rosetti and Samuels; Mrs. Quinton, Miss Kough and the Secretary.

The Minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed. New members were received for Barnsley, Manchester, Newcastle, South London, and the Parent Society.

The nomination of Mr. H. R. Clifton as representative of the N. W. Group, in place of Mr. McLaren, unable to attend for the present, was submitted and approved and Mr. Clifton elected.

The report of the Propagandist Committee was received and their recommendations *in re* Mr. Whitehead's Freethought Mission and the continuance of Mr. Atkinson's work in South Shields and Newcastle were adopted with slight emendations.

Mr. Cohen consented to allow his recent article in the *Freethinker* on the late Mr. F. W. Walsh to be reprinted as a tract.

Further to the consideration of the offers from the Board of the Secular Society, Ltd., adjourned from last meeting, it was resolved that the Branches be informed of a project by which adults of both sexes, recommended by the Branches, could, if approved, receive financial assistance towards their training as Freethought speakers.

Instructions were given for enquiries to be made *re* Stratford Town Hall, and also as to the possibilities of a char-a-banc excursion before the end of September.

The meeting then closed.

E. M. VANCE,
General Secretary.

The same means that have supported every other popular belief have supported Christianity. War, imprisonment, assassination, and falsehood, deeds of unexampled and incomparable atrocity, have made it what it is.—*Shelley.*

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY.—No meeting.

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park): Near the Fountain: 6.15, Mr. F. P. Corrigan, a Lecture.

FINSBURY PARK.—No meeting.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S.—No meeting.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Brockwell Park): 3.30 and 6.30, Mr. E. Burke will lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Outside Technical Institute, Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. A. B. Moss, a Lecture.

COUNTRY.

OUTDOOR.

GLASGOW BRANCH N.S.S.—Friends' trip to Lock Libo; meet at Spiers Bridge at 12 o'clock.

MR. WHITEHEAD'S MISSION.—Thursday, August 2, to Sunday, August 5: Preston, Sessions Ground, 7.30. Monday, August 6, to Sunday, August 12: Nelson, Chapel Street, every evening, 7.30.

NEWCASTLE BRANCH N.S.S. (Town Moor, near North Road entrance): 7, Mr. F. Carlton, a Lecture.

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