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Views and Opinions.

Religion and Experience.

No Freethinker is likely to treat the argument from experience lightly. It is, indeed, part of his case that experience, individual or racial, or both combined, is the only reliable guide humanity can have. All our laws and customs and institutions are no more than, so to speak, solidified experiences. That much talked of quality "intuition," which runs "instinct" very close in a competition for fallacy, is no more than the often little-headed experience of years expressing itself in rapid judgment. Whether a thing be useful or truthful experience is the only ground we have for accepting it as one or the other. But experience is one thing, and the interpretation of experience is another. The objective surroundings of two men crossing a graveyard at night may be exactly the same, but where the one sees nothing but half-lights and delusive shadows, the other will see dim forms and hear faint voices from the next world. It is not here so much a question of being guided by experience as it is an interpretation of experience. That, as I have often pointed out, is the real line of division between the Freethinker and the believer. The objective world is the same to us, nay, it is the same world in which our ancestors lived. We are faced with the same forces as faced them. The difference between our attitude towards the world, of our beliefs concerning it, is wholly a question of interpretation. The fight between religion and science is a contest between rival interpretations of the same set of phenomena.

Facts and Fancies.

It is well to bear these considerations in mind when one is dealing with the argument so beloved by Christians—that based upon individual experience. We get this in the crude form of the "experience" of the revival meeting, with its ignorant interpretation of manufactured waves of emotion, and at the other end we get the more sophisticated pleadings of "mystics" and others, who believe that their experiences open to them the gates of a super-mundane world. A Freethinker who by some lucky accident of parentage or other fortunate circumstance has never believed in Christianity is solemnly warned that he is not in a position to understand Christianity, since he has never tried it; or we are told that Christianity

does not rest upon historic proofs or ratiocinative processes, but upon individual experience of the inner spiritual life. More and more, as criticism shatters the alleged historic basis of the Christian doctrines, and as comparative mythology helps to make clear the natural origins of religious beliefs, there grows up a tendency to use the alleged experiences of individuals as providing a safe basis for religious belief. Of course, it is only considered "safe" because it is considered impossible to get behind the conviction of those who assert these spiritual experiences. The fact that each of these "spiritual" experiences is possessed by others who have an entirely different explanation of their experiences is either ignored or overlooked.

* * *

A Question of Interpretation.

Let us take some concrete cases. Certain individuals, an ignorant peasant in one case, an educated man in another, pass through what they call a religious experience. Each describes the feelings experienced, the one putting it as due to the "power of Jesus" simply, the other asserting the existence of a whole order of spiritual beings of whom average mankind is altogether ignorant. Now here is a fact and an interpretation of the fact. There can be no reasonable question that when a man states the experience of a certain feeling his statement must be taken at its face value. But between that and the acceptance of the same person's explanation of the nature of his feeling there is a very wide and a very important difference. If a man complains of a feeling of intense depression, there is no ground whatever on which the statement can be questioned. But if he goes on to attribute the cause to the influence of the spirits of some departed ancestors who are tormenting him, the educated listener may well dismiss that theory and substitute a badly working liver. We do not usually take an individual as the best authority concerning the causes of his mental or physical states; we consult a specialist. And if we act thus in the case of ordinary mental or bodily states, why should we proceed on different lines when we are dealing with religious experiences? And yet, if we are to be guided by our religious teachers, while we are not prepared to accept the dictum of even an educated layman as to the cause of a headache, we are expected to accept unquestioningly the dictum of the most ignorant of religionists as to the real nature of his religious experiences.

* * *

Opening the Spiritual World.

If one studies religious records, ancient and modern, it is surprising the very large proportion of the evidence on behalf of religion which consists in a simple misunderstanding of ordinary experience. Thus, the other day the Master of the Temple was advocating the benefits of fasting during Lent on the ground that some of the greatest of religious visionaries had caught visions of a spiritual world through checking the "grosser" side of human life. Quite so, but a little sounder reflection might have led him to the

conclusion that the visions of the saint gained in this way are not substantially different from the visions of the alcoholic gained from over-indulgence in whisky. Fasting has been one of the oldest of religious devices to ensure glimpses of another order of being; and while the religionist has never failed to take fasting as the condition of entering into communication with another world, sounder knowledge prefers to treat it as a common consequence of a temporarily deranged organism. Primitive society manifested far more logical common sense in this direction than does the modern religionist. With earlier generations all visions, whatever their nature, were placed on the same level. Supernatural agency was claimed for the origin of all abnormal mental states. In modern times we readily admit a purely naturalistic explanation of all mental states with the single exception of those which serve the cause of religion. As usual, the primitive theory of things lingers longest in the field of religious belief. It is the last stronghold of the savage.

* * *

Cases of Conversion.

If we come from the obviously abnormal to the more normal we meet with the same thing. We are told that the subjects of religious experience fully realize that a change has come over them as a consequence of their religious experience, and the change is confirmed by the testimony of those around them. This can be granted without the admission proving the truth of the religious theory. There is the commonly cited case of the man over-fond of drinking who attends a religious service, listens, is impressed and finally "surrenders himself to Jesus," and moderates or gives up his drinking habits. What need is there of supernaturalism here? In the first place the temperament of the convert is probably ill-balanced, impulsive, emotional, in any case the drinking habit tends to make him so. The weakness of character which prevents him standing against the temptation of drink opens him to the emotionalism of the religious gathering—appealing as it does almost wholly to the emotions, and but little to the intellect. And once "saved," the constant presence of new friends, the desire to stand well in their estimation, the new class-feeling evoked, in short, the purely social influences brought to bear, are surely enough to account for the comparatively small number of cases benefited. The same instance of reform may be found altogether outside the field of religion, although in the ordinary way men and women who have lent a helping hand to a "weaker brother" do not go round advertising themselves or the degradation of their "cure."

* * *

The Point at Issue.

One may safely say that the religious experience of individuals, except so far as they serve as cases for the psychologist and the mental pathologist, are of no value whatever. No one questions the visions of the saint any more than one questions those of the dipsomaniac. It is not a question of whether a man here or there has certain experiences, but wholly as to the nature of their origin and meaning. And we must realize that the same canons of interpretations which serve when we are dealing with a man suffering from admitted neural derangement must also serve when we are dealing with the visions of a Christian saint or a revivalistic convert. It is the more surprising to find a psychologist of the standing of the late William James saying:—

It is the fashion in certain circles to-day to disparage such experiences in the name of pathological science. We have a medical materialism which will describe you St. Paul's vision on the Damascus road as a "discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he

being an epileptic," will dismiss St. Teresa as a case of hysteria, and Francis of Assisi as a hereditary degenerate. But all this is too amusingly superficial.

But why superficial? We have the same visions occurring now as then. Why is it superficial to say that the same phenomena in different ages must be due to the same causes. To my mind there is nothing more certain that a greater collection of pathologic cases than the *Lives of the Saints* does not exist. And while we are able to explain the whole phenomena of religious experience as partly due to the clothing of social forces in religious phraseology, and partly due to the misdirection of human energies at a time when the organism is peculiarly subject to such misdirection, there is no need to invoke the philosophy of the savage and the Dark Ages, and assume the existence of spiritual powers for the existence of which the whole history of man has failed to furnish a single proof.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Life of Olive Schreiner.

(Concluded from page 195.)

DURING her girlhood Olive Schreiner was an omnivorous reader, and one of the great books which enchained her all through her life was Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In one of her letters to me in 1894 she admitted having gone through that extraordinary work more than seven times. From 1874 to 1881 she acted as governess in several families, a position for which she was not naturally qualified and in which she was not a shining success. Her first and in many respects her worst place was in the family of Mr. George Weakly, a general agent and auctioneer, who had also a shop and owned and edited the local newspaper at Colesberg. In a letter to her mother soon after she took up the engagement she wrote:—

I think you will like to have some idea of the way in which I spend my days here, and it will be very easy to give it you, as one day passes exactly like another. I get up pretty early and always find many little things in the house to be seen to till breakfast-time. As soon as that meal is over, and, like all the others, it is a very hurried one, I go into school, and we don't come out till one, which is the dinner hour. When dinner is over, I dress at once and go down with Mrs. Weakly to the shop, where I stay till sunset. This is the hard part of my day's work, and I like it less and less every day. By the time we go up to the house supper is generally on the table, and that being over and the little ones put to bed, Mrs. W. and I get to needlework, which we keep on till half-past ten.

Mr. Havelock Ellis, writing of this in 1884, says:—

The work became harder and harder. She had to teach the children, to be shop-boy, to correct proofs for the newspaper (Weakly was lawyer, editor, and auctioneer; he was about 33). Here she in part gained the experience which enabled her to describe Waldo's experience in his letter to the dead Lyndall (but Waldo is herself *plus D*—). This man tyrannized over her. She was so hard worked that she used to sleep in her clothes from weariness and to save the trouble of undressing. At last he did something which made her leave; but as she was unable at first to get anything else to do, she stayed a month longer. At the end this man said: "You stayed for your pleasure," and paid her nothing.

That was barely fifty years ago, and one's blood runs cold at the merest possibility of such inhuman cruelty.

This interval of seven years, devoted chiefly to teaching Boer children, was not distinguished for its pleasures and enjoyments, but rather for its disappointments, sufferings and sorrows; at times its trials were most crushing. For instance, Mrs. Fouche, of whose

children she had charge for a year, would not let her have any more candle than a very small piece; saying that "nobody was any good who wanted a candle except to go to bed." The result was that Olive used to read and write by moonlight, and consequently had trouble with her eyes. Mrs. Fouche was an enemy of cleanliness, whilst Olive both loved and practised it. On one occasion, when Olive was suffering from an attack of asthma, her mistress addressed her firmly and kindly:—

Of course you're ill. How can it be otherwise? You're always washing yourself. Take a piece of meat now, if you keep on washing it won't you wash all the strength out of it? Of course you will; you know that's the truth. Well, it's just the same with your body; you wash all the strength out of it, and you get ill. Now take my advice and don't do it again.

The children all loved her passionately. Mrs. Fouche admitted that her son loved his teacher and wanted to marry her. The mother strongly advocated her son's suit, saying, "He loves you very much." "Oh, no." "Yes; can't you see it? Look how he shoves you." Ere long, however, Mrs. Cawood, her closest friend, and whose children she taught, learned that Olive was a Freethinker. In a letter written on July 25, 1879, Mrs. Cawood tells Olive how ardently she had loved her, and how for her sake she could have become anything. Then she goes on thus:—

That is why God in his goodness and wisdom used you as a means to show me what an awful soul-destroying thing Freethinking is. You know, I have often told you I can only learn through my affections. I must tell you I am not alone in what I now feel. Richard and I have both, while pointing out to the children that they owe you gratitude, told them that you are God's enemy, and that they cannot love God and you at the same time. I tell you this so that you shall be spared the pain and humiliation of expecting more from them than they have been taught to give. You know, Olive, if I were a Freethinker, I should be a much prouder one than you are. I should never be able to accept hospitality and kindness from Christians, knowing that if they knew me as I really was they would fly from me affrighted.

That startling letter began with the terrible declaration: "I no longer love you." And yet the wicked, hard-hearted Freethinker had the courage to reply: "I love you still just the same."

To us, the most interesting feature of this period in Olive Schreiner's life is the information frequently thrown out that she was reading and writing with the intention of publishing a book as soon as possible. At last, on March 4, she sailed from Port Elizabeth in the *Kinfauns Castle* for Cape Town and England, reaching her destination on March 30, 1881, with *The Story of an African Farm* ready for publication. As already stated, that incomparable work of art made its appearance early in the year 1883, and created a stupendous sensation among all classes of readers.

We must now face the question already alluded to, namely, Why was the *African Farm* never followed by a novel as great or greater? No one who really knew Olive Schreiner has any difficulty whatever in giving a satisfactory answer to that question. It was my privilege to become her friend in 1892, and almost immediately we commenced to correspond. In several of her letters she referred to the suffering from asthma which she had to endure. I asked her what was the origin of the asthma, and she related that when a girl of sixteen she went on a whole day's cart journey in a heavy rain. She sat in a corner and the rain, through some defect in the canvas, trickled in and ran down the back of her neck until she was thoroughly soaked. That night she was very ill, and suffered great pain, while next day she had a severe, and her

first, attack of asthma. For the rest of her life she was a perfect martyr to this terrible complaint; and more than once I witnessed her indescribable torture, after which I never wondered at her inability to work.

After an exceptionally beautiful and touching courtship, during which a series of almost ideally beautiful love-letters passed between them, Mr. S. C. Cronwright and Olive Schreiner became man and wife on February 24, 1894, the bridegroom adding the bride's name to his own. I have known Mr. Cronwright-Schreiner well for thirty years, and I can honestly testify that it has not been my fortune to meet a truer, more intensely honest, or a more courageously upright man, and, in this respect, he was a fit mate to Olive Schreiner. It is not my intention, however, to dwell upon the marriage, happy though it was, beyond observing that it enabled Mr. Cronwright-Schreiner to get nearer his wife than any other human being, in consequence of which his descriptions of her sufferings are more reliable than those of any others. He assures us that they had incapacitated her for work. He says:—

She arrives at a town and takes a room, she sends off a postcard at once saying how delightful it is, how the climate suits her and how she means to work; the next day perhaps, nearly always within a very few days, she writes again, condemning the place from the standpoint of her health, often in very forcible language, sometimes including the people; and she is off to some other town; and so it goes on.

Under such circumstances work became impossible. On this account she was a much greater woman than she ever succeeded in showing herself to be to the outside world. Again and again she told me of her great novel, of which she sent several lovely specimens; but her complaint always was that she was not in a state to revise it.

Mr. Cronwright-Schreiner's *Life of Oliver Schreiner* is a masterpiece, not a line too long for those who knew and loved her, nor for those who desire to study and understand a great character. It is also a biography utterly unlike any other I have ever read. You can scarcely tell the difference between the writer and the one written about.

J. T. LLOYD.

A Bishop Who Was Lynched.

The treason of to-day is the reason of to-morrow.

Eden Phillpotts.

A country without a saint, lacks something that nothing else can supply.—Ramsay MacDonald.

What gasconading rascals those saints must have been, if they first boasted these exploits or invented these miracles! These legends, however, were no more than monkish extravagances, over which one laughed inwardly.—Charlotte Brontë.

PROTESTANTS are supposed to be averse from saints; but, like so many other things connected with religion, this is far more accurate in theory than in fact. For there is one saint—Saint George—who is treated with unusual respect in this Protestant country. The saint's portrait is on the gold coinage, and on some of the banknotes; or, rather, there is a design of a man on horseback killing a militant cockroach with a carving-knife. This is meant to portray Saint George and the Dragon; and the man is supposed to be the patron saint of a civilized country.

Hence, it may prove of interest to many to be informed who Saint George was—his connection with English history, and his association with the dragon. Here is an account of the saint, as penned by Ralph Waldo Emerson, a very cultured American writer:—

George of Cappadocia, born at Epephania, in Cilicia, was a low parasite, who got a lucrative contract to

supply the army with bacon. A rogue and informer, he got rich, and was forced to run from justice. He saved his money, embraced Arianism, collected a library, and got promoted by a faction to the episcopal throne of Alexandria. When Julian came, A.D. 361, George was dragged to prison. The prison was burst open by the mob, and George was lynched, as he deserved. And this precious knave became in good time Saint George of England, patron of chivalry, emblem of victory and civility, and the pride of the best blood of the modern world.

It is all very sad, but "Saint George" himself is the trouble. Simple folk, like the Prime Minister, may consider the life of such a scoundrel edifying, but astute professors of religion have tried to escape responsibility by discarding the dishonest army contractor and by pretending to identify the saint with another man of the same name. But the other fellow is really a harder nut to crack than the pious profiteer who was lynched, and richly deserved it. The chief exploit of the other fellow is the slaying of the dragon. Sane people regard this as a mere fabulous invention, such as the stories of Perseus and the sea monster, Apollo and the python, Bellepheron and the chimera, and many another legend. This dissolves the saint into a solar myth; and it also disposes of him as the Christian crusader, champion of chivalry, patron saint of England, and stained-glass-window hero.

The other stories of the "saint" serve to show to what depths human credulity can sink. This "saint" was, we are told, killed three times, reviving on two occasions. During his short but not merry life, he was roasted, beaten with rods, crushed with rocks, beheaded, and thrown to wild animals. These fragments were thrown into boiling pitch, but he again came to life, being finally forced into heaven by being broken to pieces on a wheel.

What has all this nonsense to do with England, or even with common sense? Only in one fable is the "saint" described as having visited this country. If Christians believe that, they believe that the decrees of Omnipotence are affected by saintly intervention. Of what use is this particular "saint"? Is he not one of the patron saints of Germany and Austria as well as England?

There is no getting out of it! "Saint" George, in either version, is one of the most complete shams from which soft-hearted and soft-headed folk sought to extract religious sentiment. His story may appear as true as the Gospels to the unlettered and unsoaped members of the Greek Church in the East of Europe, but what concern have decent English people in England with the scoundrelly bacon-curer of Alexandria, or with the central figure in a solar myth?

Every schoolboy should know that "Saint George's" vogue came to England with the Crusades, though the legend was known long before. As a Protestant country we do not need a patron saint at all, as a civilized country we do not need to perpetuate the follies of the Middle Ages; but Roman Catholic priests must rub their hands with glee when they recall that, in spite of our so-called Protestantism and our boasted civilization, a real "saint" still figures on our coinage and currency, and commands the admiration—real, or assumed—of our Prime Minister. The patron saint of England, like so many Biblical heroes, is a sham and a delusion. So far as the "saint" is concerned, there is nothing to celebrate.

MIMNERMUS.

I read it all in black and white yesterday, for as a priest I must read the papers, a thing that none iv ye must do, bear in mind, for ye have not been educated up to it and ye might fall into sin if ye do things that yer priest forbids ye to do.—Patrick Macgill, "Glenmoran."

Sir William Crookes.

To the general public the man of science is a man of mystery, a man of inhuman and somewhat unaccountable tastes. Not everyone goes so far as to maintain that he is a freak because he indulges in an activity "with no money in it." But it seems to be generally agreed that the "scientist" is a being living outside ordinary human spheres, not amenable to ordinary human standards, a being who is usually harmless, but may quite conceivably become dangerous—a sort of well-meaning revolutionary who plays with fire and other forces without much regard for the safety and stability of existing institutions, and who is therefore best kept at work along recognized lines under the general supervision of the more orthodox leaders of the community.—Fournier D'Albe, "Life of Sir William Crookes," p. 2.

THE recently published life of Sir William Crookes¹ is, of course, mainly concerned with the discoveries and researches of the great chemist, as to the value of which we all agree. The range and diversity of his discoveries in science was wonderful. He invented the radiometer, the spintharoscope, and the "Crookes's tube"—by means of which he demonstrated the existence of "radiant matter," or, as he described it, matter in "a fourth state."—to mention only three of his discoveries, and there were many others.

Sir William Crookes is also known all the world over as a believer in Spiritualism, and more especially as a convinced believer in the physical phenomena, such as the playing by spirits of musical instruments, the lifting of tables, the floating in air of mediums, the materializing of spirits, and so forth; of which we hear very little to-day, the spirits having become uncommonly shy of this kind of demonstration since that time. It is the spiritual side of Sir William Crookes's experiences with which we are concerned in this article.

It cannot be said that Fournier D'Albe contributes anything new, or throws any fresh light upon the subject, to which he devotes one chapter (chapter xii). He is very anxious to hold the balance even, and considers himself "as capable of impartiality in this matter as anyone living"; having personally attended many séances, some of which he apparently considers genuine, and others, like Dr. Crawford's "Coligher Circle," to which he gives an adverse verdict.

Sir William Crookes's spiritual investigations began in the year 1871, when he was thirty-nine years of age, and lasted until 1874, when he dropped them for ever. His biographer asks:—

Was Crookes tricked? Why did he not go on? Did he have doubts later? Was he always a Spiritualist? The name of Crookes has been used for fifty years to support spiritualism. Hardly a week passes but his name is flourished in the face of a sceptical world, often in support of the grossest fraud. The amount of harm thus done is incalculable, both to the public and to the good name of Crookes. There is no protection for the dead man's memory, for nobody could keep up with the mass of misrepresentation issued every week. There is not a single fraudulent medium who does not habitually reel off half a dozen of the most eminent names in science to support his (or her) pretensions. And the list invariably includes Crookes.

Was Crookes the founder of a new science of the supernatural, or was he an eminent physicist gone wrong?.....These questions, important as they are to millions of human beings, born and yet unborn, can hardly be decided yet. (p. 179.)

One very curious and significant fact is here publicly revealed for the first time, namely, that a great many of the letters written by, and to, Sir William Crookes at the time he was engaged in these spiritual investigations, letters dealing with the subject in hand, have

¹ Fournier D'Albe. *The Life of Sir William Crookes* (Fisher Unwin, 1923).

been destroyed. Sir William used to keep copies of the letters he wrote. They were copied into a letter-book and indexed. The copies have been removed, but the index has been left intact, and shows that seventy-three letters are missing; and his biographer says: "I have been unable to ascertain why and by whom these copies were removed." Similarly, from a register of letters written to Crookes during the same period, 208 have vanished.

It is not a difficult matter to guess who destroyed these letters, or his motive in doing so. Who would be interested in their destruction? Not the Spiritualists, because Crookes is writing at this time, as we shall see, as a convinced and fervent believer. We also regret the destruction of these letters, as they would demonstrate—as the one we shall presently quote from—the utter unreasonableness and want of common precaution against fraud which characterized these investigations. Everything points to Crookes himself as the destroyer of these letters; for a very simple reason. He employed several mediums who were afterwards publicly exposed as frauds and tricksters. Moreover, they were the same tricks which Crookes certified could only have been performed by spiritual assistance. There was Eva Fay, to whose sésances Crookes paid repeated visits, but who, owing to Mr. Maskelyne's exposure of her tricks, got into low water and then wrote to Maskelyne offering to come to the Egyptian Hall and publicly explain how she tricked Crookes. A public statement which, if it had not been true, would have involved Maskelyne in a prosecution for libel and heavy damages. Then there was Florrie Cook, who materialized a lady spirit into warm flesh and blood, who allowed herself to be caressed and kissed by Crookes. Florrie Cook was afterwards—three times—caught in the act of impersonating a spirit, and then retired from the business. Herne and Williams were two of the most arrant rogues and impostors in the history of spiritualism; they are mentioned in the letter from which we are now going to quote.

This letter is one of those of which the copy has been destroyed, but the original has survived, it is written to his friend Huggins, and describes a sésance held with the mediums Home, Herne, and Williams. It is dated April 12, 1871, and begins: "We had the most exciting and satisfactory meeting last night I have ever known." Exciting it certainly was, Herne and Williams saw to that. The sésance was held in the dark, the reason given being that "the phenomena with Herne and Williams are not strong in the light." Which we have no difficulty in believing. Home was with difficulty induced to sit, on the plea that dark sésances were not satisfactory—Home himself, by the way, usually allowed very little light at his sésances—probably the real reason was that he did not care to work with a pair of such coarse and clumsy practitioners as Herne and Williams. The account proceeds:—

We were arranged round the table in such a way that each medium was held by a trustworthy person, and the rule was *very rigidly* enforced that all hands were to be held during the darkness. This was so strictly carried out that when any of us wanted to use his handkerchief or get his chair, a light was struck. At first we had very rough manifestations—chairs knocked about, the table floated about six inches from the ground and then dashed down, loud and unpleasant noises bawling in our ears, and altogether phenomena of a low class. After a time it was suggested that we should sing, and as the only thing known to all the company, we struck up "For he's a jolly good fellow." The chairs, table, and things on it kept up a sort of anvil accompaniment to this. After that, D. D. Home gave us a solo—rather a sacred piece—and almost before a dozen words were uttered Mr. Herne was carried right up, floated across

the table and dropped with a crash of pictures and ornaments at the other end of the room.....This being repeated a second time, on Home's singing again. Both mediums this time being lifted up and placed on the table. Hands being held throughout.

Of course, Herne and Williams were trying to "stash up"—as schoolboys say—Home's performance, which always made a feature of hymn singing and religion. As to the rule about the holding of hands being *very rigidly* enforced—emphasized by italics—it is difficult to imagine Herne's hands being still held when he was dashed to the end of the room; and, as a matter of fact, everybody pleased themselves in the matter. Crookes goes on to relate how Sergt. Cox liberated one of his hands by joining the hands of those on either side of him. And, what is more, Crookes had his own hands free some of the time, for he tells us: "On several occasions I made rapid darts in front, trying to catch the arm when the fingers were touching near me, but not once did I touch anything." And this is what he terms carrying out the rule *very rigidly*!

Fournier D'Albe remarks:—

In criticism of the sésance so glowingly described to Huggins, it should be mentioned that Herne and Williams were some years afterwards convicted of trickery. The phenomena described as "exciting and satisfying" are absolutely devoid of any evidential value, and only indicate the clumsy frauds which two, at least, of the mediums were subsequently found to practise. In reading the account we do not recognize our Crookes. There seem to be two Crookeses: one, the conscientious, painstaking, accurate man of science, who excels in weighings and measurings; the other, an impulsive, excitable hunter after miracles, whose caution and common sense are bowled over completely in the presence of some tricksters and some devotees of a fashionable craze. One feels some gratitude towards the Spillers, Carpenters, and Ray Lankesters for their trenchant opposition, without which Crookes might never have got clear of imposture. Their criticism forced him to use scientific methods in his investigations, and applied a much-needed brake to his ardour. (p. 195-196.)

There is no doubt in our mind that when Crookes in later years came to look over this correspondence he recognized its damaging character to his reputation, and therefore he destroyed it.

W. MANN.

Elijah's Great Flight.

THE story of Elijah has always been attractive and fascinating to the young. I remember when I was a Sunday school scholar many years ago how I revelled in the wonderful achievements of this mighty Man of God—how he raised from the dead the son of the widow of Zarephath; confounded the priests of Baal by calling fire down from heaven; and finally, when he came to say farewell to the children of Israel, there came a fiery chariot, with fiery horses, and he went by a whirlwind up to heaven. This kind of story appeals to the youthful and credulous mind, but later in life, when one begins to examine it, how incredible and absurd it all seems.

This great flight to heaven in a chariot of fire, with fiery horses, we may call "The Flight of Ages"—for it had never been done before, and certainly has never been accomplished since. For Elijah went up, but never came down again—either with or without his chariot and fiery horses. Aviators can fly up with their aeroplanes to a considerable height to-day, but however high they may fly they are always compelled by considerations of getting their breath and the law of gravitation to come down again. But the mighty Man of God defied the law of gravitation and flew straight

up to heaven, and stayed there—wherever that may be.

Now however attractive this story may be in the Bible narrative, it is much more fascinating and impressive in *The Oratorio*, with the melodious music of Mendelssohn. Some years ago the Carl Rosa Opera Company presented this Oratorio in the form of an opera; now "The Old Vic" Opera Company occasionally perform it; they do not, however, call it an opera, but an "Oratorio in Action," which religious people, I suppose, think sounds better. At all events, in this form it makes a very attractive programme, with fine recitatives and airs for Elijah and Obadiah and others, and some glorious choruses by a well trained choir of young and fresh voices. Mr. Joseph Farrington, with his fine bass voice and his noble and dramatic bearing, makes a splendid character study of Elijah; indeed, he moves so majestically and sings with such rare power and pathos that he dominates all the scenes in which he appears. He was particularly fine in his scene with the widow. But she at first tries to repulse him. She asks:—

What have I to do with thee, O Man of God? Art thou come to me to call my sin unto remembrance? To slay my son art thou come hither? Help me Man of God! My son is sick, and his sickness is so sore that there is no breath left in him. I go mourning all the day long; I lie down and weep at night. See mine affliction. Be thou the orphan's helper! Help my son, there is no breath left in him.

Sung in plaintive style, with the clear soprano voice of Eleanor Felix, this appeal is very effective. Elijah then goes into the widow's cottage. He exclaims in dramatic fashion:—

Give me thy son. "Turn unto her, O Lord my God; in mercy help this widow's son. For thou art gracious and full of compassion, and plenteous in mercy and truth. Lord my God let the spirit of this child return, that he again may live."

But the widow asks: "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? There is no breath in him." Elijah cries yet again to his God: "Lord let the spirit of this child return that he again may live"; and Elijah, the miracle worker, goes again into the cottage of the widow and brings the child out alive. But, of course, it is the Lord's doings, although the widow gives Elijah some of the praise. She says: "Now by this I know thou art a man of God, and that his word in thy mouth is truth. What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?" And both Elijah and the widow exclaim in song: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might"; which makes a fine dramatic ending to the first act. Even the Freethinker listening to the beautiful music forgets to be critical at such a juncture.

In the second act we find ourselves outside the temple of Baal on Mount Carmel. The Baalites are praying to their God. There has been a drought in the land; but Elijah predicts that God will send rain again upon the earth. The children of Israel, in addition to the Baalites and their prophets, are gathered at Mount Carmel, and also the prophets of the Groves, and before this multitude Elijah throws out a challenge. He says:—

Rise, then, ye priests of Baal, select and slay a bullock and put fire under it; uplift your voices and call the God ye worship, and I will call on the Lord Jehovah; and the God who by fire shall answer, let him be God.

Well, that challenge seems fair enough. But Elijah goes one step further, he proposes that the Baalites should first call upon their Gods: "your numbers," he says, "are many; I, even I, only remain, one prophet of the Lord; invoke your forest Gods and mountain Gods."

And then the contest begins. The Baalites, in a glorious chorus, call upon their Gods: "Hear us Baal," they cry. "Hear mighty God. O Baal, answer us. Let the flames fall and extirpate the foe." But however well they sing there is no reply. Then Elijah begins to blaspheme, just as ordinary vulgar Freethinkers are supposed to do. He says, in quite a satirical vein: "Call him louder, for he is God! He talketh; or he is pursuing; or he is on a journey; or peradventure he sleepeth, so awaken him; call him louder." Smarting under this pitiless sarcasm, the Baalites call still louder, and ask their God why at such a time he slumbers; but let them call never so loud there is no response. Then Elijah speaks. He bids them yet again call louder, and then urges them "with knives and lancets to cut themselves after your manner; leap upon the altar ye have made; call him and prophesy"; and for the third time there is no answer.

Then comes Elijah's turn. He calls upon his people "to cast their burdens upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. He never will suffer the righteous to fall. He is at thy right hand." And then, with a loud voice, Elijah cries: "O thou who makest thine angels spirits; thou whose ministers are flaming fires, let them now descend!" And at that moment a spark comes down from the wings on to the altar; the bullock is consumed; and so Elijah claims the victory. But Elijah is not content with victory only; he seeks the spoils of war; and so he commands his followers to "take all the prophets of Baal and let not one of them escape you, bring them down to Kishon's brook, and there let them be slain." All this is done in truly religious fashion; that the Lord may be glorified.

After this, Obadiah and the people call on Elijah to use his influence to obtain rain on the earth; all the other gods have failed, and Jehovah therefore must be appealed to. He alone can effect this desirable result. Elijah sends a youth to the mountain to see what effect a prayer may have, but the youth says that he can see nothing; the heavens are as brass, they are as brass above me. Elijah prays yet again; but the youth says "the earth is as iron under me; there is no sign of rain. But at length, when the youth has listened again, he exclaims: "Behold, a little cloud ariseth now from the waters, it is like a man's hand! The heavens are black with clouds and with wind; the storm rusheth louder and louder." Then the people shout: "Thanks be to God for all his mercies." And Elijah joins this chorus of praise by the declaration: "Thanks be to God, for he is gracious, and his mercy endureth for evermore."

In the third and last act the incidents are as interesting and exciting as ever. The widow joins with Elijah in praising the Lord; and calls upon the people to hear what the Lord speaketh; and the Queen of Israel sings that beautiful solo, *O Rest in the Lord*, which goes straight to the hearts of the audience.

The Queen then asks: "Why hath he [Elijah] spoken in the name of the Lord? Doth Ahab govern the kingdom of Israel, while Elijah's power is greater than kings?" This causes a revolt among the people, and they exclaim with one accord: "He shall perish!" Elijah finding that his power is on the wane, asks the Lord to let him die, for he is no better than his fathers. An invisible spirit commands him to "get thee without; stand on the mount before the Lord." Elijah does so. For a few seconds the stage is darkened, and when the lights are turned up he has disappeared. He has been taken up by a whirlwind; the people join in a glorious chorus, and the curtain falls, with Elijah on his way to heaven. Assuredly as an opera or an "Oratorio in Action," the story of Elijah is more attractive and entertaining than the mere narrative in the Book of Kings.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Acid Drops.

A Bill has just been introduced into the House of Commons by the Member for North Hackney making it possible for clergymen to sit in Parliament. On the face of it, and as a matter of pure principle there can be no objection to this from those who believe in genuine religious equality. As a matter of expediency we may be very strongly of opinion that the fewer parsons returned to Parliament the better, but it is one thing to assert that if people were wise they would not elect a clergyman to Parliament, and quite another thing to say that because a man is a parson he shall be debarred the privileges of other citizens. That is to punish a man for his opinions, and is not a whit better or more justifiable than excluding a man from Parliament because he does not believe in the Christian religion. And with opinions about religion, for or against, the State should have no concern.

But these men must be logical and have the courage that comes from the appreciation of a principle. If parsons object to the State laying down regulations concerning them, if they desire the State to stand aloof from them and their opinions, they must be content to surrender privileges at the same time that they demand freedom from particular restrictions. They must cease to demand an official place in civic ceremonies, from the Crown downwards. They must relinquish that form of State endowment which comes from the non-payment of rates and taxes, and submit to all the responsibilities to which every citizen submits. They must agree to having their opinions treated exactly as the State treats other opinions on any subject whatsoever. In a word, if the parson wishes to be treated as an ordinary citizen he should be so treated. But he cannot expect to, at the same time, be placed on the same level as other citizens and put in a position of privilege which no other citizen enjoys.

But when the principle has been admitted, it remains true that the very worst people to be placed in Parliament are parsons. There is not one in a hundred who would be capable of looking at a question from any other point of view than a sectarian one. He would be there to represent a sectarian interest, not a national one, and would judge all questions from the point of view of the effect they would have upon the fortunes of his own Church. Let anyone try to picture the way in which members of Parliament who were parsons would discuss such questions as those of divorce, education, or freedom of opinion, and they will realize that parsons in Parliament would mean the establishment of an interest that has always been shamelessly sectarian and profoundly intolerant. On principle there is no reason why a parson—granted the genuine disestablishment of the Churches—should not be permitted to stand for Parliament. But an electorate that placed many of them there would be on the way to committing political suicide.

Cardinal Dubois, Archbishop of Paris, recently forbade the performing of a religious service on the body of General Pelié. The ground of the refusal was that General Pelié had married a Protestant lady who had divorced her husband. From the Roman Catholic point of view we assume that the Cardinal was justified in his action. It was narrow, it was intolerant, but it was Christian, and we do not see that anyone has a real ground for objection. But we wish that Christians would be equally punctilious when it comes to the case of burying known Freethinkers. In the latter case we find the Churches everywhere snatching the corpse of a man, and performing a religious service in order to hide the fact that the dead man repudiated them and their teachings.

The parishioners of the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, being about equally divided between followers of the Archbishop Tikhon and followers of the "Living Church," have asked the authorities to build a brick wall down the church in order to divide one group from the

other. All over the world Christianity seems to breed the same feelings of brotherly kindness. Only a solid wall would, we presume, prevent these two lots of Christians from fighting during the service.

The Church Council of St. Michael's, Bromley-by-Bow, has sent a resolution to the Bishop of London asking him to appoint a Sunday for the preaching of sermons on the conditions of the German people, and appeals for collections for their assistance. The Bishop has declined. He believes in loving our enemies at point of the bayonet, and succouring them with poison gas.

A Miss Hickey, of Birkenhead, in a speech reported in the local press, says: "We are a thinking people who believe in a home, a country, and a God." The lady is a Theist. Christians believe in a three-headed God.

According to an interview in *Collier's Weekly*, an American publication, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald is reported to have said: "The leaders of the Labour Party are ministers of the Gospel, lawyers, writers, and the intelligentsia of England." It is so kind of the reporter to separate the parsons from the "intellectuals."

The principal Christian Churches in Europe are considering the advisability of a fixed date for Easter. Should the date be fixed, the clergy will lay their hands on their hearts and swear that it was never altered.

The Churches are to meet in solemn conclave for the purpose of discussing how war may be prevented. Why not follow the example of a Gothic bishop, who, when he translated the Bible into Gothic, thoughtfully omitted the Book of Kings, explaining that he feared that the many accounts of wars that were contained therein might render the Goths more warlike than they were by nature.

The *Guardian* takes up the cry, uttered last week by the *Church Times*, that the Churches are getting insufficient recruits. "Anxiety is felt," it declares, "in many quarters about the man-power of the Church." It suggests the same remedy—the recruiting of priests from the ranks of the lower classes, to whom hitherto the Church has been practically a closed profession. There is a charming *naïveté* about one of its admissions. "Even if it be held that it would be wrong to reduce the standard of general culture in the ministry—as, indeed, it would be—the leavening of the clergy by a strong admixture of *men of rugged, independent and virile character* could not be other than advantageous." The italics are our own. Some of the meek and lowly followers of the Nazarene will be tempted to the use of picturesque language when they read this implicit confession that the clergy lack the manly qualities.

The same issue of the paper is guilty elsewhere of a frankness that is rather unusual in the Christian. "In religious matters," it says gravely, "ceremonial has in all countries played a uniquely important part." If this habit of candidly admitting the truth is cultivated, we may live to see the *Guardian* admitting that a good deal of the strength that religion possesses to-day in this country is based purely on the appeal that it makes to the senses.

Mr. George Lansbury, writing in the *Daily Herald*, says that Christians are not "conscious hypocrites." He adds: "Their lives are too full either of work or pleasure; they have no time to really think." To comment upon this would be to gild refined gold, to paint the lily.

The Bishop of Exeter having suggested that prisoners should be trained as skilled artisans, Mr. Fred Bramley, general secretary of the Trade Union Congress, replied: "Why not train them for the Church. The converted

criminal would surely make a fine preacher!" A palpable hit!

In a new Biblical film is shown a picture of the Israelites walking dry shod through the Red Sea, which obligingly stands on either side like a stone wall. A newspaper describes the effect as being "so realistic as to leave one dumbfounded." We can quite believe it.

The Archbishop of Canterbury opposes reform in the marriage laws in the name of a two-thousand-years-old superstition. And the people of this country are willing that he should receive £15,000 yearly for so kindly preventing them from becoming civilized.

The verger at St. Andrew's Church, Coulsdon, going his rounds, found the altar draperies in flames. The infidel wind had blown the altar draperies against the sacred candles.

Some of the new Labour Members of Parliament have been hurling Biblical texts at their opponents' heads in the House of Commons, much to the amusement of the hard-shell politicians facing them. When the Labour Members have been longer in politics they will find out that for every text an opposite can be found; and the duty of faith is to believe both.

Holding up a copy of the Rent Restriction Act, during the hearing of a case in the County Court at Doncaster, Judge Turner said it was worse to understand than the Ten Commandments, a remark that provoked laughter in the court.

The Rev. Hector MacTurk, vicar of Silk Willoughby, Lincolnshire, is very frank concerning the League of Nations in a letter which he recently wrote to the Press. According to this follower of the Nazarene pacifist, those who believe in the League are living in "a fool's paradise." Furthermore, they are reckoning without God, and displaying their ignorance of his word. We doubt whether this charming frankness will commend itself to the majority of Christians. It is more popular, at the present time, to quote piously from the New Testament, than to refer to the innumerable wars and massacres of the Old Testament.

We have recently come across another example of the divers ways in which Christianity has benefited the human race materially. This time it is not the founding of a hospital, or some of those other acts of benevolence (which are generally of doubtful authenticity). Two Portsmouth men have demolished St. Mary's Church, in Old Portsmouth, carted away the bricks, etc., and built a cinema capable of accommodating a thousand persons.

Great difficulty is experienced in carrying on Church work in North Worcestershire, owing to the prevalence of 'flu, which has attacked many clergymen. Several churches have had to close owing to the impossibility of obtaining preachers. Here is very plainly an occasion for a miracle, or supernatural healing. The miraculous healing of the sick clergy, or the provision of a corps of celestial preachers would do more to strengthen the faith of the doubters than any number of dances and other social aids to piety.

Apparently the Father of all Evil has corrupted the organist and choir of Upton Church, Nottinghamshire, for they are on strike! The Rev. A. S. Randle, the vicar, requested them to take the responses in a lower key during Lent, but with a truly Christian meekness they refused and resigned in a body. The choir has since formed itself into a village glee party!

The Rector of Keighley, the Rev. E. T. G. Hunter, said recently in a lecture on Spiritual Healing, that spiritual

healing was no longer a fad, but a definitely recognized work of the Church. Spiritual healing did not interfere in any way with medical work or with mental treatment, but worked in co-operation with them. There is, perhaps, no surer sign of the final decay of religion in this country than this growing tendency of the clergy to regard various forms of spiritualism with favour.

A Doncaster miner who claimed to have a cure for cancer, has been committed for trial on five charges of inflicting grievous bodily harm to his patients, and on four other charges of obtaining money by false pretences. His cure seems to have consisted of ointments and liniments used for treating dogs and horses, and contained intensely corrosive drugs. He claimed an intimacy with the Deity that some of the patriarchs of the good old book might have envied. In one of the letters read to the jury the following passage occurred:—

God visited me in this cell on Sunday night, and he called me twice, saying, "David." I put my head under the clothes, and heard a second call. When I spoke, I said "Here I am, Lord." He replied, "Why did thou not speakest at first? Be at rest; I am with you. You have no earthly friend. I will be with you on the day of your trial, and place my words on the end of your tongue. I have chosen you to be my servant now and for evermore."

Alas! these be degenerate, unbelieving days. The somewhat ungrammatical Deity does not appear to have impressed the twelve good men. A couple of centuries or more ago this claim, supported by such circumstantial evidence, might have established the gentleman's reputation as a holy person. Alternatively, it might have aroused the jealousy of the professional miracle vendors, in which case he would likely enough have found himself condemned to some particularly nasty kind of death on a charge of witchcraft.

Glasgow is to have brighter religion! In an endeavour to check the decline in church attendance at the Glasgow churches the United Free Church of Scotland has decided to group the churches in the Blythswood district of that city, and to institute a series of brighter services. In the course of the discussion at the presbytery, Mr. J. Buyers Black, a representative elder, said parents were being urged by young people to instal wireless sets so that on Sunday evenings they need not trouble to leave their firesides, but could listen-in to songs of the sirens which allured them to abstain from assembling together. Glasgow, the worthy man admitted, had a population of one million, of which four hundred thousand persons had no connection with any church. A variety of reasons seems to have been adduced in explanation of this non-attendance at church, ranging from joy-riding to attendance at political meetings. One gentleman was exceedingly frank. The methods of the church were wrong, he declared. They were antiquated, and for a hundred years *the Church had failed to keep up with the growing intelligence of the young people.*

In New York, however, this attempt to brighten up Christianity seems to have created a storm in a teacup, for the repeated performance of Greek dances by bare-footed girls in the Church of St. Mark in the Bowery has led Bishop Manning to place the rector, Dr. Guthrie, under discipline. Moreover, the Bishop has cancelled his visitation to the church for this year, and will do so until the rector obeys orders. According to Reuter, however, the rector has the support of many clergy and church members for his innovation.

Men's wear is to be brighter this summer; and those who play tennis, golf, cricket, and indulge in boating, are to sport rainbow colours. May we suggest, prayerfully, a return to the highly coloured blankets that artists suggest were worn by the twelve disciples, and North American Indians.

"Is modern preaching too quiet?" asks the *Manchester Guardian*. It is quite evident that the Salvation Army does not hold meetings outside the *Guardian* office.

The National Secular Society.

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

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

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

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

To Correspondents.

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

H. BAYFORD.—We cannot say when the second series of *Essays in Freethinking* will be issued, but we hope soon. Your letter did not reach us till Wednesday.

J. ALMOND.—Thanks for address.

TAB CAN.—The unfortunate thing is that a man has no legal right over his own body after he is dead. In spite of all injunctions the next of kin has the right to dispose of the body as he or she may think fit. The only remedy is either to get an alteration in the law, or to develop in Christians a sufficient sense of decency that they will respect the wishes of the dead person as to the absence of a religious ceremony. Thanks for cuttings.

R. OGILVIE.—Thanks for offer to send copy of pamphlet, which we shall be pleased to have. We are glad to have your warm appreciation of the *Freethinker*.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—A. M. Wright, 10s.

G. BEDBOROUGH.—Received, with thanks.

H. SMEDLEY.—What we intended to convey was the idea that the achievements of culture in art, literature or science are built up through the progressive life of the race. That does not in any degree take away from the greatness of an individual who effects a new synthesis of these cultural products.

A. MILLAR.—Next Week.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

Considerable interest was shown in Mr. Cohen's lectures on Sunday last in the Town Hall, Pendleton. The audiences showed a slight improvement in point of numbers, and it is quite evident that the bigoted action of the Town Council with regard to the *Freethinker* has served to whet people's interest in such a wicked paper and the movement it represents. Mr. Rosetti occupied the chair in the afternoon, and Councillor Monks in the evening. There were a number of questions asked after each lecture; and friends were present from Bolton, Stockport, and other places in the district.

Perhaps it is an open question whether the world is growing better or worse, it depends upon the point of view. But those who have strong opinions on either side will have a chance of expressing them at the St. Pancras Reform Club to-day (April 6). Mr. Rex Roberts is to affirm "That every year the world becomes a worse place to live in." To be followed by discussion. Admission is free.

The Birmingham Branch is holding a concert to-day (April 6) at Dericourts Restaurant, High Street. The proceedings will commence at 7. Admission is free to members and their friends.

The Bethnal Green Branch opens its open-air work in Victoria Park to-day (April 6) at 3.30. We hope that East End Freethinkers will see that there is a good rally for the first meeting. There is nothing like a good start. Mr. Corrigan will deliver the opening lecture.

For seven shillings and sixpence one may read *An Ex-Prelate's Meditations*. One gathers from a review of this book that there is as much sincerity in religion as could be comfortably placed on a pin's point. The clergy are told how and when to answer invitations; and the author, Herman J. Heuser, concludes by saying that a good lay organizer in a parish is like a blooded collic—he can often do what a pastor cannot." We trust that the lay organizer recognizes his identification with sheep, is duly flattered by this clerical condescension, and at the same time impressed by this chitter-chatter in book-form, that may be described as cynicism for the very young. Bishop Blougram was not the first to set the fashion in the priestly game of "heads or tails I win."

Dean Inge has now realized that his shrieking performances in public have consequences different from those delivered to the public six feet above contradiction. As a change from this paper's opinion of his opinions, we take the *Times Literary Supplement*: "The peril by which Dean Inge's society would be menaced would be that which has often proved fatal to Protestant communities—the accumulation of wealth." A glance at the daily list of wills is sufficient proof for anyone that in life there was much talk of worship of him and him crucified; and death discloses that it was really the Calf of Gold who had been worshipped in secret, all the time.

A man that tells me my opinions are absurd or ridiculous, impertinent or unreasonable, because they differ from his, seems to intend a quarrel instead of a dispute, and calls me a fool or madman, with a little more circumstance though perhaps. I pass for one as well in my senses as her, as pertinent in talk, as prudent in life; yet there are the common civilities, in religious argument, of sufficient and conceited men, who talk much of right reason, and mean always their own; and make their private imagination the measure of general truth. But such language determines all between us, and the dispute comes to end in three words at last, which it might as well have ended in at first—that he is in the right, and I am in the wrong.—*Sir William Temple*.

The Scottish Church in the Seventeenth Century.

IN view of what Mr. Ramsay MacDonald has recently said at the Council of the Free Churches concerning the virtues of the old Scottish Sabbath, it is rather interesting to enquire into the condition of that country during the period when the priesthood was supreme. After the latter part of the sixteenth century a variety of causes conspired to increase the prestige of the clergy, and they were not slow to make use of the influence which they thus acquired. Buckle and other historians have given us amazing pen-pictures of the state of affairs which resulted. Says Buckle (*History of Civilization in England*):—

The Scotch, during the seventeenth century, instead of cultivating the arts of life, improving their minds, or adding to their wealth, passed the greater part of their time in what were called religious exercises. The sermons were so long and so frequent that they absorbed all leisure, and yet the people were never weary of hearing them. When a preacher was once in the pulpit the only limit to his loquacity was his strength. Being sure of a patient and reverential audience, he went on as long as he could. If he discoursed for two hours without intermission he was valued as a zealous pastor who had the good of his flock at heart, and this was about as much as an ordinary clergyman could perform, because, in uttering his sentiments he was expected to display great vehemence, and to evince his earnestness by boiling and sweating abundantly. This boundary was, however, often passed by those who were equal to the labour; and Forbes, who was vigorous as well as voluble, thought nothing of preaching for five or six hours.....On great occasions several clergymen were present in the same church, in order that when one was fatigued he might leave the pulpit and be succeeded by another, who, in his turn, was followed by a third; the patience of the hearers being apparently inexhaustible.....The same congregation would sometimes remain together for ten hours listening to sermons and prayers, interspersed with singings and readings.

Christian priests have never been remarkable for their meekness, and the excessive homage they received seems completely to have turned the heads of the Scottish clergy, so that they usurped civil authority. At the height of their power in the seventeenth century, the pastor of each parish selected a number of laymen on whom he could depend, who were known as elders. When this council assembled together it was known as the Kirk-Session, and its task was to enforce the injunctions uttered from the pulpit. Such was the superstitious reverence of the people, this council was more powerful than any civil tribunal, and by its aid the pastor reigned supreme. Whoever dared defy him was excommunicated, deprived of his property, and was (if these penalties were not sufficient), considered to be eternally damned to suffer in the particularly hideous hell which the Scottish divines had conceived. So powerful did the clergy become that they interfered with men's private and domestic concerns. Clarendon, for example, in his *History of the Rebellion*, declares that "The preacher reprehended the husband, governed the wife, chastized the children, and insulted over the servants, in the houses of the greatest men." One famous preacher defended the right of the minister to interfere in family affairs on the grounds that such was the custom in the times of Joshua. In 1603 the Presbytery of Aberdeen commanded that every master of a house should keep a rod, that his family, including the servants, might be beaten if they used improper language; and in 1674 the clergy exercised supervision over all visitors to that city, lest any person should be "re-

ceived in the familie without testimoniall presented to the minister."

Nothing could escape the supervision of the minister and his elders and other spies. One elder was allotted to each of the several districts into which the parish was divided. During divine service private houses were searched lest any one should be absenting himself or herself from the kirk. Without consent of the Kirk-Session no one could engage himself, either as a domestic servant or as a field labourer. To speak disrespectfully of a preacher was a heinous offence; to pass him in the street without proper salutation, a serious crime. Indeed, the clergy declared that whoever was lacking in humble respect to them was prompted by Satan. His very name was sacred, and not to be lightly taken in vain. Indeed, the General Assembly of St. Andrews, in 1642, passed "an Act against using ministers' names in any of the public papers, without their own consent."

This temporal power was bolstered up with the most amazing claims to spiritual power. What was spoken from the pulpit, they said, was binding upon all believers, and to be regarded as proceeding directly from the Deity. They could fortell and control the future, and had power to open or shut the gates of heaven against members of their flock. Some even made the astounding claim that a word of their's could hasten a man's death!

Thus, a celebrated preacher, one John Welsh, was sitting at table one evening, discoursing upon theology, when a young, hot-blooded Roman Catholic lost his temper, and insulted the divine, and made faces at him. Gravely Welsh bade those assembled see what the Lord would do to this mocker. Scarcely were these words uttered (so the story as related by the preacher's biographer goes), when the young man sank under the table, and speedily died.

On another occasion a preacher by the name of Thomas Hog, sitting down to supper, observed that the servant had omitted to lay the knives and forks. This oversight constrained him to deliver what was doubtless a very tedious homily. Be that as it may, it so amused another gentleman who was present that he could not restrain his laughter. For a while the clergyman bore it uncomplainingly; then, turning, told the other that shortly he should seek for mercy and find none. That very night the scoffer was taken ill, and beseeched Mr. Hog to come to him; but before the pastor could reach him he had died.

There is scarcely any limit to these ridiculous fables, which were received with universal credence. One of the most bizarre relates to Gabriel Semple, who had the curious habit, when preaching, of thrusting out his tongue. On one occasion this so amused a drunken man that he thrust out his tongue in derisive imitation of the holy man. Then, to his horror, he was unable to withdraw it; it stiffened, lost all sensibility, and later caused paralysis, from which the wretched man died.

Nothing seems to have robbed the Scottish clergy of their autocratic power. They retained it even in prison. Thus, it is related of one Alexander Peden that whilst in gaol he heard a young girl laughing at his vociferous devotions. Straightway he cursed her, with the result that shortly afterwards she was blown over a cliff into the sea, and lost her life.

Sometimes the pastor's vengeance pursued his enemy's children. Thus a minister who had unavailingly applied to a trader for monetary assistance cursed him. The result was that the man died an idiot; two of his sons and one daughter also lost their reason; and the second daughter, who was married, became destitute and her children were reduced to beggary.

To prosecute a minister, or to oppose him in a civil

court was to invite certain destruction. Fraser relates in his autobiography that when he was preparing for the ministry he was sued in a court of law for a sum of money due from his father's estate. Being under the special protection of Providence, one of his opponents was unable to appear, and "the Lord, laying his hand upon the others, put them to death."

As was only to be expected, the Scottish divines could never find epithets strong enough to express the ecstatic joy they experienced in the contemplation of their own manifold virtues. They alone knew the truth! They were ambassadors from Christ! They were messengers sent by the Almighty! They were watchmen who spied out all dangers, and whose vigilance protected the faithful! They were the joy and delight of the earth; they were musicians singing songs of sweetness; they were sirens seeking to lure men to the paths of righteousness; they were chosen arrows, stored up in the quiver of God; they were shining torches, candles, stars—these are but a few of the extravagant terms which they applied to themselves in their writings and sermons. When they departed this life strange portents accompanied the momentous event—candles might be mysteriously extinguished without a human agency; animals sometimes came with warning of their approaching demise; and in divers other ways God gave them his intimation of their approaching death.

And how did this dominant caste use its power? Did it seek to benefit the nation? Buckle answers the question in unequivocal language:—

How they laboured to corrupt the national intellect, and how successful they were in that base vocation, has been hitherto known to no modern reader; because no one has had the patience to peruse their interminable discourses, commentaries, and the other religious literature in which their sentiments are preserved

To the domination of the priesthood he attributes "the hardness and moroseness of character" of the Scots—

Their want of gaiety and their indifference to many of the enjoyments of life.....For, in that age, as in every other, the clergy, once possessed of power, showed themselves harsh and unfeeling masters..... They not only deprived men of innocent amusements, but taught them that those amusements were sinful. And so thoroughly did they do their work that, though a hundred and fifty years have elapsed since their supremacy began to wane, the imprint of their hands is everywhere discernible. The people still bear the marks of the lash; the memory of their former servitude lives among them; and they crouch before their clergy, as they did of old, abandoning their rights, sacrificing their independence, and yielding up their consciences to the dictates of an intolerant and ambitious priesthood.

In the light of such facts as these, surely no leader of a democratic party can seriously lament the passing of the Scottish Sabbath. Rather he should welcome it as a token of the emancipation of a people from the old religious thralldom. For that religious system, of which the Scottish Sabbath was a product, has, in and, in the very nature of things, always must be on the side of reaction, whether its support be covert or overt.

W. H. MORRIS.

The heart of man is set to be
The centre of this world, about the which
Those revolutions of disturbances
Still roll; where all the aspects of misery
Predominate; whose strong effects are such
As he must bear, being powerless to redress;
And that unless above himself he can
Erect himself, how poor a thing is Man!

—Wordsworth.

The Muse of Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

I DO not know what position (if any) Ella Wheeler Wilcox occupies in the affections of those hypersensitive individuals, the *critics*, but to me—who am just a plain individual, in whom the critical faculty is not abnormally developed where poetry is concerned—there is a wealth of sweetness in her verse. It is true that I smile in derision when she attempts a transcendental philosophy and declares:—

He would not deem it worth His while to send
Such crushing sorrows as pursue us here,
Unless beyond this fleeting journey's end
Our chastened spirits found another sphere.

Or when—with a fine contempt for what she has previously written—she assures us that "Whatever is—is best." But when she leaves theology alone and deals with the tenderness of human relationships, then can one attune one's ear to the still, sad music of humanity. I remember, at quite a tender age, being swept with emotion on first reading:—

So many Gods, so many creeds,
So many paths that wind and wind;
Yet, just the art of being kind
Is all this sad world needs.

This still rings true to-day, although the more thoughtful would probably observe that the path to hell is paved with good intentions, and that even loving kindness needs to be under the control of a right method.

Mrs. Wilcox was—again I speak under the correction of the critics—a past-master at interpreting the sweet sadness of the love passion; as in her lines written after the burning of old love-letters:—

Can you burn up the rapture of kisses
That flashed from the lips to the soul?
Or the heart that grows sick for lost blisses
In spite of its strength of control?
Have you burned up the touch of warm fingers
That thrilled through each pulse and each vein,
Or the sound of a voice that still lingers
And hurts with a haunting refrain?

Is it done? is the life drama ended?
You have put all the lights out, and yet,
Though the curtain, rung down, has descended,
Can the actors go home and forget?
Ah, no! They will turn in their sleeping
With a strange restless pain in their hearts,
And in darkness, and anguish and weeping,
Will dream they are playing their parts.

Or, again:—

One soul is aflame with a godlike passion,
One plays with love in an idler's fashion,
One speaks and the other hears.
One sobs "I love you," and wet eyes show it,
And one laughs lightly, and says, "I know it,"
With smiles for the other's tears.
One lives for the other and nothing beside,
And the other remembers the world is wide.

Occasionally Mrs. Wilcox touches lightly on the absurdities of religious ceremonies, and when she does so the result is always pleasing, as in "The Belle's Soliloquy":—

Heigh ho! well, the season's over!
Once again we've come to Lent!
Programme's changed from balls and parties—
Now we're ordered to repent.
Forty days of self-denial!
Tell you what I think it pays—
Know't! freshen my complexion
Going slow for forty days!

And then there is the homely philosophy expressed in her verses on Woman, which will find an echoing answer in all democratic hearts. There is, however, one poem of hers which appeals to me most, and which I never read without feeling a tug at my heart—

strings. It is entitled "An Episode," and runs (I quote from memory) as follows:—

Along a narrow Moorish lane
A blue-eyed soldier strode.
Veiled from her lashes to her toes
She stepped from her abode.
When dark eyes glow with sudden fire,
And meet two eyes of blue;
The old, old story of desire,
Repeats itself anew.
For love may guard a favoured wife
Who leaves the harem door;
But hungry-hearted is her life
When she is one of four.
When bugles call, the soldier flies,
Though bitter tears may fall.
A Moorish child with blue blue eyes,
Plays in the harem hall.

I always find the winsomeness of the last two lines quite irresistible in its appeal.

VINCENT J. HANDS.

Pascal, Skittles, and Billiards.

GLANCING over the firmament of religious disputation, it has often appeared to us that there are many names commanding respect. Bishop Butler, with his *Analogy of Religion*; Hooker, with his *Ecclesiastical Polity*; Cardinal Newman, with his gentle words in controversy in the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, to mention only a few, lift argument to a level above passions, and beyond the touch of fanaticism. In this category we may also include Blaise Pascal, whose sincerity in his writings is beyond dispute.

We read that he was born at Clermont-Ferrand, in Auvergne, on June 19, 1623. His father, Etienne Pascal, was a pious but stern person, who had the usual faiths and superstitions of his time. Believing that his son's ill-health arose from witchcraft, he employed the old woman who was supposed to have caused the malady to remove it, by herbs culled before sunrise and the expiatory death of a cat. These remedies were unavailing, and Blaise Pascal suffered from feeble health all his life. He died in Paris on August 9, 1662, at the age of thirty-nine, having "spent his last years in an ecstasy of self-denial, of charity, and of aspiration after God."

With provisional sympathy we approach this austere figure of a good man and his beliefs, looking for one moment at a few active figures in French national life at that time. In 1622, a year before the birth of Pascal, Jean Baptiste Poquelin, known to the world as Molière, was born. This dramatist translated Lucretius, studied Aristotle, and was also interested in the battle between Descartes and Gassendi. Molière, the enemy of religious hypocrisy, expounded the gospel of common sense in his comedies.

Another figure of special interest was Savinien de Cyrano Bergerac, born in Paris in 1618, and presented by Edmond Rostand in his famous play. Cyrano is described as a dangerous Freethinker, a mentally brave man, and a demon of courage. He was the author of many whimsical works, including a *Comic History of the States and Empires of the Moon*.

Yet one more, René Descartes (1596-1650), and we then have three formidable figures, active and questioning many matters held in reverence by Blaise Pascal, whose ideas on religion we will now consider, using C. Kegan Paul's translation in the Bohn Library.

In the "General Introduction" to *The Thoughts of Pascal* we read in the first sentence: "Let them at least learn what is the religion they assail, before they assail it." And after that Pascal goes on to state that this religion does not claim to have a clear view of God—as a matter of fact the scriptural name given to the central figure in the religious hierarchy is *Deus*

absconditus. This temper of writing reveals the difference between zeal and fanaticism; we can at least reason with zeal, and agree to differ. The immortality of the soul is a matter of great importance to the member of Port Royal; neglect by people of gaining light and knowledge on this subject makes him angry. The colour of paint, the wetness of water, and the coming of spring are matters that may be discussed, and from which sound conclusions may be deduced. The pair of abstractions in the statement "the immortality of the soul," produce a further one—discussion on two unknowns, and, after chewing the cotton-wool in Plato in the hope of finding something to eat, we deny the soft impeachment of Pascal that we hold our soul to be but a little wind or smoke; the knowledge of the soul has not expanded this last three hundred years in the same degree that our knowledge of artificial light has developed.

Pascal reproaches Montaigne for being credulous and ignorant when the essayist wrote of people without eyes, squaring the circle, and imagining a greater world. Instinctively we return to his assertion about the immortality of the soul, and further on we come to his famous statement: "How many kingdoms know nothing of us! The eternal silence of these infinite spaces alarms me." How well Pascal anticipated another great Frenchman, Camille Flammarion, may be judged by reading that astronomer's delightful book on the stars; how much the astronomer added to Pascal may be found in *Astronomy for Amateurs*. It is just this added portion that makes amends for the valleys between the high peaks of history.

In the chapter on the "Greatness and Littleness of Man," our author begins to strike out with his sword, which, unfortunately for him, is two-edged. He writes: "Man is so framed that by dint of telling him he is a fool he believes it, and by dint of telling it to himself he makes himself believe it." That, in a nutshell, is the Freethinker's case against Original Sin. Let asylums with their inmates of religious maniacs provide the evidence that we would rather did not exist. Reiteration through the ages of the fallen state of man might obliquely have affinity with housemaid's knee; it is "Cougéism," with the reverse gear running; it is mistrust of human nature.

Commenting on the fact that neither Josephus, nor Tacitus, nor other historians have spoken of Jesus Christ, Pascal very naïvely writes that "far from this being any argument against, it is rather for us"; but the evidence that he brings forward to support his contention is weak and unconvincing. In the chapter, "The Perpetuity of the Christian Religion," we read: "The religion which alone is contrary to our nature, to common sense, and to our pleasures, is that alone which has always existed." Further on: "Men despise religion, they hate it, and fear it may be true. To cure this we must begin by showing that religion is not contrary to reason." Pascal is here putting up his own skittles and knocking them down again. This form of amusement is not altogether confined to religious apologists. He is also having the argument both ways, but the careful reader of him will not find that irritating "compel them to come in" attitude; and in many instances on matters other than religious, his judgment displays care, thought, lucidity, and a finely balanced sense of justice. Pascal was a favourite of Nietzsche; Christ and Anti-Christ. One tortures himself with mathematics, and dies at the early age of thirty-nine; the other, the greatest event in Europe since Goethe, dies in a stage of madness; yet there is this chord of sympathy between the modern myth-maker Nietzsche and the gentle Pascal, who accepted a myth "contrary to our nature," but "we must begin by showing that religion is not contrary to reason."

Our space will not permit us to treat further this seventeenth century Newman. Time is not wasted in reading his *Provincial Letters* or the volume mentioned above. On the green baize of the earth's history there is a goodly number of billiard balls being poked about with an invisible stick. Bruno, Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Comte, Spencer—the table is almost full—there was kissing and cannoning on the cloth with Pascal and his contemporaries—it would be an event in history if we could be enabled to see all the leaders of thought, by some synthesis, brought to a pattern of purpose wherein all shades of opinion might rejoice, and the tragedies of Cowper, Nietzsche, Dean Swift and others might never again be repeated. This may savour of idealism, at a time when the *Daily Chronicle* states that the Sermon on the Mount is not practical politics. Christianity in a crisis seems as reliable as the gold currency during the last war. Men have gone mad in trying to save the world; and the world persistently refuses to be saved. When forty thousand men on strike are necessary partly to solve the London traffic problem, we rightly suspect the majority who talk of the other world, through their collective inability to deal with things on this earth. We eventually come to that position of choice as to whether we are in the world but not of it. There is something of majestic calm about the position of Pascal that will repay meditation; the stick that struck Nietzsche on the green cloth was the same one that struck Pascal, but with different results. Is it possible to condense the whole of this article in one sentence, and conclude by asking, does any man make a splendid step upward when he writes *finis* to his function as simply that of a billiard ball?

WILLIAM REPTON.

Some Aspects of Hell.

IV.

(Concluded from page 205.)

FROM the same writer we get the following: "The heavens open, and millions and millions of angels and archangels come forth; but deep down below the gates of hell open also, and devils pour forth like a black torrent; flashes of fire come from their eyes, and the air is darkened by their frightful forms." The child has to undergo judgment in this fashion: "The angel guardian of the child comes forward and, standing at the child's right hand, holds the book in which is written all the child's good works; a devil, the accuser, goes to the child's left hand and holds the record of his sins. The devil opens the proceedings, and is followed by the guardian angel. Jesus demands that the condition of the child's soul should be properly stated, and then he proceeds to pass judgment in the following terms: "You shall never, never see my face any more, you have chosen during your lifetime to obey the devil rather than obey me. Therefore, with the devil, you shall be tormented in hell. The smoke of your torments shall rise up before me night and day. Your painful cries shall come to me for ever and for ever; but I will never listen to them." And this from the figure that we have been told said: "Suffer little children to come unto me." If the consequences to children were not so serious (speaking from personal experience) the whole thing would be too great a farce to deserve notice.

The author of these beastly books is so exact as to provide punishments of sickening exactitude. The following is the condition of a little child in what he is pleased to call the fifth dungeon:—

The little child is in this red-hot oven. Hear how it screams to come out. See how it turns and twists itself about in the fire. It beats its head against the

roof of the oven. It stamps its little feet on the floor. You can see on the face of this child what you see on all the faces of all in hell—despair, desperate and terrible!.....God was very good to this child. Very likely God saw that this child would get worse and worse, and would never repent, and so it would have to be punished much more in hell. So God in his mercy called it out of the world in its early childhood.

It is said by some persons that the Protestant hell is not so terrible as the Roman Catholic hell—that the Protestant churches are getting new ideas in regard to their eschatology. There is some truth in this statement of changed conceptions. But still they have a hell. And if they have a hell what is its nature? And if their conception of hell is changing, what is changing it? It certainly is not the forces at work within the Protestant movement. The modern Christian eschatology is the result of advanced scientific ideas that are forcing changes in spite of religious opposition. The reactionary forces of religion, or anything else, cannot prevent the tide of progress; of course, they may retard it, but the retardation merely diverts the progressive forces and ideas into other channels, directions, and spheres of activity. The ultimate consequence will be confusion within the Churches; and this has been seen in the establishment of the various Protestant sects owing to internal disagreement. These eschatological beliefs have a very important sociological significance, because, if they can be entirely destroyed, the foundation of the Christian religion will be undermined. When this happens the science of ethics will supersede the present eschatological ideas with their corollaries of rewards and punishments. The opinions on right and wrong conduct will be based on scientific principles, in which the doctrine of hell will not have a place. The maleficent members of society will be judged and treated as resultants of forces at work within society, and not as persons prompted by the Devil from his abode in hell.

It is claimed that the doctrine of the fearful consequences of hell acts as a deterrent from evil conduct. If this is so, how is it that evil of every description is as prevalent after 2,000 years of this doctrine? The truth is that the doctrine of hell's fire is as ineffective as it is brutal: as absurd as it is impossible; and as irrational as it is antiquated. And when this doctrine is utilized for the purposes of frightening children it is blatantly inhuman, and produces many nervous disorders, from which the unfortunate subject never completely recovers; and indirectly causes the evil tendencies that the doctrine of hell is supposed to prevent. If we wish to eradicate evil from our midst we must do so on socio-ethical lines, and not on ideas that have had their origin in sheer ignorance. To do so we must realize the truth of the following words:—

How little the Christian religion appreciates the nature of morality is seen by the favourite expression of Christian apologists that the tendency of non-religion is to remove all moral "restraints." The use of the word is illuminating. To the Christian morality is no more than a system of restraints which aims at preventing a man gratifying his appetite in certain directions. It forbids him certain enjoyments here, promises him a reward for his abstention, a greater benefit hereafter. And on that assumption he argues, quite naturally, that if there be no after life then there seems to be no reason why man should undergo the "restraints" which moral rules impose. On this scheme man is a born criminal and God an almighty policeman. That is the sum of orthodox Christian morality. To assume that this conception of conduct can have a really elevating effect on life is to misunderstand the nature of the whole of the ethical and social problem." (C. Cohen, *A Grammar of Freethought*, p. 201.)

A. MITCHELL.

Correspondence.

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE AND MATERIALISM. TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Your contributor, Mr. W. Mann, says that so long as I was a materialist the world was not informed of it, but only after I had accepted the facts of spiritualism. This is not true. I wrote a book, *The Stark Munro Letters*, which defined my early position. I also wrote several letters to the press, including one to the electors of Edinburgh in 1900.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

INFLUENZA AND SNUFF.

SIR,—With your kind permission I should like to make a few comments upon an "Acid Drop" in this week's *Freethinker* relative to the above subject.

The Roman Catholic Bishop of Clifton is undoubtedly right in advocating tobacco snuff as a sure prophylactic of influenza. Although I have never tried "holy water," I certainly gave a good innings to prayer and faith years ago, and ultimately sent them into the limbo of useless superstitions. But the use of snuff is an entirely different matter, as I can prove.

Over two years ago I read the report of a lecture in our local press by a well-known Harley Street physician on the nose and throat. He concluded by advising his audience, if they would keep immune from influenza, to take a pinch of ordinary tobacco snuff three or four times a day, and recommended it as a certain specific against this truly dangerous scourge.

I at once adopted the suggestion—result, no influenza for nearly two and a half years. Previously I had never passed through a winter without several attacks.

My object in writing is to convey this information to other Freethinkers, and to positively assure them that although the Bishop's creed is utter tosh to us, he has undoubtedly "struck oil" in his advocacy of snuff for influenza.

JOHN BREESE.

A CORRECTION.

SIR,—If Mr. Ed. Clarke would kindly re-read my letter he would find that I never wrote anything so exquisitely foolish as what he ascribes to me. And the humour of it is that in the rough M.S. of my letter I referred to "spectacles" in proof of what I said, and not in disproof of it!

KERIDON.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON MARCH 27, 1924.

The President, Mr. C. Cohen, in the chair. Also present: Messrs. Corrigan, Quinton, Rosetti, Samuels; Mrs. Quinton, Miss Kough and the Secretary. In consequence of the tram and 'bus strike other members were unable to be present.

New members were admitted for Nelson, North London, and Preston Branches and the Parent Society.

Correspondence from Finsbury Park and Plymouth Branches was dealt with.

The Propagandist Committee's Report *re* Mr. Whitehead's tour in London and the Provinces was received and, after sundry additions, adopted.

Invitations were received from Manchester and Preston for the Annual Conference to be held on Whit Sunday, and the circular for the Branches to record their vote and the reminder for matters for the Conference Agenda ordered to be issued.

It was also resolved that at the afternoon sitting, arrangements be made for the reading of papers on Free-thought subjects.

All outstanding accounts were ordered to be paid, and the meeting closed.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary.*

For the healing of mankind's many sores, *thought*, not *faith*, is the only ointment. Religion is the fly in it.—*D. P. Stickells.*

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.1): 8, Debate—"That Omniscience Destroys Man's Freedom of Will." Affirmative, Mr. C. H. Keeling; Negative, Rev. S. J. C. Goldsack. The Discussion Circle meets every Thursday, at 8, at the "Lawrie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W.): 7.30, Mr. Rex Roberts, "That Every Year the World Becomes a Worse Place to Live In." Open Debate.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W.9): 7, Mr. E. Burke, Civilization and the Kingdom of Man."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): 7, Mr. Joseph McCabe, "The Re-union of the Churches."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, Professor Hermann Kantorowicz, "Germany and the League of Nations."

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Upton Labour Party Hall, 84 Plashet Road, Upton Park, E.13): 7, Mr. F. Shaller, a Lecture.

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 3.30, Mr. F. P. Corrigan, a Lecture.

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BOLTON SECULAR SOCIETY (Socialist Club, 16 Wood Street): 2.15, Mr. F. Edwin Monks, "Death and the Beyond."

GLASGOW BRANCH N.S.S. (Shop Assistants' Hall, 297 Argyle Street): 6.30, For particulars see Saturday's *News and Citizen*.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Operetta—"Hawthorn Glen." Performed by the Children of the Secular Sunday School. (Silver Collection.)

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

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Secularism declares that theology is condemned by reason as superstitious, and by experience as mischievous, and assails it as the historic enemy of Progress.

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