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## Views and Opinions.

### Man and His Soul.

I refrained last week, in dealing with Edison's disbelief in immortality, from any discussion of what he had to say concerning the consciousness of personal identity, on which many appear to think they may base an argument in favour of the belief in “a soul.” I also promised to deal with some questions concerning this same consciousness of personal identity that had been sent me by other readers. Edison's own statements about the make up of the human personality is very fanciful in expression, but it enshrines a solid truth. The fancifulness consists in giving to the cells composing the human body certain moral attributes which they certainly do not possess. Morality is no more a quality of the cells than it is of the atoms, than it is of Nature itself. Moral qualities belong entirely to the associated life, and the goodness or the badness of an act lies in that circumstance. If one tries to think of an act as either good or bad, out of relation to the life of a group, he will at once understand what is meant by morality. Honesty and dishonesty, kindness and cruelty, duty and neglect, are terms which carry a meaning only in relation to groups. On the other hand, the truth brought out by Edison is that the life of the individual is essentially a group product. As the body is made up of innumerable cells, each possessing its own modicum of energy, so the organized body is the product of the amalgamated cell life of the body, and the life of the body, whether in its lower or its higher, its simpler or more complex expression, is an expression of the energy contributed by the cells themselves. About this I do not think there would be any serious dispute among biologists. And if that be accepted, it remains for the believer in survival to explain how a “soul,” which is the product of the organized sum total of cell life, can exist after the condition of its being has passed away. One might as well postulate the survival of a nation after all the individuals composing it are dead.

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### A Useless Theory.

It cannot be denied that the “soul” theory has fallen upon unfortunate days. Psychologists of the rank of the late Professor William James and of Professor McDougall admit that modern science has no use for it. It explains nothing, and only increases the difficulty in understanding the facts before us. And, on the other hand, anthropological research has

left no doubt as to the manner in which this belief in a “soul” originated. It belongs to that group of discarded early theories which lie heaped behind mankind in its march towards more exact and verifiable knowledge. Nevertheless, there are problems confronting students which are seized upon by interested reasoners as some evidence that man is not, so to speak, the product of his organization, but that he uses this organisation as a means of expressing his real self. In nearly all scientific and philosophical controversy there is a borderland of vague meaning and misleading phrases, which will always lead one astray unless a constant guard against the coercive effect of mere words is exercised. There is, for example, no question of the reality of a sense of self or of personal identity, and all the pseudo-philosophical talk about “I am I,” or the impossibility of denying the sense of personality is so much verbiage. With this question, as with that of life, instead of first asking what is it that is given to us in the facts which we call self and personality, it is assumed that there is something existing above and beyond the reactions of the organism. And not only is this assumption without any evidence worthy of the name, but when we try and reduce the statement to clear mental images, we find it to be almost unthinkable. As is so often the case, questions are asked that ought never to be put, and because no clear reply can be given to an unthinkable question, it is assumed that the questioner holds the field.

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### What are the Facts?

Let us try to form a clear idea of what it is we are trying to find out. “A man,” says Professor Bradley in his fine work *Appearance and Reality*, “commonly thinks that he knows what he means by self. He may be in doubt about other things, but here he seems to be at home.” That is one of the misfortunes of the situation. “I know that I am myself,” is a common expression. “I am the self which persists through all change, and cannot therefore be the outcome of or dependent on these changes,” is another. And from such-like hazy convictions, enforced by the primitive ghost theory, is built up the belief that the “self” is something which uses the bodily organism during life and seeks other fields of adventure after death. Another and superficially more impressive argument is this. States of consciousness, which must form at least a very important part of the “self” are fleeting things. They come and go, and there does not seem any necessary reason why there should be any organic connection between them. To create a self—a person—these states of consciousness must be fused into an organic whole, and for this work a transcendental entity is assumed which fuses these changing and impermanent states of consciousness into one. This fusion gives us our changing but constant mental life, but it does not create the self. The real self—the soul—is nourished by the experiences through which it passes, but is not dependent upon them for its existence. That is the spiritualistic theory in as few and as simple words as I can put it.

### What is the "Self"?

The opposing theory is that "self," while a reality as representing the sum of the activities of the organism, is myth, if by it is intended something which merely takes possession of the organism, or is in its essence independent of its activities. Hume, with that delightful clarity of vision and preciseness of phrase of which so many philosophers are destitute—and which, if they possessed, might quickly prevent them being recognized as philosophers—put this clearly. He says:—

There are some philosophers who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our Self; that we feel its existence and its continuity in existence; and are certain beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity.....It must be some one impression that gives rise to every real idea. But self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are supposed to have a reference. If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, through the whole course of our lives; since self is supposed to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any idea of these impressions or from any other, that the idea of self is derived—For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other: of heat or cold, or light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself without perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep, so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions removed by death, and I could neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate after the dissolution of my body, I should be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is further needed to make me a non-entity. If anyone, upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of himself, I must confess I can reason no longer with him..... But I venture to affirm of the rest of mankind that they are nothing but a bundle of perceptions which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and which are in a perpetual flux and movement.

This is very clearly put, and later writers have added nothing to the essence of the statement. There have been additions, and certain reservations, the phraseology may have changed a little, and there have been some powerful endorsements from the physiological side, and by experimentation in the psychological laboratory—an insitution quite unknown when Hume wrote. But, substantially, this theory holds the scientific field. The self is not something which exists prior to experience, and which is superior to experience. It is born of experience, and represents the sum total of the activities of the organism in given directions. Had Hume lived in our day he would undoubtedly have agreed with the leader of the Behaviouristic school of psychologists, that personality is the expression of "the total mass of organized habits; the socialized and regulated instincts, the socialized and tempered emotions; and the combinations and inter-relations among these." Self as an entity is inconceivable and useless, since we can only deal with self as the mass of the reactions of the organism to specific environmental activities. And from that point of view we are able to understand, not merely the existence of the self as a normal fact, but also its alterations and aberrations.

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I have probably said enough on this topic for one week. The rest is not silence, but it can wait.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### Is the Christian Faith Worth Preserving?

THE Rev. James M. Wilson, D.D., Canon of Worcester, is well known as a remarkably progressive theologian, who is neither afraid nor ashamed to express his advanced views in plain, unequivocal language. He calls himself "a very old man," who took his degree at Cambridge sixty-five years ago. He has spent his long life since as a teacher of religion. For the first twenty years he was a layman, "studying and teaching natural science and exploring and reconstructing the substance of his old religious faith." During the last forty-five years he has been in Holy Orders, loyally discharging the duties of a clergyman; and on Sunday, May 18, he preached before his own university a highly characteristic discourse, which was published in the *Guardian* of May 23. As to the early and general presentation of the Christian Faith, he says:—

On this subject, which is perhaps more important than it may at first appear, I confess there is something I have long wished, and long hesitated, to say in public. I think we all feel that something is not going well now with Christendom, that something is even paralysing the efforts of the Churches..... I am thinking of the apparent powerlessness now of the Faith, as held and presented by any of the Churches, to attract and impress those that are without, or even to unite and inspire those that are within.....Men even ask whether Christianity is not played out; whether the Faith is as living as it was. More than ever, I think, is the world, on the one hand, prepared and ready to believe in God as revealed in Christ; and more than ever are those who do so believe tenacious, in spite of some misgivings, of their own form of faith; but outside those believers there is, on the other hand, a more than ever increasing number of men and women—reverent, truth-loving, surely dear to God, and Christian in spirit—who cannot believe in God and Christ just as the Churches present them.

That extract contains much truth and some error. It is impossible to deny that the conditions of life in Christendom are by no means what they ought to be, and that the Churches are morally and socially impotent. So much is absolutely indisputable. But it is not true that the world is "more than ever prepared and ready to believe in God as revealed in Christ"; nor is there any justification whatever for calling unbelievers "reverent." Truth-loving they certainly are, at least the bulk of them. Genuine unbelievers are wholly out of touch, not only with the Churches, but also and more particularly with what the clergy call spiritual realities.

Canon Wilson enumerates the theological changes which have occurred during the last sixty-five years. He tells us that since he took his degree "the then practically universal belief in the verbal inerrancy of the Bible has been all but universally abandoned"; that "miracles, whether recorded in the Old Testament or the New, have been almost completely robbed of their evidential value and even of their reality"; "that the transactional theories of the Atonement are not now taught as they then were"; and that "the awful teaching as to the fate of the Heathen in the next world is now unheard of." In the Canon's estimation such doctrinal transformations are fundamental improvements which render the Christian Faith more acceptable to the modern mind; but he forgets that the dogmas held sixty-five years ago were in greater harmony with the New Testament than the looser ones advocated to-day. Dr. Wilson's definition of Christianity is entirely unscriptural. He says:—

Christianity is in its essence righteousness and holiness, as the expression of the Life and Spirit of

God implanted in us, and of his Will for us as revealed in Christ.

As presented to us in the New Testament Epistles, however, Christianity is the Divine plan of Salvation from sin and the wrath to come through faith in the crucified and risen Son of God. However immoral and absurd such a doctrine may be, there can be no doubt whatever that it is clearly taught in the New Testament, and has always been the Church's supreme message to the world. To us there is no truth in it, nor does it make the slightest appeal; but we are convinced that what the Modernists substitute for it is, if possible, even less true and applicable. The Canon declares that in the twentieth century people cannot endure the old Gospel, which was so enormously powerful a hundred years ago; but he ignores the fact that the crowds do not rush to welcome the newer Gospel concocted by the party to which he belongs; the truth being that supernaturalism in any form is becoming obsolete. It is not the presentation of the Christian Faith that is out of date, but the Christian Faith itself.

Canon Wilson denounces the orthodox idea of God with great severity. He says:—

The impression as to the nature of God left by much of our early teaching is misleading and ineffaceable. Is it not so? The prevailing thought is still that we must look for him in "signs from heaven"; some interference with physical laws. "If there is a God in heaven, such as we were taught about, he could interfere to prevent the awful evils in the world." That is the natural conclusion from the conception, which we now implant in our schools, of a pre-Christian God, apart from men, ruling the world of man. "If he is not that," men ask, "what is he?" He is regarded as willing and causing all that happens. That is more than we are entitled to say. The mystery of God is not so simply solved. A few months ago, when Tokio was destroyed by an earthquake, a leading newspaper, and even a Bishop, spoke of it as "a dispensation of Providence." Is it so? Such a thought of God as "dispensing an earthquake," is neither Christian nor philosophical, but a primitive and mistaken guess.

That reminds us of a story told by Mark Rutherford in his *Revolution in Tanner's Lane* (p. 51) of an old gentleman who was riding along in his carriage, when a lightning flash killed the coachman. The old gentleman, talking about it afterwards, said that "providentially it struck the box-seat." It is easy enough to claim that such happenings are due to the operation of natural laws, and that God has absolutely nothing to do with them. But, surely, if a Supreme Being exists, it inevitably follows that all natural laws are of his imposition, and that ultimately he must be held responsible for all that happens. There is no possible escape from such a conclusion; and such a conclusion only proves the utter futility and absurdity of the belief in God. And yet no other God is conceivable, and it is this kind of God that the Church has consistently declared from the beginning.

According to Canon Wilson, two new streams of thought are converging to his revised idea of God. The first is a theological stream, teaching men to think of God as "Spirit animating man from within"; and the second is a scientific stream, which the Canon describes in one of the strangest sentences ever framed: "Biological evolution is being seen by science as 'culminating in Deity.'" If this queer sentence means what it says, Deity has not yet arrived, but is still in the process of being made, in which case all the Canon's allusions to the various revelations of himself God has been pleased to grant are sheer nonsense, because if what science is said to teach about biological evolution is true, there has been as yet no God to reveal himself. In any case, the reverend

gentleman moves about in a dense fog and can see neither God nor Nature with any degree of intellectual clearness. Towards the end of his sermon he asks us all "to remember how very ignorant we are"; but in his treatment of God he wholly forgets or deliberately ignores that vastly important fact. He speaks as if he knew God infinitely better and more accurately than Jesus, the Apostles, and the historic Church ever did.

What Canon Wilson fails to realize is that the attempt to revise Christianity now being made by a certain section of the clergy, owes its existence to the consciousness that orthodox theology has proved a stupendous failure, and that the masses have completely lost faith in it. What they need, however, is not a revised edition of the Christian religion, but a totally new interpretation of the universe. Supernaturalism has ceased to grip them, and the craving for natural knowledge is awakening within them. They have discovered that religion is not natural to them, but is, rather, a foreign element which was forced upon them before they had reached years of discretion. Canon Wilson repeats the old fable that conscience is the voice of God; but conscience is nothing of the kind, though children of tender years are persistently trained to believe that it is. It is not true, as the Canon asserts, that "religion is the natural atmosphere of the school, not always talked of, but always there." Religion is an artificial atmosphere of the school, owing its presence there to the interference of the Church. The masses of the people are now beginning to find this out, with the result that multitudes of them throw religion overboard and become convinced and avowed Atheists. Such is the trend of the world at present, and those who try to resist it will not succeed. Their attempts to turn it back will have the same effect as waves on steel. Secularism is destined ultimately to become the universally accepted philosophy of human life.

J. T. LLOYD.

## Singers and Science.

Verse is the form most apt to preserve whatever the writer confides to it, and we can, I believe, confide to it, all sentiments, almost all ideas.—*Sully Prudhomme*.

SULLY PRUDHOMME's name does not often meet the eye in these days, but a North Country newspaper report states that a candidate has been granted a Fellowship at Durham University, and the thesis used was on the famous French poet.

Although not widely popular, Prudhomme's significance lies in the fact that he caught a glimpse of the new poetry which Science has revealed, and which is grander than that which it is destroying. People commonly assert that this is a scientific age, and that good poetry is impossible in such an atmosphere. The poets themselves help this delusion by seeking their subjects from the remote past. Instead of drawing inspiration from the world around them they find ancient legends, old stories, and other second-hand subjects. Yet Sully Prudhomme, disdainful of outworn materials, was actually awarded the Nobel prize for the greatest work in pure literature. To those who have become inured to the sham antique school of poetry it must be a shock that the prize for the ideal in literature was awarded to a man who, more than any other modern poet, has embodied in his verse the new material gathered by Science, and has best expressed the scientific spirit which characterizes the age.

Sully Prudhomme's imagination and his modes of thought are scientific. He foreshadows the "Bobby

Burns to sing the song of steam" whom Rudyard Kipling calls for. He is not a poet of the people like Beranger; or a poet of the few like Baudelaire. But he differs from other singers in that he has caught a glimpse of the new poetry which a wider and broader knowledge reveals. For instance, he does not hold to the theory that the vocabulary of three centuries ago is better fitted to express modern thought and feeling than the living language of to-day. Hence a poet who sang of balloons and barometers, of submarine cables and photography, of the wonders of evolution, was a wonder to the critics. According to the usual standard the sword is more poetical than the revolver. Cavalry may be mentioned, but to introduce torpedo-boats into poetry is to attempt too much. That Sully Prudhomme should use astronomy is taken for granted, but that he should sing of biology and chemistry is unpardonable. In English the difference between the literary and popular language is far greater than in French, and there is all the more need for English poets bold enough to bridge the gulf which separates literature from life.

The critics overlook the fact that this is not altogether a new note in literature. Twenty centuries ago, Lucretius made his readers thrill with his magnificent presentation of the atomic theory and other scientific ideas. In *De Rerum Natura* one can see the modern method in its infancy. Modern readers may gain some notion of the general effect of this masterpiece by conceiving Tennyson to have devoted his magnificent genius to versifying Spencer's *Synthetic Philosophy*, or Swinburne to have subordinated his splendid gifts to the poetic presentation of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. But Lucretius had no successors for many generations, and his presentation of the hidden truths of Nature hardly found any poetic expression until the nineteenth century, and then only in an experimental form.

Science, which is simply ordered thought, imposes clarity and sincerity on poetry, and both qualities are prominent in the poems of Sully Prudhomme. Indeed, Brunetiere, a Catholic reactionary, complained that the poet was too much afraid of the Sorbonne and the *Ecole Polytechnique*, and did not care enough for his readers. Brunetiere missed the freedom of phrases when poets sought rather to be musical than truthful, and did not care what they said so long as they said it beautifully. Granting that over-nicety is a blemish, is it not possible that poetry can acquire the exactness demanded by science without losing its charm? Sully Prudhomme proved that it can. Tennyson, too, in our own tongue, has shown the same thing. Passages from *In Memoriam* and *The Two Voices*, as well as from *Le Bonheur* and *La Justice*, express scientific ideas accurately, and show that it is not necessary to be false in order to be poetical.

It was once widely believed that the advance of Science would make poetry impossible. This is not the case. There is as much poetry to be seen through the microscope and the telescope as with the naked eye. Prudhomme had a truer insight into the significance of the effect of science on poetry than Keats, consummate artist that he was. Even Whitman could have shown Keats that there was much lumber in the literary property-room. What beauty and force the metaphors of science may give to literature has been shown abundantly by Huxley, a magnificent writer who has eluded all the critics. Maeterlinck's *Life of the Bee*, and many another work, are examples of what may be achieved by those who can handle the new symbolism. It requires a master-hand to use the crude material excavated by science, because it is lacking in poetical association in the public mind. The average poet really masks his incapacity by using words and thoughts which he knows are poetical,

because poets have used them for thousands of years, and people have applauded them for so doing.

Prudhomme deserves full credit for having attempted to extend the domain of poetry. Maybe he occasionally passes over the boundary of poetry into prose in his use of unconventional expressions. The boundary line depends largely on the reader. Oliver Wendell Holmes succeeded in *The Chambered Nautilus*, and failed in *The Living Temple*, although it would be hard to say why the anatomy of a mollusc should be more susceptible of poetic employ than that of man.

Mind you, Prudhomme was a poet, and not a mere versifier. There is "the sense of tears in mortal things" in his well-turned lines, and sometimes his face flushes as he writes. Not but what he is cheerful compared with so many French writers, who, though often joyful in life, are not often jolly in literature. Prudhomme's sadness never takes the theatrical and rhetorical form of Byron or Baudelaire, but is clear and cold, with the saving grace of meliorism. In the last resort, like old Voltaire, he bids us "cultivate our gardens."

Death is to him, as to Whitman, the liberator as well as the consoler, and on this subject he has written with the force and originality of a master-musician. Here is an example which preserves something of the charm of the great original. It is entitled *The Hour of Death* :—

Kindly watcher by my bed, lift no voice in prayer,  
Waste not any words on me when the hour is nigh;  
Let a stream of melody but flow from some sweet prayer,  
And meekly will I lay my head and fold my hands to die,  
Sick am I of idle words, past all reconciling—  
Words that weary and perplex, and pander and conceal :  
Wake the sounds that cannot lie, for all their sweet  
beguiling,  
The language one need fathom not, but only hear and feel ;  
Let them roll once more to me, and ripple in my hearing,  
Like waves upon some lonely beach, where no craft  
anchoreth,  
That I may steep myself therein, and craving nought,  
nor fearing ;  
Drift on through slumber to a dream, and through a  
dream to death.

MIMNERMUS.

## "The Enigma of Jesus."

### II.

(Concluded from page 374.)

THUS, according to M. Guignebert, the Jews never denied the real existence of Jesus, and he points to the Talmud as part of his proof. On the other hand, Dr. Couchoud makes short work of the references to Jesus in the Talmud. Thus :—

In Jewish writings, in the intricate and incoherent mass of the Rabbinical Scriptures, one might expect to find some definite tradition as to Jesus. Nothing of the sort. Very few are the allusions to Jesus. No one shows any first-hand knowledge of him. The Jesus of the Talmud is nothing more than the distorted Jesus of the Gospels. It is a trivial caricature, clumsily traced over the Gospel outline. The naive sarcasm and credulous inventions (of certain peevish rabbis) dealt mainly with the Virgin Birth, the miracles, and the death sentence.....As the result of the rabbis' incredible incapacity for chronology, this inverted gospel oscillates without any definite date between a hundred years before our era and a hundred years after.....The Jews themselves, no more than the Greeks and Romans, had any knowledge of the historical Jesus. They never gave him his Hebrew name, *Yeshu*, as they would have done for one of themselves. They always called him by his Greek name, *Yeshou*. This shows that they knew him only by Christian books, written in Greek.

Parallel with this closer intimacy are the writings of all good men who by their testament acknowledge first and foremost *Man*; and this universal aristocratic idea naturally transcends that of our own brand, whose trinity is hunting, shooting and fishing. To know all, is to forgive all; and one of our own aristocrats with divine simplicity says: "Life at the greatest and best is but a froward child, that must be humoured and coaxed a little till it falls asleep, and then all the care is over." Let us then see how the conflict between Heaven and Hell is stated by Anatole France, whom, when he wrote *Thaïs*, and had Flaubert at his elbow.

Paphnutius, a holy monk, Thaïs, a courtesan, and Nicias, a man of the world, form the central characters of the story. The story is no doubt familiar to my readers, but each finds in it something different, according to taste. Paphnutius, on his journey to Alexandria, refrains from entering the towns—fearing lest his heart might soften at the sight of men. This is a keen stroke at salvation in sections. His meeting with the hermit, who is mistaken for a pious anchorite, is marked throughout with attic salt. Their argument sums up the distinction between thought and feeling, and the reader is impressed by the invulnerable qualities of the sceptic, who remained unmoved by the emotional monk.

Paphnutius is a symbol of renunciation; Thaïs is a symbol of acceptance. Both start from points far apart—converge, meet and part again—and, on the symbol of a cross, Anatole France has created his dramatic novel. He has projected himself into the age of antiquity, when mankind had reached one slope of development whereon all that was physically beautiful reigned supreme. The "no-sayers" of Christianity, mistaking their own enthusiasm for truth, and with a malign use of exoteric teaching honoured their God—with filthy bodies, and in justice to some of them—with filthy minds. Apollo, an eternal in the world, as eternal as the sun is out of the world, was challenged by all those with a guilty conscience at work after picking up Christianity as a weapon of slave values. These denied the world before accepting it, and running through this story is the figure of Nicias—emphasizing the Greek truth of "nothing too much."

In the second part of this novel, entitled "The Papyrus," there is a description of conversation worthy to rank with Plato's Banquet. Paphnutius accompanies Thaïs to the banquet hall and is received by Lucius Aurelius Cotta, prefect of the fleet. With serenity old Cotta greets him: "Welcome, Paphnutius, you who profess the Christian faith.....Latin wisdom, in fact, ought to admit your Christ into our Pantheon." Nicias embraces the monk, and warns him that Venus is powerful, and if he does not recognize her as the mother of gods, his ruin is certain. After much drinking and talking for and against, and the dramatic suicide of Eucritus, the philosopher, who had said that the true God lives in the wise man's heart, Paphnutius and Thaïs take their leave, and she is persuaded to enter a nunnery. Before she goes, however, the monk orders a bonfire of all her possessions, and the incident of the destruction of the little god Eros is full of meaning. In spite of the womanly entreaties of Thaïs to keep it, even to give it to a monastery, for those who see it will turn their hearts to God, for Love knows by nature how to rise to thoughts of heaven, Paphnutius will have none of it; it is thrown on the fire. Here, we may gently touch on one of the attitudes of Swinburne's artistic odyssey. His generation could not endure a panegyric of Venus in Chastelard, when he sang of her:—

Splendid supple body and mouth on fire,  
And Paphian breath that bites the lips with heat.

If it could not endure this, it could tolerate the degrading industrial conditions of men, women and children

—and that age also agreed that Eros should be thrown on the fire.

The monk, after being rescued by Nicias, takes Thaïs away, leaves her at a nunnery after many speeches in which the playful mockery of the artist breaks out, and he returns to his companions. He then does penance and remains on the top of a pillar in public for many days, but the memory of the beauty of Thaïs gives him no rest, and, on hearing that she is ill and dying, he hastens to see her again. She will not speak to him; she has found that mysterious salvation spoken of earlier by the renouncer, who now returns to make another renunciation.

"Do not die," he cried, in a voice so strange that he did not recognize it himself. "I love you, do not die! Listen, my Thaïs, I have deceived you, and I was but a miserable fool. God, heaven, both are nothing. Nothing is true but life on earth, and carnal love. I love you, do not die." She does not hear him. She murmurs: "Heaven is opening. I see angels, prophets, and saints....." These two figures, through whom Anatole France can make you feel the very struggles taking place in them both, are now poles apart again. Let us return now to the time when Thaïs is confiding in Nicias that she believes in the promises of Paphnutius and believes that he possesses the truth.

"I, beloved friend," Nicias replied, with a smile, "possess the truths." He has only one of them; I have them all. I am richer than he is, and, to tell the truth, neither prouder nor happier."

Here we seem to be getting near to the kernel of the philosophy of our author. One may live a lifetime and fail to define truth. The renunciation of Paphnutius appeared to be the truth *at the time*. So was the courtesan life of Thaïs *at the time*, and so in her final decision she appeared to have the truth. The gathering together of all truths is the work of genius; displaying them *all* is the work of art to be seen by all who are not tied to one truth. At present the intellectual capacity of most people is only for one truth. It may be British Empire, Holy Roman Church, the cult of Gandhi, etc., but the perfection of our *Man* will be brought nearer through the efforts of men like Anatole France, who see this world from another planet.

"Fear to offend Venus; her vengeance is terrible." So Nicias had warned Paphnutius. Thaïs was dead. Paphnutius, in desperate embrace, devoured her with desire, rage, and love. He is driven away. He had become so hideous that, passing his hand across his face, he could feel his ugliness. Thus ends the story of Thaïs. The sycamore and the willow must remain sycamore and willow trees all their lives. The book of life is difficult to read; extremes, like a gale, will shake and bend the strongest trees, but cannot change their nature, and a sacrifice to each God in turn will make for sweet sanity that cannot be found in monasteries or the seats of the mighty. Anatole France points out for us the path of wisdom in *one* truth; for that we give him our praise and thanks.

WILLIAM REPTON.

#### GOD'S ACRE.

Apart from the pathos of calling the resting-place of our dead "God's Acre," how subtly true that age-long title is. How true the gods represent the dead and not the living—the living never have quite the same god the dead believed in. No god is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. The living god lives only in the living mind; the mind of the dead "know not anything." The living god is a subjective conception; to the mouldering dead god was an objective reality, now slowly passing into the oblivion of his creators—perpetuated only as they are by the sculptured tombs in his own acre.—I. W. W.

So much for the value of the Talmud as a witness for Jesus. And as for the second question of M. Guignebert, it would not prove very difficult to demolish that just as easily. He seems too ready to accept the tradition that it was the apostles or their friends who wrote the Gospels, but this, it need hardly be stated, is one of the traditions in question. All we ask for is *proof*, and not mere assertion.

"We, like the Jews," says Dr. Couchoud, "must derive all our knowledge of Jesus from the Christians." The worthy doctor does not think much of the Christians as historians, and says so. I wonder how many of the despised Freethinkers have said so long years before him? But it is worth repeating, even if it is some of our thunder. At all events, we get the timely warning: "The historian must beware of transforming into the evidence of history that which is but the evidence of faith." What a thorough demolition of nearly all Christian history that would cause if rigidly followed by the conscientious historian!

Dr. Couchoud's examination of Mark as the earliest Gospel is particularly illuminating and provocative. He shows the part played in its making by the Greek version of the Old Testament, and undoubtedly throws a flood of light on this aspect of the question—a point of view long ago noted by the Jews, who have always protested that the so-called prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament did more credit to imagination than to truth. It was the Septuagint that gave the Gospel makers the word *virgin*, and though it proved a veritable godsend to Christianity in the past, a good many Christians would only be too pleased to throw over the Virgin Birth nowadays. After a searching examination of Mark and a comparison of it with the other Gospels and with Paul, Dr. Couchoud comes to the conclusion that—

As a historical personage, Jesus is unknown..... It will not do to say with certain critics: we know nothing about him save that he existed. We must say courageously: we know nothing about him, not even that he did exist.

And then he asks: "How came this man, whose very existence is doubtful, to be the Great God of the West?"

Dr. Couchoud waxes very satirical over Renan. Thus:—

The Jesus of Renan, robed in his white burnous, was admirably acquainted with the moral and political questions of the nineteenth century. He had associated with such people as the Saint Simonians, Michelet, Quinet, Pierre Leroux, George Sand, Alfred de Musset. He was quite at home in the Parisian society of 1863. That is why he pleased and displeased many.

In fact, as Albert Mordell pointed out, Renan really painted himself in his *Life of Jesus*.

An examination of the work of Alfred Loisy, as the greatest of French Modernists, proves that he also is as ruthless an iconoclast as any Atheist critic of most of the Gospel stories. He leaves them without a leg to stand upon, but he cannot get over the Crucifixion; so, of course, Jesus must have existed—a Jesus "who is very thin and very meagre, but who is consistent, comprehensible, coherent, and historically possible."

Finally, we come to the evidence of Paul—in the opinion of many critics absolutely conclusive and the strongest evidence we have as to the veritable reality of Jesus. Dr. Couchoud looks upon the Epistles as "the earliest Christian documents." But he claims that: "There is not one word of Paul's which would warrant the supposition that he was acquainted with any historical legend of Jesus." The word "Jesus" was a sort of synonym for the word "Jehovah" (or "Iaveh"), and therefore Paul only "knew Jesus through the Scriptures and through his own ecstatic

visions." The chapter dealing with the views of Paul and of Peter is very interesting, and is certainly novel. The weak point in it, in my opinion, is due to the fact that the Doctor takes for granted that the Epistles are really the work of Paul; whereas there is quite a strong tendency to place them much later than his (supposed) time. It would take too long to go into the question here, but the reader should study the article on Paul in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. As Professor van Manen there says of the Epistles, "they are none of them by Paul; neither fourteen, nor thirteen, nor nine or ten, nor seven or eight, nor even the four, so long 'universally' recognized as unassailable. They are all without distinction, pseudepigrapha."

As Dr. Couchoud's case practically rests upon Paul, if the Epistles are shown not to be genuine, we seem to be as far off the solution of his enigma as ever. It is no use telling us that Christianity actually emerged and really began when Peter first saw Jesus (who is really a mixture of Iaveh, the Messiah of the Prophets, the Servant of the Lord of Isaiah, etc.), as narrated in 1 Cor. xv, 5, unless it is first proven that Corinthians was really written by someone called Paul, somewhere about the year 50 A.D. Dr. Couchoud accepts Peter and Paul, and thus accounts for Jesus and Christianity. He may be right, but I hope in his larger work he will deal very fully with Professor van Manen's position.

For the rest, what the Doctor has to say about Jesus himself (or the idea of Jesus), born first in a vision to Peter and then preached and propagated by Paul from Galilee, is most ingenious, but there seems to me to be a great deal more behind the cult than his explanation. The Astro-Myth theory is not so easily dislodged, nor the Saviour-God idea appertaining to so many other religions. But we want as much of this sort of book as we can get, for the question of the historicity of Jesus is one which Christians do not like to discuss. Roman Catholics, in particular, get rather savage when their attention is drawn to the controversy, and that is all to the good. And for my part I only wish it were possible to spread broadcast another life of Jesus not very well known in England—the famous *Vie de Jésus*, written by that extraordinary character, Léo Taxil. It has one supreme quality that it shares with other lives of Jesus—it is just as true. An actual Jesus never existed.

Mrs. George Whales' translation is excellent, and I heartily recommend the work of Dr. Couchoud to those readers who are interested in this particular aspect of the origins of Christianity.

H. CUTNER.

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## Anatole France.

### A TRIBUTE.

WHITMAN wished for immortality to enable him to read all the good books that had been written. He was one of the few men who touched the fringe of life in terms addressed to the universe. He was also one of the few pan-human voices that echo across seas and continents and with the surety of Shakespeare touch the hearts of mankind irrespective of colour. There are artists with skill, there are artists with knowledge; but there are not many who have the power to sublimate skill and knowledge into wisdom—and wisdom into simplicity. After reading through *Thais* for the second time, we venture to add the name of Anatole France to the pair mentioned above for this quality of synthesizing the speech of the whole human race.

The next thing to discovering that the earth was round should have been that of acknowledging the fact that all human beings must live on it. The sky and the clouds are the roof of this house, and wireless development will bring continents to our garden.

## Acid Drops.

Letters of protest against the Sunday hill climb held by the Bradford Motor Club at Rosedale were considered by the Pickering Rural Council. The letters were from York and Scarborough District Synod of the Primitive Methodist Church, and from the vicar and Nonconformist minister of Kirbymoorside. The Rev. A. C. Birch, vicar of Rosedale, moved that the protests should not be discussed. The Council had no power in the matter, he declared. He had been in communication with the Bradford Club, who had acceded to his wishes, and agreed to hold the climb on Whit-Monday next year. The trouble was, he said, that people went about these protests in the wrong way. The days of persecution were past, and the people would not have it. The protests were read, and after further discussion the Council proceeded with the next business. This intolerable interference by organized religion with the pleasures of other people should cause those who maintain that religion is a spent force, to ponder. Whether on a national scale, as in the case of the Empire Exhibition, or on a local scale, as in the case just referred to, the Churches are ever ready to assert their right to dictate not merely to their own supporters, but also to that vast mass of the population who are in no way connected with organized religion. And, quite plainly, if the religious bigots had the power, they would not stop short at insulting common-sense folk who make Sunday a day of real recreation. They would impose their will in every detail, and encompass us with taboos as they did in the heyday of Presbyterianism in Scotland.

If further proof were needed of the sinister, if often underground influence of the Churches in this country, it could be obtained from a casual glance at almost any newspaper. For example, we see that the Town Council of Bridlington has prohibited swings for children in the Avenue Park Old Town on Sundays. Behind all this agitation against Sunday amusement—agitation that would be petty and contemptible were it not for the dangerous possibilities which it contains—is the influence of the Sabbatarians. Sometimes their bigotry is concealed behind specious arguments against the use of Sunday labour; but in the ultimate analysis it is always found that the real objection is a purely superstitious one. Indeed, even a Christian priest would scarcely be fool enough seriously to argue that the Sabbath should be strictly kept, and no labour allowed. In a highly complex civilization such as ours, labour must necessarily be employed every day, and every hour of the week.

The most bigoted Christian never suggests that there should be no police on duty on Sunday; that the transport system should cease to operate on that day; that there should be no bread baked on Sunday night; and no Monday morning newspapers, because of the labour entailed. Civilization is too complex for us to act upon the rule which was practicable in the case of a barbarous people such as the ancient Hebrews. And yet, if it is sinful for men, women and children to engage in such a mild form of exertion as playing tennis or swinging on the Sabbath, it is surely vastly more wicked for men to labour driving our underground trains, or attending to our blast furnaces. Examined logically the objection of the Churches to Sunday recreation and labour is seen to be as absurd as most of their other peculiar fetishes.

Mrs. Ethel Bliss, of Egham, won the first prize of £10,000 in Duggan's Derby sweep. The lady states that she made her winning effort with the aid of a prayer-book. This may be the beginning of a religious revival that will shake the world—during the flat racing season.

*Augustus Carp, Esq.*, by Himself, appears to be a good advertisement for joining the Church as a career. The anonymous author evidently knows what is known by

all intelligent people outside the ring of organized humbug. Here is a sample of his gentle satire:—

It was on strictly moral grounds that Augustus obtained his first employment. He overheard a married woman make love to a married man in Greenwich Park—and his redoubtable father did not call it blackmail, but strict justice, when he persuaded the lady, as the price of silence, to obtain a post for dear Augustus in her husband's religious publishing business.

On the authority of *John O'London's Weekly*, Dean Inge is always happy when face to face with the eternal snows of the Alps. The human nature that the Dean reviles must be satisfied with London mud on his clothes, and a view from a window of eternal chimney-pots. Following Christ at a distance is profitable; and a crown of thorns is no more uncomfortable than a bishop's hat.

The Joanna Southcott Movement has received from the Archbishop of Canterbury a letter, in which he says:—

I must repeat, what I have at least twenty times reasserted to yourself and others, my strong view that the box you possess, or somebody possesses, ought to be opened in order to get this controversy ended. But I have refused, and continue to refuse, to summon twenty-four bishops to sit round and watch the procedure of opening the box.

Joanna Southcott was a religious fanatic, born in Devonshire in 1750. Originally a domestic servant, she became a Methodist, and, pretending supernatural gifts, dictated prophecies in rhyme; proclaimed herself to be the woman mentioned in the Apocalypse (ch. xii); and, although 64 years old, affirmed that she was to be delivered of "Shiloh," October 19, 1814. She died of dropsy ten days later. At one time her sect numbered 100,000. As late as last summer, at least, they held meetings in Hyde Park. There is nothing more absurd in this cult than there is in Christianity. But the Archbishop is too wary to allow the Church to be intimately associated with the opening of the famous box which Joanna left, with certain instructions as to its ultimate disposal. The cult is not old enough to be so venerable as to be above popular criticism and ridicule. Those people who accept the Virgin birth, and the miracles of the New Testament without a moment's doubt, quite rightly pour scorn upon the absurd claim made by the Southcottians. The Church would lose prestige, therefore, if it became associated with them. In another couple of hundred years time, if organized religion still exists, we may find Joanna included in the Christian hagiology.

Sir Robert Kennedy opposed the bands and said that if they permitted bands on Sunday they would "strike at the very roots of the home life they so much desired to perpetuate." But Alderman Duff pointed out that in Belfast they had twelve and fourteen people living in one room. Probably Sir Robert Kennedy thought that if anything was done to lure these people into the parks it might make them forget the sociability and the religious atmosphere of their happy homes. Sir Robert also said that when in Spain he had had experience of cock-fighting, open cafés, and bull-fighting on Sundays. The placing on the same level of open cafés and bull-fighting was delicious. But what was Sir Robert doing in seeing these things on Sunday? We gather that it was not so much the cock-fighting and the bull-fighting that Sir Robert objected to, but because it was performed on a Sunday. Which reminds one of Macaulay's comment that the Puritans objected to bull fights not because it hurt the bull, but because it pleased the people. That is the Puritan all over.

If a thought is great because a great number think it, then a pronouncement by Queen Marie of Roumania must be included in the world's catalogue of great thoughts. Her Majesty stated that what she liked about London was that one could have models slightly altered to suit one's own taste or style. We will put that side by side with any anti-human bilge imagined by Dean Inge in the sure and certain hope that Eve is our mother more than the reverend gentleman's god is our father.

Lord Hugh Cecil's God is not the same being as Mr. Lloyd George's God. God did not make the land for the people, says the noble lord. Presumably he is in the know, and the possession of a good share of it by the Cecil type is a proof that God brought into the subject means which common sense left out of it.

What is described as current "Posh Posh," is a book entitled *Lighted Windows*, by Frank Crane, D.D. The author tells us that a woman stares at him in the street, and, he muses, "possibly she was a woman with an evil heart, but the charity of my sadness disinfected her signal, and it fell pure as a star upon my spirit." One would be led to believe from this that Degrees of Divinity were given away with a quarter of a pound of tea.

One of those mysterious coincidences at a time when the papers have vamped up horse-racing, is the publication of a book, *Gambling and Religion*, by James Black. This gentleman urges that more attention ought to be given from the pulpit to betting. When the stick of the rocket of revealed religion comes down to earth, it wants to interfere with a shilling each way; when a man wants to know the winner, he buys a paper—a wooden jacket has to be bought to test the "tip" of all those busybodies like Mr. James Black.

*The Mystery of Preaching*, by James Black, is a metaphor indicating the author's mind. There is as much mystery in preaching as there is in the selling of collar-studs; both callings are followed for the sake of getting a living.

In discussing the Immigration Bill in which America wishes to exclude the Japanese altogether, the *Daily News* leader-writer twitters a new note in the newspaper world. Whether the world can live in national compartments is a problem now on its trial. Nurse Cavell said that patriotism was not enough. Telegraphy, transport, and speed have created a unity; the world may be viewed as an allotment. The writer mentioned above states that a time must come when the nations of the earth will have to face reality and make their choice. We might add that the time has come, and whether the writer means it or not, he is to be congratulated for transposing Thomas Paine's famous words "The world is my country." For the curious, according to "N.W.H." in the *Times Literary Supplement*, it may seem a coincidence that Paine's body, after being brought to England by Cobbett, was dispersed in parts—a little finger, the skull, the right hand and other bones, some hair and part of the brain. The brain, however, was recovered by Moneure Conway for £5, taken to America, and buried. We suggest that America remembers this during its consideration of the Immigration Bill, for most of our wild beast and block-head statesmen of Europe are past praying for.

The Belfast City Council decided by 24 votes to 19 not to have Sunday bands in the park. We are not surprised. In matters of religion a great deal of Belfast is away back in the dark ages—and is proud of it. We notice the vote here, not because we are surprised at the 24 who voted against the band, but on account of the 19 who voted for it. We are left wondering how on earth they got into office in such a place. That they have done so, shows that even in the religion of Belfast there is movement in the direction of enlightenment.

The Rev. C. S. Newham, vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Prestolee, Bolton, committed suicide by inhaling gas. Apparently, religious faith proved valueless in this sad case.

A Congregational minister bears the name of "Pickles," and a Wesleyan pastor rejoices in the name of "Onions." What is the Christian religion coming to?

At a London music-hall a performer is said to "create two women out of nothing." This is something like a miracle. Omnipotence had to rely on Adam's rib in order to make one lady.

During the hearing of a summons for assault in the Doncaster West Riding Police Court, the presiding magistrate remarked that it would be better perhaps if the parties read the Bible a bit. A somewhat ambiguous piece of advice. Those who are addicted to violence might be still further excited by a reading of the numerous warlike expeditions recorded in the Old Testament. And, of course, some of the episodes in the lives of the patriarchs might seem to provide justification for drunkenness and other more deadly sins.

"Belonging to the Labour Party gives one a good idea of what it must have been like to be an early Christian," says the *Daily Herald*. As leading Labourites attend Court functions, wear fancy dress, and draw good salaries, the *Herald* writer is somewhat confused concerning his ideas of Christian martyrdom.

## Correspondence.

### A LIVERPOOL LARRIKIN.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The Rev. J. J. R. Armitage, Christ Church, Everton, is a very successful advertiser, giving titles of lectures such as "God's Lies, by Bradlaugh," "Is Man a Fallen Angel or a Risen Ape," and such-like "scare-heads," in the manner approved by all showman from Barnum to Bottomley.

Recently he treated Liverpool to a brilliant effort: "A Challenge to Liverpool Atheists," an address apparently at a meeting for men only. Presumably the reverend gentleman does not entertain the idea of a woman being an Atheist.

A number of acquaintances, mostly Christians, drew my attention to this bill, and seemed to think that it was a *bona fide* challenge. I, of course, knew better. There is, in my opinion, no sane, benefited clergyman in England who will face a Freethinker on a neutral platform. At least, I have never heard of one.

I knew that the bill was intended to give a false impression, but that the bold challenger of Atheists might be given a chance to fight, I wrote accepting the challenge, and congratulating Mr. Armitage on his efforts to relieve the monotony of the picture house and theatre bills on the hoardings.

Apparently I should not have done so, for by return of post and on a very cheap type of postcard I received the following lofty communication:—

June 7, 1924.—The Rev. J. J. R. Armitage has received your letter of the 6th. Based upon his experience of Rationalists in all parts of the country, he would ask why is it that whenever men of their mentality write letters as a general rule they make assumptions which are untrue, and they have to descend to banalities and cynicism which are not the characteristics of gentlemen? Never mind anyone else, what think ye of *The Christ*?

This ignominious retreat may open the eyes of the few Christians who expected the reverend gentleman to have the courage of his "scarehead," and I hope you will publish this, to show the Freethinkers of Liverpool and district the calibre of the gentleman whose characteristics are evidently of the type of the little boy who pulls a door-bell and then runs off. JAS. W. K. IFFER.

### CRUELTY AT WEMBLEY.

SIR,—H.R.H. the Prince of Wales is a patron of the R.S.P.C.A. The Heir Apparent is also a patron of the British Empire Exhibition, Wembley, where the Rodeo cruelty—a horse's right front leg broken just for the fun of the thing—was on the "menu" last Saturday.

QUANTUM SUFF.



### 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.

OWING to the demands on our space for the report of the proceedings of the Preston Conference, we are obliged to hold over several letters till next week. But they will not suffer from the brief delay; and the writers will appreciate the situation.

D. MACCONNELL.—Thanks for letter. The information is useful, and we like to exercise all possible caution in such matters. Pleased you liked Mr. Cutner's article so much. He is generally very clear on what he writes. His chief fault is that he writes so seldom. If others we know had the same complaint we should be better pleased, and the public would be less bored.

J. ALMOND.—The addresses were asked for for a special purpose other than the one you name. It was part of a plan to see what could be done to increase sales.

E. E. STAFFORD.—Received, and hope to publish in two or three weeks.

*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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*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. 6d.*

### Sugar Plums.

Mr. Cohen's remark at the evening meeting of the Conference that in Preston, as in other places, candidates for public honours were often afraid to avow their free-thinking opinions for fear of the consequences, set a "Special Commissioner" of the *Manchester Evening Chronicle* investigating whether Preston was more bigoted than other towns. The Special Commissioner is not, however, well informed as to the procedure of the N.S.S. Conference, as he says:—

The remarks were evidently inspired by the fact that the centre in which the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society is held has the privilege of appointing the chairman of one of the meetings. Preston was the venue this year, and the local members of the Society fought very shy of the honour of presiding; at least two of the leaders declining it.

The purpose of the comment is obvious. But it is quite false. The standing rule of the Society, which is never departed from, is for the President to take the chair at all Conference meetings. Local men were never asked, and so could not refuse.

The Commissioner interviewed "prominent Roman Catholics, and High and Low Churchmen, and they [of course] denied that religious intolerance is worse in the proud town than in others." That is not quite a disproof of what Mr. Cohen said. It only condemns other towns

with Preston. Still, it is admitted that Roman Catholics have been barred from the Mayoralty, because they could not make a State visit to the Parish Church, and a Baptist had to decline the honour for the same reason. And "since the trouble over the Roman Catholics carrying the Madonna in a Whitsuntide procession," there has been no outbreak of religious bigotry. That, also, is not a very convincing disproof of what was said. A Labour member of the Council, Alderman Dunlevy, said that candidates were given fair treatment "so long as they did not flaunt personal views on religion in public." We fancy everyone will know what that means. It means that any candidate may jabber nonsense about Jesus as long as he likes, but if he expresses views against Christianity he may as well retire from the contest. We should like to ask Mr. Dunlevy whether in his own body the fact of a man being a known and outspoken Freethinker would not be regarded as something that would prevent his being successful in an election contest? We do not think he will answer in the negative. Finally, one unnamed gentleman pointed out that the best answer is that the President's speech was allowed to be made without interference. Not so, good sir. It only means that Christians cannot do as they once did. Such meetings are held in spite of Christians, not because they favour the other side being heard.

What the Special Commissioner's report impresses us with is the deeply imbedded habit of the Christian public of this country of pretending that a lie is a truth, even when all know it is a lie. Everyone all over the country knows that every political body in the country regards it as a handicap to a candidate if he is known to be a Freethinker. In quite a number of elections the fact is raised during a candidature and worked for all it is worth. This is within the knowledge of all connected with public work. And the net result of this is that all who value their mental integrity above all else are often shut out of public life, while the hypocrite and the coward and the place-seeker is welcomed. It leads to a lower tone of public life than might otherwise obtain. Mr. Cohen's remarks evidently stung. They were meant to do so. And as he does not care the value of a tin-tack for public, parliamentary, or municipal honours, he can afford to say what others are afraid to admit. If his words do something towards making Christians ashamed of their intolerance, they will have served a good purpose. And if they make it easier for men to take part in public life without concealing their opinions on religion, he will have done something of no small value in raising the general tone of public life and administration.

We learn with regret that Mr. M. Q. Holyoake, the only surviving son of George Jacob Holyoake, is bedridden and in distressed circumstances. Mr. Holyoake is seventy-nine years of age, and a fund is being raised to relieve him of further financial anxiety and thus brighten his closing years. Those of our readers who would feel inclined to contribute to this fund should forward their contributions to Mr. C. A. Watts, 50 Cecile Park, Crouch End, London, N.8, who is acting as treasurer.

The report of the recent deputation to the Home Secretary has now been issued by the Society for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws as a penny pamphlet. It contains the speeches of Mr. Cohen, Dr. Walsh, and Mr. Hocking, with Mr. Henderson's reply. Those interested in the matter will thus have the arguments for repeal of these relics of mediæval intolerance presented by Freethinker and Christian. It contains a summary of the arguments against the law; and should prove very useful for propagandist purposes. The pamphlet is on sale by the Pioneer Press; and we hope to see the edition rapidly exhausted. Our readers should make good use of it in educating the general public on the subject.

On Sunday (22nd), Manchester ramblers take a char-à-banc ride to Chester. The char-à-banc leaves the corner of King Street, Stretford, at 9.45 a.m., and goes direct to Delamere for the Pine Forest. Mr. A. C. Rosetti

has organized the affair and made arrangements for lunch and tea, also a river trip on the River Dee to Eccleston Ferry. Return to Manchester about 9 p.m. Total charge 12s. 6d. There are a couple of seats vacant, and those who want them should write or wire to Mr. A. C. Rosetti, 39 The Crescent, Flixton.

## The N.S.S. Annual Conference.

### Evening Public Meeting.

THE public meeting following the National Secular Society's Annual Conference on Whit-Sunday at Preston, held in the capacious Star Theatre, may be pronounced an unqualified success. At 7 p.m. precisely the President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, followed by Messrs. J. T. Lloyd, A. B. Moss, E. Clifford Williams, R. H. Rosetti, F. P. Corrigan and G. Whitehead, mounted the platform of the rapidly filling hall, and as soon as the preliminary ovations had subsided, the audience, composed of an almost equal number of both sexes, settled down to follow with rapt attention the remarkably excellent speeches, of which we give a brief résumé.

MR. CHAPMAN COHEN, on rising to introduce the speakers, said: Before introducing the various speakers to you, I may explain what the National Secular Society is and what are its aims and objects. The National Secular Society was founded over half a century ago by that great Freethinker and great social reformer Charles Bradlaugh. No man bit more deeply into his time than did Bradlaugh, no man ever fought for more unpopular causes against greater odds, and no man ever gained, in many ways, more signal victories. A hundred years is a long time for an individual to look back on, but in the history of a nation it is but little, and in the life of the race still less. A hundred years ago the Christian religion dominated the religious and political life of this country. It not only tyrannized over unbelievers, but it oppressed all Christians who did not believe in the form of Christianity established by law. Dissenters were refused many of the rights of citizenship; Roman Catholics and Jews were not permitted to sit in Parliament; there were injustices in the name of religion in relation to marriages and funerals; and men and women were imprisoned for having the temerity to express opinions about the Bible that are now openly expressed by many preachers in Christian pulpits. I suppose that no body of men ever undertook what was, on the face of it, a more hopeless fight than did the Freethinkers of a century ago. Year after year the fight went on—Robert Owen, Hetherington, Carlile, Watson, Holyoake, Bradlaugh, and others fought superstition at every step. They were a small body of men fighting the entrenched forces of fashion, wealth and position. And yet step after step was gained: dogmas were robbed of their terror, the Church lost much of its power, and the healthier tone in matters of religion that now obtains is largely due to the work that Freethinkers have carried on during the past two or three generations.

If I had to sum up in a few words the aims of the N.S.S., I should say they are: freedom on matters of opinion, rationalism in social life, and naturalism in matters of morals. I have been told that there are in Preston very many people who sympathize with our views, but it would not do for them to say so. Religion is very strong here, and men in business, or those with ambitions towards public life, dare not avow themselves to be Freethinkers. Well, all I have to say of that is this: so long as you allow a man to suffer for the honest expression of an opinion, so long will you be doing your best to lower the social and political integrity of the country. You are making it a crime to be honest, a punishable offence to be straightforward, and in these circumstances you cannot wonder if instead of getting the most honest men into the public service you are getting the more cowardly and the more dishonest. We need not say that we are right in our opinions, but there is only one way of getting at the truth of any matter, and that is by encouraging the free competition of opposing ideas and opinions.

Very many people are troubled as to whether God

exists or not. In my opinion it does not matter. If there is a God it is evident that he does not interfere with us, so long as we refrain from bothering about him. Also, if there is a life beyond the grave, we shall get it, whether we believe in it or not. It is the height of folly to worry about it. We cannot avoid it, so why worry whether we shall get what we cannot by any possibility avoid. There may be mansions in the sky. The clergy assure us of their existence. But it is not mansions in the sky that trouble us, but the housing question on earth. Still, in order to pay for these mansions in the sky we are called upon to spend something like thirty millions annually, and when that demand note is presented I am bound to say that I do not believe in paying rent in advance. We should commence payment from the time we take up residence. Anyway, the problem you have to face is not whether there are mansions in the sky, but whether there are enough houses here; not whether there is a God, but whether you realize that whatever be our opinions on religion we are all fed with the same foods and killed by the same poisons, and that our only chance of coming out successfully and happily in the battle of life is to understand the world in which we are living, and to work for the common betterment of all.

I know there are some—young men in a hurry mostly—who are of opinion that we can kill religion without fighting it. They say let us improve the material conditions, give us another pound or so a week in wages, and the religious question will settle itself. That is folly. The greatest instrument in social life is opinion. The Churches know this, the governments of the world know this, and therefore their first aim is the control of opinion, through the school, the press and the platform. They see to it that whatever we are short of it is not religion. There may be a housing shortage, but not a shortage of churches and chapels. We may often not have enough school teachers, but there is always enough parsons. Good books may be dear, but Bibles are always kept cheap. There is a purpose in all this. They know that the best method of getting the earth from you is to keep your eyes fixed on heaven. They realize that the prevailing complaint of the people is not hardness of heart, but softness of head. The clergy tell you that you are sheep. "Ye are my sheep." And it is largely true. The people are bred like sheep, they are reared like sheep, and when the time comes they are sheared like sheep. For what other purpose are sheep here?

We are meeting to-day in what is supposed to be one of the strongest centres of Roman Catholicism in this country. I don't know whether Preston would be better off if it were a centre of Presbyterianism or Methodism—it would probably be only a different form of the same complaint—but the fact remains that the Roman Church is the only one that we need seriously concern ourselves with. It is a Church that has been thoroughly consistent in its opposition to advanced thought, in its pride in possessing what it should be ashamed to own, in being ashamed of having what it should be proud to possess, and in preaching a set of doctrines which any civilized body should be ashamed to profess. It is a fact that the Christian Church, in the words of Kingdon Clifford, killed two civilizations and came very near killing a third. And wherever it has gone—North, South, East or West—it has carried on its work of obstruction, of persecution and retrogression. There is not a country in the world to-day in which one cannot trace the influence of religion in complicating social and political problems, and in dividing people who might otherwise be working together for the common good. That, ladies and gentlemen, is some of the things which we desire you to consider. We believe that man can become the master of his own fate, and that human life can be made better as we acquire knowledge and apply it with wisdom, above all, as man learns to trust and love his fellow man and to leave the Gods alone.

J. T. LLOYD, who was greeted with hearty applause, said: The President's jocular reference to my "wicked past" as a Christian minister and to my endeavour for upwards of twenty years to redeem it on the Secularist platform, gives me an opportunity to explain why I made the exchange. It goes without saying that I could not have made it except as the result of abandoning the

Christian religion. But if there are Christians present they will naturally wish to know why I exchanged the Christian Gospel for Secularism. I will mention two of many reasons that led to the change in my life. The first was my discovery of the fact that the makers of Christianity, realizing that the older religions were dying out because of their failure to redeem their pledges in this world, transferred the redemption of pledges from this world to another. One of the cleverest religious moves in history! Christianity issued cheques not to be cashed till after death, and supplied innumerable promissory notes, or notes of hand, redeemable not in time, but in eternity. For many centuries this clever trick gave entire satisfaction to countless millions of ignorant and superstitious people; its marvellous success was due (and this brings me to my second reason for rejecting Christianity) to the dense ignorance of the masses of the people. The promise of endless bliss in heaven, after the very hell of a life on earth, appealed only to exceedingly credulous individuals. This is the reason why the Church throughout the ages has been the sworn enemy of secular knowledge. In the days of its power it resented and punished with the utmost severity every appeal to reason. It is a most impressive fact that the Ages of Faith were Dark Ages. Happily they are at last passing, and I am confident that the world's trend is towards sanity and the sure reign of Reason. There may be periods of reaction; but it remains true that, like the tide, this trend of the world is absolutely irresistible. You may do your utmost to stop it, you may build high and solid walls to keep it back, but sooner or later all barriers will be swept away, and all opposition beaten down. It is destined to drive everything before it and march on to final victory.

The veteran A. B. MOSS, also warmly received, said that he was a Freethinker because it was not only his right to think, but because it was his duty; and he claimed to give expression to his thought without any intimidation from without. With regard to religion, he found that all religions were but the expression of the early guesses of our primitive ancestors respecting the phenomena of the universe; and the priests and parsons were in favour of instilling these primitive ideas in the minds of children in all the schools in our country. Thus, our religion in this country was based upon bad science, wrong history, and bad morality. Fortunately, all the forces of our civilization were against Christianity. The education of the rising generation in other respects was certainly opposed to fundamental teachings of Christianity—especially when it was based upon the latest deductions of modern science. As Freethinkers, we were in favour of devoting all our attention to the affairs of this world; and making this world worth living in. He had no desire to live for ever in another life, but he did desire to do his best to convert this world into the long-dreamt-of paradise.

Mr. G. WHITEHEAD, whose reception indicated that he had made many friends during his outdoor mission work, said that in spite of the Churches' record in the past, they were now attempting an alliance with the Labour movements everywhere, and even our Cabinet ministers were talking as if their aims were identical with those of Jesus, and went so far as to say that if the Sermon on the Mount were applied to daily life all our problems would cease and the millenium would be here. He outlined the objects of any trade union and amusingly portrayed what would happen if a member of a trade union at one of their meetings, where the question of a reduction in wages was being discussed, suddenly decided that we ought to apply the teaching of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are the meek," etc. "If a man go to law with thee and take thy coat, give him thy cloak also." "Give to him that asks," etc. On this, the working man, when it was proposed to take £1 off his wages, would offer the masters £2, which illustrated the absurdity of saying that what was needed was a religious revival or "real" Christianity in the shape of the Sermon on the Mount teachings.

MR. CLIFFORD WILLIAMS, who spoke with his usual eloquence, said: One may say there are various stages in the history of religion. Primitive man was a polytheist. He believed in many gods. There was a god

malevolent or benevolent behind all he saw, and he judged them as they affected his well-being. As knowledge and experience, science and reason, grew there was a corresponding change in his religious beliefs, the number of gods diminished, their character altered, until we get to the triune God of the Christian Church, which is still believed in by millions. Even this God is undergoing a transformation. As our knowledge grows, so our trust and belief in God weakens. We are beginning to realize that man has always made his Gods, and he has fashioned them in the likeness of himself from generation to generation. But these beliefs about God have been through the ages a great force. They have influenced the lives of millions of believers, but not always—or even usually—for good. Believers have always been the most intolerant, and the most warlike. In Europe, from 1914 till 1918, there were some thirty millions of professed Christians facing each other in warfare, egged on and blessed by thousands of men who were dressed in the livery of professional Christianity. And their gods stood silently by while the slaughter went on. Christians have prided themselves that down the centuries their religion has been that of the Bible. But it has also been the religion of the bayonet and the bullet. The utilizing of the Christian religion during recent years to inflame men's warlike passions is only a natural following on of the influence which inspired the crusades and the Inquisition. One may sum up a large part of the history of Christianity in the words of Ingersoll, Christians "were meek and malicious, they were pious and pitiless, they were religious and revengeful, devout and devilish, Christ-like and cruel." Christianity has helped to write a large part of human history in letters of blood. It is the humanity of man that has raised him above the level of his gods.

Mr. F. P. CORRIGAN, our most recent addition to the platform, said references had been made to the special difficulties facing local Secularists through the presence in Preston of a large number of Roman Catholics. As an ex-Roman Catholic, he could assure them that the problem was greatly exaggerated. If the beliefs of Roman Catholics were examined they would be found to be as stupid, if not more stupid, than the beliefs of any other Christian sect. Proceeding, he referred to the resolution passed by the House of Commons which pledges the State to build schools for Roman Catholics where they may desire them, with teachers and inspectors appointed by Roman Catholics. He showed the danger of this procedure by recounting some of his own experiences whilst a school-boy. The laughter which repeatedly arose from his remarks undoubtedly went a long way towards proving that Roman Catholicism only needs to be understood and its destruction will rapidly follow.

MR. R. H. ROSETTI, in the course of a thoughtful speech, said: Many reformers have, under the influence of Christianity, devoted much time and attention to what they considered the darker side of human nature. It is, perhaps, more helpful to fix attention on the brighter side of life, but we have always had plenty of warnings about and denunciations of the evil qualities of man. They have dwelt upon the power of the environment in developing evil qualities and in crushing good ones. They suggest many remedies—many of them quack ones—for this state of things, but few have stopped to reflect upon the influence of the Christian religion in developing the evils they deplore. All the moral teaching which we may bring to bear upon the child is robbed of most of its good consequences by the influence of Christian teaching. The Christian doctrines of exclusive salvation, the principle of rewards and punishments in an imagined after life, and the sectarian feelings developed, offer a fruitful seed-plot for a great many of the national jealousies, the wars, the cruelties and the hatreds which have brought Europe to the pass it is in. It is in a Christian country, and after a war that cost the world millions of lives, that we had the walls plastered with posters advising young men to see the world for nothing by travelling with a machine-gun corps. Such a state of things would be impossible but for the fact that the minds of the young have been poisoned and deformed with Christian teaching. You cannot sow without reaping; and for the misdirection of the mind of the young by the influence of thousands of churches all over Europe we are paying to-day in the misery that exists. Those who really value the progress

of the world will, if they act wisely, do what they can to save the young from the distorting influence of Christian teaching, and will remember that it is Christianity we have largely to thank for the misery and the degradation that surrounds us to-day.

In closing the meeting the President, in a brief speech that was received with much laughter and applause, said that some of the speeches they had just listened to made him wonder why Christians would persist in slandering themselves, or at least why they permitted their parsons to do so. Believers are often told that if they relinquish Christianity morality would suffer. Such a statement cannot be meant to apply to Freethinkers, because it is not seriously questioned to-day that they are at least not worse men and women than are believers. It must be meant to apply to their own congregations. They say in effect: "It is all very well for you Freethinkers, you can do without God very well, but what about my lot? How will they behave if once they do not believe there is a God watching them?" Now I do not believe that Freethinkers are made of such superior stuff as this statement would lead one to believe. I believe that if a Freethinker can behave himself without a God to watch him, a Christian can do the same if he will only try. It does not follow that if any of you cease to believe in Jesus Christ that you will at once go home and murder your wife and ill-treat your children. Morality has nothing to do with the belief in God. One has only to watch the way in which a dog will fight for what he has, or the way in which a bitch will fight to defend her pups, or the way in which the animal parent will forage for food for its young to find there the beginnings of the highest and most complex expression of morality in human beings. Human morality is dependent upon the relations that exist between human beings, and can well take care of itself without a God.

There is only one thing in which I may venture to differ from my friend Mr. Lloyd. He said the world had never had a God that had not done harm. I have heard of one. Some years ago there was discovered among some old Roman ruins an altar "to the God who takes no heed." And I think that is the only God in the history of the race who cannot be charged with working harm. It is when God interferes with things that trouble commences. But a God who leaves man alone is harmless, and man is all the better for the neglect.

We have also heard to-night something about dying, and the right way to meet death. In my opinion the less you trouble about that the better. It should not be a Freethinker's trouble how he will die. It may be a Christian's trouble, because he may believe that he will spend eternity in either bliss or blisters. But I submit that it matters very little how you die, and in any case that is quite a personal affair. But it does matter how you live, and that is everybody's concern. Often we are told that many Freethinkers repent at the end and die Christians. Well, it has always seemed to me that if a man is to turn Christian his death-bed is the fittest place for him to do so. When the body is worn with disease and the brain is losing its strength, there is some excuse for a man turning Christian. And I would not mind the whole world dying Christian if men and women would only live Freethinkers. It is better to die silly and live sensibly, than it is to live silly and die sensibly. It is the life a man lives that matters, and if we wish to make the most of life for ourselves and for others we must cease troubling about God, we must cease thinking the thoughts of the savage camouflaged in a civilized phraseology. Let us bear in mind the old Eastern saying: "All I had I spent; all I saved I lost; all I gave I have." Give yourselves freely, fully to the work of making the world around you brighter and happier, and you will realize that in trying to make the world better for your having lived in it you will gain daily a contentment and a happiness of which nothing can rob you.

The meeting then closed, having lasted for nearly two and a-half hours. The applause at the close of the President's speech was a fine testimony to the interest awakened by the various speeches. It was not a tired, but a refreshed audience, that left the meeting place; and Freethought should have received a good impetus in pious Preston.

## N.S.S. Annual Conference.

HELD IN THE STAR CINEMA THEATRE, CORPORATION STREET, PRESTON.

Whit-Sunday, June 8, 1924.

### Morning Session.

THE following branch delegates were present: James Neate (Bethnal Green), E. Clifford Williams and Mrs. C. A. Clifford Williams (Birmingham), W. Addison and W. H. Sisson (Bolton), Miss M. Mostaert (Finsbury Park), Harold I. Bayford, F. Edwin Monks, and S. Cohen (Manchester), W. A. Holroyd (Nelson), Miss K. B. Kough (Newcastle-on-Tyne), S. Samuels (North London), H. Barber, and Alfred Potts (Preston), Robert A. Crank (Stockport), J. T. Lloyd (Swansea), F. P. Corrigan (South London), A. B. Moss (South Shields), R. H. Rosetti and T. J. Thurlow (West Ham).

Amongst the visitors were noticed: Miss Elizabeth Williams, H. B. Bradshaw, Robt. Jas. Thompson, Frank Terry, Mrs. Minnie Terry and Miss Freda Terry, Mrs. Croydon, Miss Emma Collis, John Flintoff, Mrs. L. Greenall, S. Hampson, J. G. Dobson, Arthur Rogerson, H. Black, Mrs. C. Neate, G. Whitehead, J. Allen, and Mrs. Potts.

The Minutes of the last Conference were confirmed.

The Executive's Annual Report was read by the President, and unanimously adopted.

On the presentation of the Financial Report a delegate thought the amount actually standing to the credit of the Benevolent Fund required some explanation. It was explained that although the finances of the Society were in a healthier state than had been the case for some time, the Benevolent Fund was in low water. The President agreed that although the figures were correct the Auditors should be asked to furnish some more detailed information, which should be sent round to branches. The report was then adopted on the motion of Mr. Black (Manchester), seconded by Mr. Monks (Manchester).

The next business being the election of the President, the chair was vacated by Mr. Cohen and temporarily occupied by Miss Vance, who said there was, and could only be, one nomination, Mr. Cohen, and called upon the delegate of the West Ham Branch to move the resolution. Mr. R. H. Rosetti, speaking for his own and for the Bethnal Green Branch, testified to the ever-increasing admiration and respect inspired by Mr. Cohen in his official capacity, and moved: "that Mr. Cohen be re-elected." Mr. Samuels, on behalf of North London, heartily supported the motion. Mr. Monks voiced the appreciation of the Manchester Branch; and the veteran, Mr. Thurlow, having added his quota, Miss Vance declared Mr. Cohen unanimously elected as President for 1924, and handed him the one insignia of office, the chairman's historic hammer. Mr. Cohen, resuming his seat, thanked the delegates for their confidence in him and said he would continue to do, as he always had done, his best for the Cause.

On behalf of the Executive, the President moved the re-election of Miss Vance, who had held the office for so many years and had proved a good official. Mr. Thurlow, representing West Ham, and Mr. Samuels (North London) supported the nomination on behalf of their branches, and Miss Vance was re-elected unanimously.

Miss Vance, thanking her colleagues, remarked that while her enthusiasm for the cause was unabated and her mental capacity, she hoped, unimpaired, increasing physical infirmities warned her that her official career was drawing to a close, and without the entirely voluntary assistance of Miss Kough it would be impossible to retain it. On the initiative of the President, a vote of thanks was passed to Miss Kough for the help thus given to the Cause, and suitably acknowledged.

Mr. Rosetti moved and Mr. Neate seconded "that Mr. C. G. Quinton be re-elected Treasurer"; carried unanimously. Messrs. H. Theobald & Co. were also re-elected as Auditors. The nominees for the Executive were then elected as set forth on the Agenda.

Motion No. 9, by Birmingham Branch:—

That in order to ensure full representation at the Annual Conference, the expenses of delegates be paid by the parent Society.

Moved by Mr. Clifford Williams on behalf of his branch, seconded by Mr. Crank (Stockport).

Mr. Potts (Preston) moved, as an amendment, to delete all words after "Annual Conference," and substitute the words "the railway fares of delegates be pooled." Seconded by Miss Mostaert (Finsbury Park) as being a more democratic measure. After discussion, in which Messrs. Rosetti, Sissons (Bolton), Williams, Crank, and Miss Kough (Newcastle) took part, both amendment and resolution were lost.

It was here agreed that Motion No. 10—

That in view of the history of the Christian Church and its relation to social progress, this Conference deplores the manner in which political leaders coquette with the various Churches, and insists that any party advantage so gained must be at the expense of the more permanent interests of the people; it is also of opinion that a check would be given to this practice if Freethinkers connected with political movements were to give freer expression to their own convictions on religious subjects;

and Motion No. 16—

That while expressing its satisfaction with the reply of the Home Secretary to the deputation which recently waited on him in connection with the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, this Conference reminds Freethinkers all over the country that the laws still exist, and that prosecutions for blasphemy under either statute or common law will only be abolished as a result of unremitting agitation; it therefore calls upon Freethinkers all over the country to make this a test question to candidates at all elections, and to decline to vote for anyone who will not promise his or her support in securing the removal of a religious and social injustice.

be adjourned until the Afternoon Session.

Motion No. 11, by Bethnal Green Branch:—

That the Annual Branch Collection on behalf of the Benevolent Fund be abolished.

Mr. Neate, in moving the resolution, said his branch desired to call attention to the lax way in which contributions were made to this fund; and if greater support were not obtained, it would be better abolished. Mr. Black (Manchester) formally seconded. The resolution was lost, and promises given towards increased efforts.

Motion No. 12, by Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch:—

That a directory of Branch Secretaries be published each year for the use of members wishing to correspond, or when visiting strange towns.

It was pointed out that valid members could always obtain such information from the General Secretary; and, further, there were frequent removals. On the suggestion of Mr. Sissons (Bolton), the President undertook to publish once a year in the *Freethinker* a list of Branch Secretaries as supplied to him.

Motion No. 13—

That in order to provide the public and the Government with an object lesson in the reality and extent of the objection to religious instruction in State-aided schools, this Conference urges upon Freethinkers, and all those who support the principle of secular education, to avail themselves of their rights under the Education Acts and withdraw their children from all forms of religious instruction.

and Motion No. 15—

That in view of the plans being put forward by various religious bodies for the strengthening of religious instruction in State-supported schools; and of the conferences held between leaders of the various Churches with the object of arriving at some agreed plan of religious instruction in the schools; and in view also of the danger of such agreement being made the basis of a Government measure, this Conference reaffirms its opinion that the only just and wise policy is for the State to confine the education given to purely secular subjects, leaving all religious instruction to be provided by those who consider it necessary; and urges upon Freethinkers and believers in religious equality to do their utmost to end a system which is unjust to the children and which serves

to prevent a thoroughly efficient system of national education.

were taken together. Moved by Mr. Corrigan, seconded by Mr. Rosetti in brief speeches and carried unanimously.

At this point an exceedingly illuminating and common-sense letter from Mrs. Letitia Bell (Hull Branch), citing her own experiences in withdrawing her children from religious instruction and urging parents to avail themselves of the withdrawal clause, was read and greatly appreciated.

Motion No. 14—

That the Executive shall arrange with the Branches for the compilation of a weekly report of meetings held, and to be held, for insertion in the *Freethinker*.

Moved by Mr. Samuels, who, after discussion, accepted the transposition of the words "Executive" and "Branches." The President pointed out that the non-appearance of such reports was entirely due to the failure of secretaries to send them in time. If received on Monday, they could be summarized and should appear.

The Conference then adjourned for Lunch.

#### Afternoon Session.

Motions Nos. 10 and 16 were then moved by the President and discussed.

Mr. Potts (Preston) thought it was unfair to embarrass a candidate who might be favourable to our views but who would lose votes by publicly agreeing to support those views. The question should be put to a candidate in writing and privately. If the resolution were passed it would practically disenfranchise the majority of Freethinkers at all future elections. A candidate might be quite a good one in all other respects; and, after all, there were questions of greater importance than this one; if a "test" question must be made, why not "Secular Education," or something which affected people more widely and which would not prejudice a candidate in the eyes of non-freethinking electors. He proposed an amendment to delete the word "test" before "question" and to delete all words after "elections." Mr. S. Cohen opposed the amendment. Mr. Rosetti, in opposition, said it (the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws) was a matter of common justice, and we should not get it until we had made the road safe. He would not give his support to a man who refused to give him common justice. Mr. Clifford Williams supported the original motion: "We should keep this question well to the front at all elections." Finally the amendment was lost and the original motion was carried.

Motions Nos. 17 and 18—

That the present rule authorizing the sitting Conference to appoint the place of meeting for the following year be rescinded, it having been found impossible in practice.

That in order to increase the Society's membership, this Conference is of opinion that a special person should be appointed at each public meeting whose business it should be to distribute Forms of Membership and otherwise see to the enrolment of new members.

were formally moved by Miss Mostaert, on behalf of the Finsbury Park Branch, and carried unanimously.

Motion No. 19:—

That this Conference strongly urges upon the Government to take steps which shall surround the ceremony of civil marriage with a greater degree of dignity and solemnity than at present exists.

In moving this resolution, Miss Kough gave instances showing the necessity for such action, and evoked some lively discussion. The motion was carried.

Motion No. 20:—

That this Conference, bearing in mind the importance of the political education of a democracy, is of opinion that the time has arrived when the whole of our civic and municipal institutions should be completely secularized.

Mr. Moss spoke in favour of this motion, and gave his experiences on a local council, and showed what could be done to spread Freethought ideas and promote secular ends. The motion was carried.

Motion No. 21:—

That this Conference, recognizing the need for some

central building in London in which meetings may be regularly held and which would also form a centre for Freethinkers, authorizes the Executive to take whatever steps may be practicable to acquire a suitable building for these purposes.

Mr. Cohen, in moving this resolution, pointed out that it was a matter of importance, and it was carried unanimously.

Motion No. 22 :—

In view of the importance of the International Free-thought Conference to be held in Rome in September, 1925, this Conference is of opinion that the National Secular Society should be officially represented on that occasion, and instructs the Executive to arrange for as large and as important a delegation as is possible.

This motion was also carried; and it was pointed out by Miss Vance that Freethinkers taking a holiday next year might consider taking it in September and visiting Rome for the Conference.

A paper was then read by Councillor F. E. Monks (Manchester) on "Methods of Propaganda." Among the proposals was one for a district council to unite branches in the vicinity to arrange combined meetings and exchange of speakers, etc.; also Secular Sunday Schools with graduated classes, ending in classes with the object of training speakers for Freethought. Messrs. Rosetti, S. Cohen, C. Williams and G. Whitehead commended the paper. The latter further supported the idea of district councils. What was needed especially was an organizer, or several organizers, who should live on the spot and arrange meetings all the year round. There was need also for some inducement to be offered to speakers, as otherwise likely men drifted into other movements. The President, whilst agreeing with many of the proposals, said the question was not wholly one of finance. He commended the idea of district councils and was willing to publish the paper in the *Freethinker* for further consideration of the idea.

A second paper, by Mr. Ona Melton (Birmingham), on "Freethought and Adolescence," was read by Mr. Clifford Williams, who did full justice to the excellent suggestions on the training of children therein embodied. This completed the Agenda. A vote of thanks to the local Secretary, Mr. Arthur Rogerson, and the members of the branch for their energetic and courteous assistance having been passed, the President closed the meeting with congratulations on the good feeling that had prevailed throughout, and hoped all present had received fresh inspiration for the work before them in the coming year.

E. M. V.

### Mr. Whitehead's Mission.

Mr. Whitehead concluded his fortnight's mission at Preston on June 14. Reports on all sides assure us that the meetings have been entirely successful, in spite of the unfavourable weather. Every evening the meetings were continued to a late hour and provoked much discussion, the result being that the list of our sympathizers has largely increased. It is a sign of the times that the ladies of the Preston Branch have come forward and nobly supported Mr. Whitehead. Special thanks for their assistance at the outdoor meetings are due to Mrs. Croydon and Miss Collis. Messrs. Allen and Rogerson also helped as far as possible. Mr. and Mrs. Wilkinson and Mr. and Mrs. Eaves we thank most heartily also for their interest and help. On Sunday, June 15, Mr. Whitehead was in Nelson; and to-day, June 23, is in Bolton. Reports of these meetings will appear next week; and for further details of his tour readers are referred to the Lecture Notices. Sympathizers and unattached Freethinkers resident in the towns to be visited during Mr. Whitehead's mission (for list of towns, see Guide Notice), and who wish to be present at these meetings, are requested to communicate with the General Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, who will be pleased to send fuller particulars. It is to be noted that the whole cost of this mission is borne by the Executive.

## 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 LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY** (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): 7, Mr. Arthur Linecar, "The Haunted Man" (Dickens).

**SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY** (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, John A. Hobson, M.A., "A Study in Literary Genius."

#### OUTDOOR.

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

**FINSBURY PARK.**—11.15, Mr. F. P. Corrigan, 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., Mr. Vincent, B.A., B.Sc., and Mr. Howell Smith.

**NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S.** (Regent's Park, near the Fountain): 6, Mr. F. P. Corrigan, a Lecture.

**SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S.** (Brockwell Park): 3.30 and 6.30, Mr. A. D. McLaren will lecture.

**WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S.** (Outside Technical Institute, Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, a Lecture.

### COUNTRY.

#### OUTDOOR.

**BOLTON BRANCH N.S.S.** (Town Hall Steps): 3 and 7, Mr. G. Whitehead will lecture; also every evening at 7.30 from June 21 to June 26.

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