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Views and Opinions.

That "Blessed Word."

In the *Freethinker* for January 13, under the head of "Acid Drops," I offered some comments on a recent letter of Mr. Edward Clodd's to the *Times*. Mr. Clodd had been asked by the editor of the *Modern Churchman* for his co-operation, as a Rationalist, to settle the education controversy. To a *Freethinker* there appears to me but one line on which that controversy can be settled, and that is one which would obviously not suit the editor of so Christian a publication as the *Modern Churchman*. To *Freethinkers*, and I think I speak here for all the avowed *Freethinkers* in this country, there is only one possible policy—that is for the State to leave religion absolutely alone. We are not concerned with finding a formula that will suit Churchmen and Nonconformists, still less to finding a special place in the schools for the fetish book of the Christian Church because that book happens to have been given a position of prominence in the past. I was greatly surprised, therefore, when Mr. Clodd wrote that he stood for "true religion," that the religious instinct was "indestructible," and that he wished our schools to be so conducted as to provide for the cultivation of this "indestructible instinct," with the Bible falling into place among the religious scriptures of the world, differing from others "only in degree." The position as stated seemed to me not only unscientific, but extremely dangerous, and I felt called upon to raise a protest on behalf of the *Freethinkers* of this country, whose opinions I appear to be much better acquainted with than does Mr. Clodd. The reality of the danger and the need for the repudiation was shown by the editor of the *Church Times* characterizing the incident as the "Rationalist Press Association and the *Modern Churchman* meeting in a close embrace." I do not gather that Mr. Clodd wrote as representing the R.P.A., and should be surprised if that body would endorse what he said, but the incident is enough to show the use that would be made of Mr. Clodd if and when the matter again comes before the country as a living issue.

What is Religion? * * *

In last week's *Freethinker* Mr. Clodd replied to a portion of my comments, but left the more important part—that which dealt with the teaching of religion

and the place of the Bible in State-supported schools alone. I regret that, because I, and I think other *Freethinkers*, would have liked to see Mr. Clodd either admit an error, justify his position, or explain that in saying what he did he represented a peculiar opinion peculiar to himself. What he does is to confine himself to a discussion of his use of the word "religion" and the phrase "religious instinct." So far as the phrase is concerned he admits the justice of my criticism, namely, that there is no such thing, but adds by way of explanation that it was used loosely, and not in its biological significance. That portion of Mr. Clodd's letter which dealt with the cultivation of this alleged "indestructible instinct" may, therefore, be dismissed. It is a loose way of using the term, as Mr. Clodd says, and I may add that it is never wise to use such important terms in a way of which Christians may make capital. But Mr. Clodd proceeds to justify his use of the word "religion" by giving a so-called definition which he adopts as his own, and which one often meets in current literature. For that reason it is worth while spending a little while in examining it. Here it is:—

To love justice and mercy, to pity the suffering, to assist the weak, to forget wrongs and remember benefits, to love the truth and liberty, to cherish wife and child, to make a happy home, to love the beautiful in art and nature, to cultivate the mind, to be brave and cheerful and to make others happy, to fill life with the splendour of generous acts and the warmth of loving words, to discard error and destroy prejudice, to receive new truths with gladness and to cultivate hope; to do the best that can be done, and then to be resigned—that is religion.

As a piece of rhetoric that is admirable; as literature it is beautiful—to all who are content with a flow of words and care little about accuracy or things. For observe there is nothing here about gods or devils, nothing about prayers or miracles, nothing about a soul and a future life, nothing about the supernatural, nothing about a single one of those beliefs that have distinguished any and every religion the world has seen from the days when the savage shivered in fear before the image born of his own ignorance down to last Sunday's church service. One does not know which to admire the most, the inclusiveness or the exclusiveness of the definition. For while on the one hand it leaves out all that every religious teacher the world has seen has put forward as religion, it includes what every church has taught, and still teaches. This kind of flatulent ethical aspiration can be got without leaving the Churches. But the one thing that would make even this of some slight value, to have said that all these fine things might be without the least belief in God, a soul, a future life, or the supernatural, and which would have made the declaration some sort of a challenge to the Churches, is left unsaid. It is not a definition of religion at all. It meets genuine religion at not a single point, neither in ethics, nor in cosmology, nor in philosophy, nor in history. It is a set of phrases with which all may agree, and for that very reason incapable of injuring a single established lie or of inspiring to action in the vindication of a single serviceable truth.

Words versus Things.

Mr. Clodd reminds me that if we want a platitude there is nothing like a definition. With that I quite agree, and it is precisely for this reason that in looking for the meaning of such a term as "religion" I am concerned with what religion has always meant in men's minds and in practice, rather than with a prepared verbal definition that will permit those who adopt it to still range themselves on the side of the respectables by claiming to have a religion, and so separating themselves from those intellectual *sans-culottes* who stand before the world religionless. And I find that as a solid matter of fact religion does not take its rise in a mere love of beauty, of truth, of art, of home, of friends, etc., etc., but that it does begin in the belief in superhuman tribal spirits and ghosts that are bred from the ignorance of primitive mankind, and which are afterwards developed into the gods of the various religions. Mr. Clodd knows this to be true quite as well as I do. And he must also know that without these beliefs in superhuman, or supernatural existences, with their assumed control over human destiny, real religion has no existence. You may have the whole catalogue of those desirable things which Mr. Clodd recites in his alleged definition associated with religion, but once leave out the belief in the supernatural and you have left out its very essence. I am not wedded to a definition, but it is surely absurd to imagine that you can take a word such as "religion" and in using it ignore all its historical associations, with all that it has always meant and still means to ninety-nine per cent. of men and women. I certainly have not the faith in the power of mere words that Mr. Clodd appears to have. And if I insist that leading words should be used with some regard to accuracy it is because I believe that there is a very close connection between language and thought, and that when words are used loosely it is the condition of confused thinking, and on confused thought most of the injustices and the superstitions of the world lives.

* * *

A Universal Delusion.

I have not read Mr. Hugh Elliot's "Human Character," but I do not see the relevancy of the quotation from it that religion "is entitled to be regarded as one of the major passions of mankind." If Mr. Elliot means that all over the world men have elaborated a religion, that is no more than an evolutionist would expect, but it does not carry us far. All it means is that as the human brain functions in an identical manner, whether in the case of the savage or of the scientist, substantially identical conclusions have been reached under substantially identical conditions. But here it is not a question of whether a particular "passion" belongs to a major or minor category, but whether this particular passion is based on truth, and whether it is of service to mankind? And it may be necessary to fight a "passion" because it is of the major variety, where one might treat it with contempt so long as it was of the minor order. And I may suggest that as Mr. Clodd believes religion to be derivative and not primary, it is a mistaken psychology to treat a conclusion as a major passion. Thus, war is as universal as religion, and on the same lines war might be declared as one of the major passions of mankind. But what is major here is not war, but the quality of pugnacity. And while pugnacity has generally expressed itself in armed warfare, it has expressed itself in other forms, and might express itself wholly so. So it is with religion. The reasoning processes which gave rise to religious beliefs have also given rise to other beliefs. It is a question of an interpretation of human experience, and the religious interpretation has lost ground because every advance in unverifiable knowledge has shown it to be false. If

Mr. Elliot calls religion a universal delusion he will be nearer a helpfully scientific statement of the case.

* * *

The Need for Courage.

One of my chief objections to this use of "religion" by professing Freethinkers is the help it gives to the religionist. Every time the Christian hears it said that someone who is in public life believes in "true religion" it is an encouragement to him to persist in his own superstition. It is to him a testimony to the value of religious beliefs in social life, and even though there may be a difference as to what constitutes "true religion," there is, he assumes, agreement on the main point. Everyone knows the harm that has been done to the cause of Secular Education by injudicious praise of the Bible as literature, and how that has been used to keep the Bible in the schools as the Christians' fetish book. Or, again, there is the vague profession of public men that they believe in some sort of a "supreme power," or a "controlling force," or some other expression by which timid heterodoxy tries to veil its unbelief. This is seized upon as a testimony to the truth of the belief in God, and the Christian takes that as a proof of the soundness of his own Theism, and merely waits for the further enlightenment of the doubter. And in this he is right; for the kind of god in which a man believes does not matter so much, it is the belief in God that is the all-important thing to-day. So with this profession of belief in some sort of a "religion." It is neither intellectually sound nor morally justifiable. If a man is religious let him say so. And if he is not religious, then let him say that. But one cannot stand with profit to one's intellectual health with a foot in either camp. To-day the Christian Churches are filled with half-hearted phrases and disguised beliefs, and it is surely the duty of all Freethinkers to set them an example of definiteness of language and an unmistakable statement of belief. It is not for us to trim our words or fashion our beliefs because religion may be counted by some as one of the "ruling passions." Those who have made Freethought what it is, who have made it easier for us to exist than it otherwise would have been, and who drove out of the Churches some of their most powerful and most degrading dogmas, did not succeed in their work by borrowing the language of the priest, and professing merely to displace a false religion by a true one. They believed profoundly in the rule laid down by Kingdon Clifford that if Christianity were a truth it should be shouted from the housetops; if it were a lie, then that should be shouted from the housetops. There are millions of people throughout Christendom to-day who see the truth; what is needed is greater courage in proclaiming it. There can be no terms of compromise between a robust Freethought and the Christian Church.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Free Thoughts.

Does a Christian believe enough in Jesus to give up his family and his business for him? No! They believe in him enough to save themselves, that is all.

A new valuation of life must be had and men and women live to make earth a garden of blossoms and a theatre of joy rather than to get rich by making others poor.

Before the people had read the Bible they believed their priests, that there was something divine in the book, but now that the Bible has been read and nothing divine found in it, there is no longer any excuse for holding the book to be the word of God.

Truthseeker, New York.

L. K. WASHBURN.

Did the Gospel Jesus ever Live?

III.

(Concluded from page 35.)

THE question that confronts us now is, On what ground does Professor Schmiedel come to the conclusion that Jesus, a mere man, is an historical character? To the Evangelists and the writers of the New Testament Epistles he was clearly something more than man, and there were no other sources, no contemporary documents whatever from which we can obtain the slightest information concerning him, or which even mention his name. Having shown at length how utterly unreliable the Gospel narrative is, and how profoundly impossible a being Jesus as portrayed therein must be pronounced to be, the Professor proceeds to prove not only that the Gospel Jesus was only a man, but that as such he actually existed. In his preface to Dr. Neumann's *Jesus* he points out that in current English literature the theory he expounds scarcely finds any place at all. He says:—

So far as I can see, or can judge from the criticisms on my own articles in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, contemporary English opinion as to the Life of Jesus moves pretty much in extremes. On the one side, the genuineness and historicity of the Fourth Gospel is maintained with the greatest confidence, as also the actuality of all the miracles attributed to Jesus, his birth of a virgin, his sinlessness, his bodily resurrection; on the other, it is denied that he ever existed at all. Between such opposites is any reconciliation possible?

To that concluding question the only conceivable answer is a decided, unqualified No. It is beyond all doubt either that Jesus as delineated in the Gospels actually existed or that he did not. But Dr. Schmiedel contends that a Jesus entirely different from the Gospel one actually lived, and he pretends to be able to demonstrate that contention by reconstructing the Gospel records, rejecting those passages in which Jesus is represented as claiming to be a Divine Being, or in which others, by reason of what he does or says, attribute Divinity to him, and accepting only those which he treats himself or is treated by others as a human being. The latter Dr. Schmiedel calls "foundation pillars of the life of Jesus." Let us take a glance at them. The first foundation pillar is Mark x., 17, 18: "There ran one to him and kneeled to him, and asked him, 'Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said unto him, 'Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, even God.'" Here Jesus is reported as virtually denying that he was God. In Mark iii., 21, the members of his family regard him as a madman, and endeavour to restrain him. There are nine more or less similar passages, concerning which Professor Schmiedel, in his *Encyclopædia Biblica* article, writes as follows:—

Should the idea suggest itself that they have been sought out with partial intent, as proofs of the human as against the Divine character of Jesus, the fact at all events cannot be set aside that they exist in the Bible and demand our attention. In reality, however, they prove not only that in the person of Jesus we have to do with a completely human being, that the Divine is to be sought in him only in the form in which it is capable of being found in a man. They also prove that he really did exist, and that the Gospels contain at least some absolutely trustworthy facts concerning him. If passages like these were wanting in them, it would be impossible to prove to a sceptic that any historical value whatever was to be assigned to the Gospels; he would be in a position to declare the picture of Jesus contained in them to be

purely a work of phantasy, and could remove the person of Jesus from the field of history—all the more when the meagreness of the historical testimony regarding him, whether in canonical writings outside of the Gospels, or in profane writers such as Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny, is considered.

Dr. Neumann repeats his fellow-countryman's argument, saying that "all this is quite in accordance with historical truth," but both scholars forget that what may be "quite in accordance with historical truth," cannot on that account be characterized as historically true. And yet Professor Schmiedel's position is, as described by Mr. John M. Robertson in his *Pagan Christs*, that "when Jesus speaks simply as a man, making no pretence to Divinity, to miraculous powers, to prophecy, or to a Messianic mission, and where he is represented as failing to impress his relatives and neighbours with any sense of his superiority—there the record is entirely credible" (p. 229). The curious thing is that whilst the Professor rejects two-thirds or more of the Gospel narrative as legendary or mythical, he treats the one-third or less as beyond dispute historically true. Surely there never was a more palpable fallacy, or a more pernicious one. On that principle, or lack of principle, practically all the characters created by novelists could be treated as veritably historical personages. To all appearance Napoleon was nearer the truth when, in conversation with Wieland, he declared that in his view Jesus Christ was a wholly imaginary person; and Neumann admits that, "however surprising it may be to many, it is a fact that ever since Napoleon's time there has been a succession of writers in Germany, Holland, England, and America, who have denied all historicity to Jesus of Nazareth."

As a matter of fact, whether the Gospel Jesus is looked upon as a Divine, or as a purely human personality, it must be apparent to all students of comparative religion that no originality whatever attaches to him. This is not borne in mind by either Schmiedel or Neumann, but is duly emphasized by Mr. Robertson in more than one of his scholarly works. Of course, the Gospels contain only the rudiments of mediæval and modern Christianity in which the teaching Jesus of the Synoptists is practically ignored. In Paulinism there is scarcely one reference to his life and moral teaching, the pre-eminence being given to his death and resurrection. Paul alludes to no biographical documents whatever. Indeed, probably no such documents were in existence during the time in which, according to tradition, he achieved his marvellous successes. His Christ possessed numerous Pagan traits which were not recognised by the pillar apostles who made Jerusalem their headquarters. We mention this in order to call special attention to the fact that Christ is a theological creation which occupied not six days, like the Genesis creation, but more than six centuries before it was completed. Even the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels was but Christ in the making. Paul borrowed wholesale from the Oriental religions which were then fighting for supremacy in the Roman Empire, and our point is that the Gospel Jesus was not one whit more historical than Paul's Christ. Both are alike unreal except to those who blindly believe in them; but the most fervent faith ever known cannot transform fables into facts, or myths into realities.

J. T. LLOYD.

Religion has been made the excuse for interfering with the happiness of a nation whenever no better excuse could be brought forward; but depend on it, the mass of the people will never quarrel about religion if they are left alone, and their interests not interfered with.—"The Dog Fiend of Snarleygow." Captain Marryat.

"Hark, the Herald Angel!"

Nothing useful can be poured into a vessel that is already full of what is useless. We must first empty out what is useless.—*Tolstoi.*

THE rise to power of the Labour Party has caused much heartburning in many quarters, and not the least among professional religionists. The alarm and perturbation they feel has even found its expression in print, and sober journalists have turned Christian for half an hour in order to express adequately the spiritual views of their employers. The *British Weekly*, one of the leading organs of Nonconformity, asks tearfully as to the Labour Party's attitude towards religious education in the national schools, and, more in sorrow than in anger, reproaches the Independent Labour Party for saying in one of its publications that the teaching of all dogmatic theology is wrong. The *British Weekly* is prayerfully anxious that the Labour Party should be Christian, or friendly to Christianity. Hence these tears and lamentations, which have evoked a reply from Labour's newspaper, the *Daily Herald*, which is so remarkable as to merit notice.

Journalists often write in a hurry, but the *Herald's* rejoinder appears to have been penned by the football reporter, so extraordinary is the view of religion expressed in the article. Nor is this by any means all. The writer seems as innocent of the history of the Democratic Movement as of matters relating to religion. Ignoring the fact that for many years the Trades Union Congress has passed a resolution favouring Secular Education, the leader-writer permits himself the use of language usually found in parish magazines, and, having assured the *British Weekly* that it need have no fear about British Labour imitating irreligious and wicked Democrats on the Continent, he doles out the following soothing syrup to his readers:—

Those who are honestly striving to create a Kingdom of God upon earth, those who try to live according to the teaching of Jesus that acts matter more than words; those who enlist under the banner of Labour because their sense of justice and of comradeship is outraged by the conditions in which most of us exist to-day—these are the truly religious. No need to ask what dogmas they accept; we know that to them God is a Spirit—the Spirit of Love, and that they worship Him in spirit and in truth.

One rubs one's eyes at the printed words. The editor of the *Daily Herald* has frequently expressed his severe disapprobation of pandering and frivolity in the newspaper press, yet he is himself here responsible for a flagrant attempt to "tickle the ears of the groundlings." Mark you, the *Herald's* delirious slush has not even the merit of novelty. Years ago, pious penmen, earning dishonest pence, used to say that Charles Bradlaugh was a Christian without knowing it. But is it not playing it a little low down on the British working man thus to assume that he is on the same mental plane as a Chinese coolie? When the Education Act has run another half century the editors of newspapers will cease, perhaps, to provide sawdust instead of the bread of knowledge. The *Herald's* conduct reminds us of the story of a counsel who, in addressing a jury, characterized the defendant in the case as a "naufregious ruffian." His junior asked him afterwards what the expression meant. The counsel retorted: "I haven't the least idea, but it sounded well, didn't it?" The *Herald's* articles look important in large type, but the sentiments expressed are the merest moonshine.

Let us trace the hand of the priest in the nation's schools. Education in this country has been hampered and impeded by the desire of the clergy, of whom

there are 50,000, to ally religious teaching with the ordinary school curriculum. This desire has been further complicated by the dissensions among the "men of God" themselves. The teachings of the Established Church are considered by the Nonconformists to be mischievous and wrong; while the instructions given by Dissenters is pronounced by Churchmen to be damnable. Roman Catholics, in their turn, consider the Anglicans and Free Churchmen are alike so monstrous that they provide their own schools. Adversity, however, makes strange bed-fellows, and Churchmen and Nonconformists have agreed temporarily to the Hebrew Bible being kept in the schools. This is what is called "the compromise," and although it satisfies most of the clergy, who use it as the thin edge of the wedge, it still impedes education and fetters progress. For the "men-of-God" realize that so long as this fetish book is forced upon the children their own position as a clerical caste is quite safe. Hence the desire of reformers for a system of Secular Education.

In sober truth, and not in the cant of journalism, let us wish for the recovery of the *Daily Herald*. It is the only daily newspaper in the country which handles religious matters with the innocent unction of a young Sunday-school teacher, who cuts cheese with a wire for a living. Throughout Europe the terms "Democrat" and "intellectual" are interchangeable. Is the Democratic Movement in this country to be considered otherwise? So desperate is the dilemma that almost are we persuaded that Labour's only daily paper has declined upon a future of hypocrisy, vote-catching, and a too anxious desire for a huge circulation.

MIMNERMUS.

The Myth of Resurrection.

IV.

(Concluded from page 44.)

If a myth has often been invented for the purpose of explaining the origin or meaning of ritual, the existence of myth has been perpetuated in the minds of men, in numerous cases, by ceremonial performances which have included the original ritual, or a remnant of it, along with an elaborate display in public worship.

That the majority of the believers have failed to understand the real significance of the ritual, and have accepted the mythical interpretation which has grown around it, has been in the interest of the priesthood; while the spectacular display of the ceremonies connected with the ritual has captivated the minds of the people and prevented them from doing too much thinking.

Perhaps this cannot be better illustrated, in reference to the present subject, than by taking the Christian Easter ceremonies. To the Christian, the ritual of the death and resurrection of the sun-god at the time of the vernal equinox finds its interpretation in the myth of a semi-human, semi-divine being having died and risen from the dead. A ritual that should have symbolic reference to the sun, at a given time, and, in another aspect, to the death and revival of nature, is mythically interpreted as relating to an actual being supposed to have come on earth to save mankind. Myth and ritual are enveloped in ceremonial performances which blind the people to the fallacy of the priestly interpretation, until a Christian meaning becomes by habit attached to the most rustic ceremonies of Easter; ceremonies which are to the enlightened mind as non-Christian as they could be.

It is believed that the word Easter can be traced to the name of the Saxon goddess Eostre, in whose

honour a festival was, in early times, annually celebrated at the time of the year now called Easter. With the early controversy as to the time of celebrating Easter, we need not concern ourselves. It is significant that Christians were for a long time unable to agree on the exact date. A rather "palpable hit" for revelation.

J. B. Hannay remarks that some parts of Pagan ceremony are still quite unreformed at St. Peter's. So much so that the Persian worship of the cross of fire is carried out at Holy Week. To the huge, blazing cross of fire, formed of numerous lamps, suspended from the dome above the tomb of St. Peter is accorded the most solemn worship. The Pope and a long train of cardinals prostrate themselves before the Cross of Fire, and thus worship the symbol of the sun crucified upon the cross of the heavens. In a minor way, light, which is so often the symbol of the sun-god, plays an important part in the Easter ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Churches. The candles standing extinguished on the altar represents the dead Christ, while the re-lighting of them is symbolic of his resurrection. But, the Pagan origin of the Christian Easter is clearly revealed in the fact that, on Holy *Thursday*, the Pope, who is preceded by a procession of clergy and cardinals carrying long funeral tapers, walks under a crimson canopy with uncovered head and carries in a box the host, or symbol, of the dead body of Jesus or Saturn, from the Sistine to the Paulina Chapel. Here the symbolic dead god is placed in a sepulchre below the altar, from whence he is taken on the *Saturday*, or day of Saturn.

The custom is carried out at many Churches in Rome, and when the host, or symbol of the dead god, is slipped out of the tomb, the resurrection of Jesus is made known, to the blowing of trumpets, the firing of guns, and the ringing of bells. The latter have been tied or muffled in silence since Holy Thursday. As J. B. Hannay¹ says: "Here we have the Babylonian Sabbath (Saturday) restored to its place on the seventh day of the week, instead of on the first day of the week, Sunday."

As Good Friday and Easter Sunday are also kept with much ceremony by the Church of Rome there need be little dispute between Pagans and Christians as to the celebrating of the annual death and resurrection of the solar or vegetation god, whether called Jesus or Saturn, or anything else.

In the Greek Church there is the same symbolic re-kindling of tapers and candles, followed by the same making of noise, which seems to be so necessary in order to make the people believe that Jesus is alive again. Multitudes of people line the streets of Athens on Easter eve, and stand in profound silence, listening to the murmur of the priests as they chant in the churches until, at the turn of midnight, the archbishop makes known that "Christ is risen." Then the silence gives place to the roll of drums and the sound of music, while a candle or taper is lit by almost every individual in the crowd, and the solemnity of the occasion is turned into gladness and merry-making.

Feasting off the Easter lamb is indulged in by those who can afford it, and the drinking of wine becomes the order of the day.

This has been preceded by the Good Friday ceremony of burying the dead Christ. A waxen image of the dead saviour-god is on view in the Greek Church during Good Friday, and may be seen and kissed by the crowd which passes through the church, and listens to the melancholy singing of dirges. Towards night the effigy is carried out of the church into the streets by the priests, and the bier is covered with lemons, roses, and various flowers. The procession is

increased by a multitude of people as it winds through the town with slow and solemn step; and, thus, the community mourns for and buries its dead god in the darkness of night. When the effigy is returned to the church the doleful chants are renewed, to be continued until Saturday midnight, during which time the people remain fasting, and wait for the supplies of nature to be renewed with the resurrection of the solar and vegetation diety, whose powers of fertility enable him to replenish the earth year by year.

In this ceremonial performance we have but the old vernal festival of the dead and risen god, and there seems to be little difficulty in connecting it with the Gardens of Adonis, still shown in Sicily. Near Easter-time women sow wheat, lentils, and canary seeds in plates, and keep them in the dark. Carefully watered, the plants soon grow, and, on Good Friday, they are placed upon sepulchres which, with the figures of the dead Christ, have been made up in Catholic and Greek churches. It is Pagan and Christian meeting in the grave, and acknowledging the same god of fertility, whether called Adonis or Christ. As J. G. Frazer remarks: "The whole custom—sepulchres as well as plates of sprouting grain—may be nothing but a continuation, under a different name, of the worship of Adonis." *Golden Bough* (Ab. Ed., p. 345.) Except that one is inclined to think the learned mythologist might be more definite about the continuation.

It appears that in the Roman world the Easter ceremonies of the Christian Church were, in many places—Phrygia, Cappadocia, Gaul, and doubtless Rome itself—at one time a continuation of the rites of Attis. Rites which became Christian by being glossed over with Christian terminology and sentiment. The death and resurrection of Attis was officially celebrated at Rome, in pre-Christian days, on March 24 and 25, the latter being known as the date of the spring equinox, and the death of Christ took place on March 23 followed by his resurrection on the 25th, according to one Christian tradition. But Christians were not over particular about the actual dates of the death and return to life of their sun and vegetation god, so another tradition fixed upon March 25 and 27. However, the difference of two days as between one tradition and another does not alter the time of the year, and, as J. G. Frazer says—

If the vernal equinox, the season at which in the temperate regions the whole face of nature testifies to a fresh outburst of vital energy, had been viewed from of old as the time when the world was annually created afresh in the resurrection of a god, nothing could be more natural than to place the resurrection of the new deity at the same cardinal point of the year. (*Golden Bough*, Ab. Ed., p. 360. See also p. 359.)

In the chief festival of the Aztecs of ancient Mexico the god Tezcatlipoca died annually in the person of one victim and came to life again in that of another. Year by year the god was represented by a youth chosen immediately after one festival was over, and the youth was dressed in a special costume to befit his dignity as an incarnation of the deity. For twelve months he enjoyed every liberty, except that he was watched by an escort, whose duty it was to prevent his escaping from the honour of divinity. He was decked out with flowers, jewels and ornaments; taught to comport himself like a king; and was worshipped by both high and low. A few days before the great festival, four beautiful girls were given him as brides and consorts, their duty being to afford him every pleasure, until on the last day they bade him farewell for ever. During the last five days there had been banquets and dancing, while everything in the way of divine honour had been bestowed upon the god who approached death. When his brides left him he was taken to a temple, and at the top of the pyramid, in

¹ *Symbolism in Relation to Religion*, pp. 332, 333. See also Chambers' *Book of Days* (1878), Vol. I., pp. 412, 413.

which shape the temple was built, his heart was cut out by the priests and held up as a sacrifice to the sun-god, giver and renewer of life. In the new victim chosen ahead for the next annual festival the resurrection of the god took place.

As the religious world has always needed frequent and drastic purification and, also, has often found it necessary to have some means of protection against its deity, or deities, at hand, there is nothing surprising in the fact that for many years five festivals have been held in various parts of Europe at Easter time.

I can here only make a few remarks on the subject, but the reader will find greater detail in J. G. Frazer's *Golden Bough*.

In many parts of Germany it has been the custom to light a bonfire, on an open space near the church, on Easter Eve. This fire was consecrated, and to it people brought sticks of oak, walnut, or beech, and having charred them, they took the sticks home to be burned in a newly-lit fire. While the burning was going on prayers were put up for the protection of the house against god's blessings in the form of lightning, fire, and hail. Frequently a few of the charred sticks would be saved for later use; sometimes to be placed on the hearth-fire during a thunder-storm to save the house from being struck by lightning, and sometimes to be stuck in fields, gardens, and meadows as a protection against blight and hail. It was believed that the corn and plants, etc., in such fields and gardens would grow better, as the mice, vermin and beetles would not touch them in the presence of the sacred fire which was incarnate, as it were, in the charred sticks.

In Northern and Central Germany the purificatory and revivifying influence of fire was obtained by the lighting of bonfires at Easter. The bonfires blazed on the hill-tops, and many could be seen at a time for miles around. Possibly they acted by way of sympathetic magic and helped the sun-god to purify and revive both man and the rest of nature. The fields over which the light of the fire shone were to be fruitful during the year; the houses were to be free from conflagration, and the people were to be saved from sickness for a like period. As the flames died down, both young and old would leap through them, and sometimes cattle were driven through the glowing embers. Thus all were purified, and the land was freed from evil—until the next time. Could the sun-god, Christ, be expected to do more?

But this method of obtaining purification by fire is not an exclusively Christian performance. It is a link between Christian and Pagan ceremony and festival, or should I say, it is Paganism resurrected in Christianity? According to Ovid's *Fasts*, 1, 731, bonfires of hay and straw were made during the festival of Palilia, held at Rome on April 21 every year, and not only the sheep, but the shepherds themselves were purified by running through the fires several times. After this and other serious items of the festival had been gone through, feasting and merry-making were indulged in, just as they are at Easter-time after the gloom of Good Friday has departed.

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.

One day, when someone remarked, "Christianity is part and parcel of the land," Rolfe (afterwards Lord Cranworth) said to me, "Were you ever employed to draw an indictment against a man for not loving his neighbour as himself?"—*Memoirs.* Henry Crabb Robinson.

Kings are but Kings: they will repay the most important services by smiles, and the least doubtful act with the gibbet.—*The Dog Fiend or Snarleywow.* Captain Marryat.

Acid Drops.

On the front page of this issue we deal with Mr. Clodd's comments on our "Acid Drops" of January 13. We did not there deal with the question of education because Mr. Clodd let that go by the board. But this point was raised by Mr. Brownton last week, and that calls for a word or two by way of clearing the air. Mr. Brownton defends Mr. Clodd by suggesting that the country would gain if Christianity were taught in the schools as one of the world's religions, and if teachers were appointed absolutely independent of creed, and an Atheist teacher be permitted to teach religions. And, he says, that Christians approaching Mr. Clodd may indicate that the old theologies are willing to become rational.

Mr. Brownton appears to live in a world of his own, and to take little notice of the world in which the rest of us exist. First of all, there is no indication that the old theologies are willing to become rational. They are simply willing to let go things they can no longer hold, and transfer their irrationality to what remains. There is nothing new in this. The Christian Church has always been willing to give what it could no longer keep. That is also a characteristic of Bill Sykes when the police make what he describes as "a fair cop." But we do not therefore, shake hands with Mr. Sykes and at once appoint him to a position of trust. In the next place, it is simply impossible in a country where Christianity is the established religion and where the Bible is the established fetish book to get that book and that religion taught in public schools as though they were one among others, all making the same claims, all of which may be false. And so long as religion is in the schools it is not to be expected that teachers who are known to be opposed to the teaching of Christianity will be appointed by Christians. Finally, it is not the business of the elementary schools, at least, to teach religion at all, and it is not the business of the State to teach it. That is a plain statement of the Freethought position, and they who do not agree with it have no right whatever to speak in the name of Freethought on that subject. For ourselves, we simply cannot understand a Freethinker supporting the State teaching or practice of religion in any shape or form. The complete secularization of the State is one of the fundamental points in the Freethought platform.

Probably this subject of religion in the schools will again be before the country before long. Churchmen and Nonconformists have been very busy of late; innumerable committee meetings have been held, concordats are in the air, and we must be extremely watchful to see that we Freethinkers at least have no hand in any sacrifice of principle that may be made. It will also be remembered that in the closing days of the last Parliament Mr. Sidney Webb carried a resolution in the House of Commons which provided for the State building schools for Catholics where required, that the teachers were to be appointed by Catholics, who should be satisfied as to the teacher's fitness to teach their religion, and that Catholics should also appoint inspectors to enter the schools and examine as to the fitness of the teaching given. There is no wonder that the *Church Times* remarked if the Labour Party were all as reasonable as Mr. Webb the education question might soon be settled. Of course, it is extremely likely that Mr. Webb had nothing else in view except to capture the extremely docile Roman Catholic vote in the country; but Mr. Webb will probably be a member of the Labour Government, and if he promised so much to get into power, he is not likely to promise less to keep in power. At any rate, Freethinkers of conviction, in and out of the Labour Party, will have to keep their eyes open, or we may witness a more disastrous sacrifice of principle than occurred in 1870. We must go on making Freethinkers; that is the only way to keep certain people up to the mark. They will respect numbers, and nothing else.

An East-end mission, now being extensively advertised, announces that the two star evangelists are named

"Sikes" and "Heep." Readers of Dickens will smile at the association.

James Collins Rossiter, a Methodist lay preacher, pleaded guilty at the Old Bailey to having written an obscene and defamatory libel on a fifteen-year-old girl. Dr. Wilfrid Harris said the prisoner was "a man of low mentality obsessed by religion and sex." The combination of the two, as readers of Mr. Cohen's *Religion and Sex* are aware, is a very common phenomenon, although it does not always come before the courts in this way. Generally it works itself in ways that does not expose one to a criminal charge, but doctors are well acquainted with numerous cases, and if some of those members of the preaching profession who are so fond of dwelling upon sex questions were impartially reported, the general public would be greatly surprised at the source of their intense zeal for "Purity." And the origin of some of the mystical visions of many well-known religionists are to be found in a perverted or distorted sex feeling.

The *Sunday Express* suggests that the Labour Government might do well to open all the museums on Sunday, and also the Tower and Hampton Court. We should like to see the suggestion acted upon, but we are not very sanguine of what a Labour Government may do in this direction. With Mr. Sidney Webb suggesting a larger measure of State support for Roman Catholic schools, and so many of the Labour M.P.'s pandering to chapel interests, the party as a whole is not likely to do anything that will offend British Christianity. The leaders know that there is nothing so hard to fight as religious prejudice, and also that there is nothing to be made in the shape of material profit or popularity in fighting it. That is why there are so few who care to take up with the work.

Were things different from what they are we would urge the Labour Government to take a big step in the direction of securing justice all round, and also towards rationalizing social life by going in for the complete disestablishment of religion. It might abolish the parading of religion in social and political ceremonies, and so make the State absolutely neutral in matters of religious belief. It might also take a very much needed step in Army reform by abolishing compulsory attendance at Church service. The men do not want it, and the State might, if it must have soldiers, at least treat them as men and not as irresponsible children. Every citizen is at present allowed to go to church or to stay away just as his humour prompts, and it is hard to believe that soldiers would be worse men if they were allowed this elementary measure of freedom. The identification of the State with a form of religion is quite a primitive conception, and those who aim at making sociology a scientific matter should at least take this very preliminary step. And why not begin by giving the chaplain of the House of Commons a long holiday? We do not imagine that this gentleman's prayers have any influence on the wisdom displayed in the debates or the justice evidenced in the measures passed.

There was one good thing said by Mr. Macdonald in his speech on the King's speech. He said the "nation's Government must be carried on." Some one corrected him with the "King's Government." Mr. Macdonald said he did not deal with such distinctions, and repeated the phrase. We were glad to see him sticking to the expression. It is really time that we left off speaking of the King's Army and the King's Navy, etc., etc. If the King is the head of the State, so let it be, but there is surely no need to use such a stupid and so mediæval a form of words as the customary one. The Army belongs to the nation; it is paid to carry out the wishes of the nation through its accredited ministers, and it would be guilty of rank mutiny if it failed to obey orders so delivered. After all, we are living in the twentieth century, not in the tenth.

One never knows! Someone returns us a copy of the *Freethinker* for November 18 with "Brainless Rot by

Sceptics" written across it in blue pencil. And we had been deluding ourselves with the conviction that there was really some good brain-work in the *Freethinker*. Which makes us repeat, one never knows!

Some of the godly in Glasgow recently had a very bad shock. It seems that the Church people of Cathcart recently decided that a new church was needed. But new churches are expensive, and the project looked like being hung up when someone discovered that by the law of Scotland "heritors," or holders of freehold property could be called upon to pay. And now a tax of 10d. in the £ is to be levied upon these "heritors." We take it that the problem before these people, in addition to paying the tax, will be to decide—when the church is built—whether it is better to go to church and get religious teaching they do not want, or stay away and not get the religion they are paying for. That is the latest form of the religious difficulty on the Clyde.

A letter appeared in the *Daily Herald* of a recent date, from Mr. H. W. Davey, of Seven Kings, protesting mixing the Labour question up with theology. Mr. Davey properly said that "Justice and comradeship are human conceptions, and have no connection with the mythical gods of Christianity or of any other superstition." To this the editor appends the following note:—

We said "To them God is a spirit—the Spirit of Love." Does Mr. Davey refuse allegiance to the Spirit of Love? Our article had no reference to "mythical gods" or "exploded beliefs." This is the usual stock-in-trade of Atheist orators.

That reply is both impertinent and silly. If the editor believes in a god he should at least have the courage to say so. To say that God is a spirit is to say no more than that God is wind, and to add that he—or it—is love, in the sense of being a substantial fact, is sheer stupidity. Love is a quality; it is not a thing in itself. It is a quality manifested in human, or animal, intercourse, and to call that "God" is allowable as a figure of speech, but not otherwise. If the editor desires to be quite straightforward with his readers he should say that he does not believe in a personal god, or in a god ruling the universe; but he is content to call "love" God. His readers would then know where he stands.

The remark about "Atheist orators" is sheer impertinence, and invites the retort that "Atheist orators" are not concerned with vote-catching, and can, therefore, afford to be honest with those to whom they "orate." Mr. Davey's letter was a protest against identifying admirable human conceptions with the Christian or any other deity. Had the editor accepted the correction he would have offended many of his readers, and that was not to be thought of. And, probably, considering that the unbelievers were in the minority, he thought it best to try and mislead those who could be fooled with mere words, and at the same time satisfy his Christian subscribers by his impertinent remarks about "Atheist orators."

A grim comment on the retention of the Bible in the schools is the fact that every year 10,000 boys and girls are brought up at police courts and dealt with for offences against the law. Judging by the police records, the majority of these offenders are but imitating the heroes of the Old Testament.

Mr. Henry Ford's wealth is estimated at the modest sum of £168,000,000. If the Gospels are true, his motor-car will never ride through the golden streets of Heaven.

We notice that the *Times Literary Supplement* is bold enough to state that the creed of Buddha was atheistic. This old fellow, who was driven away by the stick of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*; lacked all the virtues that make the name of Atheist odious to the enlightened Christians of gin, gunpowder, and poison-gas. He did not believe in killing, telling lies, drunkenness, nor adultery. The last war, the divorce courts, and the

beer barrels that have made old England's name, all prove our superiority over the old fellow whose creed was atheistic. And if Dean Inge were willing, he could not by giving his ears, go down to posterity in the same glow that illuminates the old fellow whose creed was atheistic.

If you happen to be brought before Sir Herbert Nield, M.P., Recorder, you had better look up beforehand how many gods there are, for Sir Herbert appears to be an authority on the matter. A witness before him recently took the oath, and said, "I swear by the Almighty God." Then came the following dialogue:—

The Recorder (Sir Herbert Nield, K.C., M.P.): Do you mind telling me how many gods there are? I am continually having to pull people up for that. Why do you say "the" Almighty God? There is only one God.

Witness: I think I said "Almighty God."

The Recorder: Oh, no; you didn't. I am always pretty keen about it, and I heard you.

Witness: I only know one God.

What we should like to know is by what means Sir Herbert Nield becomes so cock-sure that there is only one god. He probably might not get the position he holds if he believed in more than one god, or if he avowed openly that he did not believe in any god at all. As Carlyle says, with reference to Controller Calonne: "With a Fortunatus's purse in his pocket, through what length of time might not almost any falsehood last?" And the length of the purse has something to do with the very firm opinion of our rulers and judges that there must be one god.

The Rev. J. E. Rattenbury proposes arranging for an open discussion following his sermon on the next three Sunday evenings in the Kingsway Hall. It is announced that the "widest liberty of expression will be possible within the limits of courteous debate." We have heard of this kind of thing before, but there has usually been found means to prevent a speaker who really went to the root of the matter. After all, if Mr. Rattenbury really desires to know what are the objections that Freethinkers have to Christianity, we have not the least doubt but that it would be possible to oblige him. And in an arranged discussion, with equal rights for both speakers, those who listened would get to know what the discussion was about. But that is not the kind of thing the parsons want. What they are after is to save their faces with a pretence of an open platform. Even as it is, we venture the prediction that Mr. Rattenbury will not keep his open platform going for long. It will be too inconvenient.

Almost any insane exhibition, if it is performed in the name of religion, is good enough. In Aberdeen, says the *Daily Chronicle*, about 150 Salvation Army converts publicly burned pipes, tobacco, cigarettes, boxes of powder and puffs, penny dreadfuls, playing cards, cinema tickets, sensational novels, whisky-drinking and infidel books, etc. One simply shudders at the terrible depths of depravity evidenced by people who could have such things! It affects us so much that we cease writing this paragraph in order to set about burning some tobacco that we happen to have. The degree of moral courage and high intelligence displayed by such an exhibition staggers one. If these people do not deserve heaven, we do not know anyone who does. The Christian heaven is the only place in which they will feel at home.

Mr. J. A. R. Cairns, late magistrate—we forget his proper title in remembering the man—throws a nice large brick at a Society that is suffering from being pot-bound by Christian morality. He writes that what generally impressed him in studying the life of London was "the surprising and unexpected frailty of the virtuous," and, on the other hand, "the surprising and unexpected magnificence of the fallen." In many cases we should require better testimony than that supplied by newspapers before we agreed that men only received their deserts.

The Rev. J. H. Newsham-Taylor, rector of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, is an astute man. He moves with the

times, for he can plainly see that the public will not be attracted to church by the preaching of a penny printed sermon. Accordingly, he is going to introduce Mystery Plays in the chancel of St. Paul's Church. A few more mysteries added to the religious business cannot make any difference in a profession that is already playing second fiddle to the legitimate drama that has grown too big to return to its original cradle.

A Devonshire parson, moaning in his parish magazine, says the Church of Christ's prospects are not very rosy. "Sooner or later," he declares, she will feel the impact of the advancing tides of revolution which will sweep away her endowments." As usual, when it comes to serious matters the dear parson forgets what he tells his congregation about Omnipotence.

Another suggestion as to filling the Churches was put forward by the Rev. F. C. Spurr in an address delivered in Plymouth. He suggested a method adopted by one church in Paris in which a preacher in one pulpit put forward objections to Christianity, while another preacher in a second pulpit replied to them. We should think that an elaborate farce of this kind would scarcely deceive the intelligence of even the Bishop of London. One can imagine the kind of Freethought objection put forward by a Christian priest. Really, if Mr. Spurr wishes to get a genuine Freethought church, there is the same means offered to him as we have offered Mr. Rattenbury. Mr. Cohen would be quite willing to deliver such an address in any Christian church in the country, free gratis and for nothing. But we are quite certain that there is no Christian church that would have the courage to invite him. They prefer to give their own statement of the Freethought case, or to invite someone who in the name of Freethought is almost certain not to say anything that will seriously hurt Christianity.

A prominent Plymouth clergyman, the Rev. Wilkinson Riddle, says that he has no time for such "stunts" as those proposed by Mr. Spurr. This is hardly fair to Mr. Spurr, seeing that the Church to-day lives on a series of stunts. Mr. Riddle says that the great thing is to keep on asking people, "What think ye of Christ?" But the genuine objection to that is that church attendants are really not in a position to give an intelligent answer to the question. What do they know of the real nature and origin of the Christ myth? How can men and women, who are led to believe that the Jesus Christ of the Gospels represents some kind of an amiable social reformer, reply properly to Mr. Riddle's query? If Mr. Riddle will first of all tell his congregation that the Jesus Christ story is fundamentally a form of the primitive myth of making and killing a god for the purpose of producing some magical benefit to mankind, and that different forms of this myth are found all over the world, his hearers would at least be in a position to understand the subject. As it is, Mr. Riddle is himself working a stunt of a very common kind—that of presenting a Jesus Christ that is false to the teachings of comparative mythology, false to the teachings of historic Christianity, and invented for the use of men and women to-day because the world is getting tired of the genuine article. So that what it comes to is that Mr. Riddle prefers his own stunt to that of Mr. Spurr's. If only some Christian preacher could be found who would try the stunt of complete intellectual honesty! But in that case he would not remain a Christian preacher for long.

Sir James Cantlie, the well-known physician, says everything there is to be said about the curative effect of prayer. "Prayer won't cure a broken leg," he states; and, as disinterested lookers-on in a matter not quite reaching the level of intelligent discussions, we add, neither will prayer cure a side of bacon. Rather on the light side of comedy, the Rev. Walter Walsh, D.D., weighs in with the information that prayer used curatively would give scope to superstition in religion. This is humour of a strange kind from the follower of the Man of Sorrows.

The National Secular Society.

THE Funds of the National Secular Society are now legally controlled by Trust Deed, and those who wish to benefit the Society by gift or bequest may do so with complete confidence that any money so received will be properly administered and expended.

The following form of bequest is sufficient for anyone who desires to benefit the Society by will:—

I hereby give and bequeath (*Here insert particulars of legacy*), free of all death duties, to the Trustees of the National Secular Society for all or any of the purposes of the Trust Deed of the said Society, and I direct that a receipt signed by two of the trustees of the said Society shall be a good discharge to my executors for the said legacy.

Any information concerning the Trust Deed and its administration may be had on application.

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.

H. LATIMER-VOIGHT.—Thanks for article, but there seems nothing in it that calls for special notice.

J. MACPHERSON.—Regret the error in reading your name, but it is a peculiar fact that many take less care in writing their name plainly than any other part of their letter. We are flattered by your high opinion of our writing, but not surprised to find that the gentleman to whom you introduced the *Freethinker* was pleased to make its acquaintance. It is not an unusual experience, and gives justification for our continually urging its introduction upon our friends. Shall hope to meet you when we again visit Glasgow.

W. MILLS.—The letters we publish have to bear some relation to the intelligence of the readers of this journal—both Freethinkers and Christians. And we really have no space for long letters to prove the absolute inerrancy of the Bible on matters which even educated Christians are to-day repudiating. The class of readers to whom your defence of the Bible would appeal do not see the *Freethinker*, and would be, therefore, useless.

E. MAY.—We have discussed the question of Agnosticism on more than one occasion, and you will find a special chapter devoted to it in Mr. Cohen's *Theism or Atheism?* Of course, if the occasion arises we may again deal with it in these columns.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—John Burgess, Bermuda, 5s. 6d.

E. KIRTON.—See "Acid Drops." We agree with you as to the unwisdom of mixing the Labour movement up with theology. But we imagine it is no more than a case of vote-catching, although the Labour Party will pay a big price for any support or any help the clergy care to give them.

G. SEIBEL.—Copies of *The Fall* and *The Thirteenth Son* to hand. Glad to know that you are keeping "the candle of Freethought burning" at your end of the world.

A. J. FINCKEN.—Your letter *re* the name of this journal is only what we should have expected from you. We should soon be found out by the enemy under any other name, and the change would be rightly taken as an indication of weakness. You will remember that Mr. Foote tried the experiment of another paper under the name of the *Pioneer*. But it was soon discovered that it hailed from the dreadful *Freethinker* office, and the boycott on that was even worse than it was against the *Freethinker*.

J. G. FINLAY.—The prevalence of men of the Vale Owen type, with their quite unadulterated rubbish about the next world, is a serious indictment of the intelligence of the British public.

H. DAVAL.—Money order received. Books being sent. Pleased to have your appreciation of *Determinism and Free Will*. We are delighted to know it has made what is to most a thorny question plain. We are obliged for suggestions. One of the books you suggest has already been written by Mr. Cohen—*The Other Side of Death*. You will find there a complete examination of the belief in a future life. It can be had from this office for 5s. 6d.

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

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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, 7s. 6d.; three months, 3s. 9d.

Sugar Plums.

At the time of writing we are hoping to get this week's issue of the *Freethinker* distributed safely. But we are open to all the incidents of the railway strike, and we must ask the patience of our readers in the matter. In any case there is no need for regular readers to suffer more than receive their copies of the paper a little later than usual. We ask readers to assist in this direction by seeing that their agents deliver the copies ordered, even if a little later than usual.

Even the post in London is affected by the strike, which does not say much for the foresight of the General Post Office. On Monday night, in order to avoid delay on Tuesday morning, we posted some copy to the office, including a couple of letters, and replies to correspondents. Up to four o'clock the letter has not been delivered, so we must postpone these until next week. We are living in a delightful world at present, and the only way to live through or in it is to cultivate a lively sense of humour.

Mr. Cohen is announced to lecture to-day (January 27) in the Hall of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, 120 Rusholme Road, Manchester, at 3 and 7. We say "announced," because if the railway strike develops it may be impossible for him to get there. As things stand at present (Tuesday) it looks as though he will keep the engagement. He will certainly not stay away unless circumstances compel. In any case, we hope that Manchester friends will make these meetings as widely known as possible among their friends.

Mr. J. T. Lloyd's excellent pamphlet on *Prayer* has just been translated into French by M. Raoul Robert and issued at the price of one franc. Our French friends know a good thing when they see it, and we hope it will do as good a work in its French dress as it has done in its English one. The pamphlet, in English, is still on sale at our offices, and is an excellent one to put into the hands of a Christian friend.

The North London Branch has arranged a discussion at the St. Pancras Reform Club, 15, Victoria Road, N.W., to-day (January 27) on, "Does the Bible Teach the Immortality of the Soul?" which will be opened by Mr. W. F. May, of the Christadelphian Society. The advertisements of the meeting attribute to Mr. May the taking up of the affirmative. This is, of course, an error, as Christadelphians do not believe the Bible teaches the immortality of the soul. This is one of the differences between Christadelphians and ordinary Christians.

Dr. C. G. Higginson, the well-known Midlands Positivist, will lecture before the Birmingham Branch of the N.S.S. to-day (January 27), at 7, on "The Conversion of Paul of Tarsus." The meeting will be held in the Brassworkers Hall, 70 Lionel Street. Dr. Higginson's address is sure to be interesting, and we advise Birmingham Freethinkers to make a special effort to be present.

We are also asked to announce that the Birmingham Branch will be holding its annual dinner on Saturday, February 9, at the "Chapel Tavern," Great Charles Street. Tickets are 3s. 6d., and early application should be made to the secretary, Mr. J. Collier, 181, Frederick Street, Aston. There will be speeches, music and songs, as usual.

William Blake and Mankind.

IF science is the economy of thought, then poetry worthy of the name is an exact science. In the poetry of William Blake, as with other and better known poets, there is much that may have been left out with advantage. But, as we cannot have good without evil, light without darkness, sweets without sour, hills without valleys, even the level of Blake becomes the height of lesser singers and stumblers in the quest of the absolute. His poetry is but the scaffolding of thought, his lyrical utterances but the dropping of pearls, his thoughts are revelations on the book of life, and any student will be repaid, not in the gold of merchants, by a serious examination of the philosophy of this many-sided artist.

Like all creators of values, he did not gain immediate acceptance. If we view mankind as one man, it would seem that the appearance of a genius in any age, is that age trying to express itself completely and with finality. Again, if we regard mankind as clay, the genius is one who will try to make the clay in his own image. Political systems, ethical systems, religious systems are simply the expression of a handful of men—sometimes of one man, and the converse of "God making man in his own image" may approximate more nearly to the truth. The wisdom or otherwise of the masses gaining this information may be of pragmatic interest to a few who stutter and mumble in mitres and rustling silk; "but truth can never be told so as to be understood and not be believed," and truth can never remain at the bottom of the well. The gloss over infamy, deceit, and crime of one generation is ripped off by the next; witness the period of Queen Mary of Scots, Queen Elizabeth, and James II. To any reader of the history of this period, sovereignty receives its eternal quietus, and sympathy goes out to the incredible and crazy idea of one being responsible for the universe.

Truth tells us that there is no finality; in the growth of a country like England the period above may be translated as that time when the nation was emerging from its criminal or savage state, when men murdered each other over a bit of bread. When we come to the age of Blake—mankind, our one man, is just realizing that it can balance on two legs. The whippings from Voltaire, the discoveries of Newton, the illumination from Locke, cure mankind of the rumblings in his stomach, and we find that Blake makes a titanic effort to impose his standard of value on that which has survived the dark ages of superstition, and the sojourn in ferocity and crime. Adoption in that age of the fork and pocket handkerchief may have had more to do with sweet sanity than the fulminations of Sir Thomas Browne, and the invention of the candle may have given more light for our one man, mankind, than the bonfires at Smithfield.

In 1757 our physical man has tired of reaching out for physical things; curious thoughts flash across his

brain, and we reach the springtime of introspection, heralded by the birth of William Blake. Comparisons arise at once when we examine the assertion made by Mr. W. B. Yeates that "the profound sanity of his inspiration is proved by his never having, no matter how great the contrast between himself and the blind men and women about him, pronounced himself to be chosen and set apart alone among men." The poet himself only allows his disappointment to be mildly expressed in a couplet—

I found them blind; I taught them how to see;
And now they know neither themselves nor me.

The birth of William Blake was an event; his fiery, yet humane philosophy is as significant and enduring as the plough in the sky. WILLIAM REPTON.

Thomas Paine.

AMONGST the great men whom the Anglo-Saxon race has produced, Thomas Paine is the writer's favourite hero. This statement, he is well aware, will be received with amazement by multitudes of eminently respectable and right-thinking people who have accepted without question a point of view which was once expressed by that vociferous person, Theodore Roosevelt, who referred to the subject of this sketch as "that dirty little atheist, Tom Paine."

In sharp contrast to that crude and ignorant estimate of a great soul's place in human history, we have had in recent years a careful, scholarly delineation of Paine's personal character, mental attainments, and life-work, from the pen of Rev. Brierly, M.A., in a series of sociological essays of high historic and literary value.

As illustrating how historical records become corrupted by myths and legends, and how many great and pure souls have been totally misrepresented by ignorant critics who drew their information from legendary sources, Brierly says:—

The orthodox English world still thinks of Thomas Paine as an infidel. His memory lies under mountains of denunciation. But what does the average orthodox Englishman know about him? He knows nothing of the fact that this Quaker soul was one of the bravest affirmists of his time, who spent his life, without fee or reward, for all that is sacred in humanity—for universal peace, in the cause of negro emancipation, in the cause of the child, and the cause of the poor. Whether in America, fighting the cause of Independence, or in France, upholding the rights of the people, he ever enunciated principles which we now recognize as the very alphabet of ethics. His so-called denial of Christianity was merely a denial of a presentation of it which has become as incredible now to us as it was then to him.

The legend which represents Thomas Paine as a fearsome personage, who was the very incarnation of evil, rests upon the slender historic foundation that he was formally tried in the English courts for treason and blasphemy, and found guilty on both charges. Fortunately for himself, Paine was in France, and as the dread sentence of the law could not be carried out, a writ of outlawry was recorded against him. These awful charges were founded on a harmless passage in *The Rights of Man*, wherein Paine said that he personally knew many parish constables in England who could occupy the throne with more dignity, and certainly with more intelligence, than was displayed by George III. The curious working of the legal mind by which this painfully truthful statement of an obvious fact was construed into the awful offences of treason and blasphemy was as follows:—"The King ruled by Divine right; therefore he was the earthly vice-gerent of Deity. To make frivolous remarks about a king was, therefore, not only treason, but blasphemy. Of course, all that kind of thing sounds merely solemn nonsense to

us now, just as it did to Paine; but things were very different in those days, and the verdict recorded against him at that time had the full approval of both Church and State.

From a biological standpoint, the amazing personality of Paine appears to be one of those mysterious cases where a long line of reputable, but entirely normal ancestors suddenly breaks into one transcendental genius, who dies childless. Whilst we cannot account for Paine's remarkable intellect on the lines of heredity, there can be no doubt about the source of his passionate love of justice, and his high ethical and moral ideals. The fact that he came of Quaker stock is quite a sufficient explanation of these attributes.

When we consider the age in which Paine lived and worked, the purity of his ideals and ethics seems quite as wonderful as his intellectual genius. In that day justice was a mere figment of the imagination. Under the infamous penal code of that era, mere boys and girls were sent to the gallows for petty misdemeanours which would now be dealt with by a Children's Court. Yet in that dark age was born the man who, as Brierly says, enunciated principles which we now recognize to be the very alphabet of any conception of social righteousness—ideals of liberty, democracy, justice, and freedom, which are even yet far beyond realization.

Paine was no mere academic theorist. His was essentially a constructive mind, with a mighty intellect behind it. He was a scientist of no mean order. Some of his abstruse astronomical calculations have been verified by later modern scientists, and found to be strictly accurate. Some comparatively modern inventions as the iron bridge with lattice-work arches, the steam turbine, and the internal combustion engine, were all foreshadowed by Paine. His greatest work, however, was in the direction of sociology and moral philosophy. He founded the first anti-slavery association, and also the first society for the protection of children and the prevention of cruelty to animals. He anticipated Henry George as an economist by advocating that economic ground rent should be appropriated by taxation for the purpose of public revenue. He also advocated universal suffrage, equal civic and political rights for women, old-age pensions, and international arbitration as a substitution for war.

Some of the very saddest incidents in human history are to be found in the stories of those who have spent their lives cutting steps by which others might climb, and the story of Paine forms no exception to that almost universal rule. The country of his birthplace rewarded his splendid social service by a formal sentence of outlawry. France received him at first with open arms, and he rendered great service to that country in its very darkest hour, but when later on, in his capacity of French Deputy for Calais, he recorded his vote (the only one) against the execution of the King, his uncompromising Quaker conscience not approving of capital punishment, he was arrested and sentenced to death as a Royalist. Only for the fact that, either by accident or design, his jailer omitted to make the fatal mark on the door of his cell on the morning fixed for his execution, Paine would have been numbered amongst the nameless thousands who suffered death by the guillotine. After many weary months in prison, he was permitted to leave for America, a country which owed him an absolutely unpayable debt of gratitude for his services in connection with the establishment of national independence. He was the personal friend of Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin. But once again his Quaker conscience asserted itself. He became the champion of the most unpopular of forlorn hopes at that period, that of the abolition of chattel slavery, and for that crime he was furnished by social ostracism. When his worn-out body was carried to its last resting-place, the only

mourners consisted of one faithful Quaker friend, the members of a family of poor French refugees, whom he had assisted out of his scanty means, and a few negro slaves. History repeats itself, and the descendants of those who stoned the prophets still build their sepulchres. A beautiful monument marks Paine's grave to-day, and visitors from many lands make pilgrimage to it, as to a shrine.

Thus passed away the man who was not only the supreme intellect, but also the greatest preacher of social righteousness of his age and time.

With his wonderful ability and great constructive power, had Paine chosen the path of personal ambition, there was hardly any position, either in England, France, or America, to which he might not have attained. He chose instead the thorny path of honour. The "inward light" which sustained and inspired Paine throughout his life of splendid, unselfish social service can be best portrayed in his own words: "The world is my country, and to do good is my religion." In that simple but sublime faith he lived and died, and the war-ruined world has bitter need of men of Paine's type in the councils of State to-day.

Men whom the lust of office does not kill,
Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy,
Men who possess opinions and a will,
Men who love honour, and who do not lie.

PORKOBIDNI.

(From the "World's News," Australia.)

Chats with Children.

KINGS, GODS, LAWS, AND MEN.

WORDS once in use sometimes drop out of our speech. Other words may change their meaning. There are also words which mean exactly the same as formerly, but we have so changed our views about the things for which they stand that we no longer use the old word to describe the same thing.

A word often used when I was a boy was "wench." It is a long time since I heard a girl called a wench, except in fun or on the stage in some old play. To "wend" your way is a lost verb, although we still use the past tense "went." The words "villain" and "blackguard" have become terms of reproach, a change from their original sense. Who would think that "sincere" used to mean "unsealed" (literally "without wax").

From time to time some funny old duke forgets the date, and talks with contempt of "the people"; but such talk is getting very rare indeed.

If to be a "commoner" ever implied real inferiority, it is very different to-day. Several men are known to have refused titles. For instance, Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. Lloyd George and others could easily have become lords. They lost little by their refusal. Yet it is not so long ago that ordinary men and women, who earn a living by working, could not sit in Parliament, or even vote for a member.

The "people" in those days had to obey the laws, but they had no voice in making them. The laws were made by the King and what were called "noble" families.

Few people then argued whether kings were good or not. You have only to look at the prayer-book, or at the first page of an old Bible, to read how men talked of kings.

Just as men called the best actions "noble," they got into the habit of calling the best men "kingly."

The quality of mercy . . .
It is enthroned in the heart of kings.

It was not only poets who thought these things. Nearly everybody believed that merely to kiss the hem

of a king's robe, or to be touched by him could cure diseases.

There was only One higher than a king. It was God. God was a king, too. He had a kingdom. He was the only superior of all kings. But there was no higher title than king, so he was called King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

At last the time has come when we no longer think of Cæsars, tsars, kaisers and kings as clever, powerful, and worthy of praise. So many of them have proved foolish, weak and wicked, that there is no merit in being called a king.

We all know that the best men and women are found in every walk of life.

Marcus Aurelius was a pagan emperor who possessed great wisdom and an enlightened morality up to which he lived. Epictetus, a slave, who lived about the same period, was a philosopher, whose weighty words still guide men, seventeen centuries after his death.

These, the emperor and the slave, are only extreme instances. But there is no sex, no colour, no nation which can claim *all* the best men, or in which there have been *no* instances of goodness, genius or generous life.

Men have been led by facts like these to think that the best way to rule is to spread power as widely as it can be spread. Not kings only, but all of us should have a vote (or voice) in the choice of those who have to make our laws. We all have to do what the law tells us to do, and it seems quite fair that those who are to make the laws should first ask us if they are right or wrong. We all must pay for the cost of our ships and for the pay of the men who fight in our wars. We do more than this. We may have to fight when we grow up to be men. We may lose life or limbs. A man may lose his son; his wife may lose all the men of her love. Is it right, then, that a tax, a law, or a war should be made by kings or lords who did not ask us to think, but only to pay, obey, and die for them?

We need not ask this question any more. In this and most other lands it is agreed that the common people must rule. No laws must be made by kings. Kings must do what the people tell them to do.

Through long ages men put up with the idea of a God ruling the world, because at that time men submitted to the rule of kings. The throne, the crown, the royal robes are all found in the descriptions of both God and the king. Both have worshippers who kneel in his presence, or stand bareheaded in the place where he is expected to appear.

I never heard of a religion whose god ruled with a parliament, or who consulted mortals before he made his laws. A really modern religion would have as its god somebody chosen by the people. The Kingdom of God would have become a republic. God's old laws would be improved or swept away. No throne nowadays is safe if it is not founded on the will of the people.

This is a new reason why we cannot accept these old religions: they are out of date; they do not fit modern ideas.

If there really were a God it would be our duty to rebel, even if we died fighting, as other rebels against tsars and kings have died.

If there were a heaven we should have to connect it to earth by telephone or wireless, and to bring its laws into harmony with enlightened views of politics and government.

If there were a hell, we should have to send a John Howard, or an Elizabeth Fry to make it more human, or else batter its walls down like the French citizens did to their Bastille.

We cannot have two standards of good government. We have only one rule of seeking the good and destroying the evil forms of State rule.

Man is outgrowing the desire to kneel to a king and to raise his hat to the squire. Neither can we worship God if we are worthy to be called free men and women.

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH.

Correspondence.

THE SLADE CASE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I am indebted to Mr. Ernest Oaten for calling attention to my error in the letter, "Religion and Science," in the *Freethinker* for December, 1923, wherein I said that the Spiritualist, Slade, had received three months' imprisonment, whereas what he did receive was a *sentence* of three month's imprisonment with hard labour. As, however, Mr. Oaten's letter is itself not devoid of inaccuracy, and is decidedly misleading, I propose, sir, if you can spare the space, briefly to record the facts concerning this notorious Spiritualist in so far as I have been made conversant with them. In 1876, Slade gave a seance to Professor (now Sir) Ray Lankester (not Lancaster) alone, who formed an hypothesis as to how the slate trick was managed. Lankester then asked Dr. (now Sir) Bryan Donkin to come with him to Slade's room so that there should be one to watch and one to snatch the slate at the precise moment necessary for verification of his hypothesis. The two, therefore, attended at a guinea a sitter. Slade placed Lankester on his right hand, Donkin on Lankester's right hand and opposite himself, the fourth side of the square table being vacant. It fell to Donkin to signal to Lankester the precise moment when Slade was putting the slate under the table for the spirit to write on, and this he did, with the result that the passing of the slate under the table and the snatching of it by Lankester were practically simultaneous. Ray Lankester found he held a prepared slate on which the imposter had already written the "spirit message." Slade was accordingly prosecuted by Professor Lankester and Dr. Donkin, and was convicted and sentenced as stated above. The sentence was framed with great care by the late Mr. Flowers, the senior magistrate at Bow Street. Slade appealed to Quarter Sessions and was tried before the late Mr. Edlin at Westminster. The Treasury counsel who was charged with the support of the prosecution made an alteration in the wording of the conviction as formulated by the magistrate, and adhered to this alteration in spite of an explicit warning from the court. On this the court quashed the case. Slade and his accomplice, Simmonds, instantly left the court and started for the Continent, but summonses were promptly taken out which prevented Slade's return to England.

About a year after this the prosecutors received a letter from Slade written by Simmonds, offering to come to London and give them six seances in order to convince them of his honesty. But this offer was on the condition that Lankester and Donkin should guarantee him security from further prosecution, or, in the event of their being dissatisfied, allow him a *clear twenty-four hours before they took any further action*. This the investigators very properly refused, and the summonses remained operative. Hence it will be seen that Mr. Oaten is wrong in saying that Slade was willing to come to England and place himself in these investigators' hands for a series of seances and, if these gave dissatisfaction, that he "offered to stand any prosecution they might bring before him." The whole of his arrangements were obviously carefully devised to enable him to show a clean pair of heels if again detected in trickery. Further, Mr. Maskelyne was not, as Mr. Oaten says, the chief witness, nor did his subsidiary evidence—for such is all it was—affect the case materially. It was adduced to show that the phenomena exhibited by Slade could be produced in several other ways all easily explicable.

Mr. Truesdell had previously (1872) shown in the States that Slade obtained his "spirit messages" by sheer trickery, but this was unknown in England until long after the seance attended by Sir Ray Lankester and Sir Bryan Donkin, to whom, therefore, belong the sole credit for showing up this charlatan in this country.

Some years after his exposure by Professor Ray Lankester and Dr. Bryan Donkin, Slade was again caught out in fraud at Belleville, in Canada, by a police inspector who, like Ray Lankester, snatched away the slate. He escaped arrest by begging for mercy, and went to America, where he bamboozled his fellow Spiritualists into believing, not, as in the Lankester-Donkin *débâcle*, "that it was the result of faulty observation on the part of hostile critics," but that the man exposed in Canada was another person using his name.

JAVALL.

FINGER-POSTS.

SIR,—I am glad to see that Mr. Repton has realized that we are both in agreement, if only we could decide to express ourselves through the medium of the same words. That is, however, impossible. No two persons ever do so, and the difference forms one of the most difficult problems of human intercourse. If only people would understand the same thing by the same phrase, there would be many fewer controversies than there are.

I, therefore, am prepared to maintain that it is unnecessary to symbolize humanity by the use of any other word than humanity. It seems to me a perfectly good word with a quite definite meaning, and there is no real reason why we should use a proper name when we intend to speak of humanity.

With regard to the question of whether the dramatists preach or whether they describe humanity, I shall, if you will give me permission, do my best to define my impressions of the drama as a preaching, or rather educational influence in the course of an article, which will give me more scope for the expression of my ideas than the longest letter could do, and I hesitate to trespass on your correspondence columns to the space that such a letter would involve.

G. E. FUSSELL.

THE FREETHINKER.

SIR,—For years I have had the same experience as your correspondent—possible converts have kicked at the title. Reading between the lines, I think the writer feels a change almost suggests disloyalty to its late and present editor, and this sentiment has been a factor in causing hesitation in suggesting an alteration; but Mr. Cohen tells us he would accept any change if assured of bettering the cause. So it simply stands, would an alteration help or hinder? But does not our editor let a little quite natural emotion (isn't it nice to find him fallible like the rest of us) lead him to suggest and counter what is not hinted at in the proposal—that an alteration in name means a lowering of the flag? At present Mr. Cohen writes his clever and virulent attacks on superstition with ink under the title of the *Freethinker*, and the sale is small; even were he to substitute *vitriol* for ink, with a different name to the journal, I feel sure it would sell better. So far as I can see, there is no question of lowering the lance, but simply under which "flag" the change will best get home to the public. Voltairean satire will kill as effectively under the title of the "Freethinker," the "Challenger," the "Democrat," or any other.

We all try to push the sale of the *Freethinker*, but under that name it is a bad seller, and that is the whole and only point raised. The reason is that the public, under Christian tuition, attach to the title a low standard of ribaldry, and even lewdness—that the journal is the exact opposite matters not. John Smith won't buy it to find out. Any other title, no matter how militant, would take years before the odium theologium can be so closely attached to it, and a continuation of a title which John Smith damns at sight is playing into the enemies' hands, and just what is desired. I should think every new subscriber to the *Freethinker* is one who has already gone three-parts on the road to freethought; gone, at any rate, so far that its title does not shock; but what of the hundreds who have taken the first few halting steps? You lose their support, and they your help, and what all of us are after is the great halting mass.

J. W. W.

[We fail to see that our objection to a change of name, without a change of policy, is met by our old friend. Our point is that the *Freethinker* has earned its dislike by the Christian world because it has never hesitated to tell the truth about the Christian Churches and their doctrines in

plain language. And by any other title, so long as direct language was used in its columns, it would not fail to arouse the same hostility. Any paper by any name would encounter the same amount of Christian slander and hostility so long as it declined to "trim." The average man re-echoes the slanders of his leaders, and they are not foolish enough to pass unnoticed under some other name things which they hate under the name of the *Freethinker*.—EDITOR.]

EAST AND WEST CONTRASTED.

SIR,—Mr. Maddock in his final reply raises the questions of castes in the East, and "the spirit of true democracy in the West." Regarding castes, I can only say that all feudalistic societies possessed this feature of castes in common, whether in India or in Europe. It would be indeed surprising if it were otherwise. The four classes of priests, warriors (kings, knights, administrators, etc.), merchants, and labourers (who were either slaves or serfs, according to the stage of social-economic evolution), were quite distinct in Europe till the first decade of the nineteenth century. And can anybody contend that until then knowledge was not almost the monopoly of the intellectual classes? The Hindus made their caste system too rigid, and, justly, reaped the nemesis. What released the civilizing forces in Europe was the industrial revolution. The feudalistic caste system was turned into a class system, and the class distinctions of modern civilization are fundamental, not superficial, as Mr. Maddock thinks. Sound political economy knows that quite well. I am not passing an ethical judgment, but only stating an historical fact. With the advance of industrialism in India we are witnessing the inevitable breakdown of old caste divisions and the rise of new class distinctions.

Moreover, the latter-day rigidity of the caste system was firstly due to isolation of the Hindus, and secondly to a defensive reaction on account of an impact with the barbarian hordes that began to pour into India from the north-west about 1000 A.C. It was very elastic in the early centuries. Members could change castes, rise to a higher one, and education was not altogether withheld from the lower classes, as tradition records many Hindu philosophers and writers belonging to these latter classes.

The "spirit of true democracy" in the West is only a spirit yet, and it will take a good few "Conan Doyles and Oliver Lodges" to make it materialize. Dictatorships, oligarchies and plutocracies are the order of the day in Europe, America, Japan, etc, and in parts of the East we have Albinocracy. And our political futurists tell us that the next stage in Europe, and the world, for that matter, will be either a war or a dictatorship (Fascismo or the Bolshevism brand). It is impossible here to go into the subject of the evolution of secular thought and politico-economic institutions in the East, particularly in India, but by their study the conviction is forced upon us from a new angle that the behaviouristic psychology of races is essentially similar. Man, as a political and tool-using animal, has reacted to the environments of the objective universe in fundamentally the same way in the East and the West, and Kipling's dictum that "East is East and West is West . . ." is psychologically fallacious. Epoch for epoch, from almost pre-historic times, Indian history records as many sects of Monists and Materialists, Atomists and Atheists, Heretics and Dissenters, Energists and Anti-ritualists, Politicians and Jurists as the West can show, at least till the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Finally, regarding the veneration or regarding with approval the moral and social idealism of the past, I don't for the life of me see why one should be condemned for approving the ethical idealism of a Confucius or the humanistic morality of a Buddha. After all, all ancients were not ignorant fools or intellectual decrepits.

As this closes the discussion, let me apologize for my long letters and thank you for your courtesy.

J. R. BHATIA.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

SIR,—If I am called on the jury as a witness in a law court I ask to be allowed to affirm on the ground that I have no religious belief. I mean by that that I do not believe in a God or a future state as taught in the Bible,

the book that is put before me. If I take Mr. Clodd's view of religion I am placed in a false position; and, although I agree with his sentiments, I do not call them religious. It may be that the word religious may change its meaning in the course of time, like others words, but at present it certainly has a good deal to do with the supernatural.

ANDREW CLARKE.

Mixed Pickles.

Most men and women, pigeon like, love to fly around with their fellows in the circles of custom and habit.

As lever to fulcrum, so ideas to endeavour. Brave men—pioneers, thinkers—strive and die that the masses may raise themselves on the fulcrum of the dead.

The subtle irony of Browning's "God's in His heaven— all's right with the world," still eludes the intelligentsia.

In the Garden of Eden was held the first Assize. The first and last case was one of apple-stealing. The Court awarded the delinquents *everlasting* hard labour. "The quality of mercy is not strained, methinks!"

When the Press boasts of its freedom the wise man looks for discarded fetters. Modern journalism and mob oratory are cousins.

Poor Shelley! If we take seriously his clever critics, with their haggings and speculations, he must have been as curious a phenomenon as Jesus, whose life and work has undergone much the same progress. One begins to wonder if he is only a myth after all!

To the common-place literary learned genius is a freak, instead of merely ordinary mind expanded in one or two faculties.

The ordinary mind is a table-land pool leaking in all directions. Genius is a hurtling torrent, fed by many streams, flowing in a single direction.

The fatuity of the Intellectual shakes the ribs of ordinary men. He builds in the quiet of his study porcelain theories that acquaintance with the market-place would shatter into bits.

Apathy and Ignorance are blacksmiths who rivet on the limbs of the governed the fetters of poor government and bad laws.

Advancement of science and learning depends on free-thought; progress of religion, on fear-thought.

D. P. STICKELLS.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (160 Great Portland Street, W.): 7.30, A Social. The Discussion Circle meets every Thursday, at 7, at the "Laurie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W.): 7.30, Discussion—"Does the Bible Teach the Immortality of the Soul?" Opened by Mr. W. F. May.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W.9): 7, Mr. C. H. Keeling, "Causation and its Implications."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): 7, Mr. Arthur Linecar, "Galsworthy's 'Forsyte Saga.'"

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, Laurence Housmann, "Material Outlook and Spiritual Insight."

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Upton Labour Party Hall, 84 Plashet Road, Upton Park, E.13): 7, Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe, "Is there a God?"

OUTDOOR.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Marble Arch): 3, a Lecture.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Brassworkers' Hall, 70 Lionel Street): 7, Dr. C. H. Higginson, M.A., M.D., "The Conversion of Paul of Tarsus: A Historical Study."

GLASGOW BRANCH N.S.S. (City Hall, Saloon): Mr. Joseph McCabe, 11.30, "The Rise and Fall of the Papal Church"; 6.30 (City Hall, Grand), "The Beauties of Ancient Babylon," with Lantern Illustrations. (Silver collection.)

LEEDS BRANCH N.S.S. (Youngman's Restaurant, Lowerhead Row): 7, Mr. Deans, "Robert Burns."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone gate): 6.30, Grand Concert by "Arcadian Orchestra" and local artistes. (Silver collection for the Leicester Infirmary.)

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Amalgamated Engineering Hall, 120 Rusholme Road): Mr. Chapman Cohen, 3, "What is Christianity Worth?" 6.30, "Are we Civilized?"

PLYMOUTH BRANCH N.S.S.—Discussion Circle meets every Friday at 7.30 at the Labour Club, 6, Richmond Street.

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