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Views and Opinions.

More About Blasphemy.

One of my readers writes me from Scotland that after reading all I have had to say about the blasphemy laws he is convinced that I have left unnoticed one very important aspect of the controversy. He does not question the right of anyone to assail any religious doctrine from which he dissents, but at the same time he asserts that religious beliefs do not quite come under the same heading as beliefs on many other subjects. Rightly or wrongly, many people regard their beliefs about religion as the most important of all beliefs, and they resent their being assailed in a light or scoffing manner. They demand that they shall be treated with respect, not with ridicule, and so long as this is the general attitude the law is bound to take some cognizance of what people think and feel in this matter. If, he says, people did not feel in this way about religion it would be both ridiculous and useless for the law to interfere. What the law does is not to protect the opinion, but to give a certain measure of protection to those who object to their feelings being outraged by offensive speech. He also encloses a cutting from the *Glasgow Herald* commenting on the recent deputation to the Home Secretary, which, he says, puts his views in a better way than he is able to put them himself, and he is curious to know how I would deal with the points raised. As the points put are of a rather interesting nature, I hasten to comply with the request.

* * *

Respecting Opinions.

Let me commence with the plain statement that I altogether deny that anyone is called upon to treat any opinion with which he disagrees with respect. It is a common form of speech to say, "I respect another man's opinions," when all that is meant, or all that should be meant is that we respect the right of another man to have an opinion different from our own. But how can I respect an opinion which I believe to be not only intellectually unsound, but also to be morally mischievous? The plain duty in that case is not to respect the opinion, but to respect the right of the other man to hold and express it. And no one who advocates the repeal of the blasphemy laws has ever questioned that. On the contrary, the

repeal of the blasphemy laws is urged in order to make the expression of opinion freer and, therefore, healthier than it is at present. The right of a man to hold any religious opinion he pleases, and to express it whenever and wherever he pleases is questioned by no Freethinker. But respect for an opinion should only come with a conviction of its truthfulness. What the Christian is here asking the Freethinker to do is to give to an opinion which he believes to be false the homage which he properly reserves for an opinion which he believes to be true. He is asked to destroy the distinction between truth and falsehood, and that the Freethinker altogether declines to do. I cannot reasonably expect the Christian to pay respect to my conviction that his religion is false and that its rule has been a disaster to mankind, and I quite fail to see on what ground he can ask me to behave differently with regard to his own religious belief.

* * *

Blasphemy and Character.

The *Glasgow Herald* article, to which my attention is specially drawn, offers nothing new to the controversy, and displays that hypocrisy and moral cant which appears to be inseparable from British Christianity. It says that inasmuch as Society is a school of character, and as coarse, violent, and offensive expressions have a bad effect upon character, the blasphemy laws "cannot with safety be entirely relaxed." Both statements are true in themselves, but they are quite irrelevant so far as the blasphemy laws are concerned. Coarse and violent expressions have an admitted ill-effect on those who use them, but it is not on this ground that the blasphemy laws are enforced. They are enforced on behalf of others who are assumed not to use them—at least, in relation to religion. The Christian does not say to the blasphemer "I will have you imprisoned because what you are saying will re-act disastrously on your character." He says, "I will have you imprisoned because what you are saying does not please me," and that is a very different position. Moreover, while the *Glasgow Herald* talks of Society as a school of character, it is fairly evident that what it wishes to imply is that religion functions in that capacity. And that I altogether deny. I deny that religion, as such, is ever a school of good character. Narrowness of view, intolerance of disposition, bigotry, and uncharitableness are the normal accompaniment of strong religious conviction. It is not character schooled by religion that is admirable, but religion schooled and tamed by social life that is made tolerable to a civilized community.

* * *

Criticism and Coarseness.

One hears a little too much of these coarse, violent, and offensive expressions in relation to religion. In most cases they simply do not exist, and in any case they would not be considered offensive if used in connection with any subject other than the religion that is the subject of criticism. If a man in criticizing the reputed actions of Jesus says that he was probably suffering from a form of insanity, that is considered

offensive and coarse by the believer in Jesus. But, as a matter of fact, there has been more than one elaborate study of the life of Jesus from this point of view from men who were able to express an authoritative opinion on the subject, and there are very good grounds indeed for saying that—assuming the existence of Jesus—he was exhibiting in his visions, etc., a very common form of delusion, and one which in the case of a contemporary would be called such without the slightest hesitation. When the Christian is dealing with a character such as Mohammed, he does not hesitate to say that he was either an impostor or one subject to a definite nervous complaint. He does not consider this coarse or abusive, and would resent any attempt to prevent his criticizing Mohammed in these terms. Again, caricature and ridicule are admitted weapons in political and social controversy, and no one dreams of shrieking for legal aid to protect them. Look at it from whatever point we will, it is not coarseness of speech that is the real ground of the offence given. The offence lies in the fact that someone has the courage to say that Christianity is a lie in such a way that the commonest understanding can realize the full force of what is said. Beyond that is the impudent claim from the Christian that his opinions on religion shall be treated with a measure of deference such as no other opinions expect or receive. It is sheer intolerance disguising itself as concern for public morals.

Religion and Life. * * *

There is this much also to be said on the statement that society is a school of character, with the implied statement that religion is also a school of morals. So far as the latter statement is concerned it can be said quite plainly that no worse moral influence is exerted in society than that of religion. It narrows, it distorts, it corrupts. Hardly any other force could create so clear a dividing line between people, even those standing in the closest natural relation to each other, in the way that religion does. "In my name ye shall hate one another," would have been a far more accurate prophecy of the consequences of Christian belief than "In my name ye shall love one another." And the truth of this is seen in the fact that men can unite in far larger numbers for almost any other purpose than they can for religion. There have been mountains of sentimental gush written and spoken about the war—particularly while the war was on. But the one fact remains that those who were engaged in the actual fighting were able to sink their individuality in the work for a common object, and develop a comradeship under stress of the war which they had not hitherto displayed. The men fed together, suffered together, died together. The one thing they could not do collectively was to be religious together. When that came on the scene their divisions at once asserted themselves. There is no force to-day that is so thoroughly anti-social as is religion, and the only thing that prevents people seeing this is that civilized life has compelled the Churches to preach certain things that have no more to do with religion than they have to do with the habitancy of Mars.

Encouraging the Worse. * * *

What strength is there in the plea that the blasphemy laws may be justified on the ground that society is a school of character? Social intercourse and social discipline does, of course, school character, but so far as the blasphemy laws have any influence in this direction they obviously work for harm. Let it be noted that it is not the broad and liberal-minded man who asks that his opinions shall be protected by law. It is the bigot, the uneducated, or the narrow-minded

individual who does so. And the law, so far as it acts as a school of character, is actually sanctioning and encouraging qualities of mind that are fatal to all forms of healthy social development. In place of the law openly discouraging, or at least standing quiescent, it actively assists the bigot by enacting that his convictions shall receive special protection, and then when there happens to be a public prosecution, drapes him with the mantle of a protector of public decency. The defence of the blasphemy laws on the ground that society must act as a school of character is simply ridiculous. At all events, manners and good taste are not matters that can be safely entrusted to the law. These are questions of general education and advancement in genuine civilization. It is in this direction that we have to look for the cause of the humanization of religion that has already taken place, and it would be ludicrous to take a survival of religious intolerance and re-establish it with all the dignity of a great moral force.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

"The Easter Sunrise."

SUCH is the title of the sermon which Dean Inge preached in St. Paul's Cathedral on Easter Sunday morning, its text being, "Christ is risen indeed" (Luke xxiv, 34). The Dean begins by referring to "the custom which prevails throughout the Eastern Orthodox Church. When two friends or relations, or often even strangers, meet on Easter morning one greets the other with the words, 'The Lord is risen,' to which the other answers, 'He is risen, indeed.'" The preacher wonders whether many Greeks and Russians had the heart and the courage to exchange such a greeting this year, or not. It is true that two of the seven Churches of Asia mentioned by St. John—Philadelphia and Smyrna—"have gone down in blood and fire"; but it is not true that the Turks alone are to blame for it. The Dean calls the Turks a "cruel and barbarous nation"; but he cannot be ignorant of the fact that at the end of the war the Greeks behaved very badly, and that it is not at all certain that it was the Turks who set Smyrna on fire. It seems that even the present Dean of St. Paul's is incapable of being just in his characterization of a non-Christian nation. Take the following description of the Russian Church under the existing Russian Government:—

The persecution which that Church has suffered since 1917 has been more terrible than the persecution of the Christian Church under the Roman Empire. About two years ago the monsters who have fastened their teeth in the vitals of that unhappy country published their butcher's bill. They confess to, or rather boast of, more than a million and a half of cold-blooded murders, classified according to the position of the victims. The list included—and remember that was two years ago—28 bishops, and more than 1,200 priests. Most of them are martyrs in the fullest sense of the word.

This is a gross misrepresentation of the facts, and it is difficult to believe that so generally enlightened a man was not aware of it. The truth is that the present Russian Government has never persecuted the Church as such, or priests on account of their office. Of the truth of that statement we have the repeated assurance of American and British clergymen who have visited Russia for the purpose of ascertaining the real facts on this point, and without a single exception they testify that in Russia the people enjoy complete religious liberty. The bishops and priests referred to by Dean Inge were so severely punished not because they were enthusiastically religious, nor yet because they preached their theological opinions, but simply

because as ministers of State Churches they flatly refused to hand over to the State certain treasures which in reality belonged to the State. Thus we see that their crime was not belief, not the act of worship, but disobedience to the civil powers in declining to deliver to the State what was its own property. After elaborating his false view of the treatment of the Church in Greece and Turkey, the Dean asks:—

Could we be surprised if Christians in those countries were driven to despair, to "curse God and die?" Has Christ after all risen, or did Good Friday mark the triumph of the chief priests, of Judas, and of Pontius Pilate, and the defeat which goodness must always expect in a world given over to the powers of darkness? Could we be surprised if they echoed the words of Matthew Arnold:—

While we believed on earth he went,
And open stood his grave,
Men called from chamber, church, and tent,
And Christ was by to save.
Now he is dead, far hence he lies
In that lone Syrian town
And on his grave with shining eyes
The Syrian stars look down.

The Dean harps on the Russian Church with keen delight. It is a Church which, in spite of its cruel treatment by the Soviet State, has not despaired. There are a few renegades who have surrendered to the tyrants, "but the Russian people are waiting in quietness and confidence for the end of their fiery trial." When that end arrives Dean Inge is convinced there will be a great religious revival in Russia, this being a point on which all witnesses agree.

Dean Inge is of opinion that persecution can do the Church no real harm. He says:—

The Church can always beat enemies who come out into the open and use violence against her. The blood of the martyrs is now as it always has been, the seed of the Church. Neither blatant Atheism nor persecution will ever triumph against the faith. We have not much to fear from the blasphemous Sunday Schools which the Communists are starting in our land—although for my part I think it is the business of the State to protect the minds of children from being poisoned against God and their country.

So our outspoken Dean would indulge in a bit of persecution, if he had the chance, or would rejoice to see the State doing it for him. But according to his own teaching, persecution tends rather to enrich than to impoverish a cause; to enliven rather than to kill the Church. We believe, on the contrary, that persecution has often been successful in destroying the views attacked by putting to death their loyal advocates. It is persecution that accounts for the fact that there are no Albigenses in France and no Lollards in Britain to-day, and also that Protestantism has never gained an entrance into Spain. Persecution might put an end to Labour Sunday Schools in this country, but it might help them on to complete success. Blatant Atheism we have never known, and the use of such an adjective is intended as an insult to genuine Atheists. It is easy enough to say that blatant Atheism will never triumph against the faith; but is it not beyond dispute that faith is to-day a radically different thing from what it would have become had it not been for the subversive activities of Freethought throughout the ages. Curiously enough, Dean Inge candidly admits that the belief in a risen Lord has utterly failed to transform the world. He employs the following remarkable language:—

We look nearer home, and we see little of the Easter sunshine playing upon Europe. Every one of the causes for which we took arms in 1914 seems to have been lost. We were fighting, as we believed, to put an end to militarism, and to prevent the ascendancy

of one great military power over the continent of Europe. The continent is now dominated by a great military power. We hoped to establish an era of peace and goodwill. Fear and hatred reign everywhere. We hoped to see the comradeship of the trenches and the enforced self-denials of the war lead to a period of good citizenship and plain living. We see instead an increase of crime, of vice, of idleness, and self-indulgence. The wicked doctrine of class war is preached and acted upon with shameless disregard of the interests of the whole community. *Organized Christianity has visibly lost ground.*

With these gloomy and depressing facts before us is it not natural to doubt the historic reality of that unearthly Easter Sunrise? There is no convincing evidence that anything of the kind ever took place. It is a myth even on Dean Inge's own showing. He admits that the world is in a worse condition now than it has ever been before, after nineteen hundred years of the risen Redeemer. The Dean endeavours to explain this melancholy fact by trying to show that the Gospel Jesus never expected to take the world by storm, and yet in the Gospel of John he is represented as predicting that if he died on the Cross he would certainly draw all men unto himself. That prophesy has never been fulfilled, and to-day men and women are constantly leaving him, completely disillusioned, and this fact we can only account for on the ground that the Christ of the Churches is fully as dead as Osiris, Attis, Adonis, or Mithra. J. T. LLOYD.

Marcus Aurelius the Mind-Maker.

Man is his own star, and the soul that can
Render an honest and a perfect man,
Commands all light, all influence, all fate.

—John Fletcher.

MONARCHS have rarely been philosophers. Frederick the Great delighted in the society of Freethinkers, and attracted the best brains of Europe to his court. Catherine of Russia befriended Denis Diderot and other French Freethinkers; and Marguerite Valois, to her eternal credit, held out her hands to the "intellectuals" of her day, at a time when heresy was a matter of life and death. Once only, however, has a philosopher sat on the world's throne and realized the dream of old Plato, who sighed for the fulfilment of his ideal of a ruler who was also a philosopher.

Marcus Aurelius, one of the greatest of the Roman Emperors, was a philosopher, and his philosophy was thought out amid the storm and stress of actual battle, the elation of real victory, and the sorrow of defeat. What others learnt in calm, he learnt in tempest. The most perfect expression of "the gospel of those who do not believe in the supernatural," as Renan called the *Meditations*, was produced to the dread monotone of war. Far away on the wide Roman marshes might be heard the endless, ceaseless sound of beating horses' hoofs and the marching feet of men. The barbarians were gathering their legions, and no man could be sure of the morrow.

The noblest Roman of them all died in the camp, surrounded by the soldiers he led. "Why weep for me," were his last brave words. His legacy to posterity was his *Meditations*, which was a private notebook, never intended for publication, and in which he recorded his thoughts on life and death. Burdened with the weight of empire and of Rome, he penned such words as these—not to be read at the distance of twenty centuries without an accession of pride and strength: "Every moment think steadily as a Roman and a man to do what thou hast in hand with perfect

and simple dignity." And again: "Do every action of thy life as if it were thy last." This life, he tells us, is all that concerns us:—

Though you were destined to live three thousand, or, if you please, thirty thousand years, yet remember that no man can lose any other life than that which he lives now, and neither is he possessed of any other than that which he loses.

Golden thoughts confront us on almost every page of the *Meditations*. Here are a few culled at random:—

He is a true fugitive that flies from reason.
To desire impossible things is the part of a madman.
The best kind of revenge is not to imitate the injury.
My City and Country as I am Antoninus, is Rome;
as a man, the whole world.

That which is not good for the beehive, cannot be good for the bee.

It is a thing very possible that a man should be a divine man, and yet be altogether unknown.

All men are made one for another.

Epicurus bade his followers depart from life as a satisfied guest from a banquet. In sterner language Marcus Aurelius bids us leave life's stage as an actor who has played his part. It is this sane view of things which has caused the *Meditations* to become a prized volume. It is this wise Secularism which takes tired people back to Marcus Aurelius when all other religions and philosophies have failed them. What a book might be written of the great men who came to the *Meditations* in the bad moments, when fame and fortune, and honour itself, seemed as the baseless fabric of a vision. For, by the irony of fate, this austere ruler has become one of the consolers of men, and his words carry advice and comfort across the gap of two thousand years of evolution and civilization.

Marcus Aurelius was so much more than a mere writer, for he bound men by something stronger than felicity of phrase and grace of language. It is not his choice of words only that causes men to read his book to-day. It is not merely his philosophy that causes men to turn to him from all other wisdom. It is his perfect sanity that attracts the men and women of our generation. Think of it! It was not to Lucretius, with his large grip of human destiny; or Virgil, with his tears of mortal fortune; or Horace, who sings of banquets, of women, of summer days; but to the stern soldier-leader that men turned in the last resort when close-lipped patience was their only friend. It is a wonderful achievement, this power of consolation over men of other ages, races, and sympathies. Small wonder that Ernest Renan, a writer of nice distinctions, and a rare critic, has spoken of the *Meditations* in terms of more unmixed eulogy than he ever bestowed elsewhere.

Critics have pointed out that the *Meditations* are counsels of perfection. They do not claim to be other than self-communications. The maxims should be read, as they are written, one at a time. Marcus Aurelius addressed them, not to any reader, but to himself, as the sentinals and supports of a conduct of life. The present moment is one in which such high-minded and disinterested advice is priceless, for in all the world's literature there is no other books so full of perfect sanity and Secularism. It is precisely because the *Meditations* are a bracing tonic in a time of general unrest that the book ranks among the assets of wisdom. Gone is the pomp and majesty of Ancient Rome, "like snow upon the dusty desert's face," but the great ruler's words of wisdom remain a priceless legacy because he saw life steadily and saw it whole.

MIMNERMUS.

Beyond the Veil.

Prosaic after death, our spirits then
Invent machinery to talk with men;

And Shakespeare's spirit visits earth to tell
How he and Washington are very well;
And Lindley Murray, from the body free,
Can't make his verbs and nominatives agree;
Ben Franklin raps an idiotic dream,
And Webster scrawls vile twaddle by the ream;
That splendid knave, Lord Bacon, has turned fool,
And Penn's great soul is busy keeping school.
Well may the living poet heave a sigh
To think his spirit, stooping from the sky
When he is dead, can rap at mortal call,
Bad rhymes and wretched metre on a wall!
Well may the hero shudder in despair,
Whose soul can choose to animate a chair;
And the great statesman sinking in the tomb,
To rise, and wheel a table round a room!

In his historic debate with Mr. Horace Leaf on the question of the reasonableness of the belief in man's survival of death, Mr. Chapman Cohen enquired what the next world was to be like. In his reply, Mr. Leaf gained some unmerited applause by retorting that that was not the question they were discussing; for, as Mr. Cohen pointed out, that is one of the tests by which we are to judge of the reasonableness of the belief; and, to many, it is precisely because they are unable to conceive of that other world that they cannot believe in it. One may derive considerable satisfaction from holding a belief that is held in a vague, mushy sort of way; but it is the great claim of Spiritualism that it gives us a definite, rational conception of another life, that the Churches talk about but do not describe.

What, then, is the mystic region beyond the veil like, according to the New Revelation? Seeing that the denizens of that other world are continually returning to re-visit the "glimpses of the moon" (evidently when Francis Thompson wrote of a ladder "pitched 'twixt heaven and Charing Cross," he was writing better than he knew), one would expect some sort of unanimity of opinion concerning the nature of it. One would expect it, but, unfortunately, one does not get it. Anyone who has attended many seances, or read many of the messages purporting to come from beyond the veil cannot fail to be struck with the totally dissimilar accounts that are given of the conditions of life after death. In almost every case the description is given in terms of the personal prejudices of the medium. Anyone, for instance, who has waded through the morbid script of the Rev. Vale Owen can see that it has its origin in the subconscious mind of that gentleman; the views expressed are obviously coloured by his religious prejudices, he continually expresses himself in a way one would expect from a Church of England clergyman. When the medium is a Roman Catholic one hears much of the Virgin Mary, but not if the medium is of another religious persuasion. According to some, re-incarnation is a fact, to others a fiction. Some say we have bodies and partake of food (or smoke cigars and drink whiskey), whilst others declare the contrary—and so the merry game of delusion goes on.

The nature of the future life is not only interesting, but fundamental. So far as living organisms may be said to be endowed with "purpose," that "purpose" is two-fold: firstly, the maintenance of life; and secondly, the perpetuation of the species. The instinct of self-preservation and the sex instinct are fundamental; all else might well be said to be subsidiary. And yet, after death, we are to embark on an existence in which neither of these great factors have any meaning—certainly any rational, as distinct

from mystic, meaning. Small wonder that this question of the nature of the future life is decisive with so many.

Mr. Cohen, in the debate already mentioned, pointed out that when Spiritualists talk about a future life they have to give us bodies with which to function. I had this strikingly illustrated quite recently when I went to see a film entitled, "Borderland." The "souls," of course, had bodies (dim, shadowy bodies, but bodies nevertheless); how else could they be portrayed? The central figure of the drama was a woman who had neglected her child in the earth-life and was wandering in Borderland painfully seeking it. When, eventually, she found it, she *took the child in her arms and kissed it* fervently and repeatedly. All very touching and human, of course. But oh, what materialists these Spiritualists are!

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle defends the trivialities that the spirits impart when they do return to earth, by saying that the description given by Thomas Carlyle of the inhabitants of this island being composed mostly of fools applies with equal force to the inhabitants of the spirit world, seeing that when we "pass over" we take all our failings with us. One is inclined to agree here! But the unfortunate part about it is that those men who had, at least, some degree of intelligence in this life, seem to lose it when they shed the fleshy tabernacle that hindered their development so much here.

It is often implied that they who have no craving for a life beyond the veil are either abnormal, or "possess no soul"—observe how egotism here becomes a virtue. A friend of mine recently told me that this life wasn't enough, that there was so much to find out about the universe that he felt he *must* live on in order to explore the remotest parts of the universe and learn "all about it." Personally, if there is another life, I shall be more interested in watching life on this planet. I never was mechanically inclined, and I'm quite sure I should be bored stiff if the Great Architect started explaining his great plan. I should be more interested in seeing if Scotland stood where it did, if mankind had learnt how to abolish war; if the fight against superstition was over, and if the Villa had won the cup. But, then, I am a materialist, a man who has no soul for the things of the Higher Life. Alas! I fear there is little hope for me.

VINCENT. J. HANDS.

God's Favourites.

A FEW weeks ago a Wesleyan Methodist parson in Peckham preached a sermon on "God's Favourite." I should have liked to have heard a sermon on that subject, but was otherwise engaged and unable to attend; and, unfortunately, could find no report of the discourse in the local papers. Undoubtedly, when the Rev. J. A. Johnson spoke of "God's Favourite," he was referring to one of the numerous favourites of the Hebrew God Jahveh. For ages the great masses of the people have thought of God as an elongated being very much like man, and possessing the qualities and characteristics of man in a very exaggerated form. But great men like Spinoza, or Voltaire, or Thomas Paine were capable of forming higher conceptions, and therefore to their fine, cultivated minds the anthropomorphic conception of God as described in the early books of the Bible seemed only worthy of some of our primitive savage ancestors, and quite unworthy of the worship of self-respecting, cultivated human beings. At this time of day we need not enquire who wrote the first five books of the Bible; modern Biblical

criticism seems to have established beyond dispute that they were written by more than one writer, and that Moses was not the author of any of the books of the Pentateuch. Still there are a large number of the clergy of the Church of England, as well as dissenting parsons, who cling on to the belief that the Bible, as a whole, is a God-inspired production, and therefore contains a substantially accurate account of the Hebrew God's dealings with men in the early ages of the world. And, therefore, the question to the ordinary Christian is, had the God of the Bible favourites, and were the Jews his chosen people? And, if so, who among them were his special favourites? Now if the Bible is the inspired word of God, surely he would not go out of his way to libel himself. For example, he would not say that he was of jealous disposition if he meant us to understand that he was a God of love; nor would he advise us to make slaves of the heathen if he wished us to believe that he was the father of us all, and that all men were brothers; he would not command us to slaughter inoffensive and undefended peoples if he were anxious to impress us with the idea that he was just and kind; and neither would he, if he desired us to believe that he was infinitely wise, give us to understand that he came down from above to see if the report that had reached him was true, that the people were building a tower that should reach straight up to heaven—indeed, he could not do or even sanction these things, and at the same time retain the attributes ascribed to him by theologians.

We need not bother ourselves as to what justification Christians may find for the Bible God having one favourite or many; as Freethinkers, all we need to consider is the character of the God the Christians worship, and judge him according to the standard of perfection set up for him by the priests and parsons, who claim to be his representatives on earth. For that purpose, then, let us turn over the pages of the Bible and see who were the favourites of this Jahveh—or, as the Christians prefer to call him, Jehovah—the Lord God, maker of heaven and earth and of all things contained therein. And in the first place we have a right to expect that a good, kind, heavenly father would be impartial in the judgment of his children; that, like the wisest and noblest judge who ever adorned the bench, he would administer justice to all, favouring none. If, however, he should esteem some more highly than others, those selected for this special mark of respect should certainly be among the most virtuous, the most upright and the most true. This, at least, we have a right to expect. When, however, we are dealing with the Biblical God, our expectations are very rarely realized; and the only consolation the believer can give us is that "God's ways are not our ways." Adam, the first man of whom we read, was not a favourite with God, and consequently the Lord set the Devil on to him, in the form of a talking serpent, and made short work of him, not only spoiling his career by causing him to eat of a forbidden fruit, but inflicting upon the whole of the human family, through heredity, the result of the alleged sin of eating an apple—or was it a banana?—in the Garden of Eden. If this story be true, old Jahveh, as Heine said, evidently thinks more of his apples or bananas than he does of his children. When we come to the fourth chapter of Genesis we find God showing favour to Abel by accepting his offering of the blood of a lamb, and despising poor Cain's modest offering of the "fruit of the ground." Why this favour? We all feel a thrill of horror in the contemplation of the wicked crime of Cain in slaying his brother Abel; but we should certainly feel some pity for poor Cain when we remember that it was the manifestation of

favouritism from the Bible God that led to the commission of this crime. Without a doubt old Jahveh has much to answer for!

If we continue our study of the Bible we shall find that the men and women this God had created in his own image had become irretrievably bad, so bad, indeed, that he determined to destroy them all. Stop! not all; God still had favourites. He would destroy all but one family. We search the Bible in vain to find the record of any good the family of Noah had done for mankind. God looked upon the earth and found that it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth! Noah alone was "a just man—perfect in his generation." It is perfectly true that, according to the record, he only got drunk once; but then he behaved himself in such a fashion that his own children were ashamed of him. But let that pass. We will assume that he was perfect "in his generation," though that does not say much for the generation. But what of Noah's wife; was she perfect, too? There is not a word about her in the Bible. If she were not just, did God save her for the sake of her husband or her children? If yes, here is favouritism again. But why save Shem, Ham and Japheth? What good had they done? The God who would save these, or would have pity for them, and yet ruthlessly slaughter the thousands of mothers, with babes at their breasts, cannot be worthy of a moment's earnest thought—indeed, such a low and contemptible idea of Deity could only have emanated from a base and brutal mind. We may pass by the absurdities involved in bringing all the animals, two by two, and packing them close as herrings in the ark. But we are appalled at the magnitude of this God's wickedness in destroying the world by a deluge, and wonder how many people could have put their trust in such a being again. We come then to Abraham, another of the favourites of God; indeed, old Jahveh thought so much of him that he delighted in being called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But it would be difficult to select the part of Abraham's career that would be likely to merit a good God's approval. It is true that Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac to show his faith. But God, being all-wise, must have known his faith before hand. In that case the dramatic scene of Abraham with outstretched arm ready to do the bloody deed, was sheer mockery. Though ready to show his faith, Abraham looked round to see if the Lord was at the side-wings ready to rush on and cry, "Hold, enough!" Yes, assuredly Abraham was a great favourite of Jehovah's; yet, if we study the pages of the Bible closely, we shall find that Abraham did not hesitate to tell deliberate lies respecting his relationship towards his wife; and on two occasions allowed his wife's purity to be seriously imperilled because he had not the courage to tell the truth. But this old Hebrew God Jahveh favoured liars. He favoured Jacob; and that most consummate of liars, David, the man after God's own heart.

Abraham ill-treated the woman who had borne him a child, yet Jehovah reproveth him not; Jacob cheated his brother of his birthright, yet God was with him; Moses slew an Egyptian, but the Lord did not admonish him; and David committed nearly all the crimes in the Decalogue, yet he was perfect in the sight of the Lord. These are just a few of God's favourites. There were others, but I submit this list for the serious consideration of earnest Christians in all the civilized nations of the earth. ARTHUR B. MOSS.

The stoical scheme of supplying our wants by lopping off our desires, is like cutting off our feet when we want shoes.—Swift.

Drama and Dramatists.

WALPOLE swept many cobwebs away when he wrote that: "Life is a comedy to him who thinks; a tragedy to him who feels." He touched the north and south of sentient existence without including east and west, which makes the chord of life sound like that of the diminished seventh. In the sphere of Comedy Mr. Eden Phillpotts has frolicked with his characters that have stepped out of his many novels, and *The Farmer's Wife*, produced at the Court Theatre, is pastoral comedy, with a wholesome sweetness, rich and rare in the wilderness of theatre-land.

Hardy and Dorset; Phillpotts and Devon, these two distinguished authors would make an interesting study in their outlook on life. They both have expressed themselves to those who listen with discriminating ears. The former has nothing but defiance and scorn for an abstraction thrust on the sore shoulders of humanity by an army of priests; the latter, in the comedy before us, delights in poking the vapour of Christian omnipotence—in the ribs—but not in a too pronounced manner.

The widower, Samuel Sweetland, after two years of loneliness, makes up his mind to venture a second time on the sea of matrimony, and in a business-like fashion makes a list of eligibles. His proposals to four of them constitute the plot, and there is delicious, but not malicious fun on to the end of four refusals, where that which he set out to find is under his own roof. "The next best to no wife at all is a good 'un," says Churdles Ash, the farmer's labourer, and she is found in the person of Araminta Dench, the farmer's housekeeper.

Mr. Phillpotts uses the quarter-staff very briskly in three acts. He gives one or two lusty cracks on the heads of the bogies of rural life. Churdles Ash, a name itself to straighten out the wrinkles on any face, makes the significant remark that George Smerdon, the bashful lover, although the lucky possessor of five thousand pounds, would still go on touching his hat to a carriage and pair. The Rev. Septimus Tudor, although unable to advise the lucky lover in his dilemma of whether he should share his fortune with his brother, counsels him not to forget the parish church. And, in discussing the poor harvest, at the tea-party, Henry Coaker, in broad dialect, boldly states that the Almighty ought to do as he would be done by. When Churdles Ash has brought some laurel into the house for the designing spinster Thirza Tapper to decorate the church, he throws it on the floor in disgust as he says, "I can't see what the Almighty wants our 'edge in 'is 'oly 'ouse for." We trust that many magicians of the surplice were present to hear the laughter that greeted this direct criticism of their various and respective business establishments. The vivid comparison of Henry Coaker's turnips shock the vicar, who gravitates towards his more respectable neighbour, the doctor; well, there are worse things in the Song of Solomon than comparing turnips to a woman's bosom, and our modern advertisers of means for women to become plump have familiarized us with anatomy.

There is the same direct simplicity in this comedy that may be found in the author's book of verse, *Cherry Stones*. In the proposal of Richard Coaker to Sibley Sweetland we were treated to a scene that was not marred with the neurotic nonsense that passes for love; any woman would glory in accepting such a manly lover; any man would give life some sort of meaning by living up to those moments that mark a period of self-consciousness.

The Birmingham Repertory Company are to be con-

gratulated on their performance; every character sustained an intensity of acting throughout. Churdles Ash as presented by Cedric Hardwicke was a joy for ever; his walk, speech and mannerisms were those of an "outdoor" man who had the qualities of the oak, and the common sense that reveals Mr. Phillpotts at his best. Miss Phyllis Shand forgot the dialect of Devon, but this only showed by contrast the rich, round, and rolling speech of her sister Petronell, who always remembered it.

We commend a visit to *The Farmer's Wife* wherever it may appear, and we give thanks to our industrious author, who can make us laugh from the stomach upwards without the gimcrack flummery of the twin-beds, boiled shirt drawing room plays, or any other dubious machinery that dares not call a spade a spade. In the street fifteen minutes after the performance was over four people were busy recalling the old baggage Churdles Ash; and you, reader, if you do not laugh at him as he announces the Sweetland family as "My Lot!" write us down as a fish eater and faster, or any other object of commiseration, for—

One inch of joy surmounts of grief a span;
Because to laugh is proper to the man.

And a laugh well directed is more deadly than a bomb; it destroys more than life—it will destroy a pernicious idea.

WILLIAM REPTON.

Acid Drops.

Dr. Walter Walsh, speaking at Steinway Hall, said that the spectacle of the Church in a hobble skirt is a very discomfiting one. That may be so to those who wish to have a Church of some kind; but it appears to us that a Church cannot be a Church without wearing a hobble skirt. Every Church is committed to certain dogmas or doctrines which it declares to be the whole and the final truth on the subject. And that very effectively prevents the kind of expansion and development in which we know Dr. Walsh believes, and for which he so genuinely works. But the evils of the Christian Church are not accidental, they are an essential expression of its nature and structure.

"It is," says Dr. Walsh, "an incontrovertible fact that the Churches, as Churches, have never once in history—not once since the Council of Nicea, sixteen centuries ago—done anything but persecute the pioneers within and without their borders denounce their opinions as heretical and rebellious; and in modern times, when burning alive has gone out of fashion, ignore or actively oppress them." True, every word of it; but what would Dr. Walsh have? A Church which starts with a certain number of settled doctrines must denounce any departure from those doctrines as heretical. True, it does not follow from that position merely that it must persecute and kill. But when one of those doctrines happens to be that man's eternal salvation depends upon his belief in God, and another that it is necessary to have a belief in God in order properly to fulfil one's human duties, we are not far removed from a justification for persecution. The suppression of the heretic then becomes a social and religious duty. And that is the light in which the best religious men and women have always regarded it. Fundamentally, Dr. Walsh's charges lie at the door of religion.

Americans like to think that they are a most advanced people. So they are in many respects, but not in the realm of theology. Christian backwoodsmen are now busy in the States in hunting out university professors who favour scientific opinions which are antagonistic to the Bible. Here in effete, old, feudal England the battle of Evolution versus Genesis was fought to a finish in the 'sixties of the last century. How's that for the Benighted States?

Dr. R. H. Charles has perpetrated a book entitled *The Decalogue*. Religious people are often called narrow-minded. What, we ask, is the breadth of mind that can throw out in a seven-and-sixpenny volume the following? :—

He advocates healthy recreation on Sunday, limited by regard to man's moral and spiritual progress, which means that the hours assigned to public worship should be safeguarded from competition.

Apart from the cat being out of the bag, we suggest that churches and chapels should come under the Factory Acts—on their own admission—and these places be treated exactly the same as business premises. The extract seems too much even for a reviewer to swallow, who writes that the author might do well to limit himself very rigidly, to abstain from vehemence of language, and to remember that the pulpit gives him no legitimate opportunity for airing his views on matters of which his congregation have earned an equal right.

The Rev. Charles Brown, D.D., in a letter to the *Daily News*, displays his wounded feelings over the fact that Nonconformity is not recognized at Wembley and does not get the limelight captured by the Bishop of London. There is no mention of the millions of Mohammedans and other religions in the British Empire—only Mr. Brown's particular religion and the Bishop of London's. Let brotherly love continue, and the cry for privilege be heard, and let logic take its way to some other place than the Wembley Exhibition. The straight and narrow path guff penetrates to the very mode of thinking that is called by another name abroad.

At some future time—very remote—when the Good, the True, and the Beautiful will be the only trinity worth talking about, when people will not die of starvation amidst food because they have no money, when the roof of all places of worship will be the sky, learned professors will find in their research copies of our daily newspapers, and they will be left speechless with wonder that one paper should think it of sufficient importance to record an article by Marie Stopes, entitled "My Baby." The population of the world is approximately 1,606,180,400, and this figures, of course, does not include those twenty illegitimate children on which Mr. Arthur Black was so eloquent.

In his book, *The Lost Dominion*, Al. Carhill regards all Indians as not very highly developed animals—tame or wild according to circumstances and tradition. He need not look any farther than Trafalgar Square or the West End on Boat Race night for the same thing, only a different colour. And probably Indians could reply with Disraeli that their ancestors were kings and princes when the Briton was painting himself with woad. This Christly humility and universal outlook is only bred in a country where every other member of the ruling class is seen with a gun or a fishing-rod in his hand.

"The weak spot in the Church's plan of campaign to-day is its preference for shelter." In this style Dr. Glover writes; and Father L. O'Hea, of the Catholic Social Guild, Oxford, states that: "The first and all-sufficient reason for the withdrawal of Catholic support from 'Copec' in its final stages was direction from authority—authority which had, in the first instance, led us to attempt the task." From all this it would appear that the substance of "Copec" was, and is, words; and we know what frequently happens to a rider when his horse gallops to a jump and stops. If we might flatter organized religions by calling them a horse, the factions in "Copec" dare not take a leap with humanity on its back. "Copec" contained a little elementary Free-thought, it contained a little "justice which is love with seeing eyes," it almost challenged its official paymaster; but, like the hero of old, many "fled full soon on the first of June, and bade the rest keep fighting."

From Log Cabin to Whitehall, from Downing Street to Fleet Street, is the path of fame. Dr. T. R. Glover has written his way to the position of President of the Baptist Union. The plums of office, or is it curds and whey? have been partly reached by Saturday columns of popular piety in the *Daily News*, whose racing tipster is the only sporting prophet whose forecasts show a profit with a level stake. We trust that Dr. Glover's chains of office will be less irksome than the subject of his numerous contributions; not labelled as such, but, by implication, deserving the title of "Theology in Retreat."

When two big trade interests such as the Church of England and the Church of Rome cannot agree, it is not extraordinary that the plain man prefers a glass of beer to listening to their quarrels. For threepence, teetotalers may read all about it in a pamphlet by the Rev. Thos. J. Pulvertaft. "Union with that Church," the writer declares, "would mean ruin and danger to those interests which English Churchmen hold most sacred." How these guardians of truth agree! And the price of their agreement or disagreement may be observed in the painful progress of mankind towards the shadow of a rational existence.

A number of American Methodists are dissatisfied with some of the laws of their Church and are trying to get them amended. One of these objectionable laws decrees Church punishments to those who attend theatres, or dance parties, or play games of chance, or take part in other amusements of an "obviously misleading moral character." Fancy calling these things obviously immoral! And worse than actually calling them such is the positive distortion of the moral sense that must result from young people being brought up in such an environment. One day it may be recognized that the most injurious influence of the Christian Church has not been so much in the positive harm it has taught as in the misdirection and distortion of the moral sense it has produced.

The Wembley Exhibition, in addition to a Church, has an "Evangelical Bungalow." For the benefit of visitors we may say it is situated near the Amusement Park. But we do not think they will be likely to take it for one of them, although that may have been in the minds of the promoters when they fixed it up.

Irish stew, of a kind, may be found on one page of the *Daily News*, in which T. R. Glover turns on the religious tap. Here it is fished out of the pot: F. W. Thomas, "Yes, I know just what you're thinking. Having been brought up on Sunday School Prizes and similar mental pabulum." T. R. Glover:—

We have, like the disciples, to be with Jesus if we are to understand His habits of mind, His thoughts of God, and what the Cross was and what it does.

"K," in Gramophone Notes:—

It would be instructive to students of the English language to get some records from a golf course, or to learn what a bishop says when he tears a bootlace.

Dr. Glover blows the penny trumpet of Christianity, and in so doing we catch the notes of strange implications in what passes for a Christian ethic. He states: "When you like a man you take down the barriers by which you normally protect yourself against people." We do not quarrel with the truth contained in this remark; we only point to the fact that two thousand years of varying degrees of privilege and power still finds a Christian reduced to writing such a confession of failure. That the all-powerful force of Christianity has not even brought us to a human stage is true; that the ferocity of persecution of men like Carlile and Bradlaugh, who spoke their mind to the world and not in university quarters, is easily understood when Christianity is regarded as a weapon for

a class in a similar manner to the Game Laws and the distinction of coachmen's cockades. With a little twist the quoted statement might appear as an elegant form of blasphemy—we are God's children—but in most cases we must keep up the barriers by which we normally protect ourselves against people.

The book, *Confessions of a Clergyman*, is commented on by a reviewer as a man who enjoyed his food. This record is the diary of a country parson (1758-1781), but a glance at the modern clergy, *en masse* as it were, gives one the impression that their God is situated under their waistcoats; and when they can take on the elementary training of even a Buddhist monk, what they have to say might almost reach the level of seriousness. The Buddhist monks must dress in rags, which they must sew together themselves. They are forbidden by their regulations even to lie down to sleep, and they must also exhibit charity, benevolence and kindness to animals. Lambeth Palace and the hunting parson are real evidences of following Jesus in a Pullman dining-car, as it were, and produce a Christian ethic only fit for light comedy.

Sir Stephen Collins, as a descendant of several generations of Nonconformists also thinks that the Free Church has been slighted by the omission of their representatives at Wembley. This is a sample of that charity mentioned in the Bible; and in case any Nonconformists have not read it, here it is as they say in the child's picture-book: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up." How much Nonconformists know their book or live up to it is not our concern; how much they value the limelight of publicity may be discerned in their jangle and jingle about Wembley.

Cherché la femme, and there she was hiding in the pulpit, and she bobbed up at the crucial moment as the music hall comedians say. She would protest, she would, as a Churchwoman against the erecting of a memorial to Robert Browne. And this goes to prove that, granted a definition of God agreed to by all his microscopical worshippers, the mansion in which he shall be worshipped could not teach them to love one another. The stage of this comedy was St. Giles Church, Northampton.

With a sublimity of faith that could pick up a mountain and put it in the waistcoat pocket, the *Daily News* makes the announcement that the death of Dr. Helfferich may have happy results for Europe. The odour of piety has been acquired by the newspaper through many years of hack work for Nonconformity, and its reasoning on the accidental death of a German Vice-Chancellor is a sample of that perfect love which casteth out fear.

The coloured people of South Africa have inspired Mrs. Gertrude Millin to write a book entitled *God's Step-Children*. Ironical—maybe, patronizing—probably, but as a metaphor of the mind that cannot be disguised it betrays emphatically that mark of Christian superiority that says the wrong thing by instinct.

Mr. Philip Guedalla has neatly pinned a specimen of this Christian country for exhibition in the museum of history. He writes: "High up on the short waiting-list of England's Mussolines one finds the name of Winston Spencer Churchill." This gentleman's anxiety to do us "good" is on a level with that of the great army of priests who tell us how bad we are—and offer to cure us at their spiritual clinics.

At the rate Spritualism and Christian Science and other blooms are raising their heads in this country, each one will have a right to be mentioned at national events such as the Wembley Exhibition, and it may dawn on the minds of ordinary people that the best way out will be to mention none.

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.

A. W. FREER.—Thanks, but a copy has been obtained.

J. HART.—We are interested to learn that at a meeting of the Metropolitan Secular Society a copy of the *Freethinker* was put up for auction and sold for 7s. 6d. We could supply quantities at a much lower rate.

A. FOX.—We have already commented on the Nonconformists complaining that they were not asked to pray at the opening of Wembley. As you say, the fact that prayers formed part of the opening ceremony is an indication of the way in which the priesthood of this country retains its hold on affairs. And matters are not made better by prominent politicians serving out doses of pious platitudes to satisfy certain groups of voters.

E. A. PHIPSON.—There have been already various collections of passages from the Bible, one made by Sir James Frazer. But we do not see that Freethinkers need exert themselves to dwell upon the comparatively small number of good things that may be found there. It is pandering to the common superstition that in some way we must have the Bible ever before us—if not in the Christian form, then in a so-called Rationalistic one. And we do not agree with that at all. We have a far greater need to teach people that they can do without the Bible than to impress upon them that they must have it in some form or other.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—W. Lock, £1.

O. MELTON.—Thanks. Shall appear as early as possible. It is nothing but the truth to say that the present interest in the quantity and quality of our population is almost entirely owing to the work of Freethinkers. It is a sign of the times when a Church congress discusses the subject of birth control. Those who ask for evidence of the benefits of Freethought might easily find it in the Birmingham "Copec" discussions.

T. KATER.—The remark of the Greenock Orange leader that the Orange and Protestant party was only political when the politics interfered with Protestantism, only meant that sectarian interests would be placed before all others. And his assurance was hardly needed for that much.

B. E. STAFFORD.—Sorry we cannot find space for your letter in this issue, but we will make public at least its substance in our next.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

The audience at South Place on Sunday last showed a marked improvement in point of numbers on the Sunday previous, and there was an obvious interest shown in the

lecture. Mr. Collete Jones occupied the chair and made a strong appeal for sustained support for the National Secular Society. It is a pity there is not some good central meeting place available for the Society during the winter months. There is a public waiting, if only the conditions are there for its gathering. Something may be attempted in this direction in the near future.

The Outdoor Propaganda began last Sunday in the London Parks. Mr. Whitehead opened at Regent's Park for the North London Branch in the evening. He was at Finsbury Park in the morning, and at Highbury Corner on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. To-day and during the week he will be at West Ham. Mr. McLaren was at Brockwell Park, Mr. Burke at Victoria Park and Mr. Corrigan at West Ham. Mr. Whitehead will be in London for the rest of this month. On the 31st he travels to Preston, where he will conduct a week's open-air Mission prior to the Conference; following on with visits to various provincial towns, which will be announced weekly in the Lecture Notices.

Mr. J. Goulding writes:—

In view of the efforts to alter the law with regard to blasphemy, may I suggest that a real effort be made to alter the present custom with regard to places where civil marriages may be performed, and to try and popularize civil marriages so far as is possible. In the case of large towns and county towns, why not permit them to take place in the Town Hall, or some other fine secular building in the place? Many people, particularly women, do not like the hole-and-corner way of going into some shabby little registrar's office in a back street. In many large towns the Town Hall is a fine building, and a more ornate marriage could be held in such a place with suitable dress, decorations, etc. Also the mayor of the town could give dignity to the marriage, as in France. Many registrars are very off-hand in their way of doing things. The parson manages to introduce a more personal note, and this is where he scores.

We agree with all that Mr. Goulding says, and have indeed said as much on more than one occasion. But the difficulty in the way is the power exerted in this surreptitiously priest-ridden country by the clergy. It is their aim to make the civil marriage as unattractive as possible; and our statesmen, for fear of offending the clergy, cooperate in making the civil institutions as undignified and as unattractive as possible. We should like to see something done to correct this, although the only sure way is to go on making Freethinkers. There is a good opportunity for the present Government to take a step in the direction of making the civil marriage as important and as dignified as it ought to be made.

Mr. John Paris, in his book *Sayonara*, has some very pretty advertisement matter to put in the missionary shop window. Here it is, in a solus position and without trimmings:—

Diek Aylmer's brother missionaries are satirized with equal frankness, often very effectively. Here is a fragment of their conversation about the Japanese:—

"They want edgicating," wheezed Porter. "They want the schools first, then the Churches can come after. Teach 'em to read and write and think like Christians—and there you are!"

"In the days of the blessed St. François Xavier," Paul intervened, "a thousand Japanese were converted for every one that we can get now; and they died as martyrs in those days. They were crucified, boiled in oil, cast down the craters of volcanoes—"

"That's right," Porter interrupted, not quite catching the drift of the argument; "treat 'em friendly and they'll eat out of your hand."

We hear from Mr. Millar that he confused the date of his visit to Bolton. It was not May 10 as announced, but Sunday, May 11, 2.15 p.m., at the Socialist Club, Wood Street, Bolton. The subject of his address is, "What is Freethought." We hope there will be a good attendance.

Ancestor-Worship.

ANCESTOR-WORSHIP, of course, can only occur in those religions which teach that the ghosts of the dead return to this world. In some religious systems (notably that of ancient Egypt) the disposal of the body of the dead person was one of the utmost importance, since the continuance of the soul after death was conceived to depend upon the preservation of the body. But more often the survivors were chiefly concerned with the ghost of their departed relative, having lively apprehensions that it might re-visit them. To persuade this unwelcome visitor to go away, and keep away, funeral rites and ceremonies were devised. Once an elaborate funeral ceremony has been developed, the return of the spirits of the dead becomes an indication that the burial has not been properly carried out; the deceased is probably incensed at not having received all the obsequies that are his due. Out of this burial ceremonial ancestor-worship may grow.

The ancient Babylonian, Assyrian, and Jewish religions taught quite unequivocally that the dead do not return. The early Greeks and Romans held contrary opinions. Among them it was the custom to place in the grave all the things that the dead person might require in the other world; the object evidently being to give him no reason for returning to this world. Among certain uncivilized tribes, and among the Chinese of to-day even more drastic steps are taken to get rid of the ghost, the dwelling and all the belongings of the dead man being abandoned. In China the whole house in which the death took place is formally abandoned.

Whether certain of the dead person's belongings are abandoned, or buried with the corpse, or burnt, they come to be regarded as offerings made to the spirit to induce it to go away and keep away from this world. The natural steps follow of repeating these offerings from time to time, to ensure that the ghost shall not bother the survivors. Thus, in China the family grave is visited twice a year, and offerings formally made; in ancient Greece a similar ceremonial took place each February; and in Rome each February and December.

Probably, of course, it was the same instincts that induced men to offer sacrifices to the powers that later came to be personified as gods. But in this case it was the business of the whole community to placate these rather malign powers, lest they should visit their spite upon them. In the case of the spirits of the dead, it was only the relatives who had cause for fear. This is the differential of ancestor worship and the worship of the gods. The one is limited to a select circle; the other is communal.

As is only to be expected, therefore, in most cases the worship of the gods destroyed ancestor-worship. China, of course, is the great exception. There ancestor-worship attained and retains a position unique in the history of religion. But even in China ancestor-worship is not of greater importance than the worship of the gods. The temples to the gods exist in their thousands; and the religious life of the people is centred about these temples. There are gods of the clouds, winds, thunder, rain, and other natural forces; and sacrifices are offered to a host of deities for good harvests and other blessings. The earth, sun, moon, stars, and fire are all worshipped. These deities are all anthropomorphic, and the Chinese religion resembles the other historic religions so closely that it is a safe inference that in China the worship of the gods had, in its origin, as little to do with ancestor-worship as it had in Babylon or Assyria, where ancestor-worship never developed.

The peculiar thing in China is that ancestor worship has encroached upon the worship of the gods. Sacrifice was originally offered on behalf of the community; and (before the institution of the Chinese republic) was still offered by the emperor on behalf of the community. But in China private individuals have come to make private sacrifices for their own personal ends; and thus sacrifices to the gods have been degraded to the level of offerings made by an individual to his ancestors.

Nevertheless, even in China, the gods are ranked above ancestors. For example, the ancestors of the emperor himself were not of such high rank as the supreme deity. But by various devices and subterfuges, ancestor-worship has been exalted at the expense of god-worship. Thus, the sun and moon, originally deities in their own right, later came to be ranked as ancestors of the emperor, and the latter was ranked as a son of heaven.

In many other ways ancestor-worship has encroached upon god-worship. Thus, drought and famine have come to be regarded at times not as due to the anger of the rain-gods, but as caused by the spite of the unburied dead. Again, the offering of the first-fruits, which in most religious systems forms part of the worship of harvest-gods, has come in China to be an offering to ancestral spirits. In many religions animals are sacrificed to the gods, and the worshippers by participating in the sacred meal sustain the bond of union between the community and its gods. In China a pig and goat are offered in the worship of the ancestors of the emperor, and the ancestors are invited to partake of the offering; after which the sacrifice is divided among members of the family.

There is a characteristically Chinese device, called "make-see," for limiting the value of the offerings made to the ancestral spirits.¹ In place of the costly raiment, food, slaves, concubines, and money which used to be buried or burnt with the deceased, paper slaves and concubines, gilt or silver paper in place of money, and substitutes for food and clothing made of straw, clay, or paper are destroyed.

That is to say, offerings to the dead are tending to become a survival. The form is kept up as a ceremonial; whereas the offerings to the gods are real and substantial. What still maintains ancestor-worship is filial piety, rather than the hope of gain from the dead. The Chinaman honours his ancestors, and one can respect him, even if his worship of them is little more than a ceremonial survival. At least there is an infinitely more pleasant motive behind the make-belief than is to be found among the queer mixture of motives that sends the average Christian to church on Sunday to participate in a ceremonial which is devoid of all real meaning to him.

W. H. MORRIS.

The feeling heart, the searching soul,
To thee I dedicate the whole!
And while within myself I trace
The greatness of some future race,
Aloof with hermit-eye I scan
The present works of present man—
A wild and dream-like haze of blood and guile,
Too foolish for a tear, too wicked for a smile.

—Coleridge.

¹ In Athens, on the other hand, the offerings to the dead reached such a value that it had to be stopped by the great law-giver, Solon, by means of an enactment which limited the amount that might be withdrawn from the possessions of the living for sacrifice to the dead.

C3 Denominational Schools.

THE NEED FOR ACTIVE PROPAGANDA.

In the issue for February 17 of the *Freethinker* there appeared an article by myself on the scandal of the 6,000 unsanitary, badly-equipped denominational schools in England and Wales. Since that time I have been busy on the question, and various experiences have driven me to the conclusion that only by a determined, persistent propaganda, especially amongst the rank and file of the organized workers, will a satisfactory remedy be secured.

Therefore, I once more appeal most earnestly to readers of the *Freethinker* to use every effort to give the facts of the case the widest possible publicity. A special appeal should be made to the innumerable, earnest rank and file propagandists in the various localities—the great unreported—who do the real educational work of the Labour movement. They will understand that the working class, in the toilsome march to its emancipation, cannot afford to leave 1,350,000 working-class children to be "educated" in the 6,000 denominational schools, which, according to the high authority of Mr. Frank J. Leslie, are unfit for the purpose to which they are being put; to say nothing of those in the remaining 6,000 denominational schools, which, in the majority of cases, are "no great shakes." All, let it be noted, while being publicly supported, are under clerical domination.

The "traditional tenderness" of the Board of Education towards highly inefficient denominational schools, is a subject worthy of close investigation and analysis; and I suggest that the many "intellectuals" now flocking into the Labour Party should be invited to deal with it in lectures on educational demands, which are now recognized as more or less practical politics, thanks to the unceasing, laborious advocacy by earnest workers in the Labour movement during the past 25 or 30 years.

I am hoping that the history of British education politics may ere long be included in the list of subjects studied in the classes in Social Science (controlled by working-class organizations) connected with the National Council of Labour Colleges. The 17,000 students attending those classes during the last winter, their teachers, and also the large numbers of ex-students of those classes, would find it well worth while to apply the habit of study they have acquired to this mysterious "Traditional Tenderness," by which a great Government department can be so "mangled" as deliberately to keep at a low level the standard of education for nearly half the children attending public elementary schools. It would seem that while Education Ministers may come, and Education Ministers may go, the "traditional tenderness" is destined to go on for ever.

With the power resulting from the opportunity which office has given to Labour, the workers must ask themselves whether the time has not come when a peremptory "halt" should be called to that "tenderness," which has permitted the lowering of the educational standard in the schools controlled by ecclesiastical bodies—successive Governments permitting the evasion of the legal obligations resting on those same ecclesiastical bodies to keep the schools they control in proper repair.

Among the students mentioned above are many who would certainly find this "traditional tenderness" and all its complications a fruitful subject for careful research, and in its existence would perhaps be revealed one of the strongest arguments in favour of the workers' determination to keep the control of this

particular education movement entirely in the hands of the working-class organizations, and free from association with the Church, the Universities and the Board of Education.

For a Board of Education manned by the universities, conniving with the Church against the physical and educational well-being of millions of working-class children, presents to our view a trinity in unity working against the well-being of the working class as a whole, and is clearly not a force to be trusted with the control of the education in social science, which an ever-increasing number of the best elements in the Labour movement are finding necessary to an intelligent understanding of the great events taking place in the world to-day.

Among those students are many active propagandists, and we may look to them to help in the task of rescuing the 1,350,000 children in unsanitary denominational schools throughout the country. Trade unionists in the towns must take counsel together and help the agricultural workers to free their schools from the yoke of the clergy, and to secure for the village children healthy, well-equipped schools, with the communal "atmosphere" resulting from the control by elected representatives of schools supported from public funds. Schools in which the teachers will be not only paid by the public education authority, but appointed also, and appointed with due regard to educational attainments rather than "to creeds and religious doctrine, and to the interests of local church members" (from Mr. Leslie's paper).

The position is serious, and shows the breakdown of the education compromise of 1902 and 1903, which, in Mr. Leslie's words, has resulted in "discord, difficulty and disaster to the cause of national education." This breakdown is, in the further words of Mr. Leslie: "Wholly attributable to the failure of the religious bodies to carry out their part of the compromise of 1902, upon which they insisted, and the full advantages of which on their side they never fail to take."

It is interesting to note that "Copec," the great religious organization which recently held its conference at Birmingham, while advocating certain educational reforms (a minimum of the inevitable, resulting from pressure from below) made no reference to the need for sanitary schools, although—perhaps because there was a Labour bishop in the chair—the *Daily Herald* "boomed" Copec, but did not break its silence on the question by making a note of the omission.

I should like to appeal to Scottish readers of the *Freethinker* to bring the question of the unsanitary denominational schools to the notice of the Scottish Labour Members of Parliament. Many of us who have fought for the children were thrilled by the brave fight they put up for the Scottish babies. It is true that Mr. Leslie's figures apply only to English and Welsh schools. But the Scottish members must remember that we have not yet got Home Rule for England and Wales, and while the Scottish invasion (or shall I say occupation?) continues, we shall not hold the Scottish members guiltless if they have nothing to say on behalf of the 1,350,000 children in the occupied territory who are condemned to be "educated" in unsanitary schools.

This education crisis is as serious as any of the periodical education crises of the past, and there is much hard work to be done; and I sincerely hope that Socialists and trade unionists will not allow their organizations to swell the sinister chorus of ignoble acquiescing silence, standing between the wind of an indignant public opinion and the nobility of law-evading, wealthy ecclesiastical forces.

If we cannot bring those responsible for this great scandal to a court of justice, we can at least bring them to the bar of public opinion by making the facts known.

If I had my way, a heavy fine would be the penalty, even to the extent of the forfeiture of the income for one or more years from the wealthy church endowments, for I maintain that the first charge upon those endowments should be the provision of sanitary buildings for the schools controlled by the Church; this being more important even than a living wage for sweated curates, and very much more important than an increase in the number of bishops.

As for the Ministers of Education in various Governments who have been parties to this "traditional tenderness," surely *impeachment* is the only punishment which would adequately fit the crime.

MARY BRIDGES APAMS.

A Question of Perspective.

THE Recording Angel is a capable business man with a large and efficient staff of clerks, who, under his supervision, are able to draw up a quarterly balance-sheet of the firm of God, Son & Co., Ltd. It is an interesting experience to be conducted through the offices of this company. On my visit there I was in luck's way, bearing as I did a letter of introduction from an influential source to the head of the firm himself.

As was but proper, the head of the firm was absent, and the Recording Angel deputized. He would be rather an insignificant figure in the nude, I fancy, but his waistcoat was impressive. However, I anticipate. I sent in my card with the letter of introduction—the glance of the minx who took it may have betrayed no more than interest—I was too excited at the moment for clear judgment. She returned presently and conducted me to her chief. He greeted me ceremoniously, bowing in a rather patronizing manner, but not more patronizingly than any other works manager might have done. He requested me to be seated, pushed over a box of cigars, murmuring, "Have one?" enquired if I were teetotal, and sat down. Almost immediately he arose and, murmuring a semi-audible "You don't mind, do you?" removed his wings. Of course, I stared. "Only wear them on ceremonial occasions, or when the boss looks in," he muttered in explanation. Muttering, it struck me, was his habitual mode of expression. I remarked that I did not know they were detachable. He stared in his turn. "Of course—anything is!" "But," I protested, "things that grow? Your body?" For answer he pulled off a shoe with the foot still inside it. Suddenly I wished I had been born in America. Only an American could carry this thing off with credit. I, like all my race, would be perpetually showing surprise. He replaced his foot, and commenced an apology for the absence of God:

"No doubt if he had known you intended calling to-day"—and the usual formal excuse. Naturally, I asked questions.

"Well," he informed me, "the old man is what you might term a sleeping partner, really. Only very rarely he looks in. Last time was—let me see—yes, the launch of the last new planetary system. He's thinking of retiring, I hear. 'Bout time, too; he's done a good bit of work in his time. As for the young Guv'nor"—he winked and grinned—"no harm, I don't believe, but—young blood, y'know, young blood."

Noting my horrified face, he naturally took me for one of the "Unco guid," and I saw he feared I should

have the ear of the Lord if I wished to give him away, so he continued:

"Not that I care for such things, you know, but we must make allowances for youth." I questioned him about the third member of the trilogy.

"And Company, Limited?" he quizzed. Well, I never saw any sign of other partners; my opinion, the business pays too well, they want to keep it in the family. Mere legal fiction the other partner, eh? Anyhow, I haven't seen him."

Later he very kindly let me run through his files for information. It was all quite incomprehensible to me, but he pointed out the more interesting items.

"This, see, is the returns from our newest venture; a new group of planets, complete with sun. We crammed it in the space between G and H, and don't know how to name it. Call it G ova on the quiet. D'you know, once before we got our book-keeping system perfect we mislaid a whole sytem. K department had used it up by accident on another job, and we couldn't find it out. See, it was shipped by this time. The whole place was in a quiver lest the old man should get to hear of it. Lord! Thought I was in for the sack that time. However, we managed to scrape together enough odd planets to make another system, only the sun was a dummy. Suns is the old man's fad. Watches 'em like a hawk. No leakage allowed. Got to be accounted for down to the last spot. But *what* a flurry! K department managed later to get the spare sun back from the other job, but the planets couldn't be sorted out, and, anyway, they don't matter so much."

Then I questioned him about the way the earth was run. I felt it my duty, as sole representative of our planet for the moment, to bring to his notice a few of the more obvious defects in our corner of the universe. Therefore, as a leading question, I asked him how the earth was run. He said, "Yes?" politely, but with a question in his accent. I reiterated my query.

"Earth," he said dubiously—"Earth?—Why, that's one of our prime ingredients in the manufactory. Who told you of it? I thought the old man kept it a close secret!"

Fruitlessly I sought to explain that by earth, I meant our earth. I discovered, abruptly, that it was not possible to describe anything by merely mentioning its name. Still, I managed to remember it was a planet, and said so. He smiled incredulously, even pitying, I thought.

"A planet; well, that's not much, still, it's a clue of a kind. Certainly, *we* make all the planets, but—is it an old planet, do you know? I mean, is it—what system is it in?" "The solar system, of course!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, of course, the solar system. Still, as they are all in solar systems, that does not help much," he pointed out. "Still, what size of sun has it got?"

"Well, I forget, exactly. Ninety-three million miles, or something," I answered.

"Uh-huh! Miles?" he queried—whereat I stuck. "What is the size?" he asked again—One? Two? Three? Up to seven we have them—stock sizes. There are three special ones; fads of the old man's. They are whoppers." Things seemed deadlocked.

"Suppose you just walk about through departments. Let's see. How many planets in your system?"

"About fifteen," I answered, although in some doubt.

"Well, suppose you try size three to begin. I'll stay here. The staff get confused when I'm about asking questions. Fourth passage on the right, third door on the right. Let me know how you get on," and he politely showed me to the door.

I entered the room indicated, and strode between two long rows of desks to the desk of the departmental chief. He looked up from his writing. "Well, sir, if I can do anything for you—" and paused suggestively.

"The manager suggested that I visit you," I answered. "I am enquiring as to the management of a planet which he thinks may be controlled by your department. This is the grade three sun department, isn't it?"

"Yes, size three. Which system can I show you?"

"Have you—have you more than one?" I gasped.

"You don't fancy we would keep a staff like this to run one little system, do you? What is your planet like?" he asked, rather superciliously.

"A—a globe."

"Yes, yes. Gaseous, aqueous, or solid?"

"Oh! Solid, with lots of water on it," I answered.

"Um! Quite an old shipment. Er—are there any parasites at all? You know, little, nondescript organisms that sometimes gather on the surface of planets."

"You mean animals!" I interrupted. "Why, yes, intelligent animals. Why, it is the planet Earth, I want. Man lives on it!"

He seemed surprised at my vehemence, but not very much impressed by my knowledge.

"Our planets are all earth, more or less. Of course, if you want a new planet"—he reflected—"we might make one."

"Oh! No! It's an old planet, as old as the hills!"

"The hills?" he questioned.

"Corrugations on the surface of the planet," I answered, marvelling at his ignorance.

"But, sir—if you will excuse me—any planet must be much older than the corrugations on its surface."

Forthwith, I resolved to avoid idiom, colloquialism, and comparison in his presence.

"I mean, it is very old," I said meekly.

"No, not very. You see, the very old systems don't have parasites. The parasites only last for a short time in the development of the planet. I think—

yes—if you go next door, perhaps. You see, we only deal with new material, really; chiefly assembling

parts. Try next door, or next door but one. They deal with the older systems. Of course, there's just

a chance that this is an old planet used up in a new system—but, anyway, next door they will tell you

which department is most likely to deal with your particular planet. Good-day!"

Thinking ruefully of the old jokes of Government

Department, War Office Routine, Red Tape, and the like, I stepped next door. The chief here was a pretty

but rather prim maiden, who succeeded in making me feel thoroughly uncomfortable, even before I addressed

her.

"Well, sir?" Brusque and business-like came the query. I thought of the "new woman."

"I am seeking, miss, for information of a planet, in the solid state, parasite bearing, presumed to be in

a system controlled by a size three sun. Can you assist me in any way?"

"Yes, I think we may. Let me see—two—four—fifth desk from the door on the left-hand side. Yes,

sir! Fifth desk from the door. They deal with systems of that size, and about that date. Perhaps—

can you recognize it at sight?"

"Yes!"

"Ah! All right. They will have miniatures there."

I sought the desk she had directed me to. Eight clerks, three juniors, and a message boy were working

there. I addressed myself to an elderly angel in side-whiskers, making my desires known.

"You can recognize it? Good! Phrael, show this

gentleman the miniatures. He wishes information of a planet."

Phrael was one of the juniors.

"This way, sir, if you please," and he led me to a showcase at the side of the room. This he opened. He showed me prints of fifty-three systems, with from twelve to twenty-one planets each, each planet with distinctive markings.

"This, sir, is 3/GBL—rather large—seventeen planets—three parasite ridden; it is a pity, but we cannot keep them off, somehow. No use? Then what about 3/GBM? Only twelve—"

Carefully I scrutinized all of the fifty-three systems, with no success.

"Sorry, sir! You have seen all we have. Either your planet cannot be really solid, or it is beyond the parasite stage. Unless, of course, it is the wrong size of sun—very important to be sure of the size of the sun. Are you really sure it *was* size three?"

I clutched at the ray of hope. "Well, it may be either four or two, but the manager said three!"

"The manager! Do you come from him, sir? Still, you have seen all *we* have. To get size two or four you must return to the main passage, and take one of the passages next to ours. Sorry, sir!"

"Thanks. I'll see about it."

Much disheartened, I returned to the room of the Recording Angel. He smiled when I entered. "Well, did you get it?"

I informed him of my ill-success, and of the boy's recommendation.

"Certainly, you may try if you wish. Of course, you understand, with such scant information at our disposal, it is difficult to locate a planet, or even a system for that matter."

But I decided that, since so little attention was paid to this, our planet, in the offices of God, Son & Co., Ltd., Gospel Mills, Paradise, I would pursue my investigations no further. I accepted another cigar from the Recording Angel, and lit it while he re-affixed his wings in order to see me off the premises with due ceremony.

QUENTIN MARKS.

Correspondence.

THRIFT.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Your contributor's (G. E. Fussell) article in your issue of April 27 will be accepted by most of your readers, as it is by me, as a perfectly sound argument as to "thrift" in respect to a supposed future life, but I cannot agree to his arguments as to thrift in this life, when he says "that the spendthrift is better than the thrifty." No one could be more averse to meanness, stinginess or to being a miser than I am; yet I have in my mind over half a dozen acquaintances and friends still alive and many more who are dead who, from affluence, went "stoney broke" by running race-horses, backing race-horses, gambling at cards, etc., and by every sort of extravagant living, until they could neither suitably support themselves, their wives nor their children, nor educate the latter.

I don't suppose for a moment that this sort of spendthrift was in the mind of Mr. Fussell when he penned the words I have quoted.

Such cases as I have mentioned are only on the fringe of a very wide and complicated question, viz., that of the acquisition and distribution of what is called "wealth," with which I fear neither he nor I are capable of dealing.

In present circumstances I think that all we can do is to exercise what judgment and prudence we may possess in dealing with these matters and, what is more important, to bring them under open, public discussion.

F. W. HAUGHTON.

Obituary.

We regret to hear of the death of Mr. William Guthrie, for many years editor of the *Saltcoats Herald*. Although a professed Christian, Mr. Guthrie was a man of a very liberal mind, and the columns of the paper over which he presided were always open to the expression of ideas which would have been taboo to the ordinary newspaper. This, in a small Scotch town, deserves noting. We met him on our only visit to Saltcoats, and were impressed by his liberality and wide culture. Some very fine tributes were paid to his memory by his brother journalists, and these, we are convinced, he fully deserved.

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.—The Discussion Circle meets every Thursday, at 8, at the "Lawrie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, Right Hon. John M. Robertson, "Modern Humanists Reconsidered: (II) Emerson."

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 6.15, Mr. Marshall, a Lecture.

FINSBURY PARK.—11.15, Mr. E. Burke, a Lecture.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY.—Freethought lectures and debates every evening in Hyde Park. Speakers: Messrs. Baker, Beale, Hyatt, Harris, Hart, Keeling, Knubley, Saphin, Shaller, Dr. Stuart, M.A., M.D., and Mr. Vincent, B.A., B.Sc.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Regent's Park, near the Fountain): 6, Mr. E. Burke, a Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Brockwell Park): 3.30 and 6.30, Mr. F. P. Corrigan will lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Outside Technical Institute, Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. George Whitehead; also on Monday, May 12, at the same place, at 7.30; on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings outside Forest Gate Station, at 7.30.

COUNTRY.—INDOOR.

BOLTON SECULAR SOCIETY (Socialist Club, 16 Wood Street): 2.15, Mr. Andrew Millar, "What is Freethought?"

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N.S.S. (No. 2 Hut, Simonside): 3, Conference; Local Propaganda.

OUTDOOR.

GLASGOW BRANCH N.S.S.—Ramble to Cathkin Loch. Meet at Burnside Terminus, 12 noon.

NEWCASTLE BRANCH N.S.S. (Town Moor, near North Road entrance): 7. Speakers: Messrs. Carlton, Hands and Hogan.

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