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Views and Opinions.

C. O. P. E. C.

This sounds like a new game, something resembling Ping-Pong or Mah-Jong; but it is not a new game at all. It stands, primarily, for "Conference on Christian Politics, Economics, and Citizenship," and the way it is played shows it to be just an old game with new lettering. The way the game comes into existence and the manner in which it is played is as follows: The Churches discover they are losing hold on the people; more and more stay away from church, and less and less do people pay attention to religious doctrines. Science is openly supercilious; politicians are showing a tendency to be indifferent; and ordinary folk prove by their conduct that they are ceasing to take the Churches seriously. So the heads of the ghost-business get together and say they had better find out just what they have to tell the people and see whether they can impress them with its importance. And then, having formed some committees, a conference follows, and a Christian gospel of citizenship is put before the world. The rule of the game at this stage is very simple. It consists in finding out all that is generally considered good and advisable and calling that Christian. Mark everything that is considered bad and call that un-Christian or anti-Christian. In this way Christianity is made to stand for everything that is good and against everything that is bad. The rules of the game are so charmingly simple that even the intelligence of an unfledged curate will find no difficulty in mastering them. But, all the same, it is not a new game; it is a very old one. It is the game the Churches have been playing for centuries; and they will keep on playing it just so long as the people can be fooled with phrases or satisfied with empty formulas.

* * *

The Prime Minister and Christianity.

The Conference that has been meeting during the past week in Birmingham played the game with a solemnity that could only be acquired by long practice. Generalities that might mean anything or nothing were solemnly agreed to as though they for the future would set the world straight. Not a bad opening in this line was made by a message read from the Prime Minister lamenting that problems of life and of affairs (as though the one does not include the other!) were

distorted by our diversified aims, and expressing the opinion that "but one thing can hold us to our goal and keep our powers fresh and undiverted; and that is the living belief in Christian doctrines and the simplicity of the spirit which the Christian faith engenders." The Prime Minister knew his audience; and possibly the audience knew their Prime Minister. And I do not doubt but that if they had to meet and discuss what were the doctrines of Christianity which Mr. MacDonald and they both believe in, and what they mean by them, the fat would be in the fire at once. But it is not according to the rules of this game to be definite in either speech or meaning. The truth of this was proven by a comment of the *Church Times*, in reviewing the proceedings and the reports of the Committees. "The discussions," it said, "demonstrated an enthusiastic idealism and also a wide diversion of opinion among the groups of delegates." Exactly what we have said in plainer language. They were all agreed, the Prime Minister included, in saying that the cure for everything was Christianity. But the moment it comes down to the plain common-sense question, "What is the teaching of Christianity in relation to social questions?" then there is an end to the agreement.

* * *

What Does Mr. MacDonald Mean?

One wonders what are the doctrines of Christianity which Mr. MacDonald had in mind as being capable of helping us in our social difficulties. Is it to take no thought for the morrow, to leave it all to our father in heaven, who looks after the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, and will, therefore, be the more inclined to look after human beings? We would advise him to settle that point with those of his followers who demand increased provision for old age and insurance against the evils of unemployment. Is it the doctrine that we are to turn one cheek when the other is smitten, and to follow the example of Jesus in being led like a lamb to the slaughter? That can scarcely be the case, since he has explicitly declined to leave this country without an efficient army, navy, and air force to repel attack whenever and wherever it may be made. Is it the doctrine that faith will cure disease? If so, we would remind him that persons may be imprisoned under English law who take risks in that direction. Is it the general doctrine of the adjustment of rewards and punishments in the next world to actions performed here? If so, we would remind him that it is an essential part of government to see that that adjustment is, so far as is possible, made here, and that what happens in the next world has no bearing upon the question at all. We should very much like to hear from Mr. MacDonald just what Christian doctrine it is that properly applied promises us the slightest help with any one of the problems with which he has to deal. And, meanwhile, we venture to suggest to him and to others that a reliable democracy will hardly be created so long as people are fed with mere phrases which prevent that clear and precise thinking, with-

out which profitable political action is altogether impossible.

* * *

Christianity and the Criminal.

We imagine that the proceedings of the Conference will be issued in a complete form, and we may leave extended examination of the speeches till that appears. But there are one or two things that may briefly be noted now. One of these is the treatment of crime—of course, from the Christian standpoint. The Commission appointed to deal with this subject had some quite sensible remarks to make on the question, and dwelt upon the treatment of the criminal by reformatory methods. As this has been one of the avowed principles of the National Secular Society ever since its foundation, we are naturally pleased to find the Churches following our lead. But the Commission accompanies its comments with the startling remark that the reformatory method is "clearly in conformity with the Christian ideal." What is the Christian ideal with regard to punishment? Look at its historic doctrine of punishment in an after life. What ideal is embodied there? There was no chance for reform; it was simply revengeful punishment. Look at the brutal punishments that prevailed during the purely Christian ages of the world. What kind of reform was aimed at when men and women were tortured at the slightest provocation, and when, even a little over a century since, men and women were hanged for offences for which they might now be discharged with a caution? In all these cases the Churches raised no word of protest. It was when the direction of men's thoughts fell under the influence of Atheists like Beccaria, whose writings marked an epoch in the history of criminology; when Free-thinkers like Voltaire, Bentham, and the Mills wrote and agitated for a saner treatment of the criminal; and when the scientific study of social movements began to develop, that a more enlightened view prevailed. The Christian ideal! Science and common sense and humanity have made Christians ashamed of the ideal of calculated punishment in both this world and the next, and while on the one side this is reflected in the dropping of the doctrine of eternal damnation, on the other it is reflected in a more rational treatment of the criminal, which is now claimed as a working out of the "Christian ideal." People who can be fooled with that phrase must, indeed, be ignorant of the history of social science for the past two centuries.

* * *

War and Internationalism.

I have space this week for but one other note. A lengthy discussion took place on "Internationalism and Christianity and War." On the last subject there was a remarkable confession made by the Rev. Studdert-Kennedy (Woodbine Willy), who said that during the war he had said that if we won a complete victory by force of arms we could make a new world, and he did not know of anything for which he was so profoundly sorry and so bitterly repentant. With this may go the regret of Lord Parmoor, that during the war the Churches did not strive for peace. Both comments may be taken together, because one feels quite sure that if war broke out to-morrow the Woodbine Willies and the Churches would do again precisely what they did before. And that really is in line with the Christian tradition. In every country in the world the Christian Churches have stood as a whole for the reign of brute force. And in every case they have played to the popular passion, instead of doing what they could to allay it and to induce more rational and more humane habits of thought.

The glorification of war during the time of the last European conflict is one of the most disgraceful of the chapters of Christian history in a volume in which one need not search far to find others of a similar character. And on the subject of internationalism the speakers were either stupid or dishonest. It was claimed that Christianity was international at first, but gradually became corrupted and fell into a narrow nationalism. It never struck these speakers to enquire why Christianity always gets corrupted with such ridiculous ease. But what are the facts? The facts are that whatever internationalism there was about early Christianity, it owed to the fact that it was born in the Roman Empire, which had gone far to internationalize the civilized world. And whatever tradition the Christian Church retained in that direction it owed to the persistence of the idea of the old Roman Empire. But from the first Christianity was narrow and sectarian. It never aimed at more than a brotherhood of believers. And lacking a strong intellectual impulse, its sectarian brotherhood became narrower and narrower as Christian sects multiplied. It has divided people far more effectively than national barriers have ever been able to do. And even to-day we have it recorded as a great achievement that preachers of different Christian denominations may sometimes be found preaching in the same church. The real agencies at work here have been scientific inventions and discoveries, which have served to bring people into more easy and more frequent communication with each other. And at present, in spite of the set-back of the late war, it may safely be said that there is far more genuine internationalism in science, in literature, in art, and in commerce than there is in religion. The really civilizing forces of the world lie outside Christianity. It is left for a crowd of opportunist churchmen to repeat the language of secular advancement and to claim credit for developments which often enough their Church did its utmost to obstruct.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Facts which Critics are said to Forget.

THE Rev. Amos Burnet, well known in South Africa, and now President Designate of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, has just preached a sermon, published in the *Christian World Pulpit*, of April 10, in which he makes that charge against those who venture to express and defend their non-acceptance of the Christian faith. The text is Heb. ii, 8: "We see not yet all things subjected to him, but we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour." The first thing to observe is that the text itself is not the statement of a fact, but of a fantasia, which no theologian has ever succeeded in establishing as a fact. Even to the writer of the ingenious Epistle to the Hebrews, Jesus crucified was not supreme; all things were by no means subjected to him; but by using his vivid imagination he could see him even then "crowned with glory and honour." The truth is that Christianity is a religion in which fables are presented as facts, and dreams as realities. Now which are the facts that the critics either ignore or deny? Mr. Burnet says:—

First of all there is the splendid ideal. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, crucified, in these later days risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, shall bring the whole world under his blessed sway. You cannot possibly read the New Testament without feeling that this great ideal and great hope possessed every writer. It seized their imagination. Day after day it sang in their hearts, illumined all their hopes, helped them in their martyrdom, in all

their distresses and sorrows. With a simplicity of faith which we are bound to admire, they did believe in a complete and unopposed reign of Jesus Christ.

Mr. Burnet declares that "we were all brought up in this very comforting and very delightful belief." Christ had bought this world with his precious blood, and it was his determination to possess and govern it in righteousness and truth. "But there came to these early Christians a sort of disillusionment, and the same thing has come to us." The splendid ideal has somehow miscarried. We are further away from the realization of that dream than ever before. The preacher complains that "we in these days are sometimes tempted to think that somehow we have made a great mistake." Of course, for a Christian minister to yield to that temptation would be suicidal, and, knowing this, he will never do so. So Mr. Burnet, rather than admit frankly the utter failure of the ideal, resorts to a familiar subterfuge. He says:—

I want you to face the facts fairly to-night and to look at the whole matter as I think we ought to look at it. First of all there is the great fact of human freedom. This world is never to be forced into compliance with the claims of Jesus Christ. There is not a single person in this congregation who is going to be compelled to serve Christ, whether he wishes to do so or not. There is not a single person in the whole wide world who is going to be forced into being a loyal and devoted subject of the great kingdom which Jesus set up.

Now we do not deny this fact of human freedom, but we do most emphatically deny that human freedom is a fact. Will, as explained by the metaphysicians and theologians, that is, will as a self-directing agent telling us what to do, is an entity utterly unknown to science. Indeed, will is a theological contrivance, invented for the double purpose of exonerating God from blame in connection with the entrance of sin into the world, and of explaining the complete failure of the Cross to win the world.

At this point Mr. Burnet hastens to name another fact which Freethinkers ignore, namely, "the second great fact of human sin." He says:—

The judgments of men are biased, and their preferences are against him when the Christian appeal comes to them. How is it this city is not at the feet of Jesus Christ? Certainly it is not. There are numbers of people, I am perfectly sure, in this city who are loyal followers of him, but the whole city is not won. How is it? Most convincing appeals are made, but men's judgment, their hearts, their personal feelings are biased against Christ. That is the terrible fact that we have to remember.

Most assuredly human sin, as interpreted in the pulpit, is not a fact at all. The overwhelming majority of the men and women of to-day reject Christ not because judgment, heart, and feelings are biased against him, but because they are profoundly convinced that he is not, and never has been, what the Church asserts him to be. Human sin has absolutely nothing to do with it, for human sin is as little a fact as free will, and neither of them explains in the slightest degree why the world is still so largely non-Christian.

According to the reverend gentleman, nothing in the world is easier than to hold the Church responsible for the fact that the whole world is not won to Christ. In thus criticizing the Church the Freethinkers forget a third fact of vast importance, Mr. Burnet affirms, which he states as follows:—

We always leave out one most important factor. Jesus Christ has practically to begin afresh at the same point with each succeeding generation. A hundred years ago, or thereabouts, my father went to school in a Lincolnshire village, they took the little lad and

they put a book in his hands and he began to learn A, B, C, D. Thirty or forty years later I went to school, and they began with me at exactly the same point.

Enlarging on that method of education, which remains practically the same from generation to generation, he continues thus:—

Jesus Christ has to begin almost at the same identical point with every succeeding generation. There is a fine old saint in this city who has a boy, but the lad does not begin where his father leaves off. Oh, how wonderfully devoted that father is to all that is holy and good and true; yet the lad is hard and rebellious and difficult. Christ has a terrible struggle with that boy before he is brought into subjection.

What is here represented as a fact to which Jesus Christ is bound, we reject as having not even the remotest resemblance to a fact. Not long ago the Church taught that religion is natural to man, and that every child born into the world has implanted within it a religious instinct which impels it to turn to God as readily and naturally as to its mother's milk. Every intelligent person is fully aware that this doctrine is fundamentally false, and Mr. Burnet's view is more ridiculous still when we remember that without a distinctly religious education the child comes to maturity absolutely without religion. Religion is as fully human in its origin and growth as secular knowledge. Jesus Christ is not in the business on any terms whatever. In reality Mr. Burnet has ruled him out in the most delightful manner possible.

The rest of the sermon is purely sentimental. He tells us how Christ is crowned in saintly people. He takes for granted that every good man owes his goodness to Jesus Christ, which he must know is by no means the case. Some of the men who have done most for the elevation of humanity lacked belief in God and Christ. Darwin in his old age became an Atheist; and Huxley, too, admitted in a letter to Charles Kingsley that from the Christian point of view he too was an Atheist, though he preferred to be called an Agnostic. Some of the most eminent scientific teachers of to-day make no religious profession, and yet their labours are for the benefit of mankind. All that Mr. Burnet tells about the goodness of his parents and the happiness of himself and the circle in which he turns, is no doubt perfectly true, and it is equally clear that he attributes it all to the presence and power of Jesus Christ. We, on the contrary, who do not believe in the historicity of Jesus Christ, are convinced that the majority of human beings, not only in Christian countries, but in most heathen lands, such as China, Japan, and Burma, are actuated in their conduct by high and noble ideals and humane motives; in fact, that the whole world is moving by means of purely natural agencies, and without any supernatural interference whatever, towards healthier, purer and saner conditions, and that this process has been more hindered than helped by Christianity. Mr. Burnet waxes exceedingly eloquent in his description of what Christ has done for various classes of the community. He exclaims:—

Oh, how Christ has moved and changed the world. Wherever his great ideals have been known they have conquered; and the position of woman has been revolutionized by Christ.

We wonder what Church histories Mr. Burnet has read. One thing is beyond dispute, namely, that woman never suffered more than under the Christian Church. The Fathers could not find terms vile enough to apply to her. All through the Christian ages she had no rights whatever; and the rights conferred upon her in this century she won in spite of the most vigorous and bitter opposition of the leading Christian men of this land. Christianity has persecuted woman rather

than served her. The only influence that has worked any revolution in social conditions is the upward trend of the world—the spirit of humanity, which initiated so many reforms whilst Humanists held sway in the Church just prior to the outbursts of the Protestant Reformation.

J. T. LLOYD.

Masters of Mockery.

If instead of falling foul of the ridiculous person with a satiric rod to make him writhe and shriek aloud, you prefer to sting him with a semi-caress, by which he shall in his anguish be rendered dubious whether, indeed, anything has hurt him, you are an engine of irony.

—George Meredith.

BYRON once said that "ridicule is the only weapon the English climate cannot rust." Yet it is not popular in this country, and irony has many enemies. Simple people, who must be literal or nothing, dislike it. Ladies, more often than not, do not care for it at all. Those other wearers of petticoats, the priests, whose professional gravity prompts them, look askance at it as being something unseemly.

"Without it is based on seriousness," said Heine, who was himself a master of the lash, "wit is only a sneeze of the reason." Every great wit in literature has been a man of serious aims; and the greatest writers have been the greatest wits, from the far-off days of Aristophanes to those of Anatole France, from Shakespeare to Shaw. Indeed, some of the best masters of irony have been among the most earnest soldiers of progress. Perhaps the most perfect examples of irony are to be found in Voltaire's *Candide*, the wittiest book in the world. Here is an example taken at random, when *Candide* was to be punished as a military deserter:—

He was asked which he would like the best, to be whipped six-and-thirty times through all the regiment, or to receive at once twelve bullets in his brain. He vainly said that human will is free, and that he chose neither the one nor the other. He was forced to make a choice. He determined, in virtue of that gift of God called liberty, to run the gauntlet six-and-thirty times.

After Voltaire, Heinrich Heine is perhaps the most brilliant ironist. For seven years prior to his death he lay sick and solitary on a "mattress grave," his back twisted, his legs paralysed, his hands powerless, his sight failing. "God's satire weighs heavily upon me," he said:—

The great Author of the Universe, the Aristophanes of Heaven, was bent on demonstrating with crushing force to me, the little so-called German Aristophanes, how my weightiest sarcasms are only pitiful attempts at jesting in comparison with His, and how miserably I am beneath Him in humour, in colossal mockery.

The untameable jester kept his most wonderful jibe for the last. Reproached by pious friends for his levity in religious matters, the dying man murmured: "God will forgive me; it's his trade."

Edward Gibbon is our greatest historian. Yet there is gaiety under the gravity of his sonorous prose. A splendid example of sustained irony is to be found in the famous fifteenth chapter of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, sketching with masterly skill the rise of the Christian religion. We all realize Gibbon's position. He was pretending to give an account of the early Christians from the orthodox standpoint, so as to hoodwink the pious and to avoid an accusation of blasphemy. This is how he does it, and one can almost see the laughing eyes above the printed page:—

But how shall we excuse the supine inattention of the Pagan and philosophic world to those evidences

which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence, not to their reason, but to their senses? During the age of Christ, of his apostles, and of their first disciples, the doctrine which they preached was confirmed by innumerable prodigies. The lame walked, the blind saw, the sick were healed, the dead were raised, demons were expelled, and the laws of Nature were frequently suspended for the benefit of the Church. But the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle, and pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alteration in the moral and physical government of the world. Under the reign of Tiberius the whole earth, or, at least, a celebrated province of the Roman Empire, was involved in a preternatural darkness of three hours. Even this miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, curiosity and devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history.

Gibbon is ostensibly censuring the sages for overlooking the Bible miracles. In reality, he is denying their occurrence by slyly pointing out that there is no contemporary record of them from disinterested sources.

How masterly is Gibbon's command of language! Listen to this impressive account of the Christian knight-errant, who—

As the champion of God and the ladies (I blush to unite such discordant names), devoted himself to speak the truth, maintain the right, and protect the distressed.

Discussing the impulsive acts of the early Christians, he calmly adds: "It was not in this world that they expected to be happy or useful."

A more general satire is used by Anatole France, who, in *My Friend's Book*, describes Pierre Noziere's childish passion towards the saintly life with inimitable grace and irony:—

My sole idea was to live the life of an ascetic. In order to lose no time in putting my ideas in operation, I refused to eat my breakfast. My mother, who knew nothing of my new vocation, thought I was ill, and looked at me with an anxiety that it pained me to behold. Nevertheless, I persevered with my fasting, and then, remembering the example of Saint Simeon Stylites, who spent his life on a pillar, I climbed up on to the kitchen cistern, but it was impossible to live there, for Julie, our cook, promptly dislodged me. I next decided to imitate Saint Nicholas of Patras, who gave all his riches to the poor. My father's study window looked out on the quay, and from it I proceeded to fling down a dozen coppers or so, which had been presented to me because they were new and bright. These I followed up with marbles, humming-tops, whip-tops, and eelskin whip. "The child is crazy," exclaimed my father, as he shut the window. I felt angry and mortified at hearing this judgment passed upon me, but I remembered that my father, not being a saint like myself, would not share with me in the glories of the blessed—a reflection from which I derived great consolation.

Jonathan Swift, like Voltaire, was also a master of irony. Voltaire recommended *The Tale of a Tub* as a splendid satire against religion in general; and Thackeray denied Swift's belief in that Christian religion which he had defended so ironically in his deadly and envenomed *Arguments Against Abolishing Christianity*. Perhaps the most striking example of Swift's mordant humour is *A Modest Proposal*, which is a reasoned proposition to use up for food the superfluous children. Irony will also be found in Fielding's *History of Jonathan Wild the Great*, in the acidulated pages of Flaubert, and under the polite and polished sentences of Renan. It also lurks in the robustious humour of jolly, old Rabelais, and in the suggestive pages of Denis Diderot. De Quincey has penned a forceful example in *Murder Considered as a Fine Art*. The greatest living English writer, Thomas Hardy,

has shown himself a master of irony, particularly in *Teas of the D'Urbervilles*, in which he makes play with the "President of the Immortals." But the dictionary definition of irony must be altered. It is not nearly enough to say that it is "a mode of speech expressing a sense contrary to that which the speaker intends to convey." It may be true of the simple, elementary irony of the Cockney at the seaside, who called after an ugly lady bather with large feet, "Hullo, Venus!"; but it by no means defines the more complex irony of literature. George Meredith spoke of irony as "stinging, with a semi-caress." This is far nearer the truth, and it was said by one of the greatest masters of the lash in our language.

MIMNERMUS.

Adam and Eve.

THEIR STORY RE-TOLD.

IN heaven, very many centuries ago, a great stir was caused by Michael's rushing into a crowd of angels, crying:—

"Come and worship the Image of God!"

When they assembled at the spot pointed out by Michael, they found that the Image was Adam, the First Man. Michael set the example, and bowed low in homage, and then rose and begged his comrade, Satan, to perform the act of worship.

"I will not worship an inferior and younger person," said Satan. "I am his senior in the Creation."

The many angels who belonged to Satan's quarter in heaven also refused.

"God will be angry," suggested Michael.

"Let him be so," was the defiant reply. "I shall mount above the stars and make myself his equal, and defy him."

God made short work of this rebellion. He threw Satan and the other would-be revolutionaries from heaven to earth. When, not long afterwards, Satan saw Adam and his wife Eve dwelling in a happy Paradise, he resolved to bring these upstart "Images of God" to ruin. He therefore visited the earth, on the border of which, fenced off by a low wall, he saw the orchard in which Adam and Eve spent their serene days. Adam herded male beasts, and Eve the female. In the orchard grew the Tree of Life, a sacred and unique plant. The rest of the trees bore fruit, and Adam and Eve might eat of the fruit of all except one.

Satan leaned over the wall, and whispered to one of the male beasts—a serpentine creature, which had hands and feet and wings. The serpent approached.

"I hear," began Satan, "you are wiser than the other beasts. Why not get Adam out of this place, and remain master of it, and enjoy life?"

"I fear God, the Holy One, even Ja-el," replied the beast.

"Nonsense," said Satan, "Allow me to enter into you, and speak through your mouth, and the thing will be arranged."

This was agreed to; and presently Eve saw the serpent sitting on the wall.

"Eve, I believe?" asked he politely.

"The same," she replied.

"May I enquire what you are doing here?"

"God bade us guard the place, and eat the fruits."

"All?"

"All except the fruit of the middle tree. Eating of that would mean death."

He smiled away her timid ideas, persuaded her to follow him, bent a heavily-laden branch of the middle tree down to her level, and she plucked its fruit—figs (not apples, as one tradition has it)—and ate.

Immediately she became aware of her own nakedness, and hurriedly tore leaves from the fatal tree and girdled herself. Then she ran through the orchard, calling:—

"My lord Adam! My lord Adam!"

Adam came, listened to her account of the luscious figs, ate, discovered his nakedness, and was horror-struck. At that moment a heavenly trumpet blew, and the archangel Michael shouted:—

"Angels, come with me to Paradise, and hear God's judgment upon Adam!"

The Holy One, Ja-el, rode into Paradise in a chariot. Angels went before and behind the car. At God's coming all the trees broke into lovely blossoms. The throne of the Divine Judge was placed at the Tree of Life, and the two human sinners stood trembling before Ja-el. Three sentences were pronounced:—

Adam must become an earth labourer, winning from a soil encumbered with thorns and thistles, his bare livelihood; and the beasts he once ruled would war against him.

Eve must suffer the pangs of bearing children.

The serpent would lose hands, and feet, and wings, crawl on its belly and eat dust.

"O Lord," said Adam to Ja-el, "ere I go hence, may I eat of the fruit of the Tree of Life?"

"No," answered God, "but if you act rightly henceforth you shall not be held for ever by death, for I will grant you a resurrection, and you will then be free to eat of the fruit of the Life Tree."

"And may I take a few sweet plants with me, both for my own food and for offering to you in worship?" begged Adam.

The request was granted, and Adam gathered and took away specimens of crocus, nard, calamus, and cinnamon; and he and Eve passed out into a dull and toilsome earth.

In a lonely western spot of sunset-land, Eve was about to become a mother, and her agony was extreme. Adam's prayer to Ja-el brought help, and twelve angels and two Healing Virtues crowded round the poor soul, and the archangel Michael touched her soothingly. The infant that she bore at once ran about, picked a blade of grass, and gave it to his mother; and she called him Cain; and Cain shone brightly.¹ A second child was Abel, who, growing up to be a shepherd, was murdered by the husbandman Cain. A third child was Seth. In all, Adam and Eve had sixty-three sons and daughters; and Adam attained the age of 930.

"When I die," said Adam to his sons, "bury me towards the sunrise, in yonder field."

At the burial the heavens darkened, and no light appeared for seven days, and a blast of angelic trumpets shook the dim air; and God called:—

"Adam! Adam!"

"I hear," said the dead.

"You are earth, and go to the earth," cried God, "but at the resurrection you and all your true children will rise."

In due time Eve also died, and three angels buried her in the same grave with Adam and Abel; and her kinsfolk mourned six days, and rested with joy after sorrow on the seventh day.

This old tale, of which I have only selected certain portions for recital (and part paraphrase) here, was apparently composed by a Jewish story-artist (if I may use the expression) in the first, or second, or third century of the Christian era; and the earlier part of this period is the more likely date. The narrative is not all of a piece. Various writers modified or added details; and to-day we have a miscellany of manuscripts,

¹ A terrible suspicion arose in the minds of the ancient Hebrew historians. Cain shone. Satan was a Shining One. Was it possible (they asked) that.....? Let the question stand unfinished.

giving several versions of the legend, in Armenian, Slavonic, Syriac, Arabic, Latin and Greek.²

I now venture to draw three conclusions:—

1. It is evident that Hebrew writers did not hesitate to invent stories of God and Man, and to change, with freedom and creative wit, any part of the traditional tale that, in their view, could be improved. They acted with as little sense of restraint as modern novelists, such as Defoe, or Scott, or Manzoni; and, indeed, with less sense of restraint.
2. Under this spontaneous method of writing, the picturesque interest of the different versions of a folk-tale might be spread over many types. You cannot say that the usually accepted version is the best in dramatic effect. Most of us know the story of Adam and Eve as rendered in the Hebrew Bible. The form of it which I have cited is certainly quite as good from the point of view of scenery, liveliness, and dialogue.
3. Such cases reveal to us the mental conditions of those ages in which the Bible stories—in Old Testament and New alike—were first dreamed, shaped, re-shaped, and told from mouth to mouth, and community to community. Nobody troubled to examine "sources" and "authorities," in the spirit of modern University scholars or examiners into copyright. Nobody would worry about historic truth. The story was the thing. Whatever fascinated the hearer, and whatever seemed, in the opinion of those times, to carry a moral or religious lesson—that was seized upon, and decorated, and preserved. The doctrine of Divine Revelation was the ancient form of drawing up a list of the "Best Books," or "Classics." Of course, such a doctrine was found to yield profit to groups and schools and scribes and priests. I am not now dealing with commercial aspects, or dogmatic aspects, of the literature of Judaism and Christianity. I am simply pointing out the readiness and naturalness of the process of inventing stories which a dull and foolish theology afterwards appropriated as "sacred." I think the Christian Gospels were framed in the same inventive spirit as the legend of Adam and Eve which I have above quoted. The authors had no purpose of "pious fraud." They wrote as Hardy wrote, or Conrad, or Anatole France, or Nathaniel Hawthorne, or Leo Tolstoy, or Oliver Goldsmith, or John Bunyan, or William Shakespeare. The stupidity of the doctrine of the Infallible Word must rest as a reproach upon creed-makers, and the mean and shrivelled intellects of "commentators," and "divines"—poor wretches who never understood the Bible, and never could understand poetry. F. J. GOULD.

"For this true nobleness I seek in vain,
In woman and in man, I find it not:
I almost weary of my earthly lot,
My life-springs are dried up with burning pain."
Thou find'st it not? I pray thee look again,
Look inward through the depths of thine own soul.
How is it with thee? Art thou sound and whole?
Doth narrow search show thee no earthly stain?
Be noble! And the nobleness that lies
In other men, sleeping, but never dead,
Will rise in majesty to meet thine own;
Then wilt thou see it gleam in many eyes,
Then will pure light around thy path be shed,
And thou wilt nevermore be sad and lone.

—Lowell.

The Vicissitudes of God.

Man's giant shadow, hailed divine.—William Watson.

POOR God! In these days when thrones are tottering and ex-monarchs are swelling the ranks of the unemployed, I wonder if anyone ever spares a passing thought for that lone, tragic figure, who, after the exertions of creation, strolled easefully abroad in the cool of the day? I wonder, also, could he have foreseen the trouble that his ill-advised efforts would bring him, whether he would still have viewed his creation and pronounced it good? It was perhaps natural that—flushed with creative pride—he should indulge in a little self-laudation; but time, the passage of which so often causes us to modify our early judgments, is a great corrective to self-pride, and there are few geniuses who look back with favour on their first effort at self-expression.

It is a sad thought that God, the unchangeable, has been, and is, for ever changing. One cannot but feel sorry that he, whose career commenced under such auspicious circumstances, should have known so many fluctuations of fortune and assumed so many guises; that the once proud and mighty monarch of the East should so lose caste that an English statesman should have so little regard for him as to spell his august name with a small "g"; and that even his worshippers only maintain their allegiance because his temple is useful for social purposes, and contains a billiard table in the annexe. How are the mighty fallen!

The followers of the lowly Jesus were once urged to be "all things to all men,"; but historically God has been more than that, he has been, in very truth, a barometer that has registered the feelings and aspirations of his followers with such fidelity that he has been merely man, "writ large." To the savage, God is a savage; to the gentle-hearted, God is love; to the theologian, with a passion for metaphysics, he is a mere abstraction. So faithfully does God reflect the prejudices of his worshippers, that the present writer has even met a professor of mathematics who endeavoured to show, by means of a sum in algebra, that God equalled x !

To the Freethinker the evolution of the God idea affords not only a decisive criterion as to the reality of God's existence, but also points clearly the inevitable, if far-distant, end to which the belief must finally come. Already "the voice that breathed o'er Eden" has degenerated into a husky whisper or a fitful hiccup. From a world in which the gods were everything and did everything has evolved a world in which they are nothing and do nothing—a world, indeed, in which there is no useful function they could possibly discharge.

At one time every natural phenomenon was under the direct control of a God. Slowly but surely the numbers were reduced, until we had a trinity and a devil; then the devil retired from the business; then the more mathematically minded abandoned the trinity and adopted one god. One might have thought the process would end here, but no, for no sooner had one god been reached than they even started limiting him. He is not omnipotent, or he is not infinite; he is in a state of evolution himself, or he has no control over phenomena. So the process of attenuation goes on; and apparently the Atheist is the only one who perceives the true significance of it. Poor God! Truly thy doom is said.

VINCENT J. HANDS.

² The Books of Adam and Eve will be found translated in Vol. ii. of Dr. R. H. Charles's *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, published in 1913 by the Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Would a writer know how to behave himself with relation to posterity, let him consider in old books what he finds that he is glad to know.—Swift.

A Rude Awakening.

"FOR the first time in history representatives of all branches of the Christian Church are meeting together with the avowed desire of seeking a common agreement regarding the mind of God concerning social and international relationships," says the Rev. Bertram Appleby, in the current issue of *No More War*. For the first time in history! What a record! "The basis of the conference," he goes on to say, "is the conviction that the Christian faith, rightly interpreted and consistently followed, gives the vision and power essential for solving the problems of to-day." Rightly interpreted! Surely God, when he promulgated the Christian faith, should have made it so clear and so plain that mankind could not possibly misinterpret it? The fact that it can be misinterpreted proves that it is of no more than human origin, and therefore imperfect, and there is as little likelihood of its ever being "rightly interpreted" as there is of its being "consistently followed." The "mind of God" is simply the mind of man evolving throughout the ages, and learning, by experience, better social and international relationships.

"The Church is awakening. There are signs on every hand," says Mr. Appleby, "that the Christian Church is very much alive to the clamant need for the abolition of war, and its replacement by an International Court of Law." After two thousand years of slumber, it is about time the Church did wake up! The "mind of God" having failed to move in the right direction, the Church is now experiencing a rude awakening by the mind of man clamouring for the abolition of war and other evils; it is being shaken by the shoulders and told to "get a move on," and "show a leg," and to stop patronizing war and blessing banners and battleships. But when, in all its history, did the Church ever lead the way in social or political reform? Conservative to the backbone; instead of leading, the Church has ever been dragged at the heels of any reforms that have been made, as it is being dragged at the heels of the No More War Movement at the present day. It were better for that movement to cast off such a drag and hindrance as a sleepy and conservative old Church. The ideal of the abolition of war is based upon a firmer and surer foundation than the Church or Christianity, and does not need the support of either to prop it up; small hope for it if it did.

A. W. MALCOLMSON.

Acid Drops.

Among other things, Wembley is to have a church all to itself. And it will be dedicated so soon as the medicine-men have played their part in the opening of the Exhibition. It is, says the *Observer*, to be made a real haven of rest for those who are exhausted by sight-seeing. Now that is very thoughtful. There is nothing more tiring than tramping round a huge exhibition, and it will be altogether more comfortable for tired ones to take forty winks in the church than to sit about on seats and chairs in the open. We can see the Wembley Church providing a real want. The only suggestion we have to offer is that there should be hammock chairs instead of the usual seats.

One of the topics dealt with by the C.O.P.E.C. at Birmingham, not dealt with in our notes on the meetings, was the subject of Birth Control. So far it illustrated what we have said, namely, that where it is not safe to say anything definite, Christianity has nothing to say. To say something against birth control might put the Churches out of favour with those Christians who are

beginning to accept the view of Freethinkers that birth control is a subject that should be discussed as freely as any other social subject. On the other hand, there are large numbers of Christians—the majority probably—who continue to view the relation of the sexes from the unclean standpoint of historic Christianity, and who believe that to prevent a child coming into the world is to interfere with the designs of God. Of course, if Christianity had anything to say that was worth saying or worth listening to it would have been said long ago. As it is, the Conference came to the conclusion that it would "meanwhile lay emphasis on the privileges and obligations of Christian parentage." We do not know in what respect Christian parentage differs from any other kind of parentage, but the phrase suited the audience all right, and "meanwhile" the Church will wait. If opinion gets strong enough it will declare that it is quite in accord with Christianity. If it does not, it will discover that birth control is quite anti-Christian.

But the discussion was remarkable for an outburst from one good Christian, a Mr. Arthur Black. He said: "I do not believe that the twenty illegitimate children of the woman who was recently before the London magistrate are worth as much in the sight of the Lord as, say, Paula, the daughter of Dean Inge. I do not believe that children born in sin and wickedness and iniquity are as valuable in the sight of the Lord as children born in God-fearing Christian homes." Now if Mr. Black had said that children born and reared in certain conditions are not so valuable, socially, as children born under the other conditions, the statement would have been indisputably true. But Mr. Black does not say this. What he does suggest is that they are not so good in the sight of the Lord if they are illegitimate as if they are born in "Holy wedlock." If that is true, all that one can say is so much the worse for the Lord. To think less of a child because its parents have not gone through a form of marriage is the sign of a bigot and a cad. Nature does not penalize the illegitimate child. Bigotry and social convention alone does this, and this convention, which has punished the child for the fault of the parent, is largely made by Christianity.

People often point to the good done by Christianity. As a reply we point them to Mr. Black. One would think that right-minded men and women would approach the problem of the illegitimate child, or of the child reared under bad social conditions, with every consideration for it and with full sympathy. And we fancy that if Mr. Black had not his mind and sympathies distorted by religion, he would share that attitude. Helpless and suffering childhood appeals to nearly everyone. But Mr. Black is content to worship a God who does not think so much of an illegitimate child as he does of the child of Dean Inge or of one born in a Christian home. Here is a plain case of the distortion of the moral sense by Christian teaching. Without it a great many would be better than they are—certainly none would be worse in its absence.

The Church is making vigorous efforts to keep alive. A daily newspaper informs us that a devout audience of Churchmen and women filled the New Theatre—on a Sunday, too!—to witness the passion play, *The Lord of Death*. Apart from the note of cheerfulness and high spirits that is sounded by this performance, we trust that the immortal souls of the audience will not be endangered by this form of compromise—of choosing the stage, which is a wider pulpit. "Everywhere resoundeth the voice of those who preach death," wrote Nietzsche, "or 'life eternal'; it is all the same to me—if only they pass away quickly."

The current issue of *Public Opinion* contains an article on "Why Men will not enter the Pulpit." Some interesting figures concerning the diminishing man-power of the Churches are given. It quotes from the *Church Times*, of February 15, to the effect that there are at

present in France nearly 10,000 parishes whose churches are without curés—about a quarter of the total number of parishes. It also quotes the Rev. D. Kennedy Bell (*Evening Standard*, February 28, "Is the Parson Doomed?") as stating that the annual loss to the English clergy by deaths and retirements is 700, whereas the average number of men ordained during the last six years has been only 287. "The Church is not only failing to attract the most able and gifted of our young men," says the Rev. D. Kennedy Bell. ".....it is even failing to attract a sufficiency to keep up its man-power."

Public Opinion also contains a reprint of an article contributed by Dr. Norman Maclean to the *Scotsman*, in which are contained some facts relating to the Church in Scotland which must prove very disagreeable reading to the clergy. According to Dr. Maclean, in Edinburgh twenty churches have had to close. Dr. Henderson is attributed with having declared that the population which is lapsing from the Church is growing at the rate of 7,000 a year. "One fact is as ominous as a thunder cloud. In the year 1855 there were nine so-called irregular marriages in Scotland; there are now about 5,000 annually, 5,000 families set up in Scotland every year without the services of the Church—without inviting the blessing of God!"

We have often pointed out that so far as the vast majority of Nonconformists are concerned when they talk about the disestablishment of the Church, what they are really after is the equal establishment of themselves with the Church of England. They object neither to State patronage nor to State endowment. Their objection is to one Church getting more than another, and their object is for all of them to live upon the State so far as is possible. There have been many illustrations of this, the most recent being a resolution passed in London by the General Body of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers of the Three Denominations calling the "attention of His Majesty's Government to the long-continued exclusion of the Free Churches from active participation in all ceremonial services," etc. Apart from the egotism of Christians there seems no reason why the Mohammedans, the Buddhists, and the Jews should not also have their say at ceremonial services; and if the principle of equality were properly applied, Freethinkers also should have their say. And with all the gods represented and also those who did not bother with any god at all, there would be a spectacle worth witnessing.

A recent issue of *Nature* contains an advertisement for an educated young woman, with honours degree, to conduct the education of a group of children from two and a half years to seven as a piece of scientific work and research. Preference is to be given to those who do not hold any form of religious belief. A liberal salary is offered.

We do not think it is actionable, but a really scandalous thing has been said of Mr. H. G. Wells by the Rev. Thomas Phillips, of Bloomsbury. He is reported as saying that Mr. Wells is not yet quite fit for Holy Orders, but he is coming on. Now if Mr. Wells had made application for some post or responsibility, such a statement might well be taken as a hint that his mental powers were waning. And he is not yet so old a man that one would naturally suspect that to be the case. Slander seems to come quite naturally to some clerics.

More trouble over the "Sawbath"! In far Inverary the Rev. J. P. Glen brought before the notice of his Presbytery a very "important matter." In that district a new departure was being made and the standard of Christian morals seriously threatened by the opening of ice cream shops on Sunday. This custom was "an offence to our religious faith, a subtle allurements to children, and it had an unwholesome influence on youth."

It was decided to ask the County Council to do something to stop the progress of this depravity. We deeply sympathize with Mr. Glen, and can imagine the kind of sermons he will preach in denouncing this trade in ice cream. And yet he cannot threaten his congregation that when they are roasting in hell they will regret having given way to the allurements of ice cream. Rather will they regret not having it with them. Their punishment will make ice cream seem more alluring than ever.

And at the other end of the island there are also complaints about flying on Sunday. Once more a parson was to the front in defence of local morality. The Rev. A. R. Martin, who sits on the Redruth Council, complained of the flying exhibitions that took place on Sunday. He said it interfered with the religious life of the town, by which he meant his own exhibition, for he said that people could not rest quietly in their churches while the flying was going on. But in heaven, where everyone will be fitted with wings, there will be flying all the time—that is unless the angels spend one-seventh of their time roosting. But it is difficult to get on with these pious folk. At one place their character is being undermined with ice cream, and at the other they cannot rest while aeroplanes are about. Really, the sooner these good folk get to heaven the better.

Rev. H. Anson has opened a "Spiritual Healing" exhibition at St. Martin's Church, Trafalgar Square. Mr. Anson attends to patients every Wednesday, and the announcement in the parish magazine brought, says the *Daily Chronicle*, a "small company of women" to be attended to. That is what one would expect. A number of hysterical ladies who like to pour out their imaginary ailments to a priest attend, listen to his pious puerilities, and go away feeling better. And the priest tells them it is the power of God working through him. Now if some man or woman were to set up in Regent Street and pretend to cure ills by looking in a magic mirror, he would be called an impostor. What we should like someone to do would be to point out the essential difference between the Regent Street and the Trafalgar Square operators.

For there is no question that in each case some of the patients who attend do actually feel better when they come away. That is true of both operators. And no one who understands anything about certain types of cases will question this. It doesn't matter what it is that is believed in, whether it is bread pills, "occult force," or the "spirit of God." The essential thing is to believe. And provided the affection is of the hysterical variety, almost anything will be able to effect a "cure." Of course, it may be said that whilst the Regent Street operator is deliberately deceiving his patients, the parson is not. He quite believes in the efficiency of his own medicine. That we can quite believe and readily admit. But there is this resemblance in the two cases—both are trading on the ignorance and weakness of the people. To add the ignorance of the practitioner to that of the patient hardly makes the case more acceptable. We do not question for a moment the honesty and the sincerity of Mr. Anson; it is the prevalence of these magic cures with which we are concerned. And we are fairly certain that if the people were not prepared by the teachings of priests they would not so readily fall victims to the rascality of the Regent Street operator.

For a penny, one may buy a pamphlet which explains and illustrates how publicity could be used in fighting the battle of religion. The thing that has to be advertised at one point in the religious world is, according to another of the thousand authentic voices of religion, inborn and natural. Christianity enjoys enormous privileges; it has two weapons which by instinct it has used in the wrong place, and its record has been such that hell has been robbed of its terror—there could not possibly be a worse place than the sphere under its immediate and crazy influence.

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.—Pleased to hear that you had a good members' meeting, and trust it will be renewed and still more successful in the coming season.

H.M.—The contention that the abolition of compulsory religious service in the army would lead to a weakening of discipline is ridiculous. There is no greater reason for compelling soldiers to go to church than there is for compelling civilians to attend. None, that is, save the stupid military tradition that must not be credited with the degree of intelligence and independence of a civilian.

W. D. CORRICK.—Thanks for cuttings. We may find enough material there for an article.

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.

Mr. Cohen is delivering two special lectures at South Place Institute on the last Sunday evening in April and the first Sunday in May. These will be the last indoor lectures this season; and judging from the weather we have been having it will not be too sultry for people to sit in a hall for an hour or two. At any rate, we hope

to see the hall well filled, and we trust to *Freethinker* readers to advertise the meetings as widely as possible.

While we are on the subject of these lectures, the General Secretary informs us that an extra supply of small, neat, printed announcements, which can be easily carried in the pocket, has been provided, in the hope that those of our friends who are constantly regretting that lectures are not better advertised, will revert to the old system of personally leaving a few daily in trams, tubes, 'buses, restaurants, etc. We regret to hear that this practice has been dropped, and hope Miss Vance will receive many postcards asking for a small supply. Friends residing in, or travelling by, Bishopsgate, Kingsland, Dalston, Finsbury and Islington are in the direct line for Moorgate Street, and could in this way render great service.

As most of our readers are aware, there is a Bill prepared to submit to the present Parliament for the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws. Owing to party and other regulations it is a very difficult matter to get a private member's Bill brought before the House. Bearing this in mind the Society for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws asked the Home Secretary to receive a deputation asking for facilities to be given for the introduction of the Bill. Mr. Henderson consented to receive the deputation on Wednesday, April 16. So by the time this issue of the *Freethinker* is in the hands of its readers the deputation will have been carried through. Mr. Cohen, at the request of the Society, will have acted as spokesman. We hope to give a report of the proceedings next week if possible.

Mr. Monks, of Manchester, paid a lecturing visit to the new Bolton Branch on Sunday last. We are glad to learn from his report that he found the new Branch very enthusiastic, with many young and eager members, and these provided a good discussion at the close of the address. The Branch is trying to get a good hall for a meeting to be addressed by Mr. Cohen early in the autumn.

The lecturer for the Bethnal Green Branch to-day (April 20) is Mr. A. B. Moss; Mr. Corrigan, who was to have lectured there, is unfortunately indisposed. The weather may take a more favourable turn between the time of writing this paragraph and Sunday, and in that case we hope that East End Freethinkers will turn up in force.

TO MUCH DOUBT? SOMETIMES IT'S USEFUL.

The Reverend Dr. Stires says there is too much doubting in the world. "What men believe, not what they deny, is important." That's true, of course, since the reverend doctor says it. All the same it's a good thing to doubt occasionally, along proper lines, for that's how men increase their information.

We used to think the earth was flat, doubt cured that.

We used to think that poor, mumbling, old women were witches that rode on broomsticks to the Devil at midnight and carried on. They burned the poor, old creatures. Doubt cured that. And such doubting was once considered a mortal sin.

They used to think devils and hobgoblins rode on the storm, and that the lightning never hit anything unless the Lord aimed it at something. They didn't explain why it hit steeples pretty often. Doubt ended that and brought the lightning down and put it to work.

Doubt, like everything else, can be overdone, but it's also useful, occasionally. Doubt and Discontent—thank Heaven for them. They push men onward. The Bible itself says, "Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good." "Prove all things" means Doubt until you know.—*Detroit Times*.

Drama and Dramatists.

IN a note to his translation of *Plutarch's Life of Coriolanus*, Sir Thomas North states: "See the fickle minds of common people," and it reads as though it were the final judgment, the last words, and the very end of an estimation on people who persist in being common, according to standards fixed by the earth's bullies, tyrants, rough and smooth-tongued lap-dogs, and all the other ingredients of the pudding called "tradition." On the other hand, a certain gifted writer, taking sides, definitely states that the play of *Coriolanus* is "a mine of insults to the plebs." A visit to the "Old Vic," where this warrior play was presented, confirmed our opinion that both are right.

Coriolanus, as the military ideal, is as young as yesterday; he is also as old as those hills that look down on all the ages at the struggle between the Sword and Sickle. Volumnia, his mother, who would, yesterday, have been selling flags, and to-day complaining about taxation compelling her to sell her country house, together with Coriolanus are a pretty pair; pride is the whip they use, to feel finally its lash themselves. Menenius, as the old man, who would have waltzed to the war if he had been younger; one could hear our modern newspapers' leading articles rumbling in the stomach of this patrician; our journalists have a sound instinct for picking up tools by the wrong end. The finish of the tragedy of Coriolanus is the same as the finish of that war yesterday, that has not even made the world or London safe for a pedestrian to cross the street. But as it is only common people who walk nowadays, they must account it their privilege to figure in the casualty list, that should rightly be attached to the dividend warrants of traffic companies.

The atmosphere of the *Tempest* or the *Winter's Tale* or *Pericles* gives us the impression that here at least we are reaching a goal; *Coriolanus* is in the nature of a bloody interlude on the journey, in which truth is seen in a distorting mirror by all the passions having names in this play. Pride, Avarice, Hatred—what are these but other names for the characters in the play? Coriolanus was right, the patricians were right, the tribunes were right; Volumnia was right in her choice, and so was Virgilia; they were all right, but they were all looking at truth from a different angle—and it was subjective truth that played the part of the distorting mirror. From a purely human point of view they all played their parts excellently, each answering according to nature—the poor spoke of bread, the rich held forth on power, generals planned wars, and common soldiers behaved like the automatic machines so true to type. But revisiting this play after a lapse of three years and after studying it from many points of view, it now presents a different face to us. In the first place, we cannot take sides in this presentation of the futile struggle between aristocracy and democracy; between the breath of one forked radish who cursed, and the breath of the other smelling of garlic. Nor again can we take sides in Volumnia's railing at Sicinius and Brutus; she is paying the price of her boasting; she is but of the same stock as the half-animal Goneril. Further, if man had the longevity of the Wandering Jew, civilizations would appear to come and go as night and day do to those who flutter in years—three score and ten. With impartiality we accept all and everything in *Coriolanus*.

There may be seven or seventy-seven colours to truth, in the same way that an Indian devotee may find bliss in sitting on spikes, or a Catholic in a candle, a Protestant in communion port, or that thorough baptism by some who believe in total immersion.

These follies or wisdoms have persisted for centuries; from them all has sprung no idea to give to humanity a helping hand towards the realization of full self-consciousness; and, very rightly, Freethinkers do not attach great value to these manifestations that are, like *Coriolanus*, a scuffle and sometimes a fight on the journey towards something better for which the world is waiting.

Hazlitt, in his lecture on *Coriolanus*, makes the very significant statement that "Wrong, dressed out in pride, pomp and circumstance, has more attraction than abstract Right." In the theatre may be seen the truth of this remark by the effect on the audience. The Mussolinis in the background will not complain of Shakespeare as portrayed in this play, neither will they object to the ridiculous and pathetic representatives of the tribune, Sicinius and Brutus, who were on the level of red-nosed comedians, as presented on the "Old Vic" stage and received by the audience. A frequent mention of the "market-place" reminded us of Nietzsche's chapter on this much occupied territory, and, if there are flies buzzing in the market-place, let it be remembered that they are both aristocratic and democratic flies that buzz there with their "for and against." Voices have been solicited in this quarter for many moons by proud descendants of Coriolanus, as well as by less distinguished members of society—and, in the words of Camille Flammarion, "humanity is comparatively young upon the earth. We may attribute to it some thousands of centuries of existence.....and some five years of reason!"

We regard the play of *Coriolanus* as one of the best examples of Shakespeare's skill in presenting both sides of a question. As a mental exercise, let the reader go through it taking sides with Caius Marcius; then let him go through it again joining forces with those who are cursed even in our day—yet cannot be dispensed with—a locomotive stoker who refuses to shovel coal will give you blisters on your feet, whether you believe in magic or not—and then let the reader go through this play or see it, agreeing with all. If he can do the latter, then life will be accepted in the fullest sense of the word; when some thousands do the same thing we shall have made a beginning that will herald the birth of a new type of *Man who looks through his own eyes*.

The stick that struck Coriolanus and the Citizens was the stick of Usury. The same stick is, in our present day, being vigorously used, and it may mean the downfall of the last remains of civilization. Whilst representatives of official Christianity are beating the devil and are engaged in the heroic task of seeing that the British Empire Exhibition shall only be open on Sunday for prayers, there proceeds in the market-place much talk of "for and against." In the meantime, humanity maintains its height at sea level, a hunting ground for every type of general average, politician, episcopalian, militarist, quack or bagman, along with periodic eruptions called wars. Sub-human, inhuman, human, superhuman—a fluctuation in degrees in the life of mankind—shall we say that the first of our species to utter a new note was Thomas Paine, when he made a *pan-human* affirmation: "The world is my country." Let us honour his truth by use; war then becomes a civil war, and we have no use for Coriolanus, who turned his arms against his own country when he could not gratify his pride and obstinacy at the people's expense.

WILLIAM REPTON.

If all the preventable tears of man, since first he walked the earth, have been caught in a celestial water-butt, the Creator has all he needs for a second Deluge.—D. P. Stickells.

Lincoln: The Freethinker.

Address delivered at Banquet of the Freethinkers' Society of New York, at Hotel Belleclaire, 77th Street at Broadway, on the evening of February 12, 1924.

II.

(Continued from page 231.)

EVEN those clergymen who claim that Lincoln accepted Christianity in the later years of his life, admit that in early manhood he was an infidel.

His first law partner, John T. Stewart, says: "Lincoln was an avowed and open infidel, and sometimes bordered on Atheism. He went further against Christian beliefs, doctrines and principles than any man I ever heard."

Lincoln was a reader and lover of Voltaire, Volney and Paine, and was not satisfied with being enlightened himself, but informed others of what he had found out. He thought it miserly to keep that knowledge to himself; and was zealous in his heresy. He argued and talked for that which he had discovered to be true. It is said that he never tired of reading Paine; and I ask, who does tire of reading him? Who can read the *Age of Reason* without being convinced by its logic?

Oh, what a valuable, what a priceless copy of the *Age of Reason* it was that fell into the hands of Abraham Lincoln! The germ of Lincoln, the Emancipator, was planted when he read these liberty-loving books. And friends, as a gentle reminder, if you have a son whom you would like to see develop into another Lincoln, you cannot better equip him than by giving him the mental food upon which Abraham Lincoln thrived.

Lincoln's belief in "God" or "Providence" prompted him to say: "Friends, I agree with you in Providence, but I believe in the Providence of the most men, the largest purse and the longest cannon."

The use of the word "God" has a thousand interpretations, and does not reveal the religious belief of the person using that word. The manner in which Lincoln used the word "God" in his immortal papers should be sufficient proof that he had no faith in the generally accepted sense of that word. I think the following incident as related by Herndon should settle for all time the significance of the use of the word "God" by Lincoln: "In 1854 he asked me to erase the word 'God' from a speech I had written and read to him for criticism, because my language indicated a personal God, whereas, he insisted, no such personality existed."

Herndon goes further, and says: "If Lincoln were asked whether he believed in God, he would have said: 'I do not know that a God exists.'"

Lincoln's two most important documents, the Emancipation Proclamation and the Gettysburg Address were originally written with the idea of God completely left out. It is an historical fact and noteworthy to us that the Emancipation Proclamation was written and printed by Lincoln before he consulted the members of his cabinet. When he called them into conference he handed each a copy, and asked them for any suggestions. One member, the Honourable Salmon P. Chase, after reading it, stated:—

Mr. Lincoln, this paper is of the utmost importance—greater than any State paper ever made by this Government. A paper of so much importance, and involving the liberties of so many people, ought, I think, to make some reference to the Deity. I do not observe anything of the kind in it."

"No, I overlooked it," replied Lincoln, "won't you make a draft of what you think ought to be inserted?"

And the following words, as suggested by the Honourable Salmon P. Chase were put into the proclamation: "I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favour of Almighty God." No doubt a similar circumstance was responsible for the words "under God" being put into the Gettysburg Address, as the original draft of the Address makes no mention of these words.

We must not lose sight of the fact that Lincoln was the most misunderstood and hated man of his day. There were conspirators in every branch of the Government, and, it has been intimated, even in his own cabinet. We must not judge him for what he permitted others

to do in order to accomplish his glorious undertaking, and if the Churches of his day were ready to strike him down on the slightest provocation, the over sentimental references to "God" in his messages can be readily understood and are of little importance.

When chided about his Thanksgiving Messages as being contrary to his known convictions on the subject, Lincoln said to Judge James N. Nelson: "Oh, this is some of Seward's nonsense, and it pleases the fools!" He was a compromiser in the sense that he believed in "doing a little harm for a great good," particularly so when the end meant the liberation of thousands of human beings from the bondage of slavery. Lincoln knew that the Churches would have crushed him, and thereby prevented him from carrying out his glorious principles, had he stressed his irreligious convictions. This induced him to be cautious and discreet, and in doing so he carried the nation through the most trying period in its history. While president he was reticent in public upon the question of religion.

It is very curious, indeed, that if Lincoln were a Christian, as some say, nowhere in any of his writings does there appear a single, solitary mention of Jesus Christ. In his public addresses, official documents, and his private correspondence, never once did he express a belief in any doctrine that would even remotely claim him a Christian. On the contrary, his personal conversations were such as to unhesitatingly classify him an avowed Freethinker. And yet some have the impudence to say that on the presentation of a \$500 Bible, which some deluded and ignorant negroes gave him as a token of gratitude, he is quoted as saying:—

In regard to the great book, I have only this to say, that it is the best gift which God has given to man. All the good from the Saviour of the world is communicated to us through this book. But for this book, we could not know right from wrong. All those things desirable to man are contained in it.

This statement is a lie, the enormity of which I am unable to express. To say that Lincoln said this is too ridiculous for notice, and yet when uttered by a clergyman it is taken to be true. It is utterly impossible that Lincoln, who openly doubted the truth of the Bible and questioned the legitimacy of the birth of Christ, should utter such a puerile statement, especially to a group of people representing a race that had been so mercilessly subjected to a condition of servitude because of the Bible precepts. Out of courtesy Lincoln may have thanked the little group of well-meaning negroes for their gift, yet thinking in his heart what fools they were to take \$500 of their hard-earned money and waste it upon the *very instrument* that was the greatest obstacle in their struggle for emancipation.

More likely sad-hearted Lincoln felt, if he did not actually say: "What fools you are; here I am striving with all the energy I possess, with the resources of a great nation, sacrificing thousands of lives, the very flower of the Republic, to liberate you from the chains of slavery, and here you are presenting me with a Bible, a book that has held the minds of men in mental slavery for over a thousand years, and has caused more mischief and heart-ache, and agony and hatred, and bloodshed than any other instrument in the world. Go, you are now physically free; strive for mental emancipation."

Regarding this supposed speech to the coloured people, permit me to quote Herndon concerning it:—

I am aware of the fraud committed on Mr. Lincoln in reporting some insane remarks supposed to have been made by him in 1864 on the presentation of a Bible to him by the coloured people of Baltimore. *No sane man ever uttered such folly*, and no sane man will believe it. In that speech Mr. Lincoln is made to say: "but for this book we could not know right from wrong." Does any human being believe that Lincoln ever uttered this? What did the whole race of man do to know right from wrong during the countless years that passed before the book was written? How did the struggling race of mankind build up its grand civilization in the world before this book was given to mankind? What do the millions of people now living who never heard of this book do to know how to distinguish right from wrong? Was Lincoln a fool, an ass, a hypocrite, or a combination of them all? Or is this speech—*this supposed, this fraudulent speech*—a lie?

Herndon's characterization of this supposed speech of Lincoln's to the negroes of Baltimore as being a lie, is the only term that can properly apply to it. It only goes to prove to what lengths persons will go in their desperation to prove their contentions.

But one lie begets another, and the great task before us is to disprove them and halt their circulation. I believe it was Mark Twain—another Freethinker, by the way—who said that a lie could get into circulation and around the world before truth had time to put on its shoes. While Lincoln was alive no one presumed to call him a Christian. His enemies took particular delight in referring to him as an infidel. And now that he is dead we take it upon ourselves to defend his infidelity, if you please. And when I hear the word infidel used as an anathema, I feel like answering, with all the sauciness of a child: "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me."

Abraham Lincoln was *no less* Abraham Lincoln because he was a Freethinker, any more that Hudson Maxim is less the great scientist, inventor and author that he is because Hudson Maxim is a Freethinker. In fact, the world's greatest geniuses and benefactors have been Freethinkers. And it seems to me a very difficult thing to determine whether a person is a genius because he is a Freethinker, or a Freethinker because he is a genius.

For years there has been circulated by the religious forces a picture of Lincoln, with his son Tad standing beside him. Both are looking at a large book which Mr. Lincoln has in his lap. This picture is generally captioned: "Lincoln Reading the Bible to His Son." On close examination the book is discovered to be a picture-album. And in a recent issue of a magazine in which this picture appeared, Ida M. Tarbell is the authority for the statement that when this picture of Lincoln was taken he issued this injunction: "Now, don't let anybody entitle this picture 'The President Reading the Bible to His Son.'" How well have the religious forces carried out his wishes.

The following explanation from the *Boston Globe* has an interesting bearing upon this point:—

The pretty little story about the picture of President Lincoln and his son Tad reading the Bible is now corrected for the one hundredth time. The "Bible" was photographer Brady's *picture-album*, which the president was examining with his son while some ladies stood by. The artist begged the president to remain quiet, and the picture was taken. The truth is better than fiction, even if its recital conflicts with a pleasing theory.

If the religious forces will go so far as to declare that a picture-album is a Bible, what kind of other evidence would you expect them to present in order to prove their contention?

How can anyone say that Lincoln believed in the Bible, when he so aptly characterized the religious forces of both the North and the South by saying: "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes his aid against the other." The opinion of the Church element towards Lincoln, and the reason for their opposition, can best be told by Lincoln himself. In 1843 Lincoln desired a nomination for Congress, and did all in his power to secure the designation. The opposition towards him was growing stronger and stronger, and in a letter to some of his constituents he wrote as follows: "The strangest combination of Church influence was against me." Baker (his opponent) was a Campbellite, and therefore got all that Church. "My wife has some relations in the Presbyterian Church, and some with the Episcopal Churches, and therefore, whenever it would tell, I was set down as either *one or the other*, while it was everywhere contended that *no Christian* ought to vote for me because I belonged to *no Church*, and was suspected as being a Deist."

JOSEPH LEWIS.

(To be Concluded.)

The mode of thought that Cardinal Newman represented—if that can be called a mode of thought which seeks to solve intellectual problems by a denial of the supremacy of the intellect—may not, cannot, I think, survive.—*Oscar Wilde*.

The World of Science.

The Northern Lights.

No one who has been within the Arctic Circle is likely to forget the Northern Lights, one of the most beautiful of all Nature's phenomena. First a delicate green luminosity suffuses the sky; when this has persisted for a few minutes, other colours may make their appearance, but however brilliant these may be they never obscure the pale green glow. Arms of shimmering light shoot up and spread in all directions, and fade and grow again in brilliance.

Professor Lars Vegard, of Christiania University, has recently propounded some interesting theories as to the nature of these phenomena, which are supported by some very suggestive facts, although the theories have not received universal acceptance. He subjected the spectrum of the Northern Lights to careful analysis, and discovered that many of their lines were indicative of nitrogen. This led him to propound the theory that the Northern Lights consist of a layer of exceedingly light gases; the assumption being that in the arctic regions of the sky the cold is so great as to cause the nitrogen to freeze into crystalline particles.

He conducted a number of experiments at Leiden, irradiating solid nitrogen by those electric rays which Professor Birkeland has shown to be the matrix of the Northern Lights. The results amply bore out his theory.

He suggests that there is a vast envelope of frozen nitrogenous particles, which completely surrounds the earth. In addition to their being the cause of the green radiance of the Northern Lights, Professor Vegard considers them to be the cause of the apparent blueness of the sky, and further suggests that they preserve vibrations emanating from the earth, such as those set up by the discharge of heavy guns, and wireless waves.

Science and Humanity.

Sir Oliver Lodge's grave warning of the dreadful possibilities of science applied to warfare must still be fresh in everybody's mind. The Hon. Bertrand Russell, F.R.S., goes further in a little book (*Icarus*, Kegan Paul), recently published. His theme is really the old one, that whilst science has added to man's control over material things it had done relatively little to change his moral nature. He fears that science may be exploited by groups of men for their material aggrandizement and the indulgence of their love for power. "Where they [kindly impulses] are absent, science only makes men more collectively diabolical. Science has not given men more self-control, more kindly minds, or more power of discounting their passions in deciding upon a course of action. Men's collective passions are mainly evil; for the strongest of them are hatred and rivalry directed towards other groups. Therefore, at present, all that gives men power to indulge their collective passions is bad. That is why science threatens to cause the destruction of civilization." Unhappily there is only too much truth in this contention, which has been put forward by many other modern publicists besides the Hon. Bertrand Russell. But, at least, it is a hopeful sign that this danger is widely realized and canvassed. Moreover, it is unquestionable that science had done much to ameliorate human suffering. One has merely to think of some of the triumphs of surgery and medicine. And in so far as it enables us thus to alleviate human suffering, so far does it tend to develop the kindly, communal feelings, the desire to help our fellows, the spirit of real brotherhood. Also, of course, every great advance of natural science weakens the hold of religion over civilized mankind, and therefore helps destroy a false, artificial morality, making way for one based on naturalistic and social foundations.

The Value of the Zoo.

Some interesting facts emerge from the annual stock-taking at the Zoological Gardens at Regent's Park. This wonderful collection is valued at only £26,000. The mammals are valued at £20,000; the birds at £4,000; the reptiles at £1,025; and the fish at £300. But its real wealth lies in its scientific value, and its capacity to

provide popular education and recreation. That wealth is incalculable.

A Rival to Neanderthal Man.

A human skull, the characteristics of which suggest that it may be even earlier than that of Neanderthal man (found in the Rhine Valley), has been unearthed in a valley near Los Angeles.

The frontal formation of the skull is more receding than that of Neanderthal man. It was found in glacial sands, beneath the Pleistocene clay; and it is suggested that its age is half a million years. That of Neanderthal man is probably nearer 400,000 years.

Search is being made in the hope of unearthing the remainder of the skeleton.

Oceanography.

For those interested in this entrancing science, Professor James Johnstone, who holds the chair of Oceanography at Liverpool, has just published a delightful book, *An Introduction to Oceanography* (Liverpool University Press. London: Hodder & Stoughton). The student of oceanography comes across many unexpected facts. For example, at the bottom of the ocean it is bitterly cold. One might think that the heat from the earth's interior would produce an exactly opposite effect, but seemingly the amount of heat thus received is negligible. The heat of the surface layers is entirely derived from the sun's rays. As a result, in a calm sea, there is a decided drop in temperature, even in the first foot below the surface. Below 1,000 fathoms the temperature is little above the freezing point of fresh water. In the deeps the pressure may reach the stupendous dimension of seven tons per square inch!

W. H. M.

Correspondence.

SCOTTISH TRAITS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—My compliments to Mr. Andrew Millar. As a fellow-student of *Le Comedie Humaine*, I feel a natural affinity for him. Having served in France with a Scottish regiment, and having in the course of my commercial peregrinations met many members of the Scottish army of occupation in England, I long ago concluded that the orthodox conception of the canny Scot has very little basis in fact. Indeed, I always mistrust these sweeping generalizations founded on national prejudices. At the same time, I think there are certain characteristics common to the Scot, as there are to other nationalities; and the strict Sabbatarianism of Scottish history has had much to do with the development of these traits. As illustrating the operation of the Presbyterian conscience, a friend of mine tells the story of a Scot and his lassie who went "roamin' in the gloamin'" after kirk one Sabbath evening. Being in high spirits, Sandy started whistling. "Hoch, Sandy mon," remonstrated the lassie, "you munna whistle on the Sabbath." Sandy expressed his abject sorrow; and so they sat down awhile lover-like in the heather. Returning home, Sandy, unable to suppress his high spirits, again started whistling. "Hoch, Sandy mon," exclaimed the lass tearfully, "if I'd thoctt you were gonna whistle on the Sabbath, I wouldna hae let you hae done what you did the noo!"

Mr. Millar will doubtless recognise the type

VINCENT J. HANDS.

SOME SCEPTICAL SCHOOLMASTERS.

SIR,—It is to be hoped that "Mimnermus" will follow up his very interesting and readable article on "Some Sceptical Schoolmasters" by another one on "More Sceptical Schoolmasters." This is especially indicated in view of the lack of mention of courageous thinkers like the authors of *Evolution of the Idea of God and Life and Evolution*—Grant Allen and F. W. Headley respectively. There is one insinuation in "Mimnermus's" article to which exception may be taken. He

alludes to the "perfumed darlings of Eton." As a boarder for over five years at one of the largest public schools of England, I venture to assert that at whatever schools "perfumed darlings" may be existent they are emphatically not the public ones. All boys are by nature democratic, and they judge one another by their own characteristic code of ethics, based not on length of pocket nor blueness of blood, but purely and simply on capabilities and actions. I can assure "Mimnermus" that public school boys go through a very severe, rough-and-tumble curriculum, and should any "perfumed darling" be so unfortunate as to arrive among them, he would quickly have all the scent knocked out of him and a lot of sense knocked into him, and he would also find he would have to put up with epithets of more piquancy than "brat."

JAVALL.

THE TEACHING OF EVOLUTION.

SIR,—Mr. Merchant still insists that I should state "which one of the evolutionary theories is the correct one." What does Mr. Merchant mean by "theories of evolution"?

In the inorganic world the astronomer sees the formation and development of stellar systems out of the primitive nebula.

The chemist shows how all the materials of which stars and planets consist have been evolved from a few elementary substances, and gives good reasons for believing that these elements are themselves the result of an evolution from more primitive matter.

In the organic world the biologist declares that all animals and plants are descended from a few simple forms, themselves the result of evolution from inorganic matter.

The psychologist teaches that mind has slowly evolved from the mindless primitive reflexes, and instinctive movements, characteristic of the lowest organic forms, through an infinite variety of gradually advancing types up to the highest intellectual types of to-day.

To-day every science is evolutionary, and every scientist is an evolutionist. They may differ in points of detail, but they have no doubt whatever as to the fact that the process has been evolutionary. The belated opponents of evolution—whose opposition arises not from any scientific point of view, but entirely from their religious beliefs—seem to think that Darwinism and Evolution are synonymous terms, and if Darwinism is discredited the whole theory of evolution falls to the ground, and the childish story of the creation as recorded in the Bible will be reinstated.

As a matter of fact, if Darwin had never lived the theory of evolution would have been worked out very much as we have it now. There is an influential school of evolution, very strong in America, who reject Darwin's theory altogether. Herbert Spencer, the real founder of modern evolution, drew up the plan of his synthetic philosophy, which embraced *all* the sciences, before Darwin published his great work, which was occupied with one science only, that of biology.

Although scientists differ upon points of detail, and will continue to do so until there is no more to discover, yet there is an enormous amount of firmly established truth upon which all are agreed, and this puts the Bible story quite out of court.

If Mr. Merchant is logical he should protest against any history being taught until all the historians are agreed as to the facts, or economics until all the economists are in agreement, or Christianity until all the sects and Churches are agreed as to what Christianity really is.

The opposition to evolution by Mr. Bryan and his followers, and the legislative assemblies of America, to which we called attention, as illustrating the low level of public opinion in America, is not founded upon science, but upon the story contained in the Bible. A position that provoked the laughter of our press when it was cabled over. No great public leader over here would be so ignorant as to maintain such a proposition, and no public body could be induced to discuss it. W. MANN.

We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love, one another.—*Swift*.

New Manchester Branch.

THE Seventh Annual Meeting was held on Saturday, April 12, in the Engineers' Hall, Rusholme Road, at 3.30 p.m., with Mr. Councillor Monks in the chair.

There were present: Mrs. Ballard, Messrs. Bailey, Bentley, S. Cohen, Collins and Crompton; Mr. and Mrs. Greenall, Mr. Hulme, Mr. and Mrs. Mapp, Mr. and Mrs. A. C. Rosetti, Mr. Seferian, and the Secretary.

Letters of apology for absence were read from Messrs. Bleakley, Hampson and Willis. Mr. O. Z. Seferian (Auditor) presented the balance sheet, which again showed a deficit. Some discussion resulted in Mr. Rosetti remarking that the deficit was not as bad as it seemed, although it was in two figures. Mr. Councillor Monks was re-elected Branch President for a sixth year, and both proposer and seconder said that the Presidential duties had been performed with dignity, and therefore the re-election was justified. In accepting office Mr. Monks said: "My wish is to see the Manchester Branch prosper, and it is the one movement I would not give up." Messrs. Bailey, Crompton, Pulman, Rosetti, Turner and Willis were elected Vice-Presidents.

An expression of gratitude was tendered to Mr. Mapp on resigning the office of Librarian, and Mr. T. F. Greenall was elected in his stead. The offices of Secretary and Assistant-Secretary remain unchanged. Messrs. Bailey, S. Cohen, Mapp, Rosetti, Royston, Seferian, Willis and Miss Williams constitute the new Committee; and Mrs. Ballard, Mrs. Crompton, S. Cohen, O. Z. Seferian and Mr. and Mrs. Rosetti form the Social Committee.

The President, Secretary and Mr. Rosetti were delegated to represent the Branch at the Conference at Whitsuntide. It is only right that mention should be made of the generosity of Messrs. Crompton and Bailey, who, by their donations at the close of the meeting, put the Branch in a healthy financial state.

One thing I must not overlook, and that is the meeting emphasized the crying need for social activities, for in the past it has been the chief way of making up our deficiencies. The Social Committee will soon be getting their schemes ready, and when they are promulgated I trust that everyone will give his or her support if at all possible. I am sure that if this is done the Social Committee will be a living force, and will greatly assist in the fight against mental darkness and stupefaction.

HAROLD I. BAYFORD, *Hon. Secretary.*

Whence Comes Religion?

WHENCE comes this religion,
Of which we hear so much said,
By Rabbi, Priest and Preacher who make their living
out of it?

Dig down deep, investigate,
Study the origin of all the religions that man has
ever held,
And you will find every one of them to stand upon
the same foundation:
Natural phenomena, misunderstood and misinter-
preted
By ignorant, primitive men.

That's all there is to it.

HOWELL S. ENGLAND.

The wretch that would a *Tyrant own*,
And the wretch, his true-born brother,
Who would set the *Mob* aboon the *Throne*,
May they be damned together!
Who will not sing "God save the King,"
Shall hang as high 's the steeple;
But while we sing "God save the King"
We'll ne'er forget *The People!*

—Burns.

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—"Is Atheism Rational?" Affirmative, Mr. C. H. Keeling; Negative, Dr. L. Fried. The Discussion Circle meets every Thursday, at 8, at the "Lawrie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.

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

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

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY.—No meeting.

WEST HAM BRANCH.—No Meeting.

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.

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