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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

Views and Opinions.

Blasphemy.

The result of the deputation which waited upon the Home Secretary with regard to the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws will, we think, be received by all concerned with satisfaction. All things considered the reply of Mr. Henderson to the request of the deputation was as good as could be expected. He has promised his support to a Bill when it is introduced, he has promised also to bring the matter before the Cabinet when considering the business for the next session. What remains now is to see that the matter is kept before those who can control either the introduction of a Bill, or its fortunes after it has been introduced. There are now in the House members of the standing of Mr. Asquith, Sir John Simon and Mr. Henderson who have definitely announced their sympathy with such a measure, and there are also many members who are pledged to support it. There are perhaps many more who would be ashamed to oppose it—certainly upon open and honest grounds. Probably the Bill would be lost on a first endeavour, but the vote would almost certainly be large enough to show the world that it is only a question of time for the repeal of these infamous laws, and that might easily make politicians more favourably inclined to it than they would be otherwise.

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The Pressure of Freethought.

We have indeed reached the point that very many are ashamed to be thought intolerant in matters of religion, even though their feelings may be in that direction. That is something to the credit of the Freethought activity of the past two or three generations. Few public men will to-day defend the suppression of heretical opinions on the plain ground that they are heretical. It is usually upon some other ground—that the manner of expression is offensive, that the particular speech was likely to create a breach of the peace, etc. But the old, and only genuine ground, that the opinion expressed is contrary to the established teaching is very seldom put forward. That is a significant difference and marks a notable advance. It is an admission that, after all, religion is only a matter of opinion. There is no revealed doctrine about which one may be certain, there is no religious doctrine of which one can say that it ranks as a demonstrated truth. Even religious people are driven to admit that it is a matter of speculation; and persecution cannot be defended when it is practised on behalf of a mere hypothesis. The growth of toleration in religion has kept pace with the growth of disbelief about religion. One is the consequence of the other. And that is why the only way to make toleration secure, the only way to make certain that such laws as the blasphemy laws shall be swept away, is to go on making Freethinkers. The fruits of our labours are not wholly to be seen in the number of avowed unbelievers. They are also evident in the growth of liberalism in religious circles.

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The Origin of Blasphemy Laws.

The original reason for punishing the blasphemer was, given the primitive point of view, quite a logical and a sensible one. Assuming there was a God who might get angry with the whole of a people, and punish them because some member of their community had offended him, the object of preventing blasphemy was quite a utilitarian one. It was an act of social sanitation and of social security. But to-day this position is positively ridiculous. Time has so far civilized the religious life that only the most ignorant and the most primitive will assert that a bad harvest, a devastating disease, or some natural calamity is visited upon a society because God is angry with particular individuals. God failed lamentably in the art of civilizing man, but man has been far more successful in civilizing God. Everywhere the improvement of God has reflected the improvement of man. We do not believe that diseases are sent for our betterment or for our chastisement. They fall upon the saint as well as upon the sinner; nay, it may easily be that the "saint," by his sainthood, brings upon himself disorders from which the sinner remains comfortably free. And with the disappearance of the primitive reason for punishing the blasphemer, the only possible justification for a law against blasphemy goes. What is left is a number of ingenious excuses which ring hollow even to those who applaud them.

* * *

A Ridiculous Offence.

This offence of blasphemy is a most ridiculous one. And in any case, nowadays, it is the wrong person who is punished. The man who is charged with blasphemy is charged with committing what is to him an uncommittable offence. How can a man blaspheme that which to him does not exist? A man may speak disrespectfully of King George or of his next door neighbour. He may speak slightingly of his wife or of his mother-in-law. These are all real existences to him; but how can a man behave disrespectfully or disobediently to a God of whom he knows nothing? The man who can commit blasphemy is the one who believes in a God—and he is never prosecuted. No one charges him with blasphemy. He may say what he pleases and escape scot-free. If a believer says that the Japanese earthquake was caused by God, and so makes God responsible for the death of some hundred

thousand people, no one says he is blaspheming, it is only evidence of piety. A believer may look round on the bench of Bishops, he may believe that God has selected them to represent him, but no one regards this as an insult to the divine wisdom or as an indictment of the divine intelligence. It is taken as illustrating his child-like trust in God. A man may, in the name of religion, saddle his deity with almost every crime in the calendar, and still escape being made the subject of an indictment for blasphemy. The only man who can commit blasphemy is never charged with it. The only man who cannot commit the offence is the one who is charged. It is the most ridiculous crime in the calendar, and its disappearance would be evidence of both a desire for justice and a sense of humour.

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Why Not End the Stupidity?

There is not a single rational point of view from which the blasphemy laws can be defended. Blasphemy, if there be a God, cannot do him any harm. Villification of a man's character may wound his feelings or injure his social standing; but how can my opinion about God hurt *him*? Present-day Christians are fond of telling us that how a man behaves towards God is a matter between his conscience and the Deity. Why not, then, leave the matter to be settled by the man and God, without calling in a policeman to help God Almighty? Why not adopt the attitude expressed in a fine phrase of one of the Pagan Roman Emperors, "Let the gods guard their own honour." The bottom truth is, of course, that the whole subject of blasphemy is a survival from a dark and ignorant past. It belongs to a time when it was seriously thought that a man's attitude towards the tribal deities might seriously endanger the harvest or be a prelude to some social disaster. This was not a matter to be reasoned about, because it could not be made the subject of examination. It had to be accepted, and doubts about it strenuously discouraged. In this way was bred the spirit of intolerance which has in all ages and in all circumstances distinguished religious belief. In social matters the tendency has usually been towards a growing liberality; religion has only become liberal in proportion as social developments have been strong enough to bring religion under control. The blasphemy laws are a living reminder of an earlier and less civilized form of thought. It is a duty we owe to civilization to see that they are wiped out of existence as soon as possible. The alliance between God and the police force should be ended without delay.

Chapman Cohen.

Reflections.

The annual spring holidays are once more things of the past. Good Friday and Easter Sunday and Easter Monday are now treated by the majority of the people not as Holy Days, but as days for play and secular enjoyment. It is only to a very small minority that they possess any sanctity whatever. Religious newspapers, like the *Church Times* and the *Guardian*, make desperate attempts to regard them not merely as Holy Days, but as days of extraordinary Divine Visitations. The *Church Times* of April 11, for example, maintains that "there is a quality which belongs to the records of our Saviour's Passion in the Gospels which sets them apart from any record of their kind in literature"; but this is a claim made in the interests of theology, and is not based upon any characteristics of the records themselves. Looked at from any conceivable point of view the story of the crucifixion as told in the Gospels lacks the essential marks of veracity. For example, take John xix, 34, where it is stated that, although Jesus was already dead, "one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and straightway there came out blood and water"; but every physician is fully aware that, as Dr. C. Creighton points out, it is impossible to explain "the issuing of 'blood and water' from an interior source physiologically." Indeed, almost every incident related bears the stamp of improbability. How absurd and utterly incredible is the following statement in the *Church Times*:—

> These records suggest the transaction of events in time and at a certain place, witnessed by human eyes and brought about by the agency of ordinary men, which are yet in some way independent of time and outside space. For in the Passion we are confronted with the central mystery of all mysteries which "angels desire to look into."

Such is the Anglo-Catholic doctrine of the Passion celebrated on Good Friday, and it is a doctrine no longer believable by people of thought and intelligence. The leading article in the *Church Times* was not written for such persons, but for those few who still, by means of silence and a sense of reverence and awe, find the Catholic faith acceptable and joy-giving. Christian scholars now generally admit that the Gospel narrative is exceedingly unreliable and contradictory.

Now what is true of the records of the Passion is truer still of those of the Resurrection. On Friday the hearts of believers were heavy with grief and sorrow, but on Sunday they experienced thrills of joyous rapture. On Friday the life of the Gospel Jesus came to an end in the gloom of a bitter disillusion and disappointment; but on Sunday morning the rumour spread that the tomb was vacant, and angels were on the spot to inform all anxious enquirers that he had risen from the dead and would soon appear to his loved ones. But on examining the records, here again they are found to be so completely untrustworthy; and orthodox divines have frankly confessed that had there been no other evidence they could not have believed in the resurrection of their Saviour and Lord.

On Good Friday and Easter Sunday we read carefully once more the Gospel narrative of the Passion and resurrection, and were but confirmed in our disbelief in their historicity, and therefore we took no part either in Thursday's tears of regret and sympathy or in Sunday's hearty rejoicings; and to us the *Church Times'* leading article, which described the Passion as "the mystery of mysteries," was sadly meaningless and calculated to do harm rather than good. It ignores the many difficulties in the way of adopting the narrative as true by calling it something more than mere narrative, to be read in silence and contemplated with reverence and awe. But how can that be done in face of the glaring peculiarities of the narrative? Take the prayer of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. According to the story he is said to have parted from his disciples about a stone's throw and, in entire solitude, to have prayed thus:—

> Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. And there appeared unto him an angel, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground. And when he rose up from his prayer, he came unto the disciples, and found them sleeping for sorrow. And he said unto them, why sleep ye? Rise and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.

We notice that Jesus, in the hour of his supreme agony, left his disciples in order to be alone with his

Father, and we wish to know where the record of what occurred during that solitude came from. On the assumption that the solitude and the prayer actually took place, who was qualified to give an exact report of so secret an event, even to give the very words of the prayer?

Of course, it is of no consequence whatever that the "Gospels lay a supreme emphasis on the death and resurrection" of their hero. We are informed that "of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark fully one-third is devoted to the events of the Passion Week and their sequel in the resurrection," that "Luke has several chapters," and that "John gives half his Gospel to the same period." We know full well why this is the case. To the founders of Christianity the death and resurrection were all that really counted; and we also know that in their uplifting effect upon the world, neither event, real or imaginary, has mattered in the least. Practically speaking, it must be frankly granted that they have accomplished no saving and sanctifying work in society. This is not in the least surprising when we bear in mind that the Gospel story is only a repetition, slightly adapted, of a more ancient story in the Pagan world. The minutely close resemblance of the Christian festival of Easter to the rites of Adonis, as shown in the *Golden Bough*, must be very staggering to Christian believers. We read in the *Golden Bough* the following description:—

> When we reflect how often the Church has skilfully contrived to plant the seed of the new faith on the old stock of Paganism, we may surmise that the Easter celebration of the dead and risen Christ was grafted upon a similar celebration of the dead and risen Adonis. The type, created by Greek artists, of the sorrowful Goddess with her dying lover in her arms resembles and may have been the model of the *Pietà* of Christian art, the Virgin with the dead body of her Divine Son in her lap, of which the most celebrated example is the one by Michael Angelo in St. Peter's. That noble group, in which the living sorrow of the mother contrasts so wonderfully with the languor of death in the Son, is one of the finest compositions in marble. (p. 345-6.)

Here is another highly significant passage from the same great work by Sir James Frazer:—

> Thus it appears that the Christian Church chose to celebrate the birthday of its Founder on the twenty-fifth of December in order to transfer the devotion of the Heathen from the Sun to him who was called the Sun of Righteousness. If that was so, there can be no intrinsic improbability in the conjecture that motives of the same sort may have led the ecclesiastical authorities to assimilate the Easter festival of the death and resurrection of their Lord to the festival of the death and resurrection of another Asiatic God which fell at the same season.....The death and resurrection of Attis were officially celebrated at Rome on the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth of March, the latter being regarded as the spring equinox, and therefore as the most appropriate day for the revival of a God of vegetation who had been dead or sleeping throughout the winter. (p. 359.)

Now at last we discern that Easter was originally, and in reality still remains, a Nature festival, in which we rejoice at the advent of spring and the promise of summer. Spring may sometimes be late, as it has been this year, owing to some meteorological conditions, but it always comes with summer and all its golden gifts in its bosom. And, after all, though not present at either church or chapel, we verily did observe the Easter festival right royally. In the long run, Nature is always our friend, and, having no other, it is our bounden duty to be on good terms with her; serving her in the beauty of holiness, and heartily acknowledging our indebtedness to her in all things.

J. T. Lloyd.

Towards Democracy.

> If I am not level with the lowest, I am nothing.
> —*Edward Carpenter.*
>
> A noble aim,
> Faithfully kept, is as a noble deed.
> —*Wordsworth.*

Over thirty years ago there appeared a book of poetry called *Towards Democracy*, which placed its author definitely among the forces of progress. It was the voice of a new era. Young and enthusiastic men treasured the volume, and older men looked for other works from the same wise pen. Edward Carpenter, the author, was then in the very prime of life. He is eighty years old now, and his significance in modern literature and thought is enormous. In the autumn of his days came a volume of autobiography, *My Days and Dreams*, which told in beautiful language the life story of a remarkable man, of noble simplicity and heroic modesty.

This book tells the story of a pilgrim's progress, and is of unusual interest. Born at Brighton, of middle-class parents of means, Carpenter was educated at Cambridge, becoming tenth Wrangler and a Fellow of his college. The Established Church attracted him, and he took orders under the famous Frederick Maurice, the friend of Tennyson, and one of the most broad-minded priests who ever wore a cassock. Even Maurice could not keep Carpenter in the Church. For the young curate was reading other things than the Prayer Book and the *Christian Year*. He was absorbing Shelley's passionate lyrics of Liberty, and soon he was to become a disciple of Walt Whitman. In such company the young priest was bound to look beyond the narrow cloisters of the Church and to scan far horizons.

Such a fine spirit as that of Edward Carpenter's was bound to rebel at being "cribb'd, cabin'd, and confin'd" within a Mediæval Church, which has ever regarded Progress with jealous eyes. The horrors of slavery, the brutal treatment of prisoners, and other outrages, were never denounced by the clergy until other men cried shame upon them. The Bishops almost invariably voted in the House of Lords against reforms. They voted against the Bill for abolishing the death penalty for stealing property of the value of five shillings. The Roman Catholic Disabilities and the Jewish Disabilities Repeal Bills met with their opposition. They resisted the motion for the admission of Nonconformists to the Universities, and also the rights of Dissenters to bury their own dead in their own manner. Owing to the obstinacy of the Bishops the United Kingdom remained for very many years the one civilized State where marriage with a deceased wife's sister was illegal, and Englishmen were long refused the same freedom as their kinsmen across the seas. What sixteen centuries of the rule of the Bishops had done for the people of England has been told in unforgettable language by Joseph Arch, the first farm labourer who became a Member of Parliament:—

> First up walked the squire to the communion rails; the farmer went up next; then up went the tradesmen, the shopkeepers, the wheelwright, and the blacksmith, and then, the very last of all, went up poor agricultural labourers. They walked up by themselves, nobody else knelt with them; it was as if they were unclean—and at that sight the iron entered into my heart, and remained fast embedded there. I said to myself, "If that's what goes on—never for me."

In much the same spirit of righteous indignation young Carpenter abandoned the Church, and became a University Extension Lecturer, and wrote *Towards*

Democracy, in which he brought something of the spacious spirit of Whitman into English literature. "If I am not level with the lowest, I am nothing," he said sincerely. Nor was it an idle boast, for he actually gave away the greater part of his fortune he had inherited from his father, and during the succeeding years he was one of the people. He worked with labourers, mechanics, and other toilers, and took to open-air speaking—a trying and thankless task for a cultured and sensitive man. He sought to make a living out of his garden, and carried his own produce to market and stood beside his own stall to sell it. He made sandals, and in the scant intervals of a busy career he wrote beautiful books.

Carpenter's real and lasting influence is in his books, for he is a modern of the moderns, and the pioneer of many freedoms. He is so far ahead of the times that he is still outside the region of extensive popularity, and his truly amazing power of detachment from his own age is only saved from disaster by his whole-hearted faith in the future of humanity.

Critics profess to regard Carpenter as a mere disciple of Whitman. It is true that he entered the literary arena behind the "tan-faced poet of the West," but the differences between the two men are very striking. Whitman was reared in a republic, and Carpenter in a monarchy. The American served with the army in a long and terrible war, and the Englishman was for years a curate. Whitman's psychological roots were in the United States, and Carpenter's in Cornwall. The author of *Leaves of Grass* was a self-educated man, and the writer of *England's Ideal* was a brilliant University scholar. Whitman was no great traveller, but Carpenter has visited the principal countries of the world. As we look closely at these two men we realize more clearly their moral and intellectual differences.

Humanitarian, idealist, dreamer, if you will, Carpenter commands respect. His ideals are lofty and noble. He believes that when men and women are equally free to follow their best impulses; when idleness and vicious luxury on the one hand, and oppressive labour and the dread of starvation on the other, are alike unknown; when the standard of opinion is set by the Wisest and best among us, then Democracy will come into its kingdom.

Carpenter has travelled much, but his greatest journey has been from the time when, as a young man, he preached in a priest's robe, and dallied at tea-tables, until to-day when he is the austere apostle of Liberty. We can but admire the high standard of his conduct, and the unselfishness of his life. At a time when commercialism is rampant, his career is an exception so rare as to be scarcely credible. In an age of compromise Edward Carpenter has ever remained faithful to his principles; in an age of ostentation and hypocrisy he has cared only for simplicity.

Mimnermus.

Thrift.

I have never read Samuel Smiles's works, although I know some of their titles, but I once read a chapter or so of a magnificently moral work entitled *Beneficent and Useful Lives*. This was all about Carnegie and Peabody and such people, who made a lot of money and gave away what they could not spend themselves.

It is almost axiomatic in our system of ethics that we must save money. "It does not matter how little it is, if you put a trifle away each week or each month, it soon mounts up," the phrase goes. And a man or woman is the more respected as his or her obvious prosperity and possessions increase. This is all very trite and stale, but I must plead that there is nothing new under the sun, and how could so humble a scribe as I am hope to say anything very new or original. It does seem a pity that we should judge a man not by what he is, but by what he has.

Of course, there are people who do not adopt this sordid consideration. They are the Christians. They follow the precepts of their master. They do not seek to pile up treasure in this world. They do good that their souls may live, and enjoy the infinitely greater treasure, which it is promised they shall inherit in the vales of immortality. They practise a thrift of greater value than the worldling. The latter only gets gratification for the term of his natural life, while they who save their souls get gratification—of a peculiar sort certainly—for all eternity.

Some of the Christians are even more thrifty—as we realize on Sunday mornings when the Salvation Army disturbs us with its claims to save our souls because it is convinced that it has already obtained a contract with the Almighty at usurious interest on its own behalf. The official Churches are not so concerned with thrift. They do not particularly emphasize their saving grace, and would be satisfied if people would only go to them on Sundays. The official Churches are practical people, and they do not want to enquire into business methods or morality provided attendance is regular and the official charities are subscribed to. The more violent Christians are intent upon adding other people's souls to the account upon which their own is numbered.

I think it must have been this commercial sort of bargain that made Christianity spread so rapidly. A bargain appeals to most people, and, when it is so excellent a one as that afforded to the thrifty Christian, it is bound to be popular.

Something of the same sort can be said for the Hebrew ethic, which spread across Europe, with the Christian teaching. It was a negative ethic. It confined itself to stating those things which it was forbidden to do, and consequently the European people, with their saving and thrifty ideas, appreciated it. They had a sense of saving when they obeyed one of the commandments, which denied them some pleasure. They felt that they were doing without something they wanted, and, as in the material sense, that means something is not consumed, they felt that they must be gaining something; they may not have known what it was they were laying up, but they felt that it was a necessary consequence of self-denial that something should be acquired.

The application of this sense of thrift—of saving—applies in our civilization to the accumulation of treasures upon earth as well as to the hope of treasure in the hereafter. Everyone is trying to get together more and more possessions, not realizing that these possessions are a prison in which they are confined. The idea that thrift is of undiluted excellence needs to be reconsidered.

I am inclined to believe that the spendthrift is better that the thrifty. Of course, it is necessary, or perhaps it is necessary—I am not certain which—to take some thought for the morrow. But the really thrifty spends so much time and effort taking thought for the morrow that he fails to realize that he is alive to-day; and the Christian who is pre-occupied with eternity does not begin to live in this life, although, surprisingly enough, he often appears quite contented; the content perhaps arises out of his excellent bargain with God.

The spendthrift is not occupied with thoughts of the morrow. For him the evil of the day is sufficient; but he is not only interested in evil: he is also happy in the good of the day. His life is spent: it is not saved

for some problematic future; and his experiences, many and varied, because he spends himself in so many different ways and with and on so many different sorts of people, make him tolerant and human.

Usually he does not cumber himself with possessions, because he has no particular use for possessions. They would bind him in bonds to one place, and he does not wish to remain always in one place. One cannot spend one's life in one place only: that is a situation more devoted to saving. And the negative ethic does not appeal to the spendthrift. He wants something positive, and that is why he is so often a rebel against the accepted canon, in every way so strongly "agin the Government."

The generations have devoted themselves to thrift, as they have to many other words and phrases, without very much consideration whether the copybook maxims lead to a full and complete life. We of this later post-war generation are not so prone to accept the values of our forefathers; and certainly thrift, as it seems to me to have been understood, is grotesque, although it is possible a case might be made out in its favour; but I prefer to spend my life in living, and not to save it for problematic eternity. G. E. Fussell.

The Tragedy of Little Samson.

In his book entitled *From the Memoirs of Herr von Schnabelewopski*, Heine has sometimes given what appear to be personal reminiscences. I have not seen or heard of a translation, and what follows is my own rendering of the principle incident.

After passing a few months in pleasure at Hamburg, Schnabel went for study to Leyden. There he yearned sadly after the toothsome dishes and attractive damsels that delighted him on the banks of the Elbe. Then a fortunate chance made good the double loss. Schnabel and six of his fellow-students ate together in his private room, having the food sent across from "The Red Cow." The hostess of that establishment fell deeply in love with Schnabel, who did not leave her affection unrequited. The episodes of this idyll, whether agreeable or the contrary, had a corresponding repercussion upon the table of Schnabel and his companions. The latter were not slow to observe the connection; and when the fare was mean, or scanty, or ill-cooked, they attributed the misfortune to the dissatisfaction of their hostess with Schnabel's attentions. They made all sorts of disobliging remarks about his sickly looks; and expressed the fear that he would soon loose the regard of his sweetheart, which would mean short commons for them all till the end of time. They protested that he needed feeding up; and therefore stuffed his mouth with the worst bits, and made him eat mountains of celery. When the poor diet lasted some days they declaimed upon the nobility of self-sacrifice, instancing Regulus, who voluntarily submitted to be nailed up in a tub; and Theseus, who freely entered the cave of the minotaur. Sketches on the wall illustrated this doctrine, the minotaur having a striking resemblance to the animal on the sign of "The Red Cow," and the Carthagenian tub to the hostess of that inn. At other times bread-crumbs were kneaded together into figures resembling a little thin man and a huge fat woman; and then there were references to Hannibal marching over the Alps; and to Marius sitting amid the ruins of Carthage.

> Another and still more curious effect of the situation was that when the roast was altogether bad we disputed over the existence of God. But the dear God always had the majority. Only three of our table-companionship were atheistically minded; and these let themselves be persuaded if at least we got a good cheese for dessert. The most zealous Deist was the little Samson, and when he disputed with the lanky Van Pitter over God's existence he sometimes became very irritable, ran up and down the room, and cried out continually: "By God, that is not allowed!" The lanky Van Pitter, a meagre Frieslander, whose soul was as calm as the water of a Dutch canal, and whose words proceeded as quietly as a sledge, drew his arguments from German philosophy, with which at that time one occupied oneself much in Leyden. He mocked over the narrow heads which ascribed to the dear God a private existence; he even accused them of blasphemy, because they provided God with wisdom, justice, love, and similar human qualities, which did not at all suit him, for these qualities are in a certain measure the negation of human defects, being the opposite of human stupidity, injustice, and hatred. When, however, Van Pitter developed his own Pantheistic views, the fat Fichean (a certain Dricksen, from Utrecht), stepped out against him; and knew well how to hatchel his vague God, spread out over Nature, and therefore existing in space; aye, he maintained that it is a blasphemy if one even speaks of an existence of God, since existence is an idea which presupposes a certain space, in short, something substantial. Aye, it is a blasphemy to say of God, *He is*; the purest being cannot be conceived without sensuous limitations; if one desires to thinks of God, one must not think of him as a form of extension, but as an order of events; God is not being, but pure action; he is only the principle of a supersensible world-order. At these words little Samson always became quite furious, and would run still more madly about the room, and cry out still more loudly: "Oh God, God! By God, that is not allowed. Oh God!" I believe he would have thrashed the fat Fichean for the honour of God, if he had not had too thin arms. Sometimes he really fell upon him, but then the fat one took the two little arms of little Samson, calmly held him fast, explained to him his system quite composedly without taking his pipe out of his mouth, and blew him his thin arguments together with the thickest tobacco smoke into his face, so that the little one was almost suffocated by smoke and vexation, and whined beseachingly, and in ever lower tones: "Oh God! Oh God!" But he whose cause he fought never once helped him. In spite of this divine indifference, in spite of this almost human ingratitude on the part of God, little Samson still remained the constant champion of Deism; and, I believe, out of inborn inclination. For his father belonged to the chosen people of God; a people which God protected with his particular love, and which therefore up to this very hour has preserved a certain attachment to the dear God. The Jews are always the most obedient Deists, especially those who, like little Samson, are born in the free town of Frankfort. In political questions these are able to think as republicanly as possible; aye, even to roll themselves sanculotically in the mud; but if religious ideas come into play, then they remain submissive chamber-servants of their Jehovah, the old Fetish who will have no more to do with all their tribe, and who has let himself be rebaptized into a divinely pure spirit. I believe that this divinely pure spirit, this parvenu of heaven, who is now imaged after a fashion so moral, so cosmopolitan, and so universal, entertains a secret grudge against the poor Jews who knew him in his first lowly form, and now remind him daily of his old obscure national relationship.

Schnabel lodged miserably at the house of an Anabaptist, whose study, unlike that of Chaucer's physician, was continually in the Bible.

"He was about fifty years old, a man with very very thin legs, pale wasted countenance, and small green eyes, wherewith he blinked perpetually, like a sentry with the sun in his face." The good man used to dream at night of what he had read by day; and in the mornings he related to his wife his nocturnal intercourse with the chief characters of the Old Testament, especially those of the fair sex. The latter reports got

him into trouble; and one day, when he boasted how he had combed the raven tresses of Esther while she was getting ready to win King Ahasuerus for the good cause, his wife thrashed him soundly, poured the hot coffee into his face, and would have finished him off completely had he not promised to renounce all conversation with the Old Testament women, and to converse in future only with the patriarchs and male prophets. Alas! this conversion was only apparent; and Mynheer confided to Schnabel that he had dreamed himself into the harem of Solomon and drunk tea with the thousand wives of that sage Monarch. The gods envy such felicity. One night, as Schnabel himself was dreaming pleasantly, he was rudely awakened by the shrill voice of his landlady, who stood by his bed with a blind lanthorn in her hand, asking him to rise and come to her husband's room. No self-respecting ghost would have presented such an horrible appearance as she did in her shift; but, half-drunk with sleep, he got up and followed her. They found the poor man, evidently in a state of bliss, murmuring: "Vashti! Queen Vashti! Fear no Ahasuerus! Beloved Vashti!" "There," said his wife, "he has preferred a heathen to me. But I am a wife and a Christian, and you shall see how I revenge myself."

Hereupon, she turned back the bed-clothes, and smote the limbs of the sleeper with a leather strap. He awoke uttering shrieks that set the neighbourhood in tumult; and next morning it was reported throughout Leyden that he had made this noise because of discovering his wife in the arms of Schnabel. The maid at the lodgings, who for some reason or other regarded Schnabel with hostility, went across to "The Red Cow" and told the hostess that she herself had seen his landlady pay him a visit in the night. This brought the catastrophe. For, when the companions of Schnabel had to join him at a defective and badly cooked dinner, and perceived that there was little chance of their being better served for long to come, they murmured like the Israelites in the wilderness:—

> "Now, little Samson," cried the fat Dricksen, "dost thou still believe in God? Is that justice? The landlady visits Schnabelewopski in the dark night, and because of that we get bad food on the clear bright day." "Oh God! God!" sighed the little one, rendered quite peevish by such atheistical expressions; and perhaps also by the bad food. His peevishiness grew, when the lanky Van Pitter discharged his wit against the Anthropomorphists, and praised the Egyptians who once worshipped oxen and onions; for the first when roasted, and the last when sauced, taste quite divine.

The dispute continued, especially between fat Dricksen and little Samson. Finally, the latter observed:—

> I once saw at Frankfort a clock that did not believe in any clockmaker. It was of tombac, and went very badly. "I will at least show thee that such a clock at least can strike well," replied Dricksen." Ho suddenly became quite calm, and molested the little one no further.

Though the arms of little Samson were thin, he was a smart fencer; and so it was arranged that he and Dricksen should settle their theological difference that very day with naked swords—

> They lunged at each other with great bitterness. The black eyes of little Samson glistened angrily, and contrasted all the more strangely with his little arms, which stuck out lamentably thin from his turned-up sleeves. He became ever more violent; he struck verily for the existence of God, of the old Jehovah, the king of kings. The latter, however, did not afford his champion the least support; and in the sixth round the little one got a stab in the lung. "Oh God!" he sighed, and fell to the ground.

Comedy interrupted tragedy, while Schnabel went to vent his wrath upon the hostess of "The Red Cow" for sending him no soup, and for occasioning the death of his best friend. She shed tears like a fountain. He said:—

> But I stood firm; I was resolved to break off for ever; and I left the kitchen with the tragic words: Adieu, for this life we have done boiling. In going out I heard something fall to the ground. Was it some kitchen pot, or Myfrow herself? I did not take the trouble even to look round; and went straight to the Groote Dohlen to order six portions of food for the next day. After this important business I hastened to the dwelling of little Samson, whom I found in a very bad state. He lay in a big, old Frankish bed, which had no curtains, but four large, wooden columns painted like marble, one at each corner, and a richly gilded panopy at the top. The countenance of the little one was pale with suffering; and in the glance that he cast upon me there was so much melancholy goodness, and misery, that I was moved to the depth of my soul. The physician had just left, after declaring the wound to be serious. Van Moelen [one of us seven], who alone had remained to watch by him at night, sat before the bed, and read to him out of the Bible. "Schnabelwopski," sighed the little one, "it is well that you are come. You can listen, and it will do you good. It is a dear book. My forefathers carried it with them about the whole world, and endured for it much trouble and misfortune, abuse and hatred. Every page therein has cost tears and blood, it is the written fatherland of God's children, it is the holy heritage of Jehovah." "Don't talk so much," cried Van Moelen, "it does you harm." "And especially," said I, "don't talk about Jehovah, the most ungrateful of gods, for whose existence you fought to-day." "Oh God!" sighed the little one, and tears fell from his eyes, "Oh God, thou helpest our enemies." "Don't talk so much," repeated Van Moelen. "And you, Schnabelwopski," he whispered to me, "excuse it, if I bore you; the little one insisted that I should read to him the story of his namesake, Samson—we are at the fourteenth chapter, listen: "Samson went down to Timarah, and saw a daughter of the Philistines——" "No! cried the little one, with closed eyes, "we are already at the sixteenth chapter. To me it is as if I went through all that you read there; as if I heard the sheep bleating which feed by the Jordan; as if I myself had set the foxes' tails on fire, and sent them into the fields of the Philistines; as if I had smitten the thousand Philistines with the ass's jaw-bone. Oh the Philistines! They oppressed and mocked us; they made us pay the swine tax; and they threw me out of the dancing saloon up on the Ross, and at Bockenheim trod me under foot—thrown out, trodden under foot upon the Ross! Oh God, that is not allowed!"

And so, as his fever grows, the little Samson shares in the glory and in the fall of the great Samson, confusing them more and more with the joys and the sorrows of his own short life. Then comes the end. Van Moelen has just finished the stupendous scene where the blinded hero, brought out to afford sport for his victorious foes, beseaches the Lord of Hosts to give him back his lost strength for one brief moment; and then, embracing the two huge columns which support the edifice wherein they have assembled to witness his humiliation, breaks them down, and buries himself and his tormentors under an avalanche of masonry—

> At this point little Samson opened his eyes ghostly wide, seized with his little thin arms the two columns at the foot of his bed, and pulled, as he cried out in angry tones: "Let my soul die with the Philistines!" But the strong columns of the bedstead remained immovable; and the little one, exhausted and with a melancholy laugh, fell back upon his pillows; and from his wound, the bands whereof had stirred, there flowed a red stream of blood.

C. Clayton Dove.

The Blasphemy Laws.

Deputation to the Home Secretary.

The Home Secretary received a Deputation from the Society for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws at the Home Office, on Wednesday, April 16.

Mr. Henderson was accompanied by Sir Ernley Blackwell, K.C.B., and Mr. H. B. Simpson, C.B.

Mr. Harry Snell, M.P., introduced the Deputation, consisting of Mr. Chapman Cohen, the Rev. Walter Walsh, D.D., Mr. Silas K. Hocking, the Rev. R. Sorensen, Miss Kough, Mrs. Tiedeman, Mr. and Mrs. Collette Jones, Mr. Charles T. Gorham, Mr. H. Clifton, and Mr. C. G. Quinton.

Mr. Snell: Mr. Henderson, the deputation that I have the privilege of introducing to you is composed of members of the Society for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws. This Association is composed of men and women of differing religious and political views, but we are drawn together by a desire to get these old statutes, which impose penalties on the expression of opinion, removed from the Statute Book. This is not a new demand, as you know, for over a series of years efforts have been made to bring this matter before Parliament, and it will perhaps be within your memory that during the whole of the last Parliament a Bill was on the Order Paper in my name, which I kept going throughout the session, in the hope that some opportunity might be afforded for discussing it in the House of Commons. But, in spite of a good deal of vigilance on my part, that was not possible, and now, before another Bill is introduced, the Society, which is primarily responsible for promoting this demand for repeal, is anxious to consult you as to what is possible or advisable. There will be three very short speeches this morning. The first speaker will be Mr. Chapman Cohen, the President of the National Secular Society. The Rev. Dr. Walsh and the Rev. Mr. Silas Hocking will also speak; and the Deputation will be very glad of your consideration of what they have to say.

Mr. Cohen: Mr. Snell has, Mr. Henderson, put the purpose of the Deputation, and all I need add to that, I think, is an assurance that, bearing in mind the amount of work the Government has before it, we should not have trespassed upon your time had it not been that we believe that the principle we are advocating is of great importance to the public and political life of the country. One can never leave lying about disregarded instruments that intolerance may use whenever circumstances permit. I do not think it necessary to spend any time on the history of the Blasphemy Laws, although that is a very important matter when one is considering their nature and operation. It perhaps ought to be pointed out, however, that at times the Blasphemy Laws have been used, as towards the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth, as a cover for preventing political agitation and obstructing the political education of the masses; but in general it has been the operation of an intolerant religious majority against an heretical minority. Prior to the seventeenth century, as one might expect, cases of blasphemy came within the purview of the ecclesiastical laws, but about the middle of the seventeenth century the Civil Courts for the first time began to operate in cases of blasphemy and profanity. Then came the Statute of William III, which is the existing statute on the subject. It was described by Lord Justice Coleridge as being both ferocious and inhuman—a rather strong description of an Act by a Lord Chief Justice—but when you bear in mind that it condemned to imprisonment and outlawry anyone who professed Christianity and afterwards questioned its doctrines, I do not think you will think the description was extravagant. It should be pointed out, however, that there have been, so far as the records go, no direct prosecutions for blasphemy under the statute, though it has not been a dead letter. It has been used to strengthen the hands of the judges in administering the common law. It has also been used to prevent the fulfilment of contracts made between Christians and Freethinkers. It has been used to prevent copyright in books. It has been used to prevent a parent having the custody of a child. It has also been used very frequently to prevent the paying over of legacies, when it was assumed that the legacies might be used for anti-Christian propaganda.

Direct prosecutions for blasphemy have taken place under the common law, and at common law the definition of blasphemy has been of a more elastic character: having varied from agreeing with the Statute Law that any attack on Christian doctrines or on the Bible was blasphemy, to the ruling decision, the one laid down by Lord Justice Coleridge in 1883, that one might attack the fundamentals of religion provided the decencies of controversy were respected. The prosecutions have been, as one might imagine in the case of religious controversies, rather intermittent. There has been a period of rest, then there have been a batch of prosecutions. It is worth noting that during the last fifteen years the number of prosecutions have been fairly large. The last case occurred in 1921, when a man was sentenced by Mr. Justice Avory to nine months' imprisonment with hard labour, although that man was suffering from an incurable disease, and, as a matter of fact, it turned out to be a death sentence, because he emerged from prison only to go into a nursing home and died shortly after. That case aroused very great indignation. There were some very strong expressions in the press, and I am pleased to say a great many Christian clergymen were equally indignant, not, of course, because they agreed with what was said or with the methods employed, but because they regarded it as an act of intolerance. Therefore the present position is: we have the Statute Law, which is frankly an attack upon opinion; we have the common law, which, we submit, is also an attack upon opinion, though owing to the changes and the growth of dissent in religious matters it has to work in a covert manner. Perhaps on that head one might say a word on the phrase, "The decencies of controversy." It is curious that the only case in which the law seeks to obtain decencies of controversy by the threat of legal penalties is in the case of an attack upon religion. It operates in no other circumstance. In every other instance the decencies of controversy are left, and I think rightly left, to the good sense and the good taste of the public; and that it is not the mere decencies of controversy that is aimed at, is, I submit, quite evident. At any rate, I think you will agree that if in any other direction decencies of controversy were to be the deciding point as to whether a man was to be imprisoned or not, for instance, if it operated in politics, and if, above all, it were left to the members of a political party to say whether their opponents had observed the decencies of controversy or not, a great many of the seats in the House of Commons would be vacant owing to members being forcibly detained elsewhere.

We cannot then but regard this law as a real attack upon certain opinions. It is not the language the man employs that is the real object of attack, it is the fact that he is using the language in relation to religion. There is this much to be said too, upon that: it is the only law that I am aware of which is obviously partial, ridiculously partial in its character. In a case that occurred a year or two before the last one, I think about 1920 or 1919, Mr. Justice Salter laid it down that in attacking religion you must not wound believers. That seems to me quite a ridiculous thing; that you must not discuss a subject if you are running the risk of wounding somebody's feelings, because I do not think you could discuss any subject of importance without somebody feeling grieved or injured. At any rate, it becomes ludicrously partial when you bear in mind that in such cases the prosecutor, judge and jury are substantially the same person. The only person who can say whether his feelings have been wounded by a criticism is clearly a Christian. He is the prosecutor, he decides, he judges, he sentences. It is the only case where a thing like that occurs, and consequently it is, as Mr. Asquith admitted some years ago, quite a partial law, one that can never demand the respect that all law should demand of citizens. Then, further, the common law does not discourage extravagance of opinion.

(*Continued on page 266.*)

Acid Drops.

Dr. T. R. Glover writes much in the *Daily News* in praise of mental thoroughness and sincerity. And we quite believe it is written in all sincerity. But, unfortunately, it is always difficult for a man committed to belief in Christianity to be, in practice, mentally thorough. Thus, in the *Daily News* for April 10 he complains that Christians take too narrow a view of Jesus Christ. But, he says, if we take a wider view of Jesus Christ we shall form a higher opinion of him. Thus :—

> Suppose, then, we try to conceive of a Christ.....who knows and (what is more) understands about as much of men as Shakespeare did, who is as little afraid of human nature as Shakespeare was, who is as human-hearted as Charles Lamb, who thinks as honestly and severely as Charles Darwin or Samuel Johnson; an interpreter of human feelings and longings and cravings, but neither sentimental nor fanciful; a mind misled by nothing, put off balance by nothing, dismayed by nothing.....

Of course, if one thinks of Jesus Christ as possessing all the intellectual and moral virtues we should form a very high opinion of him. But it might strike Dr. Glover that if we adopted the same plan with Bill Sykes we should find that gentleman quite an ideal character. The distinction here is that Dr. Glover would take Bill Sykes for what he is, and Jesus Christ for what he wishes him to be.

Now this method of Dr. Glover's is neither useful nor courageous, nor, in ultimate analysis, is it sincere. The only way to find out what kind of a person Jesus was—granting his existence—is to take him in relation to what he said and did and also in relation to the time. And is it likely that a character who blindly accepted every superstition of his day; who believed in legions of angels and devils; that disease was caused by demons; in the approaching end of the world; in the possibility of miracles on any occasion, etc.; who ignored the better thought that already existed in the cultured Pagan world; who, as Renan pointed out, appeared to be ignorant of the world outside his own narrow valley; is it likely that a man of this stamp combined the character and abilities of a Shakespeare, a Lamb, a Darwin, and a Dr. Johnson? If Dr. Glover desires Christians to be honest and sincere, he ought to try a different method than the one here adopted. That is only the old one over again: making Jesus stand for whatever one wishes by deleting all that is undesirable. And that plan will, as we have said, make an ideal of anyone. Why does Dr. Glover not apply the same rule to Mohammed, to Buddha, or to any other religious leader? It would work quite well.

Writing in the same newspaper Dr. Glover says, "It is a popular thing to abuse theology." This is quite in the style of the religious apologetic. He puts up this skittle at the beginning of his article and proceeds to knock it down. In the first place, there is no popularity in attacking theology; in the second place, the exponents of theology have policemen to protect their means of living—perhaps T. R. Glover *has* heard of the Blasphemy Laws—and in the third place, if this is the best that this Cambridge precisian can deal out in defence of a relic of barbarians, we shall begin to see the clay feet of the University. We had almost forgotten to tell Dr. T. R. Glover that his statement would have been up to date about forty years ago; no one takes the trouble to abuse that which even the clergy themselves do not believe—but preach for no other profound reason than that of bread and butter, with the prospect of jam on it some day. And possibly they smile when the only diagnosis of their position is stated in the *Freethinker*.

The *Birmingham Gazette* is responsible for the item of information that a clergyman who "looked in" at a fancy-dress ball at St. Pancras was awarded second prize. We do not think it exactly a compliment to say that the judges must have thought he looked the part.

The American Churches will we expect be up against Governor-General Wood, who is in command in the Phillipines. It appears to be the custom at present to force the natives in the non-Christian provinces to send their children to Christian schools. This, we suspect, means missionary schools, or schools under the control of the missionary societies. But General Wood advises that they be sent to Mohammedan schools, or to schools under the direction of non-Christian teachers. He says that by adopting this plan increased efficiency will result, much greater "than can be had under the policy of sending children to schools to teachers to whom the parents seriously object, and the use of constabulary and local police for the purpose of enforcing school attendance." There appears to have been some serious trouble among the natives owing to the conditions described by General Wood, but the Churches are not likely to mind that so long as the glory of the cross is upheld, and the dupes at home can be told of the power of the gospel over the heathen.

A priest of the Church of England has written a book entitled, *The Morality of Birth Control.* Anyone who would like to know the views of a backworldsman on this question can do so for ten shillings and sixpence. This is the kind of thing to which Bradlaugh is a modern John the Baptist; in 1876 Bradlaugh was prosecuted for his American pamphlet. In 1924 that superb ironist, History, grins expansively across some forty-eight years at the high courage of the pious writer of a half-guinea book, who doubtless was inspired by the fact that *Our Ostriches* could be played at the Court Theatre without the world coming to an end.

Dean Inge, who lately descended into the sphere of journalism, probably got as much publicity as he wanted. We do not suggest that the gentleman was taking the bread out of the mouths of the babes of Fleet Street; but something in the nature of retaliation appears in the announcement that Mr. James Douglas is asking his intelligent *Sunday Express* readers, "What is the meaning of the Resurrection?" Now when an authority on Bolshevism, War, the latest murder, and all those matters of high import begins to tackle a subject of this kind, we suggest that he should give the parsons a chance to live. They have been specially trained in the knowledge of the soul, and it is no use for the glib journalist to pretend that he can deliver the message with his pen, that which is delivered through the nose in the pulpit. Journalists and parsons, love one another, and fool the people by your respective and special methods.

The *Guardian*, referring to the Missionary Exhibition at the Wembley Exhibition, remarks that of the 445 millions of inhabitants of the British Empire, 200 millions are Hindu, 100 millions are Moslem, 12 millions are Buddhist, and 38 millions are Animist. "In striking numerical contrast to the non-Christians, stand the 38 millions of the total Christian population of the Commonwealth," it comments sadly. What a splendid field for exploitation by those leather-lunged evangelists who deliver themselves each Sunday of lengthy sermons at the streets corners, wherein Blood and Fire recur like a chorus. But perhaps it is bad enough for us to take white diseases and white vices to the heathen, without exporting too many of our lay preachers as well.

For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass, and soaring upwards, singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven, and climb above the clouds; but the poor bird was beaten back with the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and inconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest, than it could recover by the libration and frequent weighing of his wings; till the little creature was forced to sit down and pant, and stay till the storm was over; and then it made a prosperous flight, and did rise and sing, as if it had learned music and motion from an angel, as he passed sometimes through the air, about his ministries below.—*Jeremy Taylor.*

The National Secular Society.

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

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

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

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

To Correspondents.

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

J. Stephens.—The poem is doubtless well known to many of our readers, but it will be none the less welcome on that account.

H. T. Wilkins.—Thanks. Hope to publish soon, but am rather overcrowded at the moment.

H. S. Butler.—Pleased to receive application for membership to N.S.S. Please send full name and address. You are not the first, by a very long way, who has discovered how many years they have wasted in the service of Christianity. Some, however, never discover it at all, which is still more regrettable.

L. Beilenson.—Thanks for the translation. We may be able to use it later. We shall be obliged if you would state the source and date when sending cuttings. Their usefulness is sometimes destroyed by ignoring these details. Some of the Labour bookstalls would be able to procure you a copy of Blatchford's *God and My Neighbour*, if it is still in print.

T. A. W.—Shall appear as early as possible.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

All fits of pleasure are balanced by an equal degree of languor; it is like spending this year part of next year's revenue.—*Swift.*

Sugar Plums.

To-day (April 27) Mr. Cohen will give the first of two special lectures at South Place Institute. His subject will be "Why Not Secularize the State?"; and that should attract many who are not avowed Freethinkers, as well as those who are. The lecture will commence at 7, and admission is free. South Place is within two or three minutes' walk from Liverpool Street Station, and can be easily reached by 'bus or train from any part of London. We hope to be able to report a crowded house. Those who care to assist to make it so may secure a supply of small printed slips advertising the meetings from either the N.S.S. secretary or from the *Freethinker* office.

There is one remark made by Mr. Cohen in his speech on behalf of the deputation to the Home Secretary which requires correction. He told Mr. Henderson that Mr. Asquith had promised that no Government prosecutions for blasphemy should take place while he was in office, and he would leave a minute of his decision for the benefit of his successor. The promise was not made by Mr. Asquith, but by Mr. McKenna, who was then Home Secretary. Mr. Asquith expressed his entire sympathy with the object of the deputation. The error was not a very important one, but it was made, and it is corrected at the same time as the speech is given publicity. Mr. Cohen has since written to the Home Secretary pointing out the necessary correction. We have no doubt that Mr. Asquith was in agreement with the Home Secretary's statement, but he would naturally object to being saddled with a statement that was not his own.

A press notice of the deputation was sent out by the Home Office to the news agencies, which appeared in a number of papers. The *Manchester Guardian* had a leaderette on the subject—rather antiquated in its case—law; but adopting the right tone, since it decided that it would be better to clear away such obsolete legislation. On that we would remind all concerned that the Blasphemy Law is not obsolete, but operative, and given favourable circumstances would be applied on a fairly wide scale. No one believes the Blasphemy Laws would be applied till someone is imprisoned. Then much indignation is expressed, and people go to sleep again—till another case occurs.

Friends and sympathizers resident in Blackburn, Blackpool, Coventry, Hull, Wigan and Wolverhampton interested in outdoor propaganda—for which the Executive bears all responsibility and expense—and who would be glad to have an opportunity of hearing Mr. Whitehead on his Northern tour, are requested to communicate at once with the General Secretary, 62 Farringdon Street, E.C.4.

We have received a letter from Canon Dorrity replying to our comments in the *Freethinker* for April 13, which dealt with a sermon of his delivered in Manchester. Unfortunately, owing to the pressure on our available space by the report of the deputation to the Home Secretary, we are obliged to hold over the letter till next week. But the subject will not worsen by keeping.

Mr. A. B. Moss, we are glad to know, had a very good meeting in Victoria Park. Certainly the weather was on its best behaviour, and we have no doubt helped the lecturer to be at his best and the audience to be a large one.

We are glad to see that our old friend, and very good Freethinker, Mr. Price, is now chairman of the West Ham Guardians. The poor will be all the better for his chairmanship. His wife was also one of the successful candidates at the recent elections.

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I think, on the contrary, it rather invites it. When a law is regarded as unjust it is never a great difficulty to find men who are ready and even eager to break it. It invites attack, and, as a matter of fact, I think it often gets it for that reason. The law acts very unjustly and very onerously on those who are responsible for the more serious aspects of certain propaganda. I may, as an illustration of that, mention that the Society of which I have the honour to be President has during the last few years been concerned with three blasphemy prosecutions. We defended in each case and spent some hundreds of pounds in defending. In each case the man who was prosecuted was not a member of our organization. He had been deliberately refused official membership, and we had moreover expressed more than once our dislike of his methods and of the way in which he conducted his propaganda. But we felt that if the man had not been attacking Christianity his language would not have been deemed offensive or have been made the subject of a criminal prosecution. We believed it was an attack on opinion which we had to defend. Had it been left to the ordinary law, had it been a matter of using indecent speech, under the ordinary law, had he been charged under the ordinary law with creating a breach of the peace, we should not have interfered in the matter. We did interfere, simply and entirely because we felt it to be our duty to interfere.

So that the present position roughly is, that we have the statute law which no one defends, which practically everybody admits ought to be repealed; we have the common law, which no one will defend for the purpose for which it was passed, but which is defended in a roundabout and covert way. The partiality of that law is again shown in this, and also the fallacy of assuming that it is intended to protect people's feelings with regard to religion. Under common law the only person that can be prosecuted is the one who offends the Christian religion, not merely the Christian religion, for I think it is strictly correct in law to say that you must say something offensive about the established religion. You may go out into the highways and, if you are an extravagant, fanatical Protestant, blackguard the Roman Catholic doctrine of the mass in the most extravagant and abusive and offensive terms. As a Christian you may attack the Jewish religion in the most offensive way. You may attack the Mohammedan or any other religion or any other non-religion, and provided you are cautious enough not to use actually indecent language or to create a breach of the peace you will be untouched; certainly you cannot be proceeded against under the Blasphemy laws. Under the Blasphemy laws no charge would lie. So I think we are justified in saying that this is a law which operates entirely in the interest of one sect, I may add, in the strictest interpretation, one section of that sect, and against the general community.

I have been obliged, from the circumstances of the case, to speak of this matter largely from the standpoint of the Freethinker. It is only right to say, and I am very pleased to say it, and the deputation itself shows it, that this is not wholly a question that concerns the Freethinker. I think I may say we have the sympathy and support of a large number of men and women eminent in all branches of public life, amongst them a very large number of Christian clergymen who feel, and I honour them for so feeling, that their religion is discredited and dishonoured by it being thought necessary that there should be special laws for the protection of their opinions such as no other opinion in the country has. Finally, it may be within your knowledge, I think, that in 1914 Mr. Asquith, who was the then head of the Government, with Mr. McKenna and Sir John Simon, received a deputation on this subject. They fully sympathized with the objects of the deputation. They thought it would be much better if these laws were done away with, and although they could not promise Government time for the measure, they did promise their full sympathy, and to members of the deputation afterwards Mr. Asquith said that while he was in office there should be no more Government prosecutions, and that when he left office he would leave a minute for the instruction or advice of his successors.[1] I am sorry to say if that minute was left it was not acted upon, because there have been official prosecutions since. So I would urge upon you that this is not at all a sectarian question. It is not a question essentially of one sect against another. It is not a question of our pleading for licence to use offensive speech or to create a breach of the peace. We are asking only that the same law shall apply to all citizens alike irrespective of their opinions. We enter a protest against a law which we consider partial, which gives to one opinion a protection that it denies to another, which operates disastrously in many ways, and which is taken as a bad example even in our colonies. It is for that reason that this deputation is asking that you will give facilities for the introducation, and if possible the passing, through the House of Commons of a Bill that would end what we all regard as a most discreditable chapter in the history of this country.

The Home Secretary: What was the date of Mr. Asquith's minute? Can you tell me?

Mr. Cohen: The deputation was received in 1914.

Mr. Snell: We will have the document sent to you.

The Home Secretary: In 1914? That could not be the date of the minute, because Mr. Asquith was in office for years afterwards.

Mr. Chapman Cohen: It was a verbal promise to some members of the deputation who were here.

The Rev. Dr. Walsh: Mr. Cohen represents the Freethinking section of the Society which is responsible for this deputation. I may claim to represent, I suppose, the liberal religious portion of that Society, but we are all agreed, I think—I will be very short, I promise you—on one point, that is speaking before a Cabinet member of a democratic Government it will be quite in order to put the democratic point of view very strongly. Democracy believes, as I understand it, in equality of all citizens before the law, and equality before the law most certainly includes religious equality, and religious equality implies equal freedom to all citizens in the expression of their opinions. It does not matter whether the opinion is called belief or whether it is called disbelief, for one of the most distinguished Archbishops of the National Church of England declared that to disbelieve is to believe. I mean Archbishop Whately. A man who says he disbelieves one thing, therefore does so because he believes something else which to him seems better, and consequently there is no question of believers or disbelievers, Sectarians or Freethinkers, Theists or Atheists. It is a question of whether every citizen has a right, whatever be his opinion, to express it without the infliction of a penalty upon honest opinion courteously although firmly expressed. The right to disbelieve any particular doctrine of any particular religion, or any particular religion, Jewish, Mohammedan or otherwise, includes also the right to say the reasons why one disbelieves. Even perhaps if the opinions seem to the speaker to be pernicious, to be detrimental to human morals, and contrary to reason, he is even entitled, in my judgment, and I think I carry the whole deputation with me, to denounce anything that appears to him to be honestly of the nature of superstition and to be likely to cloud the clear thinking and even to contaminate the ethical nature of persons who believe it. That is a different thing, of course, from insulting the persons who hold that particular belief. None of us will agree that it is right to insult any form of religion, Christian or otherwise, and no doubt the law provides measures for dealing with what may be called the insulting attitude, words and language towards believers. Of course, that same law would cover insulting remarks about those denounced as unbelievers. If the Theist objects to the Atheist using insulting language, the Atheist has equally a right to object to the Theist using insulting language because of his opinions. So we do not on broad grounds of religious equality question the right to believe or disbelieve according to your best judgment or conscience if it be the denouncing of superstition. If we read aright religious history, with which, sir, we know you are well acquainted, we believe the great battles of freedom that have been waged by men like Luther,

[1] On further reference a slight correction is needed. The promise was made by Mr. McKenna, the Home Secretary, not by Mr. Asquith as Prime Minister.

whose words were battle shocks and offensive to men in power. Our religious liberties are not complete, but such as they are, they are due largely to the iconoclastics. There ought to be fair judgment on the part of speakers, and there ought also to be fair consideration for the mood of speakers. It is difficult, I say, for the speaker and for the law to determine just what is the right tone, and I think the less law has to do with the mere determination of tone the better. For example, a university don who is an expert in language skilled in classical synonyms, and who understands the use of language, will very deftly and skilfully with a stiletto stab in the back some ecclesiastical dogma to which he may be pledged; do it so skilfully that few people will notice it, and the law certainly will take no account of it. But if a Hyde Park orator, carried away with enthusiasm, uses a bludgeon to assail the same superstition as his more cultured colleague, very likely he will be hauled up and panelled for blasphemy, although he has said exactly the same thing. I remember about a year ago a distinguished ecclesiastic of this city—I will mention no names, of course—at a university dinner—the fact that it was an after-dinner speech may account for something—I do not know, at any rate, this speech was an exceedingly strong speech, and attacking some of the beliefs of his own Church. It was so strong as reported in various London newspapers—I will mention the *Daily Telegraph* for one—that although I am accounted rather a man of strong speech myself—

The Home Secretary: No! (laughter).

Dr. Walsh: and although my hearers are accustomed to pretty strong language, I assure you, sir, on my honour, that that ecclesiastical deliverance was so offensive to good taste that I dared not quote it fully from my own platform to my own hearers. I had to paraphrase it. Now no notice was taken of that, and rightly so. I do not want any action taken against ecclesiastics who assail their own dogmas. The more they assail them the better some of us would be pleased, but I do plead for equal justice, and I hope, therefore, that you, sir, in the plentitude of your powers, will do what you can to put on the Statute Book this additional attempt at that religious equality for which our forefathers have stood, not in its fullness, but as they saw it. We see a little further than they. We want to take a step in a wider circle of freedom, and we ask you and your Government to support us.

Mr. Hocking: Well, Mr. Henderson, I do not represent any denomination or coterie or sect. I simply represent myself here this morning. I was one of the deputation that waited on Mr. Asquith in 1914. Since then I have not changed my view on this question, and I do not want to elaborate the points at all. Your time is valuable, and the less said perhaps on this point the better, for Mr. Cohen has stated the question very clearly and concisely, and Dr. Walsh has set forth the ecclesiastical view. I think most of us to-day regard the law as an anachronism, and we also believe that it is exceedingly mischievous. It may be brought into operation against someone for whom some particular persons have dislike. Words are intended, we are told, to conceal meaning, and the word blasphemy may conceal meaning, or it may have meanings read into it which one hardly believes possible. Knowing I was coming to this deputation this morning, and after breakfast I pulled out three or four dictionaries to look at the word blasphemy to see what it meant. I find the dictionaries do not help you a bit. Speaking for my own self I think there is more blasphemy in particular churches on a Sunday than there is outside in the course of a month. That is my particular view, and perhaps in some circumstances I might be hauled up for expressing such a view. No one would accuse me of wishing to add a liberty of speech that would give offence to other people. I think that all kinds of speech that is coarse, that would offend the ears and the taste of educated people, is to be deprecated. At the same time, I do think that people should have full liberty to express their views on any question they like. If they express views which lead to a breach of the peace, it is for the civil law to take action, and not on any religious ground at all. I have used language several times which has led, I am afraid, to a breach of the peace. In fact the public took so much exception to my language during the Boer War that they took action themselves on my house and on my neighbours' houses, and I might have been prosecuted then perhaps for using language that would lead to a breach of the peace. We should not interfere in any case where that is the ground for prosecution. It is perfectly justifiable to prosecute where people use language that may result in a breach of the peace, but here in this case we have a law that is mischievous, in this that some particular person who is disliked, whose opinions are disliked, who may have offended a certain section of the community, may be prosecuted under this blasphemy law for expressing those opinions, not that the people who prosecute perhaps care so much for his opinions or an expression of them as that they would like to have the opportunity of having their fling at this particular individual. I am not going over points raised by other speakers. I know all the points. You are a Freethinker. I think someone said he is a Freethinker. I claim to be a Freethinker myself. We are all for our own views on particular questions, on theological questions, on political questions, on social questions. We do not even agree with those who belong to our communities on certain points. You belong to a certain denomination. I belong to a denomination, and I have been accused by members of my own denomination of being exceedingly heterodox. Well, what is heterodox one day may be orthodox the next. We do not want to give offence to anybody. We deprecate all violent and certainly all abusive language. We are anxious for cleanness of speech, for free and full liberty, for people to think what they like and express themselves under proper conditions, to combat the opinions of others if they like, although I think the best way is to leave other people's alone. I do not think anybody is convinced by mere argument, certainly not by abuse of their opinions, and, generally speaking, it is best to avoid controversy on these particular theological questions. Each man should hold his own opinions and let him be content for other people to disagree with him if they like.

The Home Secretary: Mr. Snell, ladies and gentlemen, I have listened with very great interest to the statement of the case that has been presented, and it is almost unnecessary on my part, speaking personally, to say that I am in sympathy with the case that has been presented, because I think as a private member of the House in the past I have expressed my sympathy in the most practical way that a Parliamentary representative can do, by going into the Lobby. I am like Dr. Walsh and Mr. Hocking, one of those who have expressed strong views inside the religious denomination that I have been associated with for very many years, and I have expressed these strong views because I am a very strong believer in the fullest possible measure of religious equality. But I have to approach the question that has been submitted not from the personal standpoint, but from the standpoint of the Government. I was interested to hear that the deputation that waited upon Mr. Asquith waited upon him in 1914. You have evidently been determined not to give this Government as many months as you gave him years, because he came into office in 1906. Now the only thing that I can say this morning is that the case as presented will in some form or other be made known to my colleagues in the Government, but I would be misleading you if I held out any hope of legislation during the present session. If we all conspired together in order to keep the Government where it is, legislation might be possible in another session. I think it is best for me to frankly say that, because speaking for my own department I think I have more Bills now to which I am committed to try to get through this session than perhaps the whips will be able to provide me with the necessary Parliamentary time to complete the measures before the session terminates, but, as I have already said, I shall bring the matter before the Prime Minister and the other members of the Cabinet when we are considering our legislative work for another session. You can now go away resting assured that, so far as the Home Secretary is concerned, the case that you have presented has my wholehearted sympathy, and, as I have already said, has actually had my vote in the Division Lobby.

Mr. Snell: Mr. Henderson, the deputation is very grateful to you for receiving them and for the cheering

assurance that you felt able to give as to the possibilities of the future. I do not think the deputation has anything further to say except to express its thanks for being received.

"Good Men Without Faith."

This is the title of a handy booklet (S.P.C.K., 2s. 6d.) written by the Bishop of Norwich about a year ago. The book comes under the heading of "devotional reading," and may therefore only be useful to those illuminated by—as the Bishop prefers to put it—"the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world." Much virtue in a comma! Or is it merely the subtlety of Bret Harte's Heathen Chinee? Yet the writer says—surely with incorrigible optimism, and not a little friendly solicitude—"I would specially value to have among my readers some of the Good men without Faith, i.e., Christian Faith, about whom I write. I believe that they might be drawn further along the road, if they found that we regarded them as allies, and desired one day to call them brothers." The trouble here is that the good Bishop would need to call those unbelievers *back* along the road they had so courageously pioneered, back to the base of ignorance and delusion whence they had with so much difficulty escaped; as well try to call spirits from the vasty deep; but the Bishops, thousands of lesser Churchmen, and innumerable lay preachers have been calling, and bawling after them in vain, for the ever-growing "great army of infidels and Atheists" (Talmage phrase) keeps marching on towards the light.

Why there are good men without faith is a conundrum only to the theologian. But for a priori misdirection the solution would be apparent to the schoolboy. Indeed, in spite of early and irrational teaching, the natural logic of the schoolboy often plays havoc with the most sedulously inculcated doctrine, just as a plant forces its way through encumbrances to reach the sunlight; but grown older and less ingenuous, met with the horrified attitudes and expressions of pastors and masters and of his fellow-men, the poor youth is fain to conform outwardly, and all too easily succeeds in smothering or rendering nugatory the nobler original impulse towards the saner, more logical, satisfying and useful conception of the world and life. Thus are countless bright, young spirits deprived of their native gift of clear thinking and direct expression, and taught to strive with "shadows, not substantial things"; their quite rational and intelligible world made irrational and unintelligible; their otherwise inescapable impulse towards goodness and truth motived and mystified in the interests of a wholly imaginary and mischievous. Before and After, to the disastrous neglect of the real and clamant issues of the Here and Now.

Our Bishop, not too dogmatically, but impertinently enough, credits Christianity with, in some indirect way, forming the better qualities of Good men without Faith. They have shared in the Light of the Incarnate, pre-Incarnate Christ, and of the post-Incarnate Holy Spirit, which, as Christ's representative, has been left to illuminate the world "till He comes again." Only in this way can the good and learned ecclesiastic reconcile himself to the spectacle of godless men being as good and sometimes better than the godly. It does not seem to have occurred to the Right Hon. Bertram Pollock, D.D., K.C.V.O., that the same rigid "law" operates in the spheres of morals as in the material spheres, as in gravitation, for instance.

Morals were acquired of necessity in the evolution of the race, with other rules and regulations, inventions etc., of a growing civilization. All goodness, argues, or plaintively suggests, the Bishop, must be of God, even when that quality is manifest in the most strenuous deniers of the Faith. God, Christ (Incarnate and pre-Incarnate) and the Holy Spirit, if these words have any meaning, are to the Bishop objective and separate entities, yet one God—

> These statements, strange to those who ne'er
> For godly knowledge thirst,
> Are simple when you know them—but
> You've got to know them first!

How crude and ignorant must the average Freethinker feel confronted with such religious learning and enlightenment. As well might the tyro in mathematics try to grapple with the theories of Einstein. Even if the Bishop is in error, he errs in good company; did not the sublime John Milton invoke the same illumination in which our author dwells:—

> Hail, holy Light! offspring of
> Heaven first-born,
> Or of th' Eternal co-eternal beam.....
> But thou revisit'st not these eyes, that
> roll in vain.....

Sad contrast! The physical blindness of Milton may typify the spiritual blindness of the good men without faith, but who unconscious of, and ungrateful for, the holy Light are yet illumined by its ray!

So the Christian comforts his vanity and confuses his mind with the reflection that the goodness of the Freethinker is from the same source as his own, and who denying the giver, yet benefits from the gift. This is the simple solution of the theological conundrum. On this note the Bishop ends his book. The conclusion is neither original nor edifying, and no doubt the great army of infidels and Atheists will keep marching on to a light before them—not behind them—towards the dawning, ever brightening light of intelligence, reason and humanity. Andrew Millar.

"When the Heart is Young."

I spent my Easter Sunday on the Wiltshire Downs. I feasted my eyes on sunlit stretches of upland and lowland. Here—though bare and brown as yet—tinged with soft, velvety hues. There—exhibiting already the bright, beautiful green of young foliage. On my ears fell the myriad soul-stirring sounds of spring-time; and not least of these was the babbling of a little stream; a stream so clear and limpid as to reveal in its bed, as it passed at one's feet, a swaying mass of grass blades; and so caught by the rays of the sun, where is approached from the distance, as to sparkle like crystal.

It was like a resurrection of past joys, and the thought, "Oh, to be young again!" swept through my mind, as memories of a happy childhood, spent in the country, sprang up before me. Then the words of a song I once knew—"When the Heart is Young"—forced themselves upon me, and the thought came: "What has age to do with it?"; and after that another thought: "What is it consitutes a young heart? And how should that be procured and retained? Is it possible that there can be beings on this earth so stunted in their mental growth, by dull and sordid surroundings in their daily lives, as to lack the inspiration of a young heart?"

I think of a street in London—only one of hundreds like it, alas! One I frequently pass through on a 'bus. There are long rows of dingy smoke-grimed houses, dirty steps leading up to open doors revealing gloomy passages, leading to—well, we know what kinds of backs! In the front of the houses are iron railings guarding more dirty steps going down to dark areas. And on these steps—as also on the pavement before them—are children. Tiny toddlers swaying from side

to side on woefully bowed legs; others, a little older, nursing or carrying babies in arms, their young bodies bent and strained by the effort. Many more, of all sizes and ages, keeping up a semblance of play with the means at their disposal.

These children, who never, or, at the best, very seldom see the country—in spring or at any time and have very little notion what a thing even should be like—are their hearts young? Or have they been prematurely aged by their surroundings? And, if the latter is the case, who is to take the blame for the terrible crime of denying them their birth-right? What can, or should be, the fate of a nation guilty of allowing such a state of affairs? Surely it may be said of a country as a whole, as it was once said of an individual: "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones.....it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

In the evening I went to church and heard sung—in one of the psalms specially appointed for that service:—

> He taketh up the simple out of the dust: and lifteth the poor out of the mire.
> That he may set him with the princes; even with the princes of his people.

It must now be over two thousand years since those words were written, but the poor and the simple are still awaiting their fulfilment. Marian Oliver.

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.

III.

(*Concluded from page 252.*)

The Honourable David Davis, a judge of the Circuit Court of Illinois, at the time that Lincoln was a practising attorney, and who was Lincoln's intimate friend and adviser, and who later became a Supreme Court judge of the State of Illinois, a United States Senator, a Vice-President of the United States, and finally a member of that august body the Supreme Court of the United States, has something to say regarding Lincoln's beliefs. The intimacy between Lincoln and Judge Davis was such a bond of friendship that he appointed him executor of his will. Few men of this country have been held in higher esteem by his contemporaries than was Judge Davis. Surely his years of association, his friendship and his intimacy with Lincoln qualify him to testify to Lincoln's religious convictions. Judge Davis says: "Lincoln had no faith in the *Christian* sense of the term—he had faith in laws, principles, causes and effects."

Recently there appeared in this city a magnificent production of a play by John Drinkwater, entitled *Lincoln*. In that play Lincoln's life was beautifully portrayed, with the exception of one particularly great blunder, a blunder that adds little credit to the playwright. In this play Lincoln is shown in a humiliating position, and despite a letter from me correcting this falsity, the scene remained unchanged. In this play Lincoln is made to fall upon his knees in prayer. I emphatically state that no evidence exists that the grown Abraham Lincoln ever prostrated himself in prayer. The scene is a lie and belongs in the same category as that of Washington praying at Valley Forge. We need no better proof of the falsity of this scene regarding Lincoln than Lincoln himself, when he said: "What is to be, will be, and no prayers of ours can arrest the decree."

In every great crisis there is always some religious fanatic who has spoken directly to God, and who is directed by God to deliver a certain message. The Civil War was no exception, and Lincoln was not free from such annoyers. It is said that Lincoln was, more than any other president, constantly pestered by clergymen with advice from "divine sources." He controlled his temper only because of his sympathy for the mentally deranged. To indicate his attitude towards such people, I will quote his words of contempt for them:—

> I am approached with the most opposite opinions and advice, and by religious men who are certain they represent the Divine Will. I hope it will not be irreverent in me to say that if it is probable that God would reveal his will to others, on a point so connected with my duty, it might be supposed he would reveal it directly to me.

On another occasion to a woman who came to see Lincoln, claiming that God sent her to deliver his message of advice to him, he caustically replied, as only a Freethinker would:—

> I have neither the time nor disposition to enter into a discussion with the friend, and will end this occasion by suggesting to her the question whether, if it be true that the Lord has appointed me to do the works she has indicated, is it not probable that he would have communicated knowledge of the fact to me as well as to her?

It is sometimes very difficult, ladies and gentlemen, to properly determine whether these "very religious people" are not fit subjects for the lunatic asylum, and I wonder if this thought was in Lincoln's mind when he said: "When an individual in a Church, or out of it, becomes dangerous to the public interest, he must be checked."

Lincoln's real opinion of the clergy may be gathered from one of his anecdotes, which, it is said, he delighted to repeat:—

> Once in Springfield, I was off on a short journey, and reached the depot a little ahead of time. Leaning against the fence just outside the depot was a little darky boy whom I knew, named Dick, busily digging with his toe in a mud puddle. As I came up I said: "Dick, what are you about?" Said he, "Making a church." Said I, "What do you mean?" "Why, yes," said Dick, pointing with his toe, "don't you see, there is the shape of it, there's the steps and the front, here's the pews where the folk sit—and there's the pulpit." "Yes, I see," said I, but why don't you make a minister?" "Laws," answered Dick, with a grin, "I hain't got *mud* enough for dat."

During the course of my address to-night I mentioned the fact that during the later years of his life Lincoln did not engage in prayer. I want to correct that statement. I want to retract it. For I find that he did indulge in this form of religious exercise. While at the "White House" someone came to pay him a visit. A terrific storm was raging. It was raining and thundering with fearful intensity. His visitor found himself unable to leave. Lincoln reflected for a moment, and with solemn reverence said: "O Lord, if it's all the same to you, give us a little *more light* and a *little less noise.*" On another occasion Lincoln prayed to God with deep and reverent devotion, that he should put stockings on the chickens' feet in winter.

More significant than anything that might be said by others on the subject of Lincoln's religious belief is the attitude and action of Lincoln himself towards religion. *The mere fact that he did not become a member of any Church is alone sufficient to silence for ever any charge that he was a Christian believer.* Lincoln, weighed down with the pains and burdens of the bloody struggle of the Civil War, and with death for ever staring him in the face, uttered the most important and striking testimony to his lifelong disbelief—it is irrefutable! In answer to a letter from Judge J. A. Wakefield, an old friend, enquiring and hoping that he had changed the infidel opinions and convictions of his early manhood, Lincoln wrote:—

> My earlier views of the unsoundness of the Christian scheme of salvation and the human origin of the scriptures have *become clearer* and stronger with advancing years, and I see no reason for thinking *I shall ever change them.*

He emphatically denied the existence of Hell, and with equal fervency said that if there were a God *all* would be saved or *none*. Lincoln certainly was not as Godly as Jehovah, but his humanity was a thousand times greater. He delighted in repeating this homely, yet philosophic epitaph:—

> Here lies poor Johnny Kongapod;
> Have mercy on him, gracious God,
> *As he would do if he were God*
> And you were Johnny Kongapod.

Other evidence, equally striking and abundant, can be adduced further to disprove the clergy's claim; but enough, I think, has been presented to settle for all time that Lincoln was not a Christian believer. And yet of the utmost significance is the fact that Mrs. Lincoln was a member and a regular attendant of the Christian Church, and that Lincoln rarely attended the services with her. And like a shaft and bolt of lightening to the heart of the Christian world, Mrs. Lincoln herself testifies that her illustrious husband and America's greatest president was a disbeliever in the Christian religion. Mrs. Lincoln says: "He never joined a Church. He was not a technical Christian. He had no hope or faith in the usual acceptance of those words." No effort of mine is needed to establish Lincoln's place in the glittering galaxy of the world's great immortals and humanitarians; and if there is a resting-place for those who have passed on, he is happily in company with Voltaire, Thomas Paine and Ingersoll. In lauding Lincoln as a Christian example, the Church makes its own weapon, and stabs itself with the very instrument it would use against us.

Joseph Lewis.

AN ANSWER TO PRAYER.

In an old copy of *Chamber's Journal*, dated 1880, we have come across some excellent stories relating to ecclesiastics. A reverend gentleman was one day walking along the cliffs near Morwenstow with a friend when a gust of wind snatched at his hat, and carried it over the cliff. A week or two later a Methodist preacher was holding forth at Truro on the manifold blessings of being one of God's chosen. "I would not have you, dear brethren," he said, "confine your supplications to spiritual blessings; ask also for temporal favours. I will illustrate my meaning by realating an incident that happened to myself ten days ago I was on the shore of a cove near a little insignificant place in North Cornwall named Morwenstow, and about to proceed to Bude. Shall I add, my Christian friends, that I had on my head at the time a shocking bad hat; that I somewhat blushed to think of entering that harbour-town and watering-place so ill adorned as to my head? Then I lifted up a prayer for a covering more suited to my head. At that solemn moment I raised my eyes and saw in the spacious firmament on high—the blue ethereal sky—a black spot. It approached—it enlargened—it fell at my feet. It was a brand-new hat by a celebrated hat maker! I cast my battered beaver to the waves, my Christian friends, and walked into Bude as fast as I could with the brand-new hat on my head."

The incident got into one of the Methodist journals under the heading: "Remarkable answer to prayer."

"Ah!" bitterly exclaimed the cleric's friend, when his attention was directed to the paragraph: "The rascal made off with Mr. W——'s new hat. There was no reaching him, for we were on the cliffs and unable to descend the precipice. He was deaf enough, I promise you, to all our shouts."

An excellent example of the Deity's method of assisting the faithful.

GOD IS EVIL.

If God exists, He is eminently hostile to our nature. We attain to science in spite of Him, to well-being in spite of Him: every step forward is a victory in which we crush the Deity. Why didst Thou deceive me? Why didst Thou submit me to the torture of universal doubt? The Satan that lies in wait for us, it is Thou! But now, Thou art dethroned, and Thy power broken. Thy name, for ages the last word of the scientist, the sanction of the judge, the strength of the prince, the hope of the poor, the refuge of the repenting sinner, Thy name, Thy incommunicable name, henceforth abandoned to scorn and curses will be hooted down among men. For God means foolishness and cowardice; God means hypocrisy and deceit; God means tyranny and destitution; God is Evil.—*Proudhon.*

If Truth is at the bottom of a well, religion sits in the bucket. To fill the bucket we must first empty it.—*D. P. Stickells.*

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

Indoor.

Metropolitan Secular Society (160 Great Portland Street, W.1): 8, General Meeting, Election of Officers, etc. The Discussion Circle meets every Thursday, at 8, at the "Lawrie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.

North London Branch N.S.S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W.): 7.30, Alderman F. L. Combes, "Has England Reached Her Industrial Zenith?"

South London Branch N.S.S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W.9): 7, Mr. F. P. Corrigan, "From Roman Catholicism to Secularism."

South London Ethical Society (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): 7, R. Dimsdale Stocker, "The Morals of Laughter."

South Place Ethical Society (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., "Art *versus* Science."

South Place Institute (Finsbury Pavement, E.C.): 7, Mr. Chapman Cohen, "Why Not Secularize the State?"

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.

COUNTRY.

Indoor.

Bolton Secular Society (Socialist Club, 16 Wood Street): 2.15, Mr. Arthur Crane, "The Living and Divine Jesus." Also Election of Officers.

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