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Views and Opinions.

Speech and Thought.

I take it as all to the good that—as our letter-bag shows—so much interest has been taken in the notes recently published on the meaning of the word “religion.” For words are not dead things, but very living ones. There is not a word of any importance which has not a life of its own, which does not stretch back to a remote ancestry, carrying with it a number of connotations from which it is difficult and almost impossible to dissociate it. The only value in any word is that it has a number of associations, and so acts as an indication of things. Despite the old tag that language was given to man to conceal thought, the fact is that words were first hammered out to express thoughts; or, to put it more plainly, to express man's thoughts about things. A child making a puffing noise to indicate a steam-engine is acting precisely as early man did to convey to others his experience of the world. Language, in short, is not something that came to man ready made—it is only in such books as the Bible that these things happen—it is something that has grown; its development is as much a subject of study as is the growth of the central nervous system, and just as a study of the animal body proves that its present structure is reminiscent of past life stages, so a study of words shows indications of forms of mental life that many of us to-day recognize as outworn and undesirable. Language is a living thing in a world of living things, and just as the animal organism, if it is to live, must adapt itself to a changing environment, so we need to constantly adapt our language to the needs of a changing social environment and developing intellectual life.

* * *

Polarized Words.

Any and every department of life offers illustrations of the truth of what has been said. Such a word as “King” will serve as well as any. Often one hears the comment: “But if we did not have a king we should have a President, the king is but a President under another name, and what does a name matter?” The two cases are not in the least parallel. A President is one who is placed where he is at the wish of his fellows. He is elected because his fellows—wisely or unwisely—believe him to be best fitted to the post.

He may be removed without anyone being shocked or outraged, and the test of his fitness is avowedly the degree to which he ministers to the well-being of his countrymen. The origin of the Presidency is utility, and the standard by which it is judged is the same. But kingship has a quite different origin, and appeals to quite another set of considerations. The king does not originate in social utility, but in downright superstition. The primitive king is the primitive priest or medicine man. He is there in power because of his fancied connection with the tribal gods and ghosts that are believed to preside over tribal destiny. And injury to him, or disloyalty to him, is treason to the tribe because it is believed it will stop the rain falling, or the crops growing, or will lead to some other social or cosmical disaster. And even when social and intellectual developments separate the functions of the king and the priest, we still have the “sacred” character of the kingship retained. He must still be approached with something of the same ceremony and special obsequies with which the believer approaches his deity. The religious “though he slay me, yet will I trust him,” has its analogue in the conviction that personal loyalty is due to the king no matter what he is or what he does. All these things belong to the history of the word “king.” They are part of its unavoidable associations, and so long as we use the name, without being fully aware of its undesirable associations, so long are we apt to become the slave of a word instead of making the word our servant.

What is Religion * * *

It was considerations of this kind that prompted our comments on the use of the word “religion” by those who call themselves “Freethinkers.” Wherever that word has been used it has universally been taken to imply a belief in gods, souls, in the sum total of established superstitions in any tribe or people. It has meant that also in general language. The expression “religious wars,” “religious belief,” “religious mania,” etc., never means, in the absence of elaborate and careful explanation, anything other than beliefs in supernatural powers. And this being so it is simply impossible for a Freethinker to take a word that is so definitely “polarized,” to use an expression of Wendell Holmes, and apply it in quite a new connection without running the risk of both being misunderstood and of deceiving those who hear it. They who hear it used do not accept it in the new meaning that has been manufactured for it, but in the old one and the proper one. If I go into a church and tell the congregation that I believe in religion, there may be some doubts as to whether I believe in the Jewish or the Christian or some other religion, but none there will doubt that I believe in some sort of a God, some sort of a soul, and some sort of a hereafter. There is not the slightest doubt as to that. And those who grasp at this word certainly pay religious people a “violent compliment” in so hanging on to the term. “You must have some sort of a religion,” has been the orthodox contention. No man can be the best kind of husband, friend, or citizen, without a religion.

And what is it but accepting this perfectly idiotic generalization, when one turns round and says: "Oh, yes, I have a religion, but it is not yours"? Is it not infinitely better, infinitely more straightforward, and far better calculated to encourage independence of character and honesty of speech, if we meet the religious challenge plainly and bluntly and insist that love of home is not religion, love of family is not religion, love of country is not religion, love of the "true, the beautiful, the good," is not religion. Those are social products, they spring from the life of humanity and have not the remotest connection with any of the beliefs that from the earliest times have formed the core of the religions of the world.

* * *

The Significance of Words.

One of the most foolish of things is to deprecate a discussion because "it is only about words." As George Henry Lewes once asked, what should our disputes be about if they are not about words? In the world of thought words—real words—take the rank of things. And as thought hammers out words, so words in turn react on thought, and even coerce it. And for that reason, because there is so intimate a relation between language and thought, there are two things that are of primary importance. The first is to, so far as we can, use words that shall accurately express our meaning to ourselves. That will help to keep our own minds clear and prevent our falling victims to the thousand and one superstitions and false beliefs which surround us. And the second is to use words that will not mislead those who listen or who read. A Freethinker to a Freethinker might use such words as spiritual or religious without any great fear of misunderstanding. Both would recognize that the words were being used in a meaning out of the common, and thought would not be hampered or misled by it. But when a Freethinker uses such words to Christians, quite well aware that those to whom he speaks will understand them in a sense quite different from his own, he is coming about as near to deliberately misleading as it is possible for him to come. He is giving a surreptitious support to the very thing he proclaims himself eager to destroy.

Words and Things. * * *

The present position is a curious one. On the one side we have masses of people still giving credence to all sorts of superstitions from the belief in mascots to those operative in established forms of religion. And on the other side there are large numbers of others with sufficient keenness of mind to see the absurdity of religious beliefs, but give them a larger or smaller measure of support by their use of phrases which sanction the cruder forms of religions. In this way mental timidity finds refuge in an evasive phraseology, and popular superstition gathers strength from the assumed sanction of the better educated classes. A prominent scientist is reported as believing in a "God." It is true that the god believed in is nothing more than a mere abstraction, an assumed unknown quantity that does nothing whatever. But it is enough. It is used to strengthen the belief in another god who is not far removed from the Mumbo-Jumbo of an uncivilized African tribe. A prominent politician professes admiration for "true Christianity." He does not stop to explain—it would hardly pay to do so—that what he means by true Christianity is admiration for the character of Jesus Christ as a mere man, a struggling social reformer, whose sole aim was the improvement in human life in this world. But, again, it is enough. He is claimed as a Christian, advertised as a Christian, used to support established Christianity in all its forms, and—most significant fact of all—without any sort of protest on the part of either scientist or politician,

against being used to bolster up a system of thought of which he entirely disapproves. One suspects that had the same liberty been taken with these men's names with reference to an unpopular form of thought there would have followed a widely spread and well advertised repudiation. Against these evils the effective remedy is accuracy of speech. That will help each to see his thoughts clearly, and everyone is the better for that. I am not striving to make men slaves to phrases or servants to mere words. Words are of no value save so far as they express thought, but it is well they should express clear and strong thinking and not be used as a cover to encourage intellectual timidity or laziness. The reformer has always a hard task in fighting established ideas. These established ideas are incarnated in words and phrases which rouse a whole set of appropriate feelings whenever they are used. On the other hand the reformer is faced with the task of either establishing a new vocabulary or of getting new meanings attached to an old one. In either case the dice are loaded in favour of the orthodox and the conservative. These difficulties are inevitable and must be accepted as part of our task. But there is no reason why the difficulties should be made greater by those who should be our friends using words that play directly into the hands of our enemies.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

A Pulpit View of Christ.

THE Rev. J. E. Roberts, D.D., minister of Union Baptist Chapel, Manchester, expresses opinions which are held by the overwhelming majority of present-day preachers. Whether he is acquainted with the conclusions of modern Biblical criticism or not, he completely ignores them in his sermons, one of which appears in the *Christian World Pulpit* of January 31. This discourse is founded on John xiv. 6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me." Dr. Roberts must be aware that Biblical scholars generally regard John's Gospel as the least trustworthy record of what Jesus said and what he did during his brief life. Of course, as pastor of an eminently orthodox church and having no doubt been trained and equipped in an equally orthodox college himself, Dr. Roberts is bound to accept and use the Bible as God's Book, and naturally the Four Gospels are the holiest portions of the Holy Bible. He is in no sense or degree a Modernist, and for this we cannot justly blame him. In fact, we even praise him for his theological consistency. The sermon now before us, entitled "The Way of Christ," is a faithful exposition of the orthodox Church's conception of Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. The only fault we can find with the Christian Gospel is that it is not true; and there are sentences in Dr. Roberts's discourse which tacitly recognize that fault. As an example, take the following:—

This world is very far indeed from being yet the Father's world, but it is a great deal more of the Father's world than it was, say, two thousand years ago.

If Jesus had really been the way, the truth, and the life, if his own alleged prophecy of the result of his crucifixion had been true, this world would have become the Father's world long ago. It is even doubtful whether the world is morally any better now than it was two thousand years ago. In some respects it is decidedly worse. Europe could scarcely be in a more hopeless plight than it is just now.

Dr. Roberts is wholly mistaken when he asserts that "each individual man is seeking the Father for himself." There are hundreds of people in Manchester

who, not only do not seek the Father, but do not even believe in his existence, being thoroughgoing Atheists in belief and practice; and their number is steadily, if slowly, increasing. What is true of Manchester is true of the Western world in general. The Rev. Mr. Rattenbury, preaching at Kingsway Hall on a recent Sunday evening, affirmed that Mohammed and Buddha are dead but that Christ lives, and that Christianity, so far from being played out, is only beginning to be played in. One would like to know where Christianity is beginning to be played in, or what signs there are that Christ lives, whilst Mohammed and Buddha are dead. Other divines regretfully admit that the Church is visibly losing ground and that the world is without doubt turning away from Christ. Dr. Roberts exclaims: "The long white ribbon over the centuries is Christ." Surely the reverend gentleman could not seriously mean what he said. In explanation all he says is as follows:—

Some two thousand years ago a little company took that road, and ever since the Christian Church has been pursuing the way of Christ. It has grown to be a great multitude, and continually new groups have joined themselves to this advancing Church.

That language conveys an entirely false impression as to what the Church has been and done in the different ages of its history. It is utterly false to declare that "the long white ribbon over the centuries is Christ." "White" is the wrong adjective to employ, "red" being the only adjective applicable to the Church. Again and again the earth has been reddened by rivers of bloodshed in the name of Christ and for the glory of God. Preachers are not nearly so honest as was Dean Milman when they supply their hearers with sketches of ecclesiastical history. Such sketches are seldom, if ever, true to the facts. As a rule they are purely imaginary and of necessity misleading. Christ is by no means the way along which has ever come, or is ever likely to come, the world's redemption.

Equally mischievous is it to call Christ the Truth, as the Church does. Dr. Roberts asserts that "all truth is in him," but he omits to inform us what the Truth is. Assuming that the Gospel Jesus actually lived, it is absolutely certain that he made no contribution whatever to human knowledge. Practically all the sayings attributed to him in the Gospels were borrowed from pre-existing religious literature, and they have been traced to their original sources in older religions. In what rational sense, then, can the Gospel Jesus be called the Truth? That is not true of any one that has ever lived, and it is much less true of Jesus than of Confucius and Buddha. Furthermore, what theologians imagine to be the truth does not exist at all: it is simply a creation of their own fancy. The Gospel Jesus did not know, the truth concerning himself, with the result that he indulged in prophecies which were doomed to non-fulfilment. Dr. Roberts, ignoring that established fact, assures us that "abiding in him we are ever amazed at the new wonders he is ever showing to us." We do not doubt the reverend gentleman's sincerity, but why does he not tell us what some of those new wonders are? Does he claim to possess any knowledge which non-Christians do not and cannot possess? He is doubtless a stupendous believer; but belief is not knowledge. In the strength of his faith he calmly misrepresents history. Listen to this:—

Any stretch of the way of the Church is fine, whether it is the first century, or the tenth century, or the twentieth century. But we must not forget to consult the record of the early Church. The Church has always been travelling by the way of God.

What a monstrous travesty of Church history. The early Church spent most of its time in black-guarding the Pagans. Professor Gilbert Murray

informs us, in Wells's *Outline of History*, that several of the Church Fathers were the opposite of excellent and delightful characters. Coming to the tenth century, we must ask Dr. Roberts if he has read any impartial history of it? Has he read Dr. Samuel Green's *Handbook of Church History*, published by the Religious Tract Society in 1904, particularly pages 412-418 dealing with "The Dark Century and its Sequel"? If he has he ought to remember that Dr. Green quotes the following passage from the famous *Annals of Baronius*:—

The Tenth Century was an *iron* age, barren of all goodness; a *leaden* age, abounding in all wickedness; and a *dark* age, remarkable above all others for the scarcity of writers and men of learning.

It should be borne in mind that Baronius was not a Protestant, chronicling the worst things he could think of about the Papacy, but a zealous Catholic of the sixteenth century, who at the request of the Pope, composed his *Annals* in reply to the Protestant work entitled *Magdeburg Centuries*, which was an attack upon the Catholic Church. Dr. Green narrates not a few disgraceful events in proof of the accuracy of the description of the tenth century by Baronius. It was in the tenth century that the Church was governed by about seventy men by harlots. Face to face with such deplorable facts, has Dr. Roberts the temerity to characterize the tenth century as "a fine stretch of the way of the Church"? In the twentieth century the Church exerts less influence than it has ever done before. Its victorious power in the world is a thing of the past.

Even Dr. Roberts admits that the Church is by no means perfect. It needs regeneration which Christ can easily accomplish:—

He can transform his Church out of all knowledge. And as the Church pursues her pilgrim way, following the lead of Christ, acquiring new truth in him, receiving fresh life from him, so shall she become more and more a glorious Church, her errors shall be corrected, her divisions shall be healed, her influence shall be increased, and she shall fulfil her function as the body of Christ and the life of Christ.

If Christ is capable of effecting such a total transformation of the Church, the question inevitably arises why has he not done so long before now? He is described as the head of the Church, and we ask what was he doing in the tenth century when "horrible popes" were permitted to occupy St. Peter's chair, and the harlots held sway? The only possible answer is that he never existed at all, and that the Church is a wholly human institution, while pretending to be wholly Divine.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Colonel's Smile.

Liberty, a word without which all other words are vain.
—Ingersoll

Before Man made us citizens,
Great Nature made us man.—J. R. Lowell.

An advanced movement like our own can have no better champion than a leader with a keen sense of humour. No human emotion is so readily awakened as that of which laughter is the sign. If the cause be a great one, if the arguments barbed by wit and winged with laughter have any worth, they strike deeper and take firmer hold because of the humorous nature of the presentation.

In a theological discussion a laugh is a blessing, and a humorist like Robert Ingersoll was our benefactor. The artificial solemnity of the subject make a joke more jocund, as the duskiness of an Oriental maid give a double beauty to her pearls. The defenders of the Christian superstition have lost themselves in

trackless deserts of verbiage; but Ingersoll, the Voltaire of our day, challenged the defenders of Orthodoxy with a smile. There was no point of real importance upon which the Colonel did not touch wittily. There were few fallacies in that enormous tissue of falsehoods which he did not laughingly expose. Nowhere is he so happy as when he describes smilingly how religions grew out of the hot-beds of man's ignorance. Although a master of the lash, he used his whip caressingly. He did not cut his subject to ribbons like Swift, nor, like Voltaire, sting like a thousand wasps. Rather is he a Voltaire into whom has passed the geniality and suavity of Renan. It was a mellowed and transformed Voltaire, looking upon a busier world with the laughing eyes we know so well. That was one of the reasons why Ingersoll was so hated by Christians. Gravity was what they wanted, for they knew that opponents who treat religion seriously play their game for them.

Ingersoll's masterpiece *The Mistakes of Moses* is a Freethought classic, and still commands readers wherever the English language is spoken. A generation after his death there is life in the book. Such literary vitality is the surest test of his power, for it is rare that purely controversial matter is endowed so richly as to survive the purposes of the moment.

Ingersoll was a master of what Milton calls the "dazzling fence." His attacks on Orthodoxy were challenged over and over again by ministers of all denominations, and he drew Cardinal Manning and Gladstone into the arena. They were glad to get away from the witty American. In his discussion with Gladstone the English politician taunted Ingersoll with riding a horse without a bridle; with letting his ideas run away with him. Ingersoll retorted that this was better than riding the dead horse of Orthodoxy in a reverential calm. Huxley complimented Ingersoll on his victory. "Gladstone's attack on you," he wrote, "is one of the best things he has written. I don't think there is more than fifty per cent. more verbiage than is necessary, nor any sentence with more than two meanings."

Imagination and humour were the qualities in which Ingersoll surpassed the orators of his time, but his humour was of most unassailable quality. How wittily, for example, he summarizes the Bible account of the creation of woman. "Just imagine Omnipotence, with Adam's rib in his right hand, making up his mind whether to start the world with a blonde or a brunette." How good, too, is his jest that "with soap, baptism is a good thing." How fine is his joke that "The Pilgrim Fathers landed on Plymouth Rock; it would have been better for humanity if the Plymouth Rock had landed on the Pilgrim Fathers." There is more than humour in his remark, "Had such men as Robert Collyer and John Stuart Mill been present at the burning of Servetus they would have extinguished the flames with their tears. Had the Chicago Presbytery been there, they would have quietly turned their backs, solemnly divided their coat-tails, and warmed themselves."

Ingersoll was as witty in private life as on the platform. When a friend, finding a set of Voltaire's works in his library, said, "Pray, sir, what did this cost you?" the Colonel answered, "I believe it cost me the Governorship of Illinois." Speaking of a hot-headed acquaintance, he said: "Show him an egg, and instantly the air is full of feathers."

One of his best stories was that of an excitable Fenian, who was boasting of the condition of Ireland. The Irishman said: "We have got 60,000 armed men, ready to march at a moment's notice." "But," said the other man, "why don't they march?" "Why?" retorted the Irishman, "the police won't let them." When Ingersoll first met George Foote he was desirous

of paying the English Freethinker a compliment. At dinner Foote passed the oysters, and Ingersoll said, smiling, "Not like oysters, Foote! That's the only fault I can find in you." How excellent, too, was the Colonel's description of a banknote: "A greenback is no more money than a menu is a dinner." A woman preacher once called Ingersoll "an infidel dog," and he replied, "The lady would have felt annoyed had I referred to her as a Christian female of the same species." On one occasion the Colonel had, in a law case, to refer to a legal book, *Moses On the Law of Mandamus*, and the judge, thinking to be witty, asked, "Is that the same author that you refer to in your lecture, 'The Mistakes of Moses'?" "No, your Honour," promptly replied Ingersoll. "I am quoting from Moses on 'Mandamus,' but I lecture on Moses on God damn us."

A thorough humanitarian, Ingersoll's life is full of a fine and noble indignation directed against all that is cruel and despicable in religion. He did one most important piece of work. From thousands of minds he lifted the awful belief in eternal torment, and banished those degrading conceptions of deity which oppressed his countrymen. The Ingersoll we treasure in our hearts was a fine soldier as well as a very noble man, who fought in the Army of Liberty, and who never wavered in holding aloft the banner of Freethought against all the priests in the world. MIMNERMUS.

Tennyson and Swinburne on Religion.

II.

(Concluded from page 69.)

TENNYSON might comfort and convince others, but he knew only too well the weakness of his case. Mr. Fausset tells us that:—

Tennyson, as he aged, became in secret more morbidly afraid of personal annihilation, and publicly more loud-voiced in his conviction of survival. For belief in the survival of the spiritual, as the only true essence in a world of phenomenal matter, was not enough to satisfy him; he demanded a retention of the ego. Of this he could not convince himself by argument, nor did science come to his aid.

The question of a future life gradually displaced all other questions:—

It was the culmination of his lifelong egotism. He must and would survive. All his days of happiness and industry, the fame he had won, the poetry he had compassed, the beauty he had known, became no more than Dead Sea fruit if anywhere a faint doubt lurked unconquered, whispering that death was the end of his distinctive personality.....Without this certainty religion was no more than a mocking shadow and God himself a conjectural fiend.¹

Mr. Nicolson also notices Tennyson's terror of—

the dark and sinister lengths to which inquiry may lead; the dread that it may lead to doubts not merely but actually essential; the dread that it may lead to doubts as to the immortality of the soul. And with this realization comes the reaction, the familiar reaction, which in after years would lead Tennyson to rant and scream and asseverate.²

That Tennyson's conviction of a hereafter was not absolute, says Mr. Fausset—

is clear from the nervous inquiries he so constantly addressed to friends, acquaintances, and even simple rustics, and the gratitude he felt towards those whose faith reinforced his own creed.

¹ Fausset, *Tennyson—A Modern Portrait*, pp. 256-267.

² Nicolson, *Tennyson*, p. 97.

In his poem "Vastness," he asks :—
 What is it all if we all of us end but in being our own corpse-coffins at last,
 Swallowed in Vastness, lost in Silence, drown'd in the deeps of a meaningless past?

Tennyson, for his part, could not contemplate it without sheer terror. The Laureate, however, like his friend and mentor Carlyle had given up the ideas of hell and eternal punishment. In his poem "Despair" he thought it would do no harm to air his opinions upon this point, just to show the philosophers that he was not so obscurantist as they accused him of being. "Despair" tells of a man and his wife who are driven to Atheism through the teaching of eternal torment by the pastor whose ministrations they attended. They are represented as so filled with despair by the loss of their religion that they throw themselves into the sea, the wife being drowned and the man being rescued by the very minister whose ministration had driven him to Atheism. The rescued Atheist immediately begins to abuse the minister in good set terms, telling him :—
 You bawl'd the dark side of your faith and a God of eternal rage,
 Till you flung us back on ourselves, and the human heart and the Age.

But the public were not quite prepared for this. They were puzzled. Was their beloved and honoured poet going over to the infidel camp? "The religious world groaned as if under a benumbing torpedo shock," says Mr. Waugh :

It began to fear that the Tennyson of "In Memoriam" had gone down before the flowing tide of disbelief. The fear seems incredible, but it is none the less a matter of history.³

Tennyson soon set to work to put himself right with the religious public—to show that he was still on the side of the angels, which he did with his drama "The Promise of May." The villain of this piece is Philip Edgar, an Agnostic, who seduces Eva, a farmer's daughter, and persuades her to elope with him, the shock causing the farmer to become paralysed. Five years later Edgar turns up again at the farm. Time and a beard have so changed him that he is not recognized. He now proceeds to court Eva's other sister, Dora; but Eva turns up, and meeting Edgar, straightway dies of the shock. The play was produced on November 11, 1882. Everything had been done to ensure success. The company was a strong one, the pastoral scenery artistically painted, even the programme was a work of art. It was known that the play was to touch on Agnosticism, and a distinguished and expectant audience filled the theatre on the first night. No doubt many came to disapprove of any Atheistic sentiment, but they were little prepared for the crude Sunday-school melodrama they were about to witness. Mr. Waugh says :—

Its opening passages were delivered into an atmosphere of respectful and eager attention.... But before the end of the first act the fate of the play was decided. The first murmurs of disapproval grew into loud and continued derision, and the principal actor could with difficulty carry his part to an end. When the curtain fell "The Promise of May" was irretrievably ruined.⁴

Moncure Conway, in his *Autobiography*, says that when the girl says of her lover, "Yet I fear he is a Freethinker," it was "greeted on the first night with loud laughter." But worse was to follow, for on the fourth night the Marquis of Queensberry rose in the stalls and publicly protested against the travesty, declaring : "I am Agnostic, and I protest against Mr. Tennyson's gross caricature of our creed." The play was soon after withdrawn, and Tennyson remained silent and sulked for a year.

³ Arthur Waugh, *Alfred Tennyson*, p. 204.
⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

With Tennyson the prevailing mood, in spite of his success and honours, was that of melancholy. Under no circumstances would he have been a happy man. Mr. Nicolson gives us an amusing glimpse of the poet's daily trials :—

The day would have begun badly because the housemaid had removed a can of hot water which he had put out for his own shaving after breakfast. It would be close on eleven before the can had been retrieved, the maid rebuked, and a shaven but grumbling Laureate sent off, with one of those pretty little manuscript books she would make for him, to the summer-house. With a wistful sigh, Mrs. Tennyson would settle down again to the day's work. In ten minutes there he would be back in the doorway, nagging about that can. Patiently she would listen to it all, and in the end suggest for him a nice brisk walk upon the downs; the garden door would slam through the little house and set the mask of Dante wobbling against the red wall; from the garden would come the scream of the mowing machine, driven with injured fury across the lawn. Suddenly the round would stop; slowly, wistfully, Mrs. Tennyson would again lay down her pen. "About that can, Emily, you won't understand: everything in this house....."

It was Swinburne who broke the spell of Tennyson over the Victorians, at any rate so far as the younger generation was concerned. Mr. Nicolson was an undergraduate at Oxford when Swinburne's first volume of poems and ballads appeared, and experienced "a wave of shame at having ever admired anything so smug and insincere as the Laureate of the Victorians."

Swinburne's poetry was the negation of everything that Tennyson stood for. Tennyson advocated belief in God and immortality, Swinburne believed in neither. Tennyson was reactionary, and supported Church and Throne; Swinburne was revolutionary. In his "Marching Song" he speaks of :

These royalties rust-eaten,

.....
 These princelings with gauze winglets,
 That buzz in the air unfurled,
 These summer-swarming kinglets,
 These thin worms crowned and curled,
 That bask and blink and warm themselves about the world.

In the magnificent "Hymn of Man" he passes judgment on God :—

Thou art judged, O judge, and the sentence is gone forth against thee, O God.
 Thy slave that slept is awake; thy slave but slept for a span
 Yea, man, thy slave shall unmake thee, who made thee lord over man.

.....
 By the spirit he ruled as his slave is he slain who was mighty to slay,
 And the stone that is sealed on his grave he shall rise not and roll not away.

Of death, which held such terrors for Tennyson, Swinburne had no fear, and no desire for immortality. In his "Hymn to Proserpine" he declares :—
 There is no God found stronger than death, and death is a sleep.

Again, in his "Garden of Proserpine," he declares :
 That no life lives for ever,
 That dead men rise up never,
 That even the weariest river
 Winds somewhere safe to sea.

.....
 Only the sleep eternal
 In an eternal night.

Tennyson bore no love to Swinburne—it could hardly be expected of him. He always spoke of him as "Little Swinburne," or "Master Swinburne." When Tennyson gave readings from his poems he would often anticipate criticism by providing it himself. "There's a wonderful touch," he would say. "That's very tender!" "How beautiful that is!" Oscar Browning tells us how Tennyson read "Lucretius" to

him, and remarked: "What a mess little Swinburne would have made of this." Browning says:—

He did not at this time like Swinburne, nor did Swinburne like him; indeed, he was always laughing at him. But Tennyson admitted that Swinburne could write "French verse"!⁵

Yes, and he could write English verse too—verse that eclipsed a great deal of Tennyson's poetry.

W. MANN.

War and Religion.

It is somewhat amusing to see the frantic efforts being made in some quarters to convert the Christian Church to Christian principles, to wake it up to a sense of its duties—if it has any duties outside of its State-established conventionalities and routine—and to put some "pep" into its rheumatic old bones by the application of currents of electricity and magnetism in the form of ideas and ideals based upon the principles of humanity and common-sense.

The idea of abolishing war is one such ideal, and great efforts are being made to convert the Church to Pacifism and the Abolition of War. How far this effort will be successful remains to be seen. But, whether the Church as a body will be converted or not, there is a growing and ever-increasing number of men and women who are determined that war shall be no more, or at all events shall receive no sanction or support of any kind from them.

It seems to me, however, that if war and its abolition were considered more from a humanitarian and economic point of view and less from a religious standpoint, there would be more hope of a speedy attainment of that ideal. War has always been mixed up with religion. The Church, even to the present day, sanctions war and bestows its blessings upon the murderous paraphernalia of war and upon the men who use them, and designates this or that war as "holy" and "righteous." If the abolition of war were left to the Church to bring about I doubt very much if it would ever be accomplished.

Those enthusiastic pacifists who by propaganda are spreading over Europe and other countries the sensible ideas of no more war, and the individual and collective determination to have nothing to do with war, would, I think, be better advised to base their arguments and their appeal upon a purely humanitarian and economic foundation, and not upon Christianity or any other religion. To be truly international such propaganda should be carried out on principles common to all mankind, irrespective of religions and creeds. If it be urged solely or principally on the grounds of Christianity or Christlike ideals, it will scarcely appeal to Mohammedans, Buddhists, or Hindus. In the event of the nominally Christian nations alone abolishing war and armaments they would be left open to attack by overpowering millions of non-Christian races.

After all, it is doubtful if the founder of Christianity was such a pacifist and Prince of Peace as some would claim him to be. To make a scourge of rope, for instance, and drive the traders out of the Temple, instead of gently and peaceably persuading them to clear out of their own accord was scarcely the act of an out-and-out pacifist. And did not he himself say that he came not to bring peace but a sword into the world? And when his disciples were anticipating a conflict with the authorities, he told them to sell their garments and buy swords, if they had none.

It seems a waste of time and energy to try to galvanize into life and activity the sleepy and decrepit old

Church of an almost effete religion. The Christian Church has had an innings of close upon 2,000 years in which to justify itself and its existence, but it has never even attempted to abolish war. It has had its birth, its growth, and the attainment of its zenith of power; and now, in accordance with Nature's laws, applicable alike to religions, to nations, and to popular deities, it is in a state of decline and decay. Why, then, endeavour to put new wine into such an old bottle?

If there is any fundamental principle left in the Christian religion after divesting it of dogma, mysticism, supernaturalism, and superstition, it is that of brotherly peace and amity among all mankind, the principle embodied in the advice to do unto others as we would they should do unto ourselves. And that maxim is not a monopoly of the Christian religion, but was propounded long before Christ was born. The appeal, therefore, to the peoples of all nations and all creeds to abolish war were better made on the grounds of humanity, rationalism, and economy, and not on religion of any kind.

A. W. MALCOLMSON.

A Pagan at the Shrine.

ONE of these days in the distant future, when Mr. Barber has converted his Aunt Muriel, and the Douglas scheme of Economics affords me greater leisure than I at present enjoy, I intend to write the story of my pious past. The work will run into about eighteen volumes, and should command a ready sale amongst *Daily Herald* readers! For the present, however, I will content myself with jotting down a few reminiscences of the time when I endeavoured—with what success you shall judge—to conform to the ethical and spiritual requirements of a Little Bethel.

Although normally one of the flock, I was in reality a wolf in sheep's clothing, for my association with the little soul-saving community had no object higher than that of being near to a certain sweet young lady who sang—and sang uncommonly well—in the choir. To her hand I aspired, and for her sake I patronized Providence three times every Sunday and several times during the week; in fact, Providence must have regarded me as quite a nuisance in this respect.

I feel a little pride in saying that even in those days I did not take at all kindly to the soul-saving business; the innate cussedness of my nature forbade me embracing a scheme of salvation whereby the majority of my fellows were to be consigned to perdition for a mere difference of opinion. There is something in healthy human nature that rebels against a doctrine at once so irrational and barbarous, and, fortunately for me, the inoculation came too late—it did not take! There is assuredly the wisdom of the serpent in the religious policy of catching 'em young. Its the only way.

It was, perhaps, unfortunate for the little Bethel that my promotion to the dignity and status of a Sunday-school teacher coincided with my introduction to Paine's *Age of Reason*; but so it was, and so efficacious did it prove that the little Bethel knew peace no more. There was an enemy within the gate; a pagan at the shrine; and henceforth the placid air was rent with schisms and abominations.

With the ardour and innocence of extreme youth I thought I had but to speak and the world would be convinced. I thought—for such is the folly and vanity of youth—that they would be grateful to me for pointing out to them the errors of their ways. I therefore seized the first opportunity that occurred and mounted the rostrum to deputize for the pious saint whose attendance had—providentially, I thought—been postponed owing to ill-health.

⁵ *Empire Review*, November 1923.

You can picture the scene, gentle reader. A very nervous and immature youth, for the first time occupying a public platform, appealing to a small congerie of ignorant evangelists, with long faces and fossilized brains, and urging them to abandon the faith of their fathers and embark on the turbulent seas of Free-thought. Ingersoll, Paine, Holyoake, and Omar Khayyam from a mission-hall platform! Surely high heaven must have been shaken to its foundations. Surely if ever there was a time when the finger of God might have been stretched forth to silence His traducers it was then. But nothing happened; I continued to the end, wound up with a quotation from G. W. Foote, and resumed my seat in stony silence. Then the storm broke!

I had given them many shocks before then. At a concert in aid of the old folk party, on being asked to recite, I once stunned and shocked them with the following:—

THE DEBUTANTE.

A yard of silk, a piece of lace,
A wisp of tulle to give it grace,
A flower—put where flowers go,
A skirt knee-high, a back waist-low,
One shoulder-strap, no thought of sleeve;
If she should sneeze—
Good morning, Eye!

On this occasion the silence that followed was deadly except for the laugh of a fat man, but the laugh instantly froze on his lips when his wife fixed him (or, rather, transfixed him) with her eagle eye!

On yet another occasion a deal of scandal was caused through the chance remark of a youngster that he liked me to take their class because I told them about *Joe Beckett!*

It will be seen by the foregoing that I was hardly a success as a purveyor of piety, and after my effort to convert the congregation (like the Deity) "my doom was said."

How I finally escaped and found my way into the clearer air of Free-thought, and brought the choir-girl with me, must be left for another time.

VINCENT J. HANDS.

Acid Drops.

A report on the condition of the Free Churches in Stepney, Poplar, Bethnal Green and Shoreditch states that during the past twenty years thirty Free Churches have been closed through lack of support. The report states that out of a population of 633,902 only 40,000 attend a place of worship. The report says that Mr. Charrington gets a big crowd every Sunday in the Mile End Road, but it is explained that he gives a free tea to 700 people every Sunday and makes it a condition that they shall stay to the service. No service, no tea. Probably if he gave a dinner as well he might get a still larger congregation. We have no doubt that Mr. Charrington cites the presence of the crowd as evidence of the hunger of the people for the gospel.

Professor Oswald Flamus (with photograph) is announced in the daily papers as Germany's foremost designer, who has completed designs for a submarine mine-layer able to carry 1,000 mines. We await the name—and photograph—of the man (professors ineligible) capable of laying one truth in the heads of common people. A glance at the pound, dollar, franc, and mark ought to convince the fattest-headed fools (professors certainly included) that laying mines is less profitable than poultry.

We have all heard of the many things that have been "materialized" at Spiritualistic meetings. At Hastings recently some spirits managed to reverse the process. A collection of personal articles were handed to a clairvoyant medium for purposes of reading. After the ex-

periment a lady found that her £20 gold ring was missing. We suggest to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle that some spirit with a taste for jewellery has dematerialized the ring for use in the next world. From a Spiritualist point of view we presume that that proper procedure would be to get the spirit of some departed policeman to hunt up the erring one and restore the ring. But instead of this we see that the aid of the Hastings police have been called in, and they "are working along a line which it is believed will lead to the recovery of the missing article." That is very prosaic, and could have been done in connection with any other meeting. It is a pity that the "spirits" so obstinately decline to do anything of a useful character

Lenin, who once died twice daily, is now dead. Miss Ethel Snowden, who prophesied years ago that he would die, is the journalistic Cassandra and also obituary writer for Lenin in the *Evening News*. We believe also that she used to sing at P.S.A. meetings; yet we cannot help thinking that she deserves great credit for assiduously pointing out what ordinary people take for granted as a consequence of being born. History will have the final word about Napoleon's sacrifice of 2,000,000 men in his desire to be a despot, the 2,000,000 men sacrificed in the late war, and the number of dead laid at the door of Lenin by what is called an evening newspaper, which, when it is not a draper's catalogue, advertises itself as a timetable.

Christians in this country have well maintained their historic reputation for untruthfulness when dealing with Russia. And the fact of those in control being Free-thinkers has enabled them to attack their enemies in this country by saddling unbelief with all the offences that have been imputed to the Bolsheviks. All the time those in touch with the facts have warned the British public as to the true state of affairs—including a responsible official of the Baptist Church—Mr. Rushbrooks, who has paid repeated visits to Russia. Now we have Mr. E. F. Wise, British Adviser to the Russian trade mission, who, as reported in the *Manchester Guardian*, says:—

Within the last twelve months he had himself been into dozens of Russian churches and had attended many services in them both on week-days and Sundays. As for holy pictures the churches were filled with them, and they could be seen in virtually every Russian home one entered. The attitude of the Soviet Government was that religion was a matter for a man's conscience, and the State neither supported nor discouraged it. Many of the leading Communists were Atheists, but they did not attempt to impose their own views on the rest of the population. What the government did forbid was the carrying on of revolutionary activities under the name of religion.

It hardly needed precise evidence to any clear-minded person to realize that the great mass of the Russian people, soaked as they have been for centuries in the most degrading superstition, are still Christian. And no government in Russia could live for long that set itself deliberately to suppress the most fanatical and the most unreasoning superstition that could obsess the human mind. All the same, we do not suppose that the most precise contradiction of Christian lies will stop their being told. Free-thinkers, at least, will not need further evidence than they possess in their own experience of the truth of that proposition

The *Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, organ of the Apostleship of Prayer, delivers itself as follows in the November, 1923, issue:—

EVIL OF IMPORTED LITERATURE.

It is very deeply to be regretted that the quantity of questionable literature in the shape of newspapers and magazines imported into this country (Ireland) from across the Channel, so far from lessening, seems to be on the increase. Hence the need of a well-organized and well-worked campaign for the spread of good Irish Catholic literature is more urgent now than ever. These foreign magazines and newspapers, even though in many cases apparently harmless, are the product of a purely materialistic Press, which practically ignores God and

religion, and sets before the reader rules of conduct and ideals that are neither Catholic nor even Christian. Thus they insensibly undermine and ultimately destroy the true Catholic spirit, to say nothing of the fervent piety and strong vigorous faith that have hitherto been so marked a characteristic of our ancient Catholic race. Worse still, such reading gives a distaste and a disrelish for true Catholic literature, such as is to be found in our Irish Catholic religious magazines, and leads their readers to begrudge even the few pence in the month which they devote to the procuring of sound Catholic literature.

Here is a sample of the true Catholic literature taken from the same pages as the above extract, under the heading of "Thanksgivings," run on the lines of the recently closed prayer-shop:—

SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL FAVOURS.

A fine day for the races. Grateful thanks for all blessings spiritual and temporal of the past year.
285 letters of thanksgiving.

SUCCESS IN MACHINE-GUN PRACTICE.

DEAR REV. FATHER,—I hope you will find space in your little *Messenger* to publish my grateful thanks to the Sacred Heart and Our Lady for the help they have given me in my work. I fired a machine-gun course a few weeks ago, and the first course was a complete failure. However, I never lost trust in the Sacred Heart, and kept on repeating the ejaculation, "Sacred Heart of Jesus! I place my trust in Thee," and at the next trial I obtained a splendid score.—AN UNWORTHY CLIENT OF THE SACRED HEART.

SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL FAVOURS.

Great temporal favour received on promise of publication (South Africa). "Our hurling team won two matches on promise of publication" (Offaly).
191 letters of thanksgiving.

From the literary side:—

But all was not ended yet; she was still to follow that long line of blood-drops, *His* blood-drops, up to the mount of Calvary, to watch her Son die there on a felon's gibbet, to have Him laid cold and lifeless in her arms, to seal Him up, and her heart along with Him, in the sepulchre of stone.

From grave to gay:—

Why does the chicken cross the road?—Because the road can't cross the chicken.

There is more of this kind of mental nourishment; but, if the above is the kind of literature the Irish want to keep in Ireland, the blind can see the reason for the barbarians wanting to keep out magazines and newspapers. We mistrust education in the mouth of the priest, and in the twentieth century here is our case stated by them.

At a Catholic school where one little girl pleaded as an excuse for not doing her home-work that she had had a bath, the following indication of the religious mind was displayed after the story of Simon the Tanner:—"Who knows what a tanner is?" asked the Sister. One bright girl, in this age of cloth shoes with wooden heels, promptly replied, "Sixpence, Sister." Even trade evolution cuts against the grain of pious education. And what is the voice calling to Samuel, when one can hear a concert in New York by wireless?

In the *Daily News* the reader may see an account headed "Making Mustard Gas." In this occupation, to quote from the log book, "one of the men had come in with his eyes useless, and two other men were just as bad, one having to be led home." On the same page there appear headings: (1) "To Court on a Stretcher," (2) "Pinned under Motor," (3) "Wife and Son Wounded," (4) "Bus Smash; Two Injured." For statements such as those made by the Canon he needs better editing and a wiser selection of surrounding matter, and his yearning for the unattainable is only equalled by the extent of his knowledge of the unknowable. Let this page of the *Daily News* speak to the Canon; we have nothing to add except that he can wallow in pious verbiage without the vindictiveness of a Dean Inge.

Honour where honour is due. For the sake of posterity it was recorded in the pages of the *Freethinker*, A.D. 1921,

that the names of the inventors of mustard gas were Dr. Levenstein and Professor A. G. Green. Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! And be it known also that, following the great peace, these two benefactors of mankind were claiming in respect of the invention, what time one and a quarter million human beings had a free choice between the dole and drowning.

We do not know exactly what lies behind it, but we take it as evidence that we are not wide of the mark when we continually warn Freethinkers that the Churches are making a determined effort to gain a stronger foothold in the schools. What we refer to is the visit of a deputation from the Edinburgh Education authority to the Edinburgh Presbytery asking for "active co-operation on the subject of religious instruction in the schools." What was asked for was visitors to each school so that the church and school could be linked up together in the work of training children. The deputation was introduced by the Rev. J. Fergusson, and we may take it that the parsons have been behind the move. But when the Education Authority ask for the co-operation of the Churches to train the children as customers for the Churches we may take it that these latter will not refuse the invitation. And when that takes place we may have Mr. Sidney Webb, who has already asked for more State help for the Catholic schools, urging the other members of the Government to treat the churches here as they are treated in Scotland.

As we have so often said, in this matter the only ones we can depend upon are ourselves. Christians—with rare exceptions—will always take whatever advantage they can to get State help and State patronage for their religion. The only genuine cure for this is to go on making Freethinkers. Every new convert is a new help for the advancement of our Cause, and only when religion has been placed before the mass of the people in its proper perspective—as a mere speculation at best, and a survival of savagery at worst, will genuine justice be meted out to Freethinkers and believers alike.

In two half-columns of words by Mr. T. R. Glover, in the *Daily News*, we gather that an American professor is to substitute the word "policeman" for "officer" in an up-to-date New Testament. Mr. T. R. Glover, with much profundity, depth of scholarship, width of acumen, and height of intelligence, writes of this humdrum innovation as follows: "If you drag in policeman instead of 'officer' is it the emotional equivalent of the Greek word?" Rising to the occasion, we emphatically state that, *le response est un citron*, and for what value the answer is to human society, the American professor is at liberty to substitute "special constable" or "generalissimo fascisimo."

How to Help.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Special.

WE have many times called attention to the boycott on this paper and also to the obstacles placed by certain newsagents—under Christian pressure, we believe—to people getting copies even when they are ordered. We have a plan in mind by which we hope to weaken this unfair attack, even if we cannot break it down entirely. But we cannot put this plan into operation without the co-operation of our regular readers. We are, therefore, asking their aid.

What we wish each *London* reader to do is this. Send us the name and address of the agent who supplies his copy, and if possible let us know how many copies he takes weekly. Then we can set to work with the plan we intend trying, and if the result is satisfactory the same plan can be extended to other places.

At present we are only dealing with London. But if the plan is to be worked even in London, all who can do so must send us the name of their newsagent. If a mere handful send us the information we require we can do little. It is a plan to which all may lend a hand without expense or undue trouble to themselves. We ought not to sit down quietly under the Christian boycott.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

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. BLACK.—Thanks for cutting. We already had a paragraph written on the subject of your letter when it came to hand.

C. P. BOOKER.—Pleased to hear from so old a Freethinker as yourself. We cannot say what the fortunes of the Bill for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws will be next time it comes before Parliament, but all that can be done in the circumstances to get it favourably considered will be done.

J. MUIR.—Your name is already familiar to us, and we are pleased to meet you on a more intimate footing. Books are being sent.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—J. Simmons, 2s.; J. Muir, 3s.

SINE CERE.—Thanks for note. As you surmise the information is useful. It is well to know these things even though they are not made public at the time. You appear to have collected a number of cases that are of great psychological interest.

W. MILLS.—You have quite misunderstood our meaning. We did not mean that you did not write simply enough for people to understand, but that the question of the inerrancy of the Bible is to-day so hopelessly out of date that we could not spare space for lengthy letters championing it.

JOHN PRITCHARD (Arkansas).—You are not the first who has found his way from the pulpit to Freethought, and we congratulate you on having completed the pilgrimage. What is specially interesting in your case is your analysis of your feelings, which makes plain that the same emotions which did duty in gambling did duty subsequently in religion and was interpreted as the power of God. Misunderstanding of normal feelings have a great deal to do with the perpetuation of religion, and most are too ignorant to analyse themselves as you have done.

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

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

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

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all commun-

cations 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.

A Social evening has been arranged by the Executive of the N.S.S. at the Rooms of the Food Reform Association, 2, Furnival Street, Holborn, on Friday, February 22, at 6.30. The Social is open to all members of the N.S.S. and their friends, and admission will be by ticket only. These may be obtained of the Secretary, Miss Vance, at the Society's offices, 62, Farringdon Street, E.C.4. As the number of tickets will be strictly limited, those desirous of attending should write at once. There will be music, dancing, and probably one or two brief speeches.

At the beginning of the year we pointed out for the benefit of all members of the National Secular Society that their subscriptions become due on January 1. We hear from the Secretary that there are still a number of subscriptions outstanding, and we should be glad to hear that these have been paid up. At the same time we gave a broad hint to non-members, but sympathizers, that it was impossible for the Society to carry on its work with only the nominal amount due for membership fees to depend upon. This year the Executive has mapped out work that will run into a considerable sum of money, and we look to those who believe in the work of the Society to provide the sinews of war. Propaganda is to-day more costly than ever it was before, and we must ask our friends to remember this fact. Members and non-members must bear this in mind—the former when remitting their annual subscriptions, the latter as soon as they please. But the Society's work must go on, and it cannot be done without expenditure.

Mr. R. H. Rosetti will to-day (February 10) lecture in the Brassworkers Hall, 10, Lionel Street, Birmingham, on "Nature, Man, and God." The lecture commences at 7. Admission is free, and we hope to hear that the hall was crowded. The Branch is holding its Annual Dinner on the evening of the 9th, at the Chapel Tavern, and Mr. Rosetti will be present as the guest of the evening.

Nottingham friends will please note that Mr. Vincent J. Hands will be speaking at the Carrington Adult School to-day (February 10) on "The Twilight of the Gods." The meeting will be held in the morning at 10.30, the lecture will be followed by discussion. We hear excellent accounts of Mr. Hands' lectures, and we hope that he will be well supported by the local friends.

The night has a thousand eyes,
And the day, but one;
Yet the light of the bright world dies
With the dying sun!

The mind has a thousand eyes,
And the heart but one;
Yet the light of the bright world dies
When love is done!

—F. W. Bourdillon.

Christianity and the Mediæval Inquisition.

II.

(Concluded from page 76.)

A FEW words in regard to the methods employed may not be without their usefulness and interest. In the attempt on the part of the Inquisitor to detect heresy nothing was left to chance. Everything possible was brought forward so that the official representative of God could discover the inner thought of the accused by whatever means, clean or otherwise, that lay within his power. The accused had to prove his innocence, and not the accuser to prove guilt, and the most trifling acts of the accused were extensively elaborated for the sole purpose of trying to saddle the prisoner with the crime of heresy if that was at all possible. The penalties were not confined to the heretics directly: the Inquisition went so far as to punish the relatives of previous heretics, so determined was it to extirpate the crime of heresy. Age, sex, position were nothing in the Inquisitors' eyes, if the least association with heresy, either immediate or remote, could be found, penalties were unhesitatingly inflicted.

The evidence required by the Inquisition was not very exacting. Nor were the witnesses required to be very precise in the evidence they gave. Twenty years of age was the official age at which witnesses were allowed to give evidence; but the Inquisitors were not particular: their function was to discover and punish heresy: the method was secondary. On one occasion a boy of ten years of age was allowed to give evidence against a family of sixty persons. If a witness wished to withdraw his evidence accusing a person of heresy, that was not permitted; but if a witness wished to withdraw his evidence proving that the accused was not guilty of heresy that was allowed. And if the latter kind of witness could be persuaded to reverse his evidence, then that increased the pleasure of the Inquisitors. The tortures applied seldom failed to compel witnesses to testify as the Inquisitors wished; the fear of the rack, and other examples of Christian religious instruments were very effective in extracting the evidence desired by the Inquisitors. It was an almost foregone conclusion that once a witness was called upon to testify, his evidence would be as the Inquisitors demanded quite regardless of truth. This condition of things led to the most serious malpractices and vices. It destroyed every trace of freedom, and the secular branch of society became infected with this hideous and intolerable distortion of evidence.

The Inquisition had the apparent grace to allow advocates to plead for the accused; but, needless to say, if the advocates showed the least sympathy with the prisoner they were liable to be brought before the Inquisitors for heresy also. In the circumstances such pleadings were rare, because the risk run was too great; and, besides, the Inquisitors had the power of depriving the lawyers of their papers, so making the trial a perfect farce. If the accused refused to plead, this was regarded as quite sufficient evidence to condemn him; if he pleaded he was seldom acquitted: the utmost that he could hope for was that his case might be deferred, but never dismissed, as the Inquisition never admitted innocence in heresy. It was quite immaterial whether or not the accused pleaded, the Inquisitors could always find methods to impose any sentence they wished. If they were determined to punish any particular person, nothing could save him from the power and cruelty of his Inquisitorial oppressors.

In general, the sentences passed by the Holy In-

quisition were of three kinds, and of three grades in point of severity (of course, this has nothing to do with punishments inflicted for the purposes of extracting evidence of heresy). The first kind was simple sentence of prayer, fasting, and so on. The second was the compulsory wearing of yellow crosses, which were sewn on to the clothing as evidence that the wearer had been guilty of heresy. Additional penalties were imposed if the wearing was neglected. But this neglect was not frequent, for the eye of the Inquisition was ubiquitous, and defaulters were quickly discovered and punished. The punishments in the third grade were more severe and consisted of various periods of imprisonment, ranging from months to years and for life. As we might expect, the condition of prison life were of the most horrible kind, death coming as a happy release to the unfortunate victim of Inquisitorial displeasure.

Human ingenuity was exercised to the utmost in devising unique forms of torture, the grossest forms of cruelty and torture were practised by the representatives of the religion of meekness. Even if we admit the justification for the existence of the Holy Inquisitions for the purpose of suppressing heresy, nothing can justify the cruelties and the enormities to which it stooped. Age or sex made no difference; heresy had to be suppressed at all costs and the unfortunate suspects and victims treated with the utmost rigour of which the horrible institution was capable.

One of the most revolting cases of cruelty was perpetuated in 1234, when a dying woman, who had confessed her heresy to the Bishop of Toulouse, was taken on her bed and burned. It is recorded that the Bishop returned thanks to God and went home from the bloody pyre and ate his dinner with marked satisfaction. Later, about the year 1239, no less than 180 Cathari were executed for their heretical opinions. In May, 1242, at the small town of Montauban no less than 250 persons were sentenced for heresy in one week. In such cases as this the penances usually took the form of pilgrimages; and so numerous did these pilgrimages become that many small districts were almost depopulated. In 1241 the castle of Mont Segur was taken by the Inquisitors after a siege, and in consequence no fewer than 205 persons were burned. A still more revolting case was when, in 1239, the Inquisition desecrated the remains of a woman who had been buried for years, simply on the grounds that some of her relations had been guilty of heresy.

In Northern France things were equally wicked and cruel. Of this part of France we find it stated that in 1239 no less than 183 Manichæans were burned outside the city of Rheims in the presence of 100,000 persons and seventeen Bishops. It is recorded that in 1393 no fewer than 150 persons were put to the stake by an Inquisitor named Boral.

In Italy similar conditions obtained. One striking case is that of a man who was a heretic, although he professed to be a devout Catholic. After his death many miracles were recorded about him. A dispute about his heresy lasted nearly thirty-two years, after which the Pope decreed that the charges of heresy were sufficiently proved, and in consequence his bones should be burned. In the same year, at Piacenza, it is said that as many as twenty-eight wagon loads of human beings were publicly burned. Later, in the 15th century, an over-zealous Inquisition burned twenty-two relapsed heretics, and, of course, confiscated their property.

In passing to the Netherlands, we are informed that in the year 1546 the victims of the Inquisitorial cruelty were no less than 30,000, while it is said that during the reign of Charles the Fifth, the appalling number, of at least 50,000 persons, suffered death at the hands

of the Inquisitors. It is recorder, too, that Charles's son, Philip, who succeeded him, was guilty of killing at least half this number at the request of the Inquisitors, under whose influence and for whose gratification he perpetuated these horrors. So horrible was the work of the Inquisition in the Netherlands that the reaction produced the well-known revolt; the inhabitants declaring that it was just as well to perish fighting for their liberty with sword in hand, as to be cruelly butchered by the Inquisition. As the strife developed in seriousness, equally strong repressive measures were taken, and in 1567 the Duke of Alva, accompanied by an army of Spanish soldiers, arrived at Brussels. Here he commenced a reign of unmitigated cruelty and horror. So effective was his villainous work that 18,000 persons are said to have been executed in the space of six years.

The Inquisition showed a pronounced antipathy towards witches. These unfortunate creatures suffered greatly at their hands. In dealing with the Middle Ages we must not forget the place that magic and witchcraft held in life. So soon as an unfortunate woman was convicted of witchcraft she could expect any punishment ranging from the simplest penances to the most inhuman tortures. The entire Church was obsessed with the idea that witchcraft was one of its greatest enemies; and the alleged necromancers were shown no mercy. The subject of witchcraft is a very extensive one, and all it is proposed to do here is to give a few examples of cruelties as practised by the Holy Office.

In Italy, in 1485, an Inquisitor burned forty-one persons for witchcraft in one district. Later, in Germany, in 1484, forty-eight persons were burned in a small district. All kinds of the most incredible charges were brought forward and the unhappy victims had but small chance of escaping conviction.

In 1510 the Holy Inquisition burned 140 persons at Brescia, and in 1514 it burned 300 at Como. In the valley district of Valcamonica no less than 5,000 were accused of witchcraft, and out of that number seventy were burned, and an equal number were imprisoned. Witches were compelled to admit that the cold spring of 1586 was caused by their magic, and in consequence 118 women and two men were burned by the Archbishop of Treves. The city of Treves has been regarded as exceeding other cities in the number of atrocities, 7,000 persons being killed by order of the Inquisition. Over and above these horrors we find that during the 16th century as many as 500 persons were burned at Geneva in the space of three months; at Bamberg, 600; at Wurzburg, 900; and, it is said, that at least 400 were burned at Toulouse in one vast *auto-da-fé*. On the authority of a 16th century Inquisitor, by name, Params, we find that the Inquisition had burned no less than 30,000 persons from the year 1404! Such figures, and such evidence as this, speak for themselves, and they stand as a lasting disgrace and dishonour to the religious system that caused them.

A. MITCHELL.

I strove with none, for none was worth my strife,
Nature I loved, and next to Nature Art;
I warmed both hands before the fire of life;
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

Various the roads of life; in one
All terminate, one lonely way.
We go; and Is he gone?
Is all our best friends say.

Death stands above me, whispering low
I know not what into my ear;
Of his strange language all I know
Is there is not a word of fear.

—Walter Savage Landor.

A Novelist's Poetry.

UNDER the simple title of *Cherry-Stones*,¹ Mr. Eden Phillpots has collected some fifty perfect little gems of musical and homely thought that will leave an impression in the mind of all readers. These poems do not come within Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity," but they do approximate more nearly to that of Bagshot, whose opinion was that "Poetry should be memorable and emphatic, intense, and soon over."

Where Mr. Thomas Hardy uses silver and grey, our poet chooses spring colours; there is not the depth or penetration characteristic of the author who smites us with problems of Fate's rascality, but they have the charm and freshness of a spring breeze across the hills. "March" is given eighteen lines; here are six of them:—

There is gold for the whin,
There is snow for the thorn,
And cuckoo is calling again.
The brown innets begin,
The lark's in the mou,
The ice has gone out of the rain.

This last line has a directness and comprehensiveness that might be taken as a model by many modern poets who, striving to be obscure—succeed. In twelve lines entitled "Diagnosis," we are warned against judging a man by his face; and in eight lines called "Wedded," we see Browning's thrush brought to earth:—

An amber-breasted thrush upon a thorn
Made glad the wind-swept lea,
With mellow melody,
To hearten buds and stars and little leaves newborn.
He sang and loved and sang, that throstle blest,
Till from the ivy-tod,
His wife cried, "Oh, my God,
Do stop your noise and help with this here dratted nest!"

Mr. Phillpots never takes his feet off the ground, and for all who do not have too high a view of the sapience of those who order our affairs "The Houses" will appeal. Even rooks will be building houses soon for houseless lovers to look at—and sigh. It is this simple tenacity to those simple things overlooked by many that gives all these poems their human significance. All the poems are short; in all of them there is something to be said, and it was worth saying. Mr. Phillpots does not invoke the name of God, nor does he dogmatize. He is content to describe life as a cat and man as a mouse, and in this manner he differs from those who rave about—

That great green sunset God shall make three days after I die.

* * * * *

Above the ruins of the stars my soul shall sit in state.

This is the heroic style, the journalist letting himself go. It is the style of those who look at things standing on their heads. It is Mr. G. K. Chesterton's, in a poem appropriately entitled "Lost." Readers of Mr. Phillpots' little volume *Cherry-Stones* will welcome its sweet sanity and Greek restraint. We conclude with one of the fifty gems. We should like to quote them all, but we give thanks to the novelist-poet who has that gift left in the box of Pandora for that great wonder in history, Man. It is entitled "Hope":—

No heart yet broke for sorrow of another;
No heart yet quailed before another's fears:
No man yet born may understand his brother,
Nor taste the bitter of his sister's tears.
So keep we sane, through limits of our feeling,
And little power to give and comprehend;
But floods of deeper sympathy are stealing
Into man's spirit; this is not the end.
Reason foretells a fellowship supernal
To knit the great unborn in golden ties;
For love's undying, and from love eternal
Compassion moulds our children's destinies.

¹ *Cherry-Stones* By Eden Phillpots. 3s. 6d. net. Grant Richards, Ltd., St. Martiu's Street, W.C.

Love, compassion, sympathy, all these may form the golden key that will unlock the door of life's problems. With a head like ice and a heart like fire, mankind may hope to give a value to life, in the assurance that gnosis of man is more necessary to him than gnosis of God, for whom praise or blame cannot effect.

WILLIAM REPTON.

The Stuff They Are Made Of.

II.

(Concluded from p. 77.)

I PASS to Isaiah, chapter vi. Here we have angels of lesser rank than the messenger type. The quantity of wing power possessed by these seem to me to be superfluous to their needs. The name of the type is Seraphim. Each possessed six wings—three pairs. One pair covered the face, one pair covered the feet, and one pair was used when flying. Are you thinking that my subject is being treated too flippantly? Perhaps you are, but the accounts of the fabulous beings now being dealt with cannot be treated in a serious vein. Not by me, at any rate, and the thought comes, through comparison with the winged creatures of the earth, that the Seraphim of the celestial regions must have a particularly unhappy time during the moulting season. They seem to be so considerably over-winged.

So much for Seraphim. Let us now turn to Ezekiel, chapters i. and x. Hans Anderson—I mean Ezekiel—gives the day, the month, and the year of his visions of God, as also the name of the reigning king. This data is introduced as part of the evidence that anything that Ezekiel states shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, as they say in the courts when we are summoned for our rates. Well, if you believe Ezekiel you ought really to believe Mahomed, Swedenborg, the late Rev. H. J. Prince of the Agapemonites, the Mormon plate expert Smith and other lunatics—pardon, I mean inspired beings—for the evidences of their visions are equally as good as Ezekiel's. The inspired Ezekiel describes still another kind of angel, and the name of this is Cherubim. I should classify it under a different name, I think. Instead of Cherubim, a more appropriate title would be Bosh! Listen for a moment to the voice of the Biblical mad-hatter Ezekiel, but study a cure first for mental paralysis.

And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire unfolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire.

Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance, they had the likeness of a man.

And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings.

And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass.

And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings.

And their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward.

As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.

Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another and two covered their bodies.

And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go they went; and they turned not when they went.

As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning.

And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.

Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces.

The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel.

When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went.

As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four.

And when the living creatures went the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up.

Whithersoever the spirit was to go they went, thither was their spirit to go; and their wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.

When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.

I've quoted more than enough of this, I think, but before we wheel Ezekiel out I would like to say that in chapter x. of the book under review there is a similar description of Cherubim, except that the faces are not alike, another kind of face being substituted for the ox's. Ezekiel must have had a bad memory, for he tells us that the cherubim had faces *exactly* like those seen by him by the river Chebar. I hate a man with a memory like that. He confuses one so. Perhaps, however, the fault lies with the translator. Well, you've heard this plain, unvarnished tale of Ezekiel's. Does not the clear, simple language appeal to every mind? What a treat is in store for those who in this life have believed. After the last trump has sounded and the faithful are gathered together in Heaven, think of the ecstasy unutterable that shall be felt when the angelic aspirants gaze upon a real man-faced, lion-faced, ox-faced, eagle-faced, multiple-winged, calf-footed cherub, especially if at work on the wheel business. Earthly circuses are all very well, but the celestial one is the thing, without doubt. The author of *Gulliver's Travels* presents his Lilliputians and his Brobdingnagians; the pseudonymous Baron Munchausen trots out his miraculous puppets; the Hindu fakir performs his startling feats of jugglery. But what of these trifles; such things are indeed trivial and unreal. For the real, turn to the Bible and Ezekiel. Here is a book worthy of belief. Is it not God's word?

One word ere I pass on. I have heard some Secularists proclaim that most Christians nowadays no longer believe many of the stories—let us not say lies—that are to be found in the Old Testament. Stories of a frightful hell, for instance. My opinion is that the wish is father to the thought, and that they deceive themselves. My experience in everyday life teaches me that the masses—and the others need not be considered—fully believe in the existence of a hell of the brimstone and fire description. The Salvation Army is not the only denomination that preaches it, either. Take hell—a fearful hell—away, and the power of the Church will shrink like a pricked bladder. The fear of punishment after death is a tremendous factor in most people's lives. The Christian strives to reach heaven. Why? Not so much because it would be glorious to be perpetually singing around the throne, but because he wants to avoid a worse torture in the

bottomless pit. As with hell, so it is with angels and everything else in the Bible. The Christian usually accepts its teachings without question. Just a few here and there venture to doubt and try to view its teachings by the light of reason. These are the potential Agnostics and Atheists.

In the tenth chapter of Daniel we read of an angel whose appearance differs from the ordinary earth-visiting angel of the earlier Old Testament. It says:—

"His body was like a beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude."

This needs little comment. Some sceptics, however, may object that the description is just the least bit overdrawn. Daniel ought to have been contented with the lightning, without saying anything about the eyes like lamps of fire. This particular angel evidently had a very powerful voice. It was so powerful that he could have shouted down the whole of the supporters of one side at a Cup Final. There's a well-paid job waiting for him if he comes earthwards again. I hope Daniel had taken the precaution to have a good supply of cotton wool for his ears, as well as a pair of tinted spectacles. He must have needed them both.

So much for the Old Testament angels. Let us glance at the New Testament. Matthew mentions an angel's announcement of the coming of the birth of Jesus. Luke mentions an angel's appearance before the shepherds. Matthew also speaks of angels ministering to Jesus in the wilderness. We also find that the Devil calls for our second notice. This celebrated stunt artist performed as great a miracle as any Jesus himself did. In fact, he reached the pinnacle of fame, so to speak, when he took Jesus up and set him down upon a pinnacle of the temple. Some miracle that! If you really want the idea to soak in, just imagine someone picking you up in Farringdon Street and planking you on the top of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Later on Matthew and Mark speak of Christ's resurrection, and state that an angel was seen by Mary Magdalen. Luke and John, however, say there were two angels. Now, an important event like this ought to have nothing contradictory about it. It is apt to muddle the person desirous of being numbered amongst the faithful. As a Rationalist, I certainly want to know how the believer reconciles the different accounts. Which shall be discarded?

Angels are twice mentioned in the Acts of the Apostle, and the next accounts are to be found in the Revelation of St. John the Divine. Here we have the celestial circus business all over again, with many additions. Any attempt to get sense out of Revelation is utterly impossible. For grotesqueness and absurdity turn to this book, but don't expect to find anything else in it. One sample will suffice, and this illustrates the ancient belief in the theory of a flat earth.

"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree."

This is food only for fatheads. Puerile pap for piffing parsons to dispense to dunderheads. Let me hasten. I have not touched the Apocryphal books. They are rejected even by the Christians. Our forefathers saw nothing incongruous in them, though. Whilst the Old Testament says nothing about the creation of the angels, the suppressed Book of Jubilees and the Slavonic Enoch describes such a creation. The references to angels in the New Testament are frequent in the Apocalypse. There are good ones and bad ones. Ranks are implied—archangels, for instance. Powers and principalities, thrones and

dominions. We have names—Gabriel, for example. For evil angels Satana, Beelzebub, and Abaddon—which last name, by the way, does not sound like an inapt title.

To sum up: We have angels that can fly.

Angels to whom ladders are a seeming necessity.

Angels that eat, drink, and speak.

Six-winged angels—Seraphim.

Four-headed angels—Cherubim.

Firework display angels, and others including evil angels.

Can we, do we believe all this? When the spot light of reason is turned on what do we see? In this great and clear light we discover what? Chimera! Intangible nothings! The vapourous imaginings of disordered minds! The ravings of men whom, if living in our day, would be deemed worthy of incarceration in lunatic asylums. They would get there, too. Here endeth the lesson!

ARTHUR ROGERSON.

Correspondence.

SPONTANEOUS GENERATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In reply to Mr. E. Anderson, who points out a "serious error" in my *Modern Materialism*; I wish to state that I do not dogmatically deny that spontaneous generation occurs to-day, as it undoubtedly has done in the past. I only say that the evidence adduced by Dr. Bastian is not conclusive. I have no bias in the matter at all, if spontaneous generation occurs now, as in the past, I should be pleased with the proof of it.

Dr. Bastian's experiments appear very convincing to those who are not acquainted with the other side; for instance, with the elaborate series of experiments of Professor Tyndall, who showed that it was not even necessary to keep things in a vacuum to preserve them, if they are placed in a tube plugged with sterilized cotton-wool they will keep indefinitely. I have no need to read Dr. Bastian's book again, I am quite aware of his argument as to the number of "blown" tins which occur, but they are not so numerous as he would make out. If many "blown" tins occurred among the highly priced game and tongue, no dealer would speculate in them.

Some germs have a high resisting power to heat, some seeds, with a thick integument, may even be boiled for a time without injury; and it seems to me that in the case of these "blown" tins the germs being in the centre of the meat, or fish, have not been killed. As for the "meat paste" which Mr. Anderson speaks of as "hermetically sealed" and yet becomes tainted, it is usually only protected with a rubber band, and is not hermetically sealed at all. In fact, the marvel is that it is preserved at all. The great majority of biologists have been unconvinced by Dr. Bastian's evidence, and the general verdict is the Scotch one of "not proven."

W. MANN.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

SIR,—Mr. Clodd's definition of religion is unsatisfactory. But your implied one is also unworkable. You imply that a religion is not a religion unless it includes at least one god. But Buddhism has no god. The *Freethinker* tells us so about once a month. Yet nearly everyone calls Buddhism a religion. What else can one call it. Confucius said nothing of gods except to tell people to ignore them. Yet nearly everyone calls Confucianism a religion. And nearly everyone would call your Atheism your religion, especially as you always discuss it in the perfectly religious spirit of cocksure dogmatism and attribution of mean motives to all who do not agree with you.

Now let me try a definition of religion, as people use the word when they are not engaged in controversy about it.

Most people want answers to four questions:—

- (1). How did the world come here?
- (2). Where will I go when I die?

(3). What acts are right?

(4). Why should I do right rather than wrong?

Any set of answers to those four questions is a religion. If it is not a religion, can you find any other name for it? It *must* have a name. The idea, though a compound one, is an extremely common compound, both in thought, speech, and writing. I find it not only in my own mind, but in every mind I have ever been intimate with. And, so far as I know, neither English nor any other language has provided any other word for it except "religion" and its equivalents. Call it X, or Mongrib, or Ponov if you like, and if you can induce people to use a new word, but a word we *must* have, and until you provide one I, at any rate, intend to use "religion." C. HARPUR.

A CORRECTION.

SIR,—We shall be glad if readers will substitute *Direction* for *Directors* in our letter published in your last issue. In our note we wrote *Direction*, and we should like to make this quite clear, as we are more interested in the journey of mankind through the ages than any person or persons.

WILLIAM REPTON.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON JANUARY 31.

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

Minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed.

New members were received for Birmingham, Finsbury Park, North London, South London, Newcastle, Plymouth, and Preston Branches and the Parent Society.

The Secretary reported that in consequence, probably, of the state of the labour market, the response to the application for the renewal of annual subscriptions had not been so prompt as usual.

The report of the Propagandist Committee was received, and their recommendation that, subject to financial conditions, Mr. Whitehead be engaged for a provincial tour on the same lines as last year, was adopted, and the Secretary instructed to correspond with branches as to suitable dates.

Correspondence with Birmingham, Plymouth, and Newcastle was dealt with, and further applications for the questionnaire from would-be speakers were reported as having been received and replied to.

The success of the Annual Dinner was also formally reported, and that a Social Evening would be held on February 22, at the rooms of the Food Reform Company in Furnival Street, Holborn.

The Executive learned with deep regret of the demise of Mr. James Partridge, of Birmingham, the oldest N.S.S. Branch Secretary, and a vote of condolence with Mrs. Partridge was carried unanimously.

It was reported that Mr. Cohen's article on the "Peculiar People," reprinted as a tract under the title, was now ready for circulation, and instructions were given for arrangements to be made to hold two Sunday afternoon meetings at South Place.

The meeting then closed.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary.*

Obituary.

I deeply regret to have to record the death, at the age of 79, of an old member of the Freethought Movement. Mr. N. C. Himmel was brought up in the religion of his fathers, but came under the dominating influence of Charles Bradlaugh in early middle life. He became known among a large circle of friends as a keen upholder of Freethought principles, and so continued to the end of a long and active life. He faced with great endurance the sharp trials of his last illness, the prospect of death leaving him undaunted and unafraid. His remains were cremated at Golders Green, on Saturday, February 2, 1924. "Man must endure his going hence, even as his coming hither. Ripeness is all."—P. S. W.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.—INDOOR.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (160 Great Portland Street, W.): 7.30, Mr. Joseph H. Van Biene, "Chloroform." The Discussion Circle meets every Thursday at 8, 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, Mr. C. Batchelor, "Religion now and under Communism." Open Discussion.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W.9): 7, Mr. W. B. Wingate, "Lucretius and Milton (a Parallel and a Contrast)."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): 7, Mr. F. P. Corrigan, "The Lunatic and the Ladle."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, Dr. Marion Phillips, "Imagination and Political Ideals."

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Upton Labour Party Hall, 84 Plashet Road, Upton Park, E.13): 7, Mr. F. Shaller, "Galileo, a Victim of the Great Lying Church."

OUTDOOR.

FINSBURY PARK.—11.15, Mr. F. P. Corrigan, a Lecture.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Marble Arch): 3, Mr. Keeling, a Lecture; and Wednesday at 8.

COUNTRY.—INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Brassworkers' Hall, 70 Lionel Street): 7, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, "Nature, Man, and God."

BOLTON SECULARIST SOCIETY (Socialist Club, 16 Wood Street): 2.15, Mr. William McLellan, "Mistakes of Socialists."

GLASGOW BRANCH N.S.S. (Shop Assistant's Hall, 297 Argyle Street): 6.30, Mr. Figgins, "Socialism and Religion." (Silver Collection.)

LEEDS BRANCH N.S.S. (Youngman's Restaurant, Lowerhead Row): 7, Mr. Bert Nell, "Poetry."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Dr. A. S. Hurn, M.A., D.Litt., "A Secular Church."

NOTTINGHAM (Carrington Adult School): 10, Mr. Vincent J. Hands, "The Twilight of the Gods." Discussion.

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

STOCKPORT BRANCH N.S.S.—Secular Society Night (Central Hall, Lower Hillgate): 6.45, Mr. George Whitehead, "Christianity and Labour." Music by Miss Dora Leech and Madame Gilfoyre. Will all friends note.

ACTIVE, wiry, middle-aged gentleman, Freethinker, ex-Lieutenant, three years' Army (Home Service) during the war, Commandant P/W Camp; seven years Admiralty Office; eleven years Purser West African steamers; one year on the Coast, paymaster, overseer, storekeeper; accustomed to accounts, correspondence; educated Brighton Grammar School; fond of travel, writing, sketching; unable to secure permanent situation since demobilization, and fed up with unemployment, is willing, for a consideration, to risk life on dangerous commission abroad, tropics preferred.—A. W. M., 2 New Street, Hadfield Town, Chesterfield.

ONE day last week a fellow-passenger sat reading a book. His reading was interrupted by little bursts of laughter. Eventually, with a loud guffaw, he slapped the book down on his knee. "Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, "but this book is too funny for anything!" He had been reading *THE EVERLASTING GEMS*. Endless merriment awaits you if you ask *THE PIONEER PRESS*, 61 Farringdon Street, E.C.4, to send you a copy. 3s. 6d. post free.

TOUCHING A SPRING is a favourite device of mystery novelists. We are not novelists, there is no mystery about our motive for advertising here, and the only spring we want to touch is the glad season now before you. You will want a new suit and we have prepared—for you—the handsomest pattern sets we have ever sent out. They will be accompanied by everything essential for ensuring that perfect fit by post which we *guarantee* and by *proofs* of the satisfaction we have given others near you. Remember every inch of the cloths we shall show you is fresh and new for the fresh new season and write us a postcard now for any of the following: *Gents' AA to H Book, suits from 48s.*; *Gents' I to N Book, suits from 93s.*; or our *Ladies' Costume and Fashion Book, costumes from 49s. 6d.* Address your enquiry to *MACCONNELL & MABE*, New Street, Bakewell, Derbyshire.

Where to Obtain the "Freethinker."

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

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