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Views and Opinions.

God and Man.

It is extremely probable that if God exists he will regard the Atheist as one of his best friends. For the Atheist is one who gives him no trouble; he neither slanders him nor wearies him with fulsome praises that would sicken an ordinary man or woman. The professed believer does both, and does them with an intensity directly proportionate to the fervency of his faith. He takes all his personal troubles to the Lord and worries him about little Johnny’s ailments and his own business cares. He declares that he feels the better for having poured out his soul to the Lord, and in this he may be speaking the truth. But what the Lord’s opinions are on the matter we have no means of ascertaining. And when things go wrong with the world there are never wanting those who will see in it the Lord’s doing. During the war there were scores of parsons—who certainly know as much of the Lord’s mind as anyone—who were convinced that the war had been sent by God to discipline the peoples of Europe. For many centuries plagues, pestilences, and other disasters were universally held by believers to be God’s handiwork. Even to-day deaths from lightning, shipwrecks due to storms, etc., are officially declared to be acts of God, and should there be no traceable cause of a person’s death, that also is placed to the credit of the deity. One way and another the believer in God saddles his fetish with most of the ghastly and unpleasant things in the world. It is the Atheist who leaves God’s character alone; he declines to say that God is responsible for all this blasting, burning, wrecking, and blighting until he has some better evidence than the believer brings forward. Even gods are entitled to a fair trial, and should not be condemned without adequate evidence.

* * *

Awkward for the “Coo.”

For some months England has been suffering the ravages of foot-and-mouth disease. Some thousands of cattle have been slaughtered, and several millions have been paid by the government to the farmers in the shape of compensation. The county of Cheshire appears to have suffered as badly as anywhere, and a few weeks ago—when it was thought that the epidemic

was nearing its close—special prayers were drawn up and read in the Churches. The Lord’s attention was thus drawn officially to the existence of the plague, and he was politely requested to stop it. But the advice we have so often given, namely, that when God is asked to do things he should be told that if they are not done his churches will be closed for a stipulated period, was not followed, with the consequence that the Lord did nothing. At any rate, the plague went on as cheerfully as ever, it is still going on, and I am indebted to the *Daily Mail* for the information that at Davenham Church the following hymn—written when the same disease was prevalent some sixty years ago—was sung:—

In our homesteads, in our valleys,
There our pasture lands give peace.
Through the Goschen of Thine Israel
Bid the grievous murrain cease.

Now unless that hymn represents the most deliberate humbug, it plainly expresses the conviction that the removal of the foot-and-mouth disease is quite an affair of God’s. It rests with him to give peace to the valleys and to banish disease from the herds. The pain suffered by thousands of dumb animals is due to his action. It is not the Atheist who says so, it is the Christian who affirms it. It is he who says that the infecting of these animals and their cure is a matter that rests with God. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. If it were shown that a man had deliberately infected these cattle he would be criminally prosecuted. If it were demonstrated that a man had in his possession a cure for the disease but declined to give the public the benefit of his knowledge he would be denounced as a social monster unfit to live in decent society. But the hymn implies both things. It says that God can, if he will, cure the animals. It implies that God sends the disease for some purpose of his own. If there is any meaning in words, the believer says this much. God has need to be protected against his friends.

* * *

All for our Good.

In the case of suffering borne by human beings the popular plea is that it is disciplinary. Disease follows our ill-deeds, and is sent for our benefit. Of course, that is not true. There is not the slightest logical connection between disease and personal merit. One writer puts it:—

When we come to examine into shipwreck and disaster we find they are due to man’s non-observance of laws or to a want of care. Nature is full of grace as well as law. She has her severity and her retributions for violated laws and rewards for obedience. That much is quite clear.

But, emphatically, that is not quite clear. It is not at all clear that man is rewarded for “observing” Nature’s laws and punished for disobeying them. In fact, it is clear that you can in no wise disobey a natural law. A law of Nature is observed sequence; and the sequence follows whatever happens. A man who jumps from the roof of a house and breaks his neck is not disobeying natural law; that is beyond his

power. It is because of natural law that his neck is broken. And what is more important, so far as the Theist is concerned, this sequence occurs in absolute independence of ethical consideration. If I am stooping over the parapet of the house to rescue a child from a burning room and overbalance I shall fall; while a burglar of surer balance may easily escape from a pursuing policeman. Between personal merit and the consequences of actions there is in nature not the slightest observable connection. Morality, the relation of reward to merit, exists between human beings, but it does not exist in nature at large. The believer in God simply invents facts in order to rationalize a ridiculous and unnecessary hypothesis.

* * *

A Demoralizing Belief.

Do Christians really believe, when they sing the hymn above quoted, that God has the power to stop the ravages of the foot-and-mouth disease? If they do not, why do they say they do? If they do believe it, what can they think of a God who can, but won't? Of course, in a Christian country we are apt to think only of the cash value of the animals killed and the loss to their human owners. But others may be disposed to give a passing thought to the sufferings of the animals themselves. For it cannot be pretended that the complaint is sent them for *their* moral improvement. They are not made the better for it. They simply suffer and die. And these people inform the world that their God could cure them if he would, but he won't—and meanwhile they will continue to praise him for his goodness. I do not know which to marvel at most, the stupidity or the servility implied in such a position. There are tribes of primitive peoples who when their local deities fail to do what they are expected to do straightway depose them and set up a new God in their place. There is common sense and manliness about that. But there is neither one nor the other in praising God for doing what men would be ashamed to do, and continuing to worship where it is impossible to feel rational respect.

* * *

Leave God Out.

It would really be better to leave God out of it altogether. In this respect the Atheist may be taken as doing God—if there be one—a service. He is the only one who gives God no trouble and who does not saddle him with the responsibility for all the disasters of Nature. He does not say when a ship goes down in a storm at sea and all hands are lost, this is an act of God. He does not call it an act of God when a hundred thousand people are killed in an earthquake. He declines to charge God almighty with this wholesale homicide. It is his friends who blackguard him in this fashion by making him responsible for all the ills that flesh is heir to. The Atheist calls Nature neither good nor bad. He neither praises nor blames natural forces, for he knows they are insensible to either. Good and bad are veritably no more than aspects of cosmic phenomena in relation to sentient existence, and have no meaning and no application in any other direction. But if we believed otherwise, if we believed that Nature was the expression of some almighty intelligent force, the outlook would then be black indeed. We should have to believe that we are in the grip of an overruling intelligence completely indifferent to human suffering, with standards of judgment completely alien to human notions of right and wrong, and that we are, no matter what we may do, ultimately powerless. Of course, evil, pain, suffering occur whether we believe they are sent from God or not, but we are relieved of the feeling that we are the sport of a power that mocks our efforts and is callous to our suffering. There remains, as Huxley

said, the fight of natural forces *versus* human intelligence; and great though our occasional reverses may be, there is an abiding inspiration in the knowledge of the many victories already won, with their promise of greater triumphs ahead.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

“Does Prayer Change Things?”

SUCH is the title of a remarkable sermon which is published in the *Christian World Pulpit* of February 7, and which was delivered by the Rev. W. E. Burnett, D.D., a bishop in the American Methodist Episcopal Church. The text is Luke xviii. 1: “Men ought always to pray and not to faint.” The parable that follows is familiar to all. There was a judge in a certain city who neither feared God nor regarded man. In the same city there lived a widow who appealed to the judge, saying, “Avenge me of mine adversaries.” For a time the judge turned a deaf ear to her cry; but she kept on repeating it so often that in the end he relented and avenged her, saying, “Though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me I will avenge her, lest she wear me out by her continual coming.” Applying that imaginary story, Jesus said: “Hear what the unrighteous judge saith. And shall not God avenge his elect, which cry to him day and night, and he is long-suffering over them? I say unto you, that he will avenge them speedily. Howbeit when the Son of Man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?” Dr. Burnett calls that “a wonderfully heartening and beautiful story”; but to us the story is depressing and the very opposite of beautiful. The preacher admits, however, that “it does not clear up all the questions that a thoughtful Christian might ask concerning prayer, some of which it does not even touch.” We agree with Dr. Burnett, but we go further still and assert that the parable does not settle one of the multitude of questions which arise concerning prayer. We are also of opinion that the moral tone of this parable is anything but high. It represents God as acting from precisely the same motive as that which impelled the Atheistic judge to grant justice to the poor widow. God also holds his hand, though his people cry to him day and night; and is he not represented here as answering his people's prayers to get rid of them? To prevent himself from being worn out by their continual crying to him he gratifies their desires.

Let us now endeavour to get at the preacher's real point of view. To his mind the widow's case differs essentially from that of God's elect. He says:—

The favour the widow asked was completely in the judge's power to bestow, while she was helpless, in herself, to gain her end. It was a case of absolute dependence upon another's will. But in most of the matters in which we are keenly interested we have some power to bring the desired results to pass; they are not completely in the hands of someone else to be bestowed upon us as a favour. It is a simple fact that God does not keep most matters within his own control to anything like the extent that the unjust judge had this widow's welfare in his keeping. He has bestowed various powers upon his children, and the exercise of these powers is calculated to bring large advantage. Even wicked persons accomplish great results because they co-operate with God to the extent of using energetically the powers he has given them. So some perplexity arises when we ask where, then, is the line to be drawn between faith in God and dependence upon ourselves. For what things specifically ought we to pray, and for what things is it in the Divine programme that we hustle for ourselves?

Here lies exposed the crux of the perplexity about prayer, and it knocks off the foundation of any theory

concerning it. Naturally, Dr. Burnett tries hard to convince us that this and other puzzling questions about prayer can be effectively answered, if we approach them in the right way.

We will now watch the special pleader actually at work. Dr. Burnett displays considerable caution in his choice of words, and is, on the whole, much fairer in his treatment of opponents than most of his brethren.. With his statement of the problem we can find no fault whatever. It is simply this:—

Is there anything real in prayer? Or shall we discard it as a superstition, and instead of talking into the empty heavens depend upon ourselves? Is there Somebody or Something up there who responds when we pray, or is the only thing that comes back the mocking echo of our foolish words?

In dealing with unbelievers the preacher makes use of no new argument and resort to no fresh method. They regard prayer as a waste of time and energy, and he naïvely asks them if they have given up the belief in God, and explain the Universe in terms of mechanism. He characterizes them as worldly-minded, and falsely accuses them of holding the view that the Universe is an amazing contrivance that just somehow got itself made and set itself going. No intelligent unbeliever has ever held such a silly theory of the Universe as that, and certainly Dr. Burnett did not find it in any work by an accredited man of science.

At this point Dr. Burnett exhibits the essential weakness of the usual argument for belief in God. Addressing an imaginary Atheist, he says:—

You stand for the sheer materiality of the world! But here you are, thinking about it all; there is at least that much mind in the scheme of things! You have a mind; that's how you study this big machine. Did this self-starting machine create mind too, yours and mine? The very act of thinking—thinking that there is no God—disproves your assertion.

How wonderfully convincing that ancient argument must sound in the ears of a believing congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan; and yet it is as empty as any drum, and fallacious to its very core. Mind is treated in it as an entity brought into being by some master-mind which existed alone before the Universe began to be. According to scientific teaching no such entity ever existed at all. Mind is a metaphysical and theological invention, absolutely incapable of scientific verification. Thoughts, ideas, conceptions, images are all brain products, brain being merely a thinking machine. If you trace the evolution of psychical activity from the simplest and least complex animals all the way up to man, you will discover that the quantity and quality of the thinking are always in exact proportion to the quantity and quality of the brain. That beautiful canary bird in a cage in front of you has but little brain, but he thinks and expresses himself in sweetest song. That he possesses no gift of speech is no proof whatever that he cannot indulge in psychical processes. We have got into the bad habit of calling all living beings that cannot express themselves in spoken words as dumb animals; but in reality they are not dumb, all possessing their own method of self-expression. An intelligent dog has numerous ways of making known his wishes, wants, misery, and happiness to the person wrongly named his master or mistress. Now the only difference between a man and his dog-friend is merely one of degree, not of nature or kind. Man occupies the highest rung in the evolutionary ladder as yet reached, but his pre-eminence is solely due to his possession of a large and educated brain. He stands highest in the scale psychically. No sooner is his brain injured, becomes diseased, or his nervous system is shattered than he loses his pre-eminence and becomes a most pitiable object.

Dr. Burnett rejects the scientific interpretation of

the Universe, and particularly of man. He calls the Universe a machine, but in the same sense as a locomotive engine is called a machine. He says:—

That was the older way of thinking about it. A machine must have a maker. That was how we used to think about God. But all those terms seem too coarse nowadays. God is not outside of it, he is inside of it. He is its life, its animating impulse, its indwelling intelligence. So, then, God indwells the world. The beauty of the world is the indwelling God. The intelligence of man is an expression of the indwelling mind. The goodness of man is the expression of the indwelling God. Now that is beautiful, and, I think, true.

To us, on the contrary, it is naked and unashamed sentimentality. No argument of any kind is employed. That to which we are treated is sheer dogmatism. If the God described by the preacher really existed he would have every reason to feel profoundly ashamed of himself. This question inevitably forces itself upon every thoughtful person, namely, if the goodness of man is the expression of the indwelling God, of whose indwelling is the wickedness of man an expression? And we know that in some people wickedness reigns to such an extent as to totally exclude all goodness. This aspect of the case Dr. Burnett leaves severely alone.

Even on the assumption that his conceptions of man and God are true, we utterly fail to see where and how prayer can possibly come in.

J. T. LLOYD.

(To be Concluded.)

Was Shakespeare a Catholic?

There is no darkness but ignorance.—*Shakespeare.*

Be neither saint nor sophist led, but be a man.—*Matthew Arnold.*

The kind wise words that fall from years that fall—
Hope thou not much, and fear thou not at all.—

Swinburne.

ORTHODOX folk repeat like parrots the statement that Shakespeare was a Christian. They wish to claim the greatest of all authors as one of themselves, and from time to time publish volumes of special pleading which would have brought blushes to the face of Serjeant Buzfuz. Lengthy disquisitions, as numerous as "quills upon the fretful porcupine," have been published to demonstrate that Shakespeare was a Puritan, a Spiritualist, an Evangelical Christian, a Churchman, and other things beyond count. Baconians, and other lunatics, dispute Shakespeare's claim to his own books. Other surprising people allege that the Jewish Jehovah inspired the plays. One of the most interesting is Father Bowden's *The Religion of Shakespeare*, in which the author seeks to show that Shakespeare was a Catholic.

The book is a work by a scholar, but it is a monument of misdirected energy; and criticism, sharp as Shylock's knife, soon pricks Father Bowden's bright bubble. Shakespearean commentators are adapts at bringing startling meanings from the master's text, as a conjurer brings eggs, birds, rabbits, and Union Jacks from a hat. But this attempt to prove the author of *Hamlet* a Roman Catholic is no more solid ground than most, and does not leave the reader gasping with amazement.

Father Bowden asks us to notice how Shakespeare employs Catholic vestments and ritual as symbols of "things, high, pure, and true." Why, think you? Because he makes wily old Henry IV say that he kept his:—

Presence, like a robe pontifical,
Ne'er seen but wondered at.

This is a phrase which as much recalls non-Christian as Catholic sacerdotal pomp. Unbelievers employ such similes daily. The monasteries were destroyed, it is alleged, through avarice. Therefore Timon's tirades against gold must be Shakespeare's protest against the avaricious spirit of the Reformation. Nay, is it not clenched by the detail that "this yellow slave," as the master says, "will knit and break religions?"

Then, again, when it is said that Desdemona could persuade Othello:—

To renounce his baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin.

It is suggested that Othello is represented as a Catholic. Naturally, for he is supposed to live in a Catholic country, although the passage does not demonstrate it. We could pile up such trifling inferences from the poet's text. A handful of customary, every-day expressions put dramatically into various mouths, such as "God rest all Christian souls," of Juliet's talkative nurse, are cited as solemn proof that Shakespeare was a Catholic. One special morsel remains. Portia says playfully to her lover:—

Aye, but I fear you speak upon the rack,
When men enforced do speak anything.

Father Bowden actually asks: "Is not this an expression of contemptuous disbelief in all the evidence upon which so many pretended Papist conspirators suffered the death of traitors?" Where cannot such an eye of faith spy Catholicism? He would find it embedded in the *Analects of Confucius*, or *Alice in Wonderland*. Even the pretty conceit of Lorenzo about the stars

Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubim,

must also be a proof. The solemn Father Bowden says it was the tradition of fifteen centuries. Why need Shakespeare have been a Catholic, therefore, because he employs, as a poet, a tradition common to Christian and Pagan for hundreds of years. Bah!

I had rather be a dog and bay the moon
Than such a Roman.

Father Bowden is on firmer ground and far happier when he is dealing with Shakespeare's relations. He reminds us that Mary Arden, the poet's mother, came of a Catholic family. The probability is that she was herself a Catholic, but there is no evidence either way. Shakespeare's father is not so doubtful. He was a member of the Stratford Corporation during the reign of Elizabeth, and must have conformed to the Protestant religion. The net result seems that young Shakespeare was brought up under a Catholic mother and a Protestant father.

If, however, Shakespeare's childhood was passed under such influences, the more clearly is emphasized Shakespeare's revolt from the Catholic Church. Shakespeare was so ignorant of Catholic ritual that he makes Juliet ask the friar if she shall come "at evening mass." No Catholic could have made this mistake. Moreover, Shakespeare's poems and plays are full of eloquent passages directed against the celibate ideals of the Catholic Church. In a wonderful line in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he pictured the forsaken sisterhood of the cloister:—

Chanting faint hymns to the cold, fruitless moon.

Elsewhere, in a more Rabelaisian mood, he refers to the fitness of "the nun's lips and the friar's mouth," and other equally significant passages might be quoted. Shakespeare's own view of life was not ascetic nor religious. Throughout he seems to say, with Sir Toby Belch:—

Dost thou think because thou art virtuous
There shall be no more cakes and ale?

Shakespeare was known to be irreligious, and the epitaph on Mrs. Hall, Shakespeare's eldest daughter,

clearly implies that his life had not been one of piety:—

Witty above her sexe, but that's not all,
Wise to salvation was good Mistris Hall;
Something of Shakespeare was in that, but this
Wholly of Him with whom she's now in bliss.

She derives from her father her powers of wit, but none of the influences which conduced to her salvation.

The fatal objection to Father Bowden's contention is that neither Elizabeth nor James could have publicly favoured Shakespeare if he were a Roman Catholic. Nor would the Pembroke have given him their patronage. Father Bowden, however, does make one point. He shows clearly that Shakespeare was no Puritan, no conventional Reformation Protestant. For this he deserves our thanks.

In an age when religious wars and schisms were convulsing Europe, and in England the Reformed religion was at death-blows with the Old Faith, it is remarkable that Shakespeare turned his back on both. Not, observe, from hostility, for he was too free from prejudice for that. It was from the knowledge that neither Catholicism nor Protestantism were useful as philosophies of life. In religious affairs his own views were Secularistic. That is why three centuries after his death, when the Christian religion is in the melting-pot, men turn to his pages for refreshment and guidance. It is well, for Shakespeare's finest thought is symbolic of "the prophetic soul of the wide world dreaming of things to come." MIMNERMUS.

Unemployment and C3 Denominational Schools.

At an education conference held a few weeks ago at Blackpool there was read a very remarkable paper on "Dual Control in Elementary Schools," by Mr. Frank J. Leslie, M.A., Hon. Secretary of the Association of Education Committees and of the Burnham Committees.

The origin and incidents of the dual system were ably dealt with, leading up to the beginning of the century when the education legislation of 1902 and 1903 (sprung upon the country without any mandate after the khaki election of 1902) saved the denominational schools from extinction. It will be remembered that those schools were in a bad way, nothing appearing to be sound about them but their "atmosphere." However, their supporters won, and the denominational schools were given a new lease of life, with not only, as formerly, Government grants, but also rate aid.

The voluntary schools were to be maintained by the local education authorities, who were to fix the number of teachers and pay them, but the appointment of the teachers was to be left in the hands of the denominational managers, who were to control the religious instruction, based usually upon trust deeds, the education authorities being responsible for the cost of it.

Thus the authorities have the duty of paying teachers whom they may not appoint, control, or dismiss. However, in return for those high privileges the denominational managers had imposed upon them the statutory obligation to keep the school buildings in proper repair.

How far that obligation has been honoured, various reports have from time to time made clear—Mr. Leslie's paper especially so.

Some time ago an enquiry was instituted by a joint committee representing local education authorities and teachers into the condition of voluntary, or as they are called, non-provided schools. Unfortunately the

full report of the committee is not yet available, but certain results can be given, which are taken from replies to questions signed by the chief officers of local education authorities. Mr. Leslie tells us that "a considerable number of authorities excused themselves from replying to the questions on the plea that the proposal to do so would certainly provoke an acrimonious discussion in their education committees and opposition from the representatives of religious bodies, which they would prefer to avoid." This does not appear to be a very courageous attitude. Personally, rather than sacrifice the children, I would prefer to face the "acrimonious discussion," especially as I would know that public opinion would be on my side.

Replies, however, were received from 151 education authorities, maintaining 2,032 denominational schools. They were asked first to say, how many of those schools could be said to be structurally satisfactory, in good repair and well adapted for use as public elementary schools. They reported 1,005, or 40 per cent. of that whole number, as generally answering that description, but with many qualifications.

Thus in some cases the condition was said to be "generally passable," "reasonably satisfactory," "the best voluntary school not as good as the worst Council school." The answers as to the condition of the 1,005 were never enthusiastic, but "show a desire not to be too hard on them."

As regards the conditions of the remaining 1,027, the replies are less restrained. Most of them are pronounced to be ill-ventilated, ill-lighted, with insufficient or worn-out sanitary, cloak-room, and lavatory accommodation.

A number of schools are noted as having been condemned by the Board of Education before the war, but as being still in full use. "The complaint is," says Mr. Leslie, "that the Board of Education inspectors have ceased to mention the condition in their reports, presumably on instruction from headquarters." (Italics mine.)

To the question whether the children are suffering in health or educationally from the condition of the schools, the answer frequently is "yes" to both questions.

Whatever may be the condition of the 1,005 schools of which no specific complaint is made, there can be no doubt but that the 1,027 are unfit for use.

Says Mr. Leslie:—

In England and Wales there are 12,000 denominational schools, the greater number being in London and the counties, from which no returns are so far available, but there is no reason to believe that the condition of the rest is any better than that of the 2,035 included in the returns, and, if that be so, we are faced with the fact that there are more than 6,000 schools, professing to educate 1,350,000 children, which are in the opinion of those best qualified to judge unfit for the purpose for which they are used. And their condition will steadily become worse.

As far as the London voluntary schools are concerned, those interested will find useful information in an official L.C.C. report (May 24, 1914, No. 33), in which, covering some 40 foolscap pages, are the facts concerning 124 denominational schools which were condemned by the Board of Education. I remember writing one or two articles in the *Freethinker* on those schools, also in numerous trade union journals.

One of those articles in the June issue (1915) of the engineers' official journal must have been seditious—at any rate, "Dora" must have thought so, for in one of the "raids" on my home, resulting from my Russian work in pre-Revolution days, the police, having first placed the unfortunate writer safely under lock and key, in her unavoidable absence, took away and have never returned many copies of a reprint of that article.

"Dora" being an eminently respectable, highly patriotic, British female, could not endure the mention of such improper things as the proximity of urinals to class-room windows, a disgusting shortage of W.C.'s, evil-smelling offices, in one case serving as a playground for girls, to say nothing of instances from the report of class-rooms even in infant schools being dark, because the church was so near.

I now very seriously put the question, especially to organized workers who read the *Freethinker*: "What is going to be done in face of what is a hideous national scandal?"

With two excellent Labour representatives (Messrs. Trevelyan and Morgan Jones) at the Board of Education, with over one and a-half million unemployed, are 1,350,000 children to be sent for "education" to the upwards of 6,000 schools which in the words of Mr. Leslie are unfit for the purpose for which they are used? Are we not leaving those children to pay rather too high a price for the privilege of being taught "the faiths of their fathers"?

Will the Board of Education of a Labour Government continue to show to the ecclesiastical faces behind those schools the traditional tenderness of other Boards? Will the denominational managers still be allowed to evade the statutory obligations (from which even the clerical education legislation of 1902 and 1903 was not able to save them) to keep the building in proper repair?

In this connection it must be remembered that in no public government department is the power of the permanent official stronger than at the Board of Education, and if this power is to be broken down, then Messrs. Trevelyan and Morgan Jones must feel that they have the sympathy and active support of organized workers outside Parliament; of all, indeed, who care for the well-being of the children and the credit of the nation. There are many such among the readers of the *Freethinker*. What are they going to do? They will not, I am sure, be parties to a conspiracy of silence.

(Mrs.) BRIDGES ADAMS.

Storie's Sad Story.

HAVE ever been to "Caledonia stern and wild," my braves and gentles? If so, you have an *advantage* over me—but not much! Personally, although I have Scotch blood in my veins (on the lodger's side), the nearest I have been to Scotland is Edinburgh (Scotch joke—very difficult). Furthermore, if *Wilson's Tales of the Border and of Scotland* (Vol. I) is in any way typical of the guid folk who dwell there, I can manage very well where I am, thankee. For this little volume of stories, published by Boots (just shows you what cash chemists can do when they start dispensing dope for the masses), takes the biscuit—not to say the Sod-Pep-Bi-carb.

The author tells his readers, with an air of infinite condescension, that the object of his writing is other than that of contributing to their amusement (I heartily agree with him here); he fain would elevate them to his own heights of piety, he would hold discourse with them concerning the fool who saith in his heart there is no God; and so he proceeds to relate the harrowing experiences of one Richard Storie, the son of a Scotch Dissenting minister.

Now, Dick's old man—you will pardon the familiarity—was not a *talented* man, but considerably *more* than talented—for he possessed of piety and humility three bags full. And being a man of great faith, ever anxious to convey the consolations of hell-fire to his erring fellows, he naturally brought his son up in the paths of grace; hoping and praying that as the boy

grew older he would not depart from them. Alas! for the vanity of human hopes.

At the age of eighteen Richard was sent to Edinburgh (you see it all came about through him leaving Scotland) to study medicine; and whilst there he was induced by his fellow collegians to become a member of a debating society. (*Sensation.*) This society, our author tells us:—

. was composed of many bold and ambitious young men, who, in the confidence of their hearts, rashly dared to meddle with things too high for them. There were many amongst them who regarded it as a proof of manliness to avow their scepticism, and who gloried in scoffing at the eternal truths which had lighted the souls of their fathers when the darkness of death fell upon their eyelids. It is one of the besetting sins of youth to appear wise above what is written.

Richard Storie's association with this society soon undid all the results of his father's pious training, until "the self-sufficient arrogance of fancied talent, which frequently assumes the name of Reason," suppressed the whisperings of conscience in his breast and made him "the willing prisoner of Doubt which held him in its cold and iron grasp, struggling in despair." (G-r-r-h!!)

In such a state of mind as this Richard was called home to the death-bed of his father, where amidst much lamentations and shedding of tears the old man urged him, with his dying breath, to "seek the licht tae nicht." (Exit to a solemn dirge on the bagpipes.)

After this Richard went from bad to worse. In his boyhood—so his biographer records—"there was a thoughtfulness and sensibility about his character; but these were by no means so remarkable as to require particular notice"; and now, whatever sensibility he ever possessed deserted him, and he became a lone solitary figure shunning the society of his fellows; the author adding somewhat enigmatically:—

Of all the hypochondriacs, to me the unbeliever seems the most absurd. For, can matter think, can it reason, can it doubt? It is not the thing that doubts which distrusts its own being?

This is evidently a Scotch conundrum, which I respectfully refer to Andrew Millar. Enter now the heilan' lassie, tripping lightly. She is "meek, gentle, and affectionate," and her anxious love throws a gleam of sunshine over the melancholy that has settled upon our hero's soul. Being "meek, gentle, and affectionate," she bears him five children in almost as many years, which isn't so bad for a hypochondriac. The death of two of the bairns, however, deepens Richard's gloom still further. He takes to drink and falls dangerously ill.

Our hero's extremity is now God's opportunity. The orchestra strikes up: *The Campbells are coming*, and God, who had been waiting in the flies (or having a small Guinness in his dressing-room), enters in melodramatic fashion and reclaims the lost one; and he who had been "shuddering and brooding over the cheerless, the horrible thought—*annihilation!*" (much virtue in an exclamation mark) arises from his bed with doubts vanquished and fears dispelled.

Having adorned the tale the author proceeds to point the moral, thus: "*Avoid trusting to reason when it would flatter you with your own wisdom: for it begetteth doubt—doubt, unbelief—unbelief, despair—and despair, death!*" As Sergeant Isaacstein, of the London Scottish, would say, "Hoch Aye!" likewise, "Hoots Awa'!"

VINCENT J. HANDS.

What is great, what is inspiring to the actions of public men belongs not to parties, not to nations, but to the whole of humanity.—*Ramsay MacDonald.*

Nativity Plays and Others.

EVERY year nativity plays seem to be on the increase. "The Old Vic" has had its nativity play for several years in succession; not always the same play, but a play upon the same subject by different authors, and this year some nativity plays have been performed in connection with certain churches throughout the country, and a specially good one on the subject of "Bethlehem" has been performed at The Regent Theatre, in the Euston Road, with some more than usually beautiful music by Rutland Boughton.

As a Freethinker I am delighted to think that these plays are being performed before the public in various parts of the kingdom at the winter season of the year, for I am quite satisfied that the more often they are performed the more incredible the story of the virgin birth and all the circumstances alleged to have occurred in connection with it will appear, even to the ordinary Christian mind. At "The Old Vic" this season—that is, just before Christmas—last year, the seventh of a series of "Chester Nativity Plays" was performed entitled "The Play of the Shepherds," which proved a very great attraction, so much so indeed that on the second occasion upon which I went to see it I was unable to gain admission, and crowds from all parts, found themselves in the same predicament. This particular play is over 600 years old; simply, but well constructed, and tells the old story of the alleged birth of Jesus, and of the extraordinary brightness of the stars which led the shepherds to the abode of Mary, the mother, before whom they bent the knee in adoration and laid their humble and pathetic gifts at her feet. In this old play the shepherds are represented as very bucolic individuals; country yokels, in fact, of a kind who would believe in any story they were told of a supernatural character, their dialogue, however, is very quaint and amusing; indeed, they are genuine old English characters; they talk as country folk, we should imagine, would have done six hundred years ago. And they play and eat and wrestle among themselves before they are attracted by the extraordinary light in the heavens (stage light), that leads them to the conclusion that a child is born that will be the saviour of the world. How they reached such a conclusion upon such flimsy evidence was, of course, enough to show the very primitive state of their minds; but most of the Christians present no doubt thought it was quite enough, and received it all in a truly "reverential spirit," while the modest Freethinker sat quiet, smiled, and said nothing. The actors who played the part of the shepherds gave a fine study of country folk and their ways six centuries ago, while Miss Jane Bacon, who is always cast for the part of the Virgin Mary, looked as demure and simple as ever, and won general admiration for her performance.

This nativity play was followed by Russell Thorndike's adaptation of Charles Dickens's story of "A Christmas Carol," which kept the audience interested and amused for the remainder of the evening. "The Nativity Play" was, of course, received in silence; "The Christmas Carol," on the other hand, was received with uproarious merriment and applause. You must never applaud a religious play—that would break the spell, and destroy the religious atmosphere. But you may laugh as much as you like over the selfish conduct of old Scrooge, who regards the Christmas spirit as "humbug," and also begrudges giving his clerk, Bob Cratchit, a holiday on Christmas Day. When, however, several ghosts have appeared to him—Marley's ghost, the spirit of the past and the future, and the spirit of Christmas—Old Scrooge is suddenly converted, and not only becomes a new man, but sends a prize goose to Bob Cratchit for his Christ-

mas dinner, and joins the party and has a fine time with the family, including Tiny Tim, and ends with a jolly dance of Roger de Coverley. No doubt Dickens knew as well as most educated writers that Christmas was only a Pagan Festival, but he certainly did succeed in knocking a good deal of the solemnity out of the celebration of the alleged birth of Christ, and infusing the spirit of good fellowship and benevolence to the poor and the unfortunate into his idea of what a real Christmas should be. ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Acid Drops.

Macclesfield Town Council has decided to commence its proceedings with prayers. Sixteen voted for the proposal and four against, and we suppose that to find four sensible people in a gathering of twenty is not bad. The official reason given for the prayers is that it will add dignity to the assembly, but one of the supporting councillors said that it would prevent other councillors telling lies. Poor man! And poor Council! If the only thing that will keep the Macclesfield town councillors from telling lies is prayers they must all be in a bad way. And if the councillor really imagines that prayers will stop a liar telling lies he provides ample reasons for his piety. So far as our experience goes the lustiest liars we have known have been pious; and even in a court of law, where God is directly invoked to see that a witness tells the truth, there are some pretty tall lies told. Poor Macclesfield!

The Bishop of London states that there are six City churches all useless. We beg to differ. They are concrete examples of the inherent religious feeling which we are told exists in everybody.

"Topics of the House" is the title of a column in the *Daily Telegraph*, and the writer of it, with courage somewhat late in the day, asks:—

Does anyone believe that the world has been made brighter and better by the submarine? Is there any good at all which that wonderful invention has done to set against the suffering and death which it has caused.

An accident in peace-time inspires the writer's questions; during the late war questions of this kind would have been distinctly un-Christian, and invited the charge of German gold or whatever happened to be the name of the mud that journalists were told to throw.

We have every sympathy with the Dukhobors in their determination to return in a mass to Russia. They are leaving Saskatchewan, and, as their religious belief appears to be diluted Deism, there is evidently no congenial region for them in Canada. They believe that Christ was wholly human, and that his soul reappears from time to time in mortals; they deny the need of rulers, priests and churches.

The pious *Daily Herald* has been reporting the doings of the "ghost" of Fenny Compton, Warwickshire. With the Holy Ghost embroidered in the leading articles, and smaller bogeys in the news columns, the publication ought to be appreciated by Spiritualists.

The ages of 575 old Doverians who were feasted at Dover Town Hall aggregated 43,400 years, the oldest married couple having a combined age of 160 years. Compared with the Bible patriarchs, this bunch was composed of mere children.

Mrs. F. B. Rutter, superintendent of Wiltshire Home for Unmarried Mothers, says that the cases with which her Society deals are often from Sunday schools; some of them minister's daughters and sisters of clergymen.

We have no desire to state this as a charge against religion, but rather as an illustration of the truth that religion certainly does not act as a "restraining" moral force, and also that this kind of thing works itself out whatever religious opinions may be held. But Mrs. Rutter manages to draw from the fact the peculiar moral that what is needed is more religion on the part of these young women, while the moral we draw from that is the incapacity of the Christian mind to see the obvious when religion is concerned. Otherwise one would have thought that the fact of so many of these girls having already received a religious training would have shown the powerlessness of religion in the matter.

But having said that, which is the most favourable thing that can be said of religion in this connection, it may be pointed out that there really is a very close connection between religion and the sexual feelings, one that has for long been noticed by medical practitioners. It is not without significance that the language of religious ecstasy and of intense religious feeling should so often coincide, a fact that comes out very plainly in most of the standard books of devotion. And of still greater significance is it that the ages of conversion should so strictly synchronize with the period of adolescence. To the scientific student there is present here a mere carrying over of sexual feeling into the sphere of religion, and a favourable conjunction of circumstances will quite easily effect a reverse change. This is particularly easy if and when the sexual feeling has all along been expressing itself under the guise of religious conviction. The real cures for the evils with which Mrs. Rutter deals would be a more sanely ordered social system and a more rational form of education, under which the social side of the adolescent nature would be directed into channels of intelligent social service instead of into the wholly mischievous ones of religious devotion.

The *Daily Herald* is eulogistic concerning a Canon of the State Religion who had a fresco painted of Christ as the apotheosis of Labour upon the walls of his church. We would, however, remind our contemporary that one swallow does not make a summer.

Many fishing vessels and their crews have been lost in a hurricane off the Norwegian coast. Too much Providence!

Speaking in the House of Convocation, the Archbishop of York said that he had no "gloomy apprehensions" regarding the coming into power of the Labour Party. Evidently the Archbishop considers that his yearly £10,000 is quite safe.

A movement is on foot to form a Christian Socialist League, embracing the various denominations. It looks as if the Christians wish to "embrace" the Labour Movement.

Attracted by a report that a woman had been miraculously cured of an illness in St. Ethelreda's Church, Holborn, a number of people visited the church, and were "touched" by a priest. The touching is usually effected by an offertory bag.

In a case in the King's Bench Division a Mr. W. S. Harnett claimed damages for wrongful imprisonment in a mental home. In defence, and as proof of Mr. Harnett's mental unsoundness it was urged that he had manifested a desire to go out preaching, he had intense religious exaltation, and had written his brother that "Jesus has touched my eyes." Mr. Harnett has fallen on evil days, or has been singularly unfortunate. With no better pretensions than he has, many a man has been exalted to sainthood, and there are many thousands of men and women who are declaring that they have been touched by Jesus, etc. And it is left for the Freethinker usually to agree that it really is a question of being more or less "touched."

The Benedictine Lord Abbot of Fort Augustus (a very impressive title for anybody impressed with this sort of jargon), at a London meeting, stated that the time had come for Catholics to come out of the catacombs and do their duty as citizens, so that they would see this British Empire brought to the foot of the altar, there to bow its knee, to recognize and adore. This is a first class sample of muddiness in thinking, and at the same time, the metaphor of the speaker's mind gives us a clue to what Catholicism is striving after. In the first place we may infer that Catholics have *not* been doing their duty as citizens, but instead have been dwelling among bones. Secondly, there are enough Mahomedans in the British Empire who are above being taught by candle-burners and the Fat Boy of Fleet Street; and, thirdly, any youngster who fiddles about with wireless is going to be an awkward customer for those lovely saints of ignorance whom Dante even recognized in the middle ages: "The fat bellies of the monks are become a proverb in Europe; every people itch with the vermin."

Archbishop Gautier, of Montreal, has been protesting most vigorously against modern dancing. Perhaps he remembers his Church has led men a dance for centuries.

Mr. Robert Smillie, M.P., says that the imposition of the Capital Levy "will make it easier for rich men to get into the Kingdom of Heaven." We should smile!

"Politics is a holy business," says Mr. C. G. Ammon, M.P. This is no new discovery. The Bench of Bishops has safeguarded the "holiness" of politics for some centuries.

In a sermon at Westminster Abbey, Canon Barnes declared that Christians objected to cremation because it weakened faith in the resurrection of the body. Comment would be, what the Prayer Book calls, "a work of supererogation."

The Rev. W. D. Sandberg was the principal speaker at a discussion on religious education in public schools, and much as we disagree with his position we find ourselves agreeing more with him than with his religious opponents. Mr. Sandberg speaks for the Church of England—or for, at least, the majority of the Church of England clergy—when he says that the present system of "undenominationalism" is unsatisfactory. A religion, he said, must be dogmatic and definite, or it must be vague and useless. That seems to us only common sense. A religion that means anything and everything in practice comes to mean nothing. We also agree in the protest against the belief underlying denominationalism that there is a common theological basis on which all the different sects in England agree. In words, this may be so, but actually agreement is not made by people using the same words, but by attaching identical meanings to them. Belief in the Bible, for instance, means to one belief in the literal truth of the Bible from cover to cover. To another it means only belief that the Bible contains a record of man's "spiritual" aspirations, but is otherwise subject to all the faults and all the errors that mark other books. And it is simply idle to pretend that these two are in agreement. Undenominationalism was a form of Christianity which was invented in order to keep the Bible in the schools and to make non-Christians pay for its being there.

But from this Mr. Sandberg goes on to demand from the State denominational teaching in all schools, teachers appointed who believe in the doctrines they are compelled to teach, with a religious teaching that shall permeate the whole of the instruction given. Again, a perfectly logical position. It is absurd to compel teachers to teach religion without seeing that they understand it, and if the State is to teach any religion it should teach all. And that simply exposes the absurdity of the whole claim. A State that establishes teachers to teach in one class that

Christianity is true, and in another that it is false, which selects the Jewish children from a class and teaches them that Jesus Christ was only a Jew of illegitimate birth, and then selects another batch and teaches them that he was the Son of God, miraculously born without the aid of a father, is making a perfect exhibition of itself. If the State is to teach a thing it should at least believe it to be true. But to teach it what it admits may be a lie is to take a criminal advantage of the children it has under its care. The position is only another illustration of the absurdity of the Modern State interfering in any way in religion. There is only one clear, logical, and honest policy, and that is to leave religion severely alone. One day the State will come to that; it is only a question of how long?

After the Facisti enter the Knights and Handmaids of the Blessed Sacrament. At a meeting held in the Coliseum (lent by Sir Oswald Stoll) Mr. G. K. Chesterton poured scorn on the present state of knighthood. His remedy is as bad as the disease, and it consists of making the Mass the centre of the whole idea of knighthood. This kind of argument, which includes generalizations about plutocrats, usurers, and oppressors of the poor, swindlers and charlatans, is in the best style of street-corner journalism, and is known as the righteous indignation stunt. Everyone of intelligence knows that modern knighthoods are more in the nature of punishments than rewards, but knights can easily retort on Mr. Chesterton's guff by asking him to ride a horse. And the Coliseum was lent to these purists by a knight, Sir Oswald Stoll.

The *Daily News* discreetly reports the questions at the service held at Kingsway Hall by the Rev. J. E. Rattenbury. These questions, judging from the meagre notice, appear to be on nothing more important than the trappings of religion—not the thing itself. In other words, the counsel's old and familiar question to prisoner: "Have you stopped beating your wife?"

A Wigan newspaper reports that Father Van Wassenhove caught a local thief operating upon an offertory-box at the Catholic Church. If one spoke broad Scotch, and the other English with a Belgian accent, the dialogue ought to have been worth reporting.

A Church of England contemporary had a leading article on "A Sweated Industry." Curiously, it contained no reference to the clerical profession, although so many bishops assure us that the clergy are starving.

The Rev. R. V. Berry, vicar of Stillington, Stockton-on-Tees, fell downstairs at his vicarage and broke his neck. Had he been a sparrow perhaps Providence would have reserved a kinder fate.

The author of *America's Greatest Menace* declares that "Protestants created America." This removes a stigma from the Red Indians, anyhow.

The *Children's Newspaper* asks its young readers to "behave our religion." We hope that they will do nothing of the kind, otherwise the next generation will revive the fires of Smithfield and other pious pleasantries.

The *Daily Herald* ought not to keep a tame theologian on its staff. Its latest burst of piety is that Bishop Wilberforce was "the man who killed the trade in slaves." We wish that he had excommunicated some untruthful journalists as an awful warning.

A prominent advertisement displayed all over London states that "Sodom and Gomorrah" may be witnessed at a certain place of entertainment. A title such as this ought to attract all the clergy of England.

The National Secular Society.

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

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

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

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

To Correspondents.

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

J. STEPHENS.—We are pleased to have your appreciation of *The Other Side of Death*, and *Theism or Atheism?* We also note what you say about "Agnostic." But you appear to have overlooked the fact that the term has two applications. In Philosophy it would imply a mental attitude in relation to the nature of existence. But in relation to the existence of God it is no more than a disguised or unconfessed Atheism. There is no special objection to personifying "existence," or describing it as the "will to live." But when we begin to treat our mental creations as an independent and objective existence we seem bound to end in confusion.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—R. Bell, 5s.

L. MASON.—Thanks for cuttings. We should very much like to see a number of friends in certain districts, who are interested in pushing the sales of this paper, doing what they could to realize their aim. We can, obviously, do no more than place the suggestion before our readers. It must rest with them to put it into operation. We are certain good would follow if the experiment were made.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Truth depends upon no one's favour or disfavour, nor does it ask anyone's leave. It stands upon its own feet, and has Time for its ally; its power is irresistible, its life indestructible.—Schopenhauer.

Sugar Plums.

To-day (February 17) Mr. Cohen will lecture twice in the Palace Theatre, Boulevard, Weston-super-Mare. The afternoon lecture, at 3, will, by request, deal with the subject of a future life. In the evening, at 7, the subject will be: "A Candid Examination of Christianity." On Sunday next, February 24, Mr. Cohen will lecture twice in the City Hall, Glasgow.

We have had a number of replies to our request for London readers to send us the name of the newsagents from whom they get their copies of the *Freethinker*. But we have not had nearly enough, and if our plan is to prove at all successful we must get as nearly a complete list as possible. We do ask London readers to bestir themselves in this matter. We shall then be able to pay attention to the provinces. But we want to see the *Freethinker* get a fair show, and we cannot succeed in this unless all who are interested lend a hand.

It is many years since Mr. A. B. Moss paid Plymouth a lecturing visit, but he is renewing his acquaintance with the western city to-day (February 17). He will lecture twice, afternoon and evening, and we hope to hear that the meetings were good ones. The meetings will be held in Plymouth Chambers, Drake Circus, at 3 and 7.

Manchester friends will please note that to-day (February 17) Mr. Corrigan will lecture twice, at 3 and 6.30, in the Engineers Hall, Rusholme Road. The hall is a very pleasant one, is easily reached from all parts of Manchester, and Mr. Corrigan's lectures usually command the appreciation of those who listen. Local friends will take the hint.

We are glad to hear that Mr. Whitehead had a very successful meeting on Sunday last at Stockport; and that Mr. Rosetti had a good audience to listen to his lecture at Birmingham.

Memor Mortus.

WHEN we are wreckage,
Boxed and hidden underground,
When we've turned putrid,
Rotted, 'neath a graveyard's mound,
Ours will be ease from toil, peace after strife,
Sound sleep after troubled dream, death after life.

We are but rendings
Of Nature's vast somnolence,
Tired eyelids uplifted
In sad self-condolence;
Sweet then to us be death, peace after strife,
Sound sleep after troubled dream, death after life.

On to Oblivion, then,
Our backs to life's riot;
May nothing disturb
Our deep stillness and quiet,
For ours will be ease from toil, peace after strife,
Sound sleep after troubled dream, death after life.

OSWYN J. BOULTON.

The more fanatical a nation the more guilty it is of cruelty to animals. In Europe the Italians and Spaniards are distinguished in this connection, though the Arabs are far worse. In Africa I have witnessed unimaginable horrors which my pen refuses to describe. Buddha, in teaching metempsychosis to his followers, affords the animal a wonderful degree of protection, whereas Christianity abandons it to any brutality, proclaiming that it is made for man and placing it at his mercy.—*Camille Saint-Saëns*.

Were the Jews Savages?

Slowly the Bible of the race is writ,
And not on paper leaves nor leaves of stone;
Each age, each kindred adds a verse to it,
Texts of despair or hope, of joy or moan.

—J. R. Lowell.

Experience shows that the conservation of the Jews is due in a great degree to the very hatred which they have incurred.—*Spinoza, "Tract. Theol. Polit.,"* c. iv.

When it is remembered that the old Israelites sprang from ancestors who are said to have resided near, or in, one of the great seats of ancient Babylonian civilization, the city of Ur; that they had been, it is said for centuries, in close contact with the Egyptians; and that, in the theology of both the Babylonians and the Egyptians there is abundant evidence, notwithstanding their advanced social organization, of the belief in spirits, with sorcery, ancestor-worship, the deification of animals, and the converse animalization of gods—it obviously needs very strong evidence to justify the belief that the rude tribes of Israel did not share the notions from which their far more civilized neighbours had not emancipated themselves.—*T. H. Huxley, "Evolution of Theology."* E. C. Q., 183.

Jews are a sensitive as well as a sensible people. Fifteen centuries of Christian persecution have only rivetted attachment to their ancestral faith. Let me, then, disclaim any attempt to stigmatize a race which has influenced the religious beliefs of nearly one-half the world, and which can fairly claim to have done its share in promoting the work of civilization. The inquiry, "Were the Jews Savages?" should provoke no more hostility than a similar inquiry as to the Egyptians or the Ancient Britons. If answered in the affirmative, the affirmation may be taken as a compliment, measuring the height which a single scattered people has attained.

The inquiry is pertinent, since opposition to the doctrine of evolution is founded upon Jewish records. Prejudices against scientific teachings are instilled into the minds of children on the ground of their incompatibility with "revealed truth." Whatever traces, then, can be brought from the Bible itself to confirm the evidence derived from the monuments of all others ancient peoples—from the wrecks of lake-dwellings as from the burrows and tumuli of prehistoric man, and the symbolic usages and customs of archaic ages, showing that man has progressed from a savage state, are important as clearing away a hindrance to the study of human development.

Nothing but traces of savagery can be expected in a record, the earliest portions of which were probably written a thousand years after Jewish contact with the Accadian, Egyptian, Assyrian, and Babylonian civilizations, and which throughout reflect rather the ideas of the time of their writers than those of the age they refer to. Yet these traces are sufficiently clear to leave no doubt in the mind of any student of anthropology that the Jewish race has ascended through a process of evolution similar to that of other families of mankind.

The distinguishing mark which every Jew bears on his person is one of those traces which take us back to times antedating civilization. We know from monumental records that circumcision was practised among the Egyptians before the time of Abraham. Herodotus says the Phenicians and Syrians of Palestine acknowledge that they borrowed it from Egypt. The rite has been found among the Kaffirs and other African tribes. It was practised among the Fijians and Samoans of Polynesia, and some races of Australia and New Holland, as a rite of initiation into the tribe at puberty. The ascription of a sanitary reason for the rite is evidently an afterthought, and the earlier one of a blood covenant with their god, only suggests the real source to those who know that the god was God the Father, the begetter of the tribe. The child's

god-father, who indeed stands for deity, is called Baal Berith, or Master of the Covenant. In whatever light it may be considered, whether as a symbolic sacrifice to some god, as a rite of blood covenanting, as a substitute for human sacrifice, a symbolical renunciation of the lusts of the flesh, as an aphrodisiac, as a phallic rite, or as the imposed mutilation of a subject race, the practice of circumcision is one of a class only found to arise among savages. Dr. Redmondino, in his *History of Circumcision*, inclines to this latter view which has the high authority of Herbert Spencer. Mr. Spencer says:—

That circumcision was among the Hebrews the stamp of subjection, all the evidence proves. On learning that among existing Bedouins, the only conception of God is that of a powerful living ruler, the sealing by circumcision of the covenant between God and Abraham becomes a comprehensible ceremony. There is furnished an explanation of the fact that in consideration of a territory to be received, this mutilation, undergone by Abraham, implied that "the Lord" was "to be a god unto" him; as also of the fact that the mark was to be borne not by him and his descendants only, as favoured individuals, but also by slaves not of his blood. And on remembering that by primitive peoples the returning double of the dead potentate is believed to be indistinguishable from the living potentate, we get an interpretation of the strange tradition concerning God's anger with Moses for not circumcising his son: "And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the Lord met Moses, and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet" (Ex. iv, 24-25).—*Principles of Sociology*, ii, 68.

Among other proofs that circumcision was a mark of subordination to Jahveh, Spencer mentions that Antiochus, who brought in foreign gods, forbade circumcision, which was strongly insisted upon by the Maccabees. Hyrcanus having subdued the Idumeans, made them submit to circumcision; and Aristobulus similarly imposed that mark on the conquered people of Iturea. As I have remarked in my *Bible Studies*, in which will be found a fuller discussion of the subject, it is not easy to see how a mutilation imposed from without should ever become part of the pride of race, and I rather incline to the view that circumcision is of the nature of savage totem and tattoo marks—a device to indicate those whom the tribe might marry. Among Australians it was held so important that tribes at war would meet in peace during the ceremonies, where, not the tribe in which a boy was born, but that in which he could marry, were the chief officials. In the Marquesas and Sandwich isles circumcision was superintended by priests. Tacitus says of the Jews:—

They do not eat with strangers or marry with them, and though prone to sensuality do not mix with strange women. They have introduced circumcision in order to distinguish themselves thereby.

The Hebrew term for male, *zachar*, which also means *memorial*, agrees with this view, which is confirmed by Genesis xxxiv, 14, if, as has been suggested, the meaning is "one who is uncircumcised is as a woman to us."

Joshua v, 8-9, intimates that circumcision was held in high honour in Egypt. Jeremiah, too, is supposed to allude (ix, 25-26) to the Egyptians, Edomites, Ammonites, and Arabs of the wilderness. Captain Cook found it in use among the islanders of the Pacific, and De Solis relates that in Mexico newborn infants were brought up to the altar, and there with a thorn of Maguey or a lancet of flint the priests drew some blood from the privy parts, after which they either sprinkled them with water, or dropped them into it.

Strabo and Ambrosius say that the Egyptians circumcised both sexes and, adds Ambrosius, in their fourteenth year. As this is the custom in savage

Africa and Polynesia, we may be pretty sure that it has crept down from puberty to childhood. In the Bible story of its institution Abraham circumcises all his house, and he himself undergoes the rite at the age of ninety-one. With modern Egyptians it is earlier. Lane says (M. E., i, 82):—

At the age of about five or six years, or sometimes later, the boy is circumcised. Previously to the performance of this rite in the metropolis and other towns of Egypt, the parents of the youth, if not in indigent circumstances, generally cause him to be paraded through several streets in the neighbourhood of their dwelling. They mostly avail themselves of the occurrence of a bridal procession to lessen the expenses of the parade; and, in this case, the boy and his attendants lead the procession. He generally wears a red Kashmere turban; but, in other respects, is dressed as a girl, with a yelek and saltah, and with a kcoors, sufa, and other female ornaments. These articles of dress are of the richest description that can be procured; they are usually borrowed from some lady, and much too large to fit the boy.

Here we can see that the child is not considered a male member of the tribe till this rite was performed. Such barbarous rites creep downward from manhood to boyhood, and then to babyhood.

J. M. WHEELER.

(To be Continued.)

Pictures or Preachments?

I FEEL rather like a baldheaded man who is trying to sleep on a warm Sunday afternoon and is bothered by flies. And the torment has got much worse since my friendly enemy has adopted the pontifical "we." I am duly impressed.

From all of which, dear reader, you will gather that I feel a little frivolous. This thing has gone far enough, and, in taking it out of the correspondence columns, I am doing my worst. When I have written this article, I don't care what happens. I won't reply to any more letters from Mr. Repton, or anybody else, so now you know. As a matter of fact I don't believe flies can resist a bald head, and I don't intend to let the fly "depicting" tickle my bald spot at all. Observe the results of the magic formula—no, not abracadabra—"ca passe."

I don't suppose anyone will disagree with me—notice how I disarm criticism by that opening—when I say that drama presents a series of pictures of life. The drama is a series of tableaux whose mutual relation is explained by the dialogue, and whose position in time and space is made clear and definite by the setting. As Mr. Repton would say, "that is precisely my point"; but, of course, he wouldn't say anything of the kind. I can hear the growls of disagreement rumbling in his throat as I write the sentence.

But let us imagine for a moment that there are at least a few persons who would agree with me. The drama is a series of pictures of life. What do we each know about life? Really very little when we are considered individually. And how do we learn the little that we know? Some of us learn from books, and what we learn is not always precisely true. It is notorious that the very bookish man or woman is usually out of touch with the very present realities with which his living, breathing fellow men are in contact. He does not realize the problems that are of most pertinent interest to them. He is not in personal human contact and is inclined to believe that his is the truer view. His error is only equalled by the amazement he shows when he finds that ordinary men and women pay little or no attention to his pronouncements.

Perhaps I may go a little further now and say that what we actually know of life is learned by watching our fellow men; only by watching them at work and at play, and observing how they behave. Knowledge of this kind is commonly known as experience, but I hesitate to use a word to which exception may be taken. Such knowledge is gained by the observation of a series of pictures—explained by the dialogue which accompanies them. Dear, dear, that sounds very like my definition of drama, and must be somewhere near the point I wanted to make, or is it only a vicious circle? Well, there it is; one learns about life by observing it as it happens, and each happening we see adds to our knowledge.

The average man's opportunities for observation are not very great. Most of us lead very monotonous lives. We do the same things every day, and we meet the same people. All that we see repeats itself *ad nauseum*, until we are so familiar with it that we know exactly what is going to happen before it takes place, so we invent several ways of breaking down the monotony, and learning more. Each of us has a different experience, and those who have the gift of expression are only too ready to tell the others what they know. They use different means, but the result is the same. Fiction, poetry, pictures, and the drama are only interesting when they tell us something about life. Those that do not are highbrow, and reserved for those superior people who are intellectual.

Again we come to the same point. Funny, isn't it?

We learn about life by living it. It makes no difference whether we live it personally or impersonally in the arts. Memory is a series of pictures in the mind, and by comparing them we learn much more. Comparison involves making a choice, and it is natural to choose what we think best. After we have watched all this different conduct we settle in our own minds which we approve, and will imitate. (Careful now. You are getting on dangerous ground.)

As I said, each of us has only limited opportunities for personal observation. The pictures shown by the drama, for instance, are often pictures of a kind of life with which we should never come into personal contact. They are pictures, however, and they allow us to compare them with what we have learned by our personal experience. In comparing them we cannot avoid placing our values on the different experiences.

To turn aside for a moment, I should now like to make a statement. The ethical side of experience lies in the comparison of different types of behaviour. Of course, we are taught what is right and wrong (from the instructor's point of view) in childhood, but our judgments are always modified by our experience. The actual sermon or teaching of others is rarely so effective as what we learn in passing through life. The sermon itself is dull, and we do not usually accept it as gospel, particularly if we have not suffered from the limited experience which is simplicity. It is the individual lessons we learn from life that we are most impressed by. I believe an old Roman who was perverted by Mr. Micawber made this profound discovery.

All life and all living has its lessons. The lesson is learned from the pictures of life which we see. The drama gives us pictures we should not see in actual life, because they would often be outside the narrow circle of our lives, and we learn from them. As much can be said for the other arts. The arts are a part of life, because they help us to learn an individual lesson, and in that way they all preach, as indeed does every event that happens to us. The man who learns most is the man who makes the most use of what he sees and experiences. In that way everything is a sermon, even the stones, and the drama with its pictures cannot escape the universal implication; no, not even the Capek drama.

Pictures and preachments cannot be separated. They are involved in one another; they are natural attributes of each other. Whatever Shaw may say, the drama is didactic. It cannot help itself. The dramatist may not even be conscious of the lesson he teaches, but, if he is successful, he cannot help teaching it, and the lesson of the Capek drama is so plain that he who runs may read. It is, as I have said, and as my friendly enemy now admits, the lesson that life is more valuable than things. In other words life is a law unto itself, and its function is reproduction of itself.

And I won't answer any more letters.

G. E. FUSSELL.

Gnomes.

BLACKFORD HILL is a challenge and a pleasure to all our citizens. The young and active delight in scrambling up its steep and rocky sides; lovers find happy secluded nooks there; while dreamers such as I enjoy its tranquillity. Thus the other day I set forth by the path that winds around its base. The sun shone as resplendently as he ever can from a blue unclouded wintry sky, and the earth sparkled with the million jewels of a hoar frost. I came to the spot where I had once seen the autumn leaves dance a rhythmic minnet to the piping of the breezes through the Hermitage Woods. Prosaic people called them leaves, but I had only to shut my eyes to see that they were fairies. Here I fell to meditating on the strange blindness of folk nowadays. They will not see things as they should; yea, even though authentic photos of "the little people" are produced, our wiseacres only scoff. Now, as I grieved over this, I came to a huge towering rock, one of the mighty bastions of the Hill. And softly there broke upon mine ear a rhythmic knocking which gradually increased and then died away. The sounds seemed to come from within the rock. The matter puzzled me at first; but at length the glad idea came to me that this must be the gnomes at work within the petrine recesses. Then delight flamed up in my soul. What if this revelation were to be accorded to me, to me "who am less than the least of all saints" in the Spiritualistic Brotherhood! Others have seen and talked, yea, played with fairies; mine be the joy and honour to re-introduce the wise old gnomes to a sceptical world. With this hope thrilling my heart, I fell to listening intently to decide the location of the sound. This seemed to proceed from behind a whin bush which was rooted in a crevice of the rock, and which, oh happy omen! was in full bloom. Its golden flowers beckoned me onwards, and I remembered our Scots saying that love is out of fashion when the whin is out of bloom—that is, never. So with throbbing heart I drew near, and there I saw the shadow of a gnome! Sure; there was the shape of the very same conical hat or cap which these little men have ever worn. The shadow was plain; yes, and the more I think of it, the plainer it becomes. Now, as I hasted, palpitating, the place being steep and the footing uncertain and beset with many shrubs, lo I slipped and plunged head foremost into a whin bush. Many thorns pricked me, and I, in my pain and unwisdom, said "Damn!" Then the shadow vanished, and all I saw was the scut of a rabbit disappearing amongst the shrubbery, and the sound of knocking I heard no more. My joy and hope perished in the stranglehold of despair. I had been found unworthy, and the gnomes had cast me off. I might have become a witness of the truth to this unbelieving and unregenerate nation, yea to the nations. What glory might have been mine! So I wended my way sadly homeward, and have not since had an opportunity to revisit the spot.

Note on the above.

The MS. of the foregoing having come into my hands, I became much interested in the facts therein set forth, as I know the spot well. Accordingly, on just such a beautiful winter day as had witnessed the writer's disappointment, I too went to the rock. For some time I listened, but heard no sound. I was inclined to "sneer" in the approved manner of all sceptics, and was about to pursue my walk, when, sure enough, there came the knock-knocking already described, with its crescendo and diminuendo. Here was proof of the writer's original statement, but how about the explanation thereof? It struck me as typical of such men that he (as the author states) had to shut his eyes in order to see things. As well might he stand on his head to view the stars. The rock is high and beetling; the screes are long and slippery; but up I went until (to parody Scott)—

An airy point I won,
Where, gleaming 'neath the wintry sun,
The Braid's fair valley stretched below,
While far shone Pentlands' Hills of snow—

so beloved of Stevenson. And there, a few hundred yards across the valley from the resounding rock, was the secret of our friend's dream. A road is being constructed along the side of the hills which bound the valley; the wheels of the carts transporting the material made a creaking, clacking noise as they passed, which was echoed by the rock over the Braid Burn. *Voilà tout!*

Some myths are born lucky, and get a run of centuries; this one was still-born. J. G. FINLAY.

Correspondence.

AMERICAN RELIGION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Mr. Mann (*Freethinker*, December 16, 1923) is horrified by the fact that over here in America bills were introduced in the legislatures of the States of Kentucky, Arkansas, and Oklahoma to prevent the teaching of evolution in the public schools. He overlooks the fact that the inhabitants (the white population) of those States are of Anglo-Saxon descent. The present immigration is largely from South-Eastern Europe, and, aside from the Jewish race, is Roman Catholic; nearly all of which is impounded in the large cities. I heartily agree with him that the immigrant of to-day is an undesirable one. Nevertheless, he is not the cause of the stupidity of our "American Religion" in which Mr. Mann takes occasion to criticize certain Protestant denominations.

Mr. Mann should also bear in mind that these bills were not enacted into laws. He says that in England "the proposition would be simply laughed down." And, perhaps, they were "laughed down" here in America by our metropolitan press.

Since my friend is distraught over the possible annihilation of his "evolutionary" hobby, perhaps it would not be amiss to enquire of the nature of his pet scheme. Would it be of the environmental, or Lamarckian, kind wherein acquired characters are inherited? Or the Darwinian theory of "Natural Selection" and "Survival of the Fittest"? Or the Hegelian idea of "Ever Onward and Upward"? Or what part do Galton, Mendel and Weismann play in the universal fitness of things?

Which one of these theories of evolution is it that Mr. Mann is so anxious we should teach our children? The Socialists and Humanitarians are of the Lamarckian school. They are also Hegelians. Nearly all of the freethinkers are of the same persuasion. And all of the new-fangled religious cults accept Hegel as a guiding star. Since Mr. Mann looks askance at the Billy Sunday type, discerning a wide chasm between the "American Religion" enthusiast and the Modernist, perhaps "an ever ascending series" as deduced by Hegel would be of the kind which is better suited to his sense of propriety.

But if Darwin is pointed to as a guiding star, the religionists of every hue and colour who believe that the worst of the human race is the best, and the best is the worst, are left without the pale. If Darwinism is the kind of evolution that needs be taught, methinks that, since there are so few who think in its terms, that it has little show in our benighted land or anywhere else. If we choose to teach Lamarck or Hegel: they are already being taught that on every street corner. Every Modern churchman is doing that; and the restive freethinker has nothing to do but sit idly on the fence and watch the procession go by.

Quite a number of publicists insist that America is at least twenty-five years behind Europe. Considering the direction in which Europe seems to be going, I am thankful for that twenty-five years. My only wish is that we were some thousands of years behind our brethren beyond the sea when I visualize the British Empire tottering to its fall; not because of dissension in its colonies, but that a lower strata of the electorate in old England itself is taking over the reins of government. Neither is the triumph of the proletariat—in its fury, might and stupidity—a “proposition” that is being “simply laughed down.”

WALTER MERCHANT.

New York City. U.S.A.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

SIR,—I don't know if your correspondent Mr. C. Harpur is a Freethinker or not, but his first question of “How did the World Come Here?” really, to my mind, savours of silliness, for I ask him where is here, and whither is elsewhere; my advice to him is to study these matters with greater care.

R. BELL.

SIR,—It appears from Mr. C. Harpur's urbane criticism of yourself he is afflicted with a somewhat limited vocabulary. The hobby-horse was the precursor of the cycle and motor-car of to-day, but we do not call them by that name now. Man in the infancy of his mind assumes every thing to have a supernatural origin and direction. This conception of the universe has always been understood as “religion.” With increasing knowledge he gradually abandons the supernatural and explains everything in terms of the purely natural. As terms are labels by which we distinguish ideas and external objects to avoid confusion, this naturalistic conception is known as scientific philosophy; Buddhism and Confucianism are included in this class, because they do not relate to the supernatural. Mr. C. Harpur's objection to Mr. Clodd's definition of religion is captious. Nor does he seem to have ever heard of Secularism.

M. BARNARD.

“THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE HOST.”

SIR,—I read with much interest your correspondent's (Mr. W. Power) comments *re* the above: I quite agree with his dictum, “Such mistakes—which are irritating—might easily be avoided.”

Being an ex-Roman Catholic and a Freethinker I have always known “Maundy Thursday” as *Holy Thursday*. To make doubly sure, I questioned my wife and two sons, also a few of my friends, amongst whom is a schoolmaster—all avowed Roman Catholics—upon the subject. I received the one and only reply, “Holy Thursday” is “Maundy Thursday,” and falls in Holy week. True, in Pear's *Cyclopædia*, under the General Information, “Ascension Day” is spoken of as “Holy Thursday.” But this is incorrect, evidently.

Now, let us dwell upon Mr. W. Power's second point, The Host, according to Roman Catholic belief and teaching. The Penny Catechism says: “The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, together with His Soul and Divinity, under the appearances of bread and wine.” Again: “Christ is received whole and entire under either kind alone.” “The Blessed Eucharist is not a Sacrament only; it is also a sacrifice.” “A sacrifice is the offering of a victim by a priest to God alone, in testimony, etc.” Further: “The Sacrifice of the New Law is the Holy Mass, which is the Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, really present on the altar under the appearances of bread and wine, etc.” “The Holy Mass is one and the same Sacrifice

with that on the Cross, inasmuch as Christ, who offered Himself, a bleeding victim, on the Cross to His Heavenly Father, continues to offer Himself in an unbloody manner on the altar, through the ministry of His priests.” Again: “The Mass is also a memorial of the Passion and Death of our Lord, etc.”

Now, to quote from “the Missal for the use of the Laity” (1838): “The priests reads the Offertory (in the Mass), and uncovers the chalice, taking the paten with the host (note, host is here spelt with a small “h”) and says: “Receive O Holy Father, almighty, eternal God, this unspotted host, etc.”.....Putting wine and water into the chalice, he says: “.....grant that by the mystery of this water and wine we may be partakers of his divinity,.....etc.” At his (the priest's) communion he says: “May the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve my soul to life eternal, Amen.” Then he receives the sacred Host (note, Host is here spelt with a capital “H” and is called sacred). Again, receiving the chalice, he says: “May the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve my soul to life eternal.” Further, coming down to the rails, he administers the Holy Communion (the Host only), saying to each communicant: “May the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy soul to life everlasting, Amen.”

I have gone to some length in my quotations, although I have cut out a lot. Well, what do we gather from this? The Laity are taught that in communion they receive a living Christ in his entirety—body, blood, soul and divinity—under the specie of bread alone; whereas the priest receives His under the species of bread, wine and water—body, blood and divinity, minus soul (soul is not mentioned in the prayers, divinity only is associated with the wine and water)—albeit at his communion he reminds himself that he receives only the Body and Blood of Christ. And as this is during the Mass which is a sacrifice, the divinity and soul must have vanished, Christ being dead; he (the priest) must receive a *dead Christ*.

I feel constrained to agree with Mr. E. Egerton Stafford in his *The Myth of Resurrection*, where he calls “Maundy Thursday” *Holy Thursday*, and the Host a “symbolic dead god.”

JNO. P. CARTER.

LABOUR AND RELIGION.

SIR,—The seven men and others of the Labour Party referred to in your “Acid Drop,” on page 72 of you issue of the 3rd inst., all of whom state that “Labour is attempting to put Christianity into practice,” is so much window dressing for display and appeal to the undiscerning public.

It is quite evident, whilst Labour representatives should above all others be honest with their members, they should be particularly so with themselves. To play upon the credulity of their supporters by means of the Christian superstition is degrading to their high mission, and just as insane as Queen Victoria's assertion that the Bible was the secret of England's greatness.

I am aware that your journal is not a medium for the discussion of political questions, but when Labour men resort to the devices of designing politicians by appeals to superstitious bigotry their sincerity cannot be allowed to go unchallenged.

SINE CURR.

Prayer.

You believe in prayer,
You pray continually day and night,
And yet you are a man of average intelligence,—
You will admit that much.

Now, if you are a man of average intelligence
You must know that there is not the slightest evidence
That there is anywhere throughout the universe
Anything whatever, except another human being,
Capable of hearing and understanding,
Much less of answering, a human prayer.

Answer me honestly,
Has any one of your numberless petitions
Ever brought results?

Let us put your theory to the test;
"The proof of the pudding is in the eating"

Pray to God, in whom you say you have such faith,
And it doesn't take very much faith;
Remember that a grain of mustard-seed
Is the size of faith sufficient to move a mountain out of its
place!

Let us be perfectly fair.
Don't pray for something to come that must of necessity
come,—
Such as that the sun shall arise at the proper calendar
time to-morrow,
Or that twice two shall be four to-morrow;
And don't pray for something to come that is impossible,
Such as that something that you know has already hap-
pened shall not have happened,
Or that from the date of your prayer twice two shall be
five or some other impossible number, instead of the
ever-present old-fashioned four;
But make your prayer that God shall cause something to
take place in the future,
That in the natural order of events either may or may not
happen

Let us suppose that your sister is very ill, that you love
her very dearly,
And that you want her to recover speedily;
Pray, therefore, to God to make her well again
By ten o'clock to-morrow morning;
Pray with all the faith you have,
Even if your stock is larger than the necessary grain of
mustard-seed, put it in.
And do not end your prayer with that age-old gag to
explain unanswered prayers,
"Nevertheless not my will but Thine be done,"
But go the whole way, and ask God to do just exactly
what you want done,
That he shall restore your suffering sister unto perfect
health by ten o'clock to-morrow morning.
One of two things will now occur,
Either your sister will be restored to perfect health at the
time specified,
Or she will not.

If she be still sick to-morrow morning at ten o'clock,
What power had your prayer?
What good was your God?
But if she be restored to perfect health,
Then you still must show these three things:
First, that there was a God that heard your prayer;
Second, that having heard that prayer, God was influ-
enced thereby, and gave your sister once again her
perfect health;
Third, that your sister would not have recovered anyway,
For it must be obvious to you that many people very
ill do actually get well again
Without one word of prayer in their behalf.

Take what alternative you will, my brother,
You sure are up a tree!

Now, after all this,
If you can still believe that God exists
And has the will and power to make folk sick or well—
really cares for us,
And hears and answers prayers,
Ask Him these questions for our enlightenment:
Why He made your sister sick,
Or if you prefer theological language, "permitted" her
to become so, in the first place?
And why, after having made her, or "permitted" her to
become sick,
He didn't care enough for her to do the decent thing
And make her well again without your prayer?

HOWELL S. ENGLAND.

What is the freedom that Rome allows? The freedom
to be a Romanist. That is the sum total of her vaunted
boast of loving liberty.—L. K. Washburn, "Truthseeker."

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, An Evening with Mr. Hyatt. 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, Debate—"Idealism," Mr.
C. E. Ratcliffe and Mr. C. H. Keeling.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brix-
ton Road, S.W.9): 7, Mr. H. R. Morell, "Nietzsche and
Modern Freethought."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School,
Peckham Road, S.E.): 7, Mr. Harry Snell, "The Higher
Co-operation."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate,
E.C.2): 11, Mr. Patrick Braybrooke, "John Morley as Thinker
and Writer."

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Upton Labour Party Hall, 84
Plasnet Road, Upton Park, E.13): 7, Mr. H. Spence, B.Sc.,
"Science and Human Affairs."

OUTDOOR.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Marble Arch): 3, a Lec-
ture; and on Wednesday at 8.

COUNTRY.—INDOOR.

GLASGOW BRANCH N.S.S. (Shop Assistant's Hall, 297 Argyle
Street): 6.30, Mrs. M. B. Laird, "The Vagaries of the Human
Machine." (Silver Collection.)

LEEDS BRANCH N.S.S. (Youngman's Restaurant, Lowerhead
Row): 7, Mr. Hands, "The Use of Libraries."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone
Gate): 6.30, Mr. F. W. Jowett, M.P., "Parliament and the
Party System."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Amalgamated Engineering
Union Hall): Mr. F. P. Corrigan, 3, "Ancient Egypt and
Modern Britain"; 6.30, "The Lunatic and the Ladle."

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

WESTON SUPER-MARE (Palace Theatre, Boulevard): Mr.
Chapman Cohen, 3, "The Other Side of Death"; 7, "A
Candid Examination of Christianity."

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the war, Commandant P/W Camp; seven years Admiralty Office;
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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,
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laughter. Eventually, with a loud guffaw, he slapped the book
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