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Views and Opinions.

"Thinking Things Out."

That dare-devil thinker, Canon Barnes, has been at it again. We use the term "dare-devil" in a Pickwickian, or at least a Christian sense, for from a Christian point of view a parson who can accept the general truth of evolution when, admittedly every scientific authority worth bothering about teaches it, must be, for a Christian, a daring thinker. And a parson who says boldly that he does not believe the Bible is telling the literal truth when it says that diverse languages had their origin in men going to sleep one night and by a miracle of God waking up the next morning speaking different tongues, or who rejects the truth of the story, that man was miraculously made by God some 6,000 years ago out of the dust of the ground, and woman manufactured, like a brace button, from a spare bone, must be— from a Christian point of view—a daring and revolutionary thinker. And a man who can at the same time accept a doctrine of evolution and still proclaim himself a Christian, occupy a Christian pulpit and take a salary for teaching Christianity, is decidedly a Christian, since only a Christian preacher could see so much and, apparently, understand so little. Even in politics, where a very high standard of intellectual integrity is neither asserted nor expected, a man does not leave one party for another and still claim to belong to the party he has forsaken. When he leaves it he says so, and admits that he has changed his opinions. And although one may suspect the causes of the change, the going over is not denied. In this direction the parson can give the politician points. His golden rule is:—"Whatever cannot be profitably denied must be accepted; and whatever must be accepted shall be proclaimed as Christian truth. There is no other rule that is consonant with the law and the profits."

* * *

Canon Barnes as a Eugenist.

I believe Canon Barnes calls himself a eugenist, the follower of a science which, so far as any science can be said to have a beginning, began in this country with a Freethinker—Sir Francis Galton. And the Canon says he has often been asked, "What has Christianity to say to Eugenics?" That is quite a natural question, and in the *Church of England Newspaper* the Canon sets out his reply. Many Christians,

he says, cannot understand why a God of love allows the diseased and sickly and children with criminal tendencies to come into existence. That is a difficulty which faces others besides Christians, but beyond saying that the difficulty arises from people refusing "to think things out," the Canon does not throw much light on the subject. Still, we take this daring thinker, whose science is of so advanced a character as to lead him to doubt the Garden of Eden story, and see what happens with a man who has the courage to think things out. It is part of the general problem of evil. So far we agree. God permits evil and sin to play their part in the world. God decreed the struggle of man against disease, etc., and "He planned earth's progress that in the end man might by his social organization learn that goodness and love are of supreme importance." At this point it may probably have dawned upon the man who is thinking things out that if God created man, and also created, or permitted evil and disease so that man might learn something from his struggle against them, it would have saved a lot of trouble and pain if he had made man perfect at once. And after thinking *this* out the Canon decides that "we must be content to believe that He knows best," which strikes us as being more in the nature of an opiate than thinking things out. If we could see the reasonableness of what is done, the advice would not be necessary; if it is necessary it is only because we feel that reason looks on such a plan by a creative deity as downright idiocy, and that we can only think he is acting sensibly by ceasing to think and trusting that "he knows best." As an attempt to think things out that is not a very encouraging start.

* * *

God and the Smallpox.

It is quite interesting to note the mental calibre of these intellectual giants of the Church, and so we observe that "God has allowed the smallpox to exist," and justification for doing this is found in the fact that by its being allowed to exist "we have gained knowledge of how to escape this dreadful disease." Now I do not think if I had been in Canon Barnes' place, and had been in the habit of thinking things out, I would have used that expression "God allowed." For it implies that God could have prevented it if he had cared to do so. The allowance of smallpox was, therefore, deliberate. God knew what he was about, but as he wished man to discover a cure for smallpox he arranged for smallpox to exist. Good God! Did anyone ever read anything like it? Smallpox is, with the exception of syphilis, one of the filthiest and the most repulsive of diseases. It is also a very old disease. It ravaged the world for hundreds of generations, and does so now whenever it appears among a people who have not been so well educated as we have been. The number of people who were marked for life by smallpox was, in the eighteenth century, almost unbelievably large. The mortality was frightful. In Berlin from 1783 to 1795 over 4,000 children died from smallpox. In Copenhagen the number during a similar period amounted

to 5,500. Every city in the world told a similar tale. And all this was allowed by God so that one day other people might discover a cure for the disease! Will this gentleman who is thinking things out please inform us in what way the people who died from the effects of smallpox were benefited, or educated, by others, a long while after they were dead discovering a cure for the disease that killed them? And will he also inform us what was the benefit of God "allowing" a disease merely that we might learn to get rid of it? If it had not been there the knowledge of how to get rid of it would have been unnecessary. If we get rid of it that knowledge is also useless—unless God is waiting till we forget the cure and then looses the disease on the world again. If that is the kind of God that Canon Barnes believes in there is far more manliness displayed in telling him to go to the devil than there is in worshipping such a mixture of stupidity and cruelty. Or, on the other hand, what is one to think of the mental equipment of a man who can put forward such unadulterated nonsense as a scientific apology for God's ways? It is either an insult to other believers or an indictment of their intelligence. And Canon Barnes is being lauded as a daring and a scientific thinker. He is just a parson after all. I can add nothing to that. As the man in the street says, it is the limit.

* * *

Christian Medicine.

There is no need to criticise at length the statement that God has given man an "instinct" to fight dirt and disease. This is so utterly unscientific, and so grossly at variance with facts, that only a parson thinking things out could say a thing so hopelessly childish. And bad as Canon Barnes is at theory, he is still worse, still more of a parson, when he comes to deal with facts. Things did not improve, he tells us, "until Christian civilization was aided by medicine and hygiene." Quite so. The power of prayer was proven when it was taken with the proper kind of medicine. God does things, when man does them for himself. Christianity could help civilization when civilization helped itself. The help of prayer, of God, of Christianity, do not show themselves when man is unable to help himself, they only display their power when man does what is required off his own bat and there is nothing left for them to do. But Canon Barnes must have tremendous faith in the ignorance of his followers to introduce the subject of medicine and hygiene. For he could have selected no better examples of the direction in which the malignant influence of the Christian Church has been displayed. Look at the New Testament and see what amount of encouragement to medicine and hygiene is given there. Prayer is to cure all disease. As all diseases come from God or the devil there is but one cure—faith. His disciples know of only one way of curing disease, and Jesus gave them but one prescription, "In my name." All the witch killing, the devil expelling, the magical cures, the ill-treatment of lunatics and epileptics of the Dark and Middle Ages owe their direct inspiration to the New Testament. If God wished men to find out the nature and the cure of disease, will Canon Barnes, during his process of thinking things out, please explain why he came down to earth, took on the likeness of a man, and deliberately misled people, and so prevented them knowing what they might otherwise have known? They are surely questions worthy of an answer.

* * *

Sanctity and Sanitation.

The evil wrought by Christianity was not merely that it sanctioned and authorised a number of ideas concerning disease that represented a retrogression to

the lowest kind of savagery, but also that it proceeded to secure the prevalence of these ideas by the most active opposition to all that medical and hygienic science had to teach. The security of the devil-dodging and miracle-working cures of the Christian Church was assured by the suppression of the medical science of antiquity, and its instinct for fighting against dirt, to use Canon Barnes' own stupid phrase, was shown by the dying out under its influence of the old Roman methods of sanitation, and, above all, by the disuse of the bath. That was so completely forgotten that when re-introduced, centuries later, into the Christian world, it became known as the Turkish bath, but even under its new name it suggests its antagonism to Christianity. Readers of Lecky will be well acquainted with his picture of the ideal religious character of the Dark and Middle Ages—the dirty, sore-spangled monk, glorying in his filth as an indication of his superiority to earthly pleasures and the joys of the flesh. And any student of history will bear in mind the Christian cities of the same period with their hovels for houses, the floors covered with filthy rushes, the people wearing dresses of rough cloth or leather that literally rotted on their persons, the absence of sanitation, with the plague and pestilence as periodic visitors. And they will also know how every improvement in sanitation or in medicine was resisted as so many attempts to overcome the will of the Lord. Like Canon Barnes, these people believed that the Lord "allowed" these diseases to exist, but unlike this daring thinker, they did not realize the wisdom of a God who first of all created a disease, and then created a man to destroy it after it had worked its ravages among people for hundreds of generations. But these mediæval Christians were not given to thinking things out. They merely assumed that their God would act with at least the sense of a not overwise human being.

* * *

Christian Eugenics.

Canon Barnes claims to be a eugenicist, and to believe that given the knowledge and the desire to put that knowledge into operation, we may protect ourselves against the operations of natural selection in its cruder forms, and by a combination of a better environment and a breeding from the better stocks, may secure the emergence of a better race. I have gone fully into the question of the influence of religion on racial development in my *Creed and Character*, and I must refer my readers to that pamphlet for a fuller treatment of the matter. But there are two ways in which the Christian Church did exert a very profound influence upon the breeding of a better race, and if Canon Barnes is intelligently sincere in his advocacy of eugenics, they are considerations that should affect him. In the first place, the Church by its denunciation of heresy, and later by its forcible suppression of heretics through the gentle agencies of prison, rack, thumbscrew, stake, slander, and boycott, did what it could to weed out the more virile minds, to decrease the measure of intellectual independence current, and so to place a decided survival value upon the opposite qualities of unthinking conformity, dissimulation, and mental cowardice. These, Canon Barnes should agree, are qualities certainly not favourable to thinking things out, even though they may lead to the kind of thinking things out in which the Canon indulges. But it is certain as it is that two and two equal four that whenever and wherever society discourages mental independence and criticism of established belief and institutions, when it punishes and shuts out from public office all who dare to criticise these things, it is doing what it can to breed a generation of mental cowards and hypocrites. The average man's anxiety to think things out is certainly not strong enough to

stand against such discouragements, and a Church that for centuries has encouraged the lower and discouraged the higher mental qualities, must have made for mental degeneration in a very marked degree.

* * *

The Survival of the Unfit.

The second way in which the Christian Church made for racial degeneracy was by its holding up the celibate ideal as the principal way by which spiritual perfection could be secured. Christian records will supply plenty of instances of the gentle and lovable nature of monks and nuns, and I have no desire to question the accuracy of a great many of these pictures. Indeed, the better the quality of the human material that was led to embrace the celibate life the stronger the indictment of the Christian Church. If the monks and nuns had been all of them low, brutal, stupid characters it could have been urged that Christianity in withdrawing these from the task of procreation had been in a very genuine sense helping the creation of a higher type of human being by inducing the lower type not to perpetuate itself. It would have been a gentle way of bringing about what some people have advocated, namely, the sterilization of the unfit. But the result of Christian influence was the exact reverse. The gentler, the better, the more reflective were led to the celibate life, the rougher and coarser were encouraged to become parents of the future generation. And the vogue of the fighting cult under Christian auspices, the fact that for several centuries the Christian nations of the world have largely resembled gangs of international pirates, allowing nothing to stand in their way when other lands invited their rapacity, the hypocrisy and mental cowardice of our public life, is certainly not unconnected with that terribly long reign of the Christian religion in Europe.

* * *

Our Evil Ancestry.

One of the fundamental facts of social evolution is the determining of the direction of human qualities by the influence of the environment. It is the social environment which so largely determines whether a particular quality shall be manifested in a lower or a higher direction. Thus, to take a pertinent illustration, the power of social opinion is ultimately a beneficial fact in the development of individual and social life. But whether the desire to stand well with one's fellows takes the form of manifesting independence of character and uprightness of mind, or whether it takes the form of a cowardly reluctance to speak out, a hypocritical profession of assent because it knows that otherwise the result will be boycott and persecution, depends entirely upon the kind of environment in which a generation is brought up. And I would ask anyone to try and realize what the effect on the mental and moral health of the race must be when generation after generation people are brought up in a social environment saturated with superstition, where a powerful Church takes some of the finer natures and condemns them to perpetual celibacy while leaving the coarse and the brutal to perpetuate their kind unchecked; where outspokenness and dissent from established religious beliefs is treated as the vilest of crimes; where this same Church threatens with damnation hereafter, and punishes here, anyone who refuses to accept without question its ridiculous beliefs, which year after year selects the freest type of mind and does what it can to exterminate it, and gives the liar, the coward, and the hypocrite full opportunity to rise to the highest place of honour or of power? Is it any wonder that we have to-day men like Canon Barnes, with his belated repudiation of doctrines that any civilized person ought to feel ashamed to have ascribed to him, hailed as a daring

and a great thinker, where newspapers that are read by millions cater for a public taste that delights in reading the most intimate details of a brutal murder, or the empty chronicle of a young prince's movements that are of no greater intellectual interest than the Bank Holiday ramble of the son of a costermonger. The vacuity of mind disclosed by these things makes one almost despair of human progress. And if Canon Barnes can appreciate that fact I would remind him that it is one of the truths of evolution, about which he *talks* so much, that a thing is to be understood by its history. We understand the nature of man by knowing the evolution of animal life. And we understand the reason for the presence and the persistence of some of the most undesirable of human qualities when we bear in mind that for about fifty generations the European mind has been under the dominance of the Christian Church. Then the fact of human nature being no better than it is ceases to surprise us. We are only surprised that it is not worse.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Is Christianity "Dope"?

(Concluded from page 548.)

DR. HUTTON candidly admits the truth "that Christianity from the beginning has spoken a great deal about the future." He quotes St. Paul's saying "that if in this life only we have our hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable." Then he proceeds as follows:—

Why and to whom does Christianity speak of a world beyond this present time? It has spoken about the future to those who in this present world, because of the very fineness of their nature, and the scruples of their conscience, are having a bad time. But the future of which it speaks is a future in which one who in this present world has been a good man and has suffered meets the approval of God and the recompense of an eternal blessedness; and it is a future in which a bad man, who has had what he would call a good time in this world, meets the disapproval of God and his eternal reprobation.

That is so ingeniously put as to make Christianity look as unlike dope as possible; and yet, even as thus expressed, the doctrine of a hereafter has for its only purpose the consolation of those Christians who are more or less unhappy here. It is a drug to deaden pain, trouble, and sorrow; a narcotic to allay the poignancy of tribulation; a soothing syrup to engender the grace of resignation under all the disharmonies and disabilities of the present life. Thus Christianity holds out a glorious hope before the eyes of believers, and a terrific threat before those of hardened unbelievers. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." It says nothing about the duty of reforming and purifying the moral tone of the world. According to its teaching, the world is totally lost and the only hope for it lies in its being converted to Christ. The only mandate the apostles received from their risen Lord was to go forth and make disciples of all the nations. The few who believe the Gospel and become disciples are asked to endure patiently whatever hardships and sufferings that may befall them in the certain hope of enjoying endless bliss on the other side of death. Or as Dr. Hutton puts it:—

We ask a man to believe that God can make up to him for every privation in life; that he can give him meat to eat which the world knows not of; that eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the mind of man the things that God hath in store for them that love him.

In spite of the reverend gentleman's emphatic denial we unhesitatingly maintain that he himself is guilty of administering his dope. The truth is that Christianity is a religion all of whose pledges are to be honoured in eternity. St. Paul says: "By hope were we saved; but hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopeth for that which he seeth? But if we hope for that which we see not then do we with patience wait for it."

Dr. Hutton tells us that "according to Christianity things as they are have never been and are not now as God would have them"; but how does he know that? Is not God supreme? Was the psalmist mistaken when he declared that "the Lord sitteth as king for ever"?

Wilberforce was more consistent than the present minister of Westminster Chapel, for he taught, in his *Practical View of the System of Christianity*, that the existing order of things is of Divine appointment, and that any human interference with it would be a sin. Wilberforce, a rich man, held that the lowly path of the poor "has been allotted them by the hand of God and that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties and contentedly to bear its inconveniences." Being an evangelical Christian, he was a firm believer in a future life in which the present order of things would be reversed, and the only comfort he could offer the poor he expressed as follows:—

All human distinctions will soon be done away with, and the true followers of Christ will all, as children of the same Father, be alike admitted to the possession of the same heavenly inheritance.

To convinced Atheists nothing can be more astounding than the Christian conception of God. Both worlds, the present and the future, are said to be of Divine creation. All alike know and admit that the world in which we live is woefully imperfect, life in which is to many a veritable hell; but, on the assumption that another world exists, what assurance is there that it is crowned with perfection, or that life in it is on any higher scale than in this? Its very existence, Dr. Hutton tells us, is only a hypothesis, and Hamilton, the distinguished Scottish philosopher, informs us that hypotheses are "propositions which are assumed with probability, in order to explain or prove something else which cannot otherwise be explained or proved." Christianity assumes, without a scrap of evidence, the existence of a perfect world in order to induce people to put their trust in itself as the only perfect religion, all whose glowing promises shall be fulfilled in that perfect world. We maintain that such teaching is fundamentally unsound and morally injurious. The present world being the only one we know, it ought to be the sole sphere of our activities. If things here are not what they ought to be it is our duty to set them right. Hamlet recognized the truth of that statement with deep regret when he exclaimed:—

The time is out of joint—O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right.

The other word upon which Christianity puts the accent is "faith."

Dr. Hutton contends that "faith has been gravely misrepresented," saying:—

Faith in Christ has been corrupted and reduced into faith in certain propositions concerning Christ. This quite naturally came to be the meaning of faith. But this was not the original meaning, and never was the true meaning. I do not know a better definition of faith or one more agreeable, as I should think, to all that is most strenuous and daring in the minds of men to-day than the definition given by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Here is what he says: "Now faith means, we are confident of what we hope for, convinced of what we do not see."

Again and again for many years has that definition of faith found expression in this journal. Faith implies the absence of knowledge. Dr. Hutton stands practically alone among the clergy in holding this view of the nature of faith; but it is beyond a doubt the correct view. Supernatural beliefs are necessarily unsusceptible of proof. To so characterize them is not equivalent to bringing the charge of insincerity against Christianity for propounding them. Although we stand apart from the Christians, we do not accuse Christianity of insincerity, all that we have against it being that it is untrue, and that, being untrue, it is opposed to human nature at its best. Dr. Hutton is entirely mistaken when he represents us as standing apart because "organized religion has laid itself open to this misunderstanding," the fact being that we remain outside the Church because we regard Christians as dupes of superstition.

The last paragraph in Dr. Hutton's article is a sentimental appeal to unbelievers. He solemnly warns them of the coming of a day when they shall bitterly repent of their unbelief. Here are the words:—

It is no hazardous thing for a man like me to prophesy that a day is coming to us all one by one when, no longer young, no longer surrounded by friends, we may be confronted with the prospect of pain, or may for some deep reason be afraid. And what I want to say is that it would be a great pity, to say no more, if we had so trained ourselves, in our robust and confident days, to imagine that all Christian Faith was rooted in insincerity, that when that day came, and we were literally ready to cry out for those ancient consolations by the help of which men in other days have borne great sorrows and have triumphed over shaking fears; if in that hour we had trained ourselves to suppose that all this talk about Christ and about God and about forgiveness and about the future with its stern prospects and its tender comfort, was all untrue. It would be a sad thing if a day came in which we would give everything and life itself for a cup of cold water, and yet had so trained ourselves that we had lost the very instinct to know water when we see it; with the result that even when our heart and flesh are crying out we suspect that it is not a kind hand which is holding the cup to our lips, and that it is not water which is being offered us, but poison. That surely would be to have lost our soul; because it would be to have rejected the final overture of man and of God.

That passage, though finely phrased and movingly eloquent, is rooted in ignorance and inexperience. The reverend gentleman has not witnessed the death-bed experiences of unbelievers, nor studied the recorded dying utterances of prominent Freethinkers. The late Mr. Foote published a book in the year 1888, entitled *Infidel Death-beds*, in which the dying experiences and sayings of upwards of sixty well-known unbelievers were supplied, and not in a single instance was Dr. Hutton's gloomy prophecy fulfilled. It has often been declared that Voltaire repented ere he died, but there is not a word of truth in the declaration. Carlyle translated the copious French accounts of the great man's illness and death. He was visited several times by the Curé of St. Sulpice, who demanded "a detailed profession of faith and a disavowal of all heretical doctrines." All his visits were resented by the philosopher, and all his appeals were utterly unavailing. His last visit occurred two days before the end. In Carlyle's translation we read: "The Curé of St. Sulpice came forward, having announced himself, and asked of M. de Voltaire, elevating his voice, if he acknowledged the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ? The sick man pushed one of his hands against the Curé's calotte (coif), showing him back, and cried, turning abruptly to the other side, "Let me die in peace." Equally false were the re-

ports of the conversion of Ingersoll and Foote on their dying beds. Both died bravely in the faith to the advocacy of which they had devoted their lives—faith in man and the noble powers with which Nature has so richly endowed him and which the Christian religion has done its utmost to discourage and suppress.

J. T. LLOYD.

A Budget of Book Titles.

A young friend of mine had a favourite cat. It grew old, extremely old, but it retained its vivacity to the last: it ran after its own tail only ten minutes before it died. What an example to the whole human race!"—

F. Lockyer-Lampson.

THE enormous output of books has made it increasingly difficult for authors to find titles for their works. More depends upon the title than most people think, and many a book has had its fortune determined by its title. A striking example was the volume, *The Love Letters of a Violinist*, which was issued many years ago, anonymously, and was ascribed to a royal prince who was also a musician. One of the quaintest titles was *Instead of a Book*, which was used by Benjamin Tucker, an American Freethinker, who reprinted some of his journalistic articles without further revision or alteration. Some of the old Puritan divines were extremely free in their choice of titles, as, for example, Richard Baxter, the author of *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, some of whose books have titles which are neither saintly nor restful. Some of these old-time theologians were very quaint gentlemen. Dr. John Donne, a former dean of St. Paul's, I remember, has a volume of poems in which sacred and profane verses jostle one another in very embarrassing fashion; and the unfortunate reader finds on one page "An Address to the Saviour," and on the next: "Lines on Seeing My Mistress Get into Bed." Modern editors spare the blushes of readers by omitting the verses which smack too much of earthliness. The more austere Puritan tradition was carried on as late as Spurgeon, whose bibliography includes such titles as *A Cheque Book on the Bank of Faith*, *A Double Knock at the Door of the Young*, *John Ploughman's Talk*, all in the old familiar Nonconformist habit. Perhaps the most audacious inscription for a volume was *God versus Paterson*, a report of a very famous blasphemy prosecution, although this is run very close by G. W. Foote's very profane *Letters to Jesus Christ*, a very racy book which ought to be reprinted. Foote had a very sure instinct for titles, and shortly before his death he intended to re-issue the story of his trials for blasphemy under the ironical title of *How I fell among Thieves*. This was calculated irony, but sometimes it happens that the irony of a title is unconscious, as in the case of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which is probably the greatest religious poem in the world, and one of the most tragic. There is real irony in Dean Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, which suggests the using of poor children as food; and De Quincey's *Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* is the quintessence of satire.

Some titles are singularly inappropriate, such as Gladstone's *Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*, which was a most elaborate and much-trumpeted defence of the so-called "impregnable rock." Mr. H. G. Wells, who is clever enough to know better, actually allowed his humour to sleep when he dubbed a Cook's excursion into the arid regions of theology. *God, the Invisible King*, for, as a schoolboy critic observed, how could he know his deity was a king or a cat's-meat man if he were invisible. Shelley's masterpiece, *Prometheus Unbound*, provoked the cruel jest of Theodore Hook that it was likely to re-

main unbound. Almost as unkind was G. K. Chesterton's jibe at Swinburne's glorious *Songs Before Sunrise*, that they were songs to a sunrise that never took place. Thomas Paine was very happy with the titles of his books, *The Age of Reason* and *The Rights of Man*. Professors are sometimes careful to keep their excursions into imaginative literature apart from their other and more serious work, and few people were aware that the light-hearted author of *Alice in Wonderland* was the solemn Rev. C. L. Dodgson, who compiled *On Determinants* and other sober works on the higher mathematics. Mr. Rudyard Kipling used *The City of Dreadful Night* as the title of one of his clever stories, forgetting that it had been used by James Thomson; but this was a small mistake compared to that made by a municipal librarian, who classified Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest* and Borrow's *Bible in Spain* under the heading of "theology."

Charles Dickens had a facetious habit of having dummy books made up, with catchy titles, to catch the unwary. One such was named, caustically, *Christian Evidences, by King Henry the Eight*. James Whistler, the artist, who was not so genial as Dickens, collected his own letters addressed to the newspaper press under the soothing title: *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*. Whistler is a good hater. He reminds me of the old Spaniard, who, on his deathbed, was asked by the priest if he had forgiven his enemies. The dying man said: "I have no enemies; I have shot them all."

Old-world writers liked to parade their learning by using Latin titles. Some have survived, such as the *Religio Medici* and *Hydrolaphia* of the learned and talented Sir Thomas Browne. Many of these ancient authors liked lengthy titles, almost as explanatory as the head-lines in a newspaper. Browning was one of the latest to adopt this style, as in *Parleyings with Certain People of Some Importance in Their Day*, but the present tendency is all for brevity. Sometimes authors miss fire with their titles, as did Lewis Morris, with his *Epic of Hades*, which a distinguished critic called "the Hades of an Epic." Another book, or booklet, which created an enormous sensation, bore the scholastic title: *The Fruits of Philosophy*. This work, I need hardly add, dealt neither with "fruit" nor "philosophy."

Newspapers are so closely intertwined with literature nowadays that no apology is needed for mentioning them. Years ago there was both a *Sun* and a *Star*, provoking the jest that the *Star* twinkled at eleven o'clock in the morning, and the *Sun* came out in the evening. There is humour in the title of the Roman Catholic publication, *The Universe*, remembering that it is published in a Protestant country. But our French friends are very clever with titles. During the late war a newspaper, entitled *The Free Man*, was suppressed by the Government. It reappeared the following day under the challenging title: *The Man in Chains*. That is as it should be. For the men who can rise triumphantly over the fell clutch of circumstance may justly be acclaimed as the masters of their fate.

MIMNERMUS.

MR. G. WHITEHEAD'S MISSION.

The unprecedented weather during Mr. Whitehead's second week at Newcastle caused several of the meetings to begin and continue in the rain, fortunately without any abatement of interest on the part of the audience. The usual seven meetings were successfully addressed and appreciative crowds listened and bought good quantities of literature. Messrs. Carlton and Bartram and Miss Bartram worked with their usual zeal and new members were made. In response to a special request, Mr. Whitehead will start another week at Hull to-day, September 7. For further particulars see Guide Notice.

The Man in Black.

A VAST crowd of people, dressed in the costume of Greeks, but all in white, assembled at a stately temple of the Goddess Artemis in the city of Ephesus; and not far off was the blue Ægean Sea. Suddenly, a warning rang out:—

"Folk of Ephesus, either you must be converted and worship the God that I worship, or you must die!"

They all looked, and lo! they beheld a man, clad in black, and standing on the top of a block of stone near the entrance to the holy temple of the Goddess. They knew him; his name was John; he was an elderly man, and a Christian. John prayed to his God for a sign, and, as he finished speaking, half the temple fell with a thunderous crash, breaking the sacred objects in its chambers, and crushing the chief priest. A fearful uproar ensued. Some fled, some fell flat, some knelt, some tore their white garments and wept. John exclaimed, in a mocking voice:—

"Where now is the power of the evil spirit, Artemis?"

So the citizens of Ephesus rose up, and destroyed the second half of the temple, and listened to the preaching of the Apostle John, and became servants of the Lord Jesus Christ; and, to show the might of his master, Christ, John raised the dead priest to life again. Not that he did the miracle himself; he bade a young man, a kinsman of the priest, to stand over the corpse, and call life back; and when this was done, John welcomed the priest into the faith of Christ, and promised that, like all other Christians, he should "live unto all ages."

As it is possible the reader has never heard of these singular occurrences before, I may reveal the source of my information, namely, a book called *The Acts of John*, and this, again, forms part of a volume recently published,¹ and edited by Dr. Montague R. James, under the title of *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Many years ago, some of us first read various gospels, that are not found in the ordinary New Testament, in a collection issued by William Hone in 1820. Hone's book had its usefulness for many years; but it is as well to recognize in Dr. James's edition a great improvement on Hone's; and besides this, Dr. James has added many curious ancient documents not to be found in Hone; and among them is the "Acts of John," and John was the prophet clad in black. Whether this John was really a companion and apostle of Jesus, and whether, indeed, the Jesus portrayed in these "Acts," or in the usual Bible, ever existed, are questions, open to more or less discussion. Certain it is that, in the second century, when this book of "Acts" was composed, people loved wonder-tales, and the supply of wonder-tales was fairly equal to the demand. Even so, in 1924, the public asks for novels, and the novels appear, by printers' and publishers' magic.

John (as we learn from an earlier passage of these "Acts") had already performed an extraordinary action in Ephesus City. A municipal officer, named Lycomedes, begged John to heal his wife, Cleopatra, who lay incurably sick of paralysis; that is, she was incurable by the usual medical methods, such as they were. Indeed, poor Lycomedes was so nervously overwrought by this tragedy in his household that he fell down dead at his wife's bedside. Such incidents never daunted a true apostle, and John both restored Cleopatra and revived her husband. It is pleasant to record the homely little sequel. John stayed a while in the official's house, and often discoursed of heavenly truths. Lycomedes made a small hole in the wall of the chamber, or parlour, in which John sat, and

hired a local artist to peep through and paint a portrait of the apostle. In two days, the picture was finished, John being represented as crowned with garlands. If the Society of Biblical Archæology could discover this painting, it would be of great interest, and, no doubt, an American millionaire would purchase it for a gallery in New York or Chicago.

John often advised Christians to live a life of severe simplicity, and, if they had an abundance of goods, to give their riches to the poor.² In one sad case, two Christian gentlemen gave away all their riches, and afterwards repented. Whereupon, in order to deride their stupid desire for so-called "wealth," John got a handful of pebbles from the sea-beach, called upon the "majesty of the Lord," and turned all into golden gems. Of this sea-pebble change there could be no suspicion, for the gems were taken to local jewellers, and pronounced "excellent and precious." It was clear, therefore, that if John presented an example of frugal habits, it was not because he had no access to riches.

Perhaps it may be suggested that, in the second century, as in the twentieth, common pebbles might occasionally be sold as precious stones. But doubters are invited to consider the still more remarkable incident of the poison cup. John issued a public challenge, and declared that he could prove his Christianity by swallowing a deadly potion. The governor of the city allowed a preliminary experiment to be made with two men, who were condemned to death, and who might as well die by poison as in any other mode. They drank, they "gave up the ghost." Then John made the sign of the cross, and drank from the same cup. A mob looked on, waited three hours, saw no injurious change in John, and then, with one voice, affirmed that John's God was the true God. At the end of this interesting book we read that John serenely arranged for his own death. He requested friends to dig a grave, and, having eaten bread with his disciples in a "eucharist" feast, he stripped off his clothes, and lay in the open trench, whispered, "Peace be with you, brethren," and so passed away. A sort of postscript tells that a light shone over the grave for the space of an hour, and that next day, on the earth being removed, nothing was found but a pair of sandals.

I have omitted to state that a passage in the "Acts" relates how John (he tells the story himself) had, in past years, walked in company with Jesus. This Jesus appeared at times as an aged man with a long beard and bald head, and at times quite different: now small and mean, and then as an immense figure, reaching unto heaven. A lively episode in this narrative tells how the apostles formed a ring round their Master, and danced as they chanted a hymn after this manner:—

Glory be to thee, Word! glory be to thee, Grace!

Glory be to thee, Spirit! Glory be to thee, Holy One!

Glory be to thy glory! Amen.....

The number Twelve danceth on high! Amen.

Whoso danceth not, knoweth not what cometh to pass! Amen.

And so on. The Lord also danced in the mystic exercise, and then went forth to the last scenes—the Trial, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension.

Dr. James calculates that this book of "Acts of John" was written "not later than the middle of the second century" by an author named Leucius, of whom no personal details are discoverable. The whole collection of Gospels, Acts and Epistles is important, not because we are called upon to believe all the stories they contain (though I, for one, honestly confess I believe the story of the sandals!), but because

¹ By the Clarendon Press, Oxford (1924); 584 pages.

² One need hardly point out how splendidly this maxim of poverty is realized to-day, all Christians being poor, and all rich persons being Atheists and Agnostics.

they throw light upon the psychology of the second century people who founded the Christian faith. The Roman civilization was in transition towards the Europe of mediæval and modern times. The second century was outwardly, on the whole, peaceful and normal; but enormous mental changes were in process among the slaves and general poor masses of the Roman Empire. These folk longed for a God, not merely majestic like Jupiter, but able to take very homely shape, and bleed and die in suffering, as so many of their own class bled and died. This longing was met by the poets, dramatists, artists, and storytellers of the time; and the result is seen in both the New Testament now "appointed to be read in churches," and in the Apocryphal documents learnedly collected for our instruction by Dr. James.

Others still exist. Dr. James says he has read "a Dispute between Christ and the Devil," but he adds that "it is not interesting." Which of the two speakers is not interesting he does not say. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and elsewhere, I have often read speeches by the Devil, and I will candidly affirm they were never dull. I myself consider dullness a deadly sin, especially in people who write articles for papers. But of this sin I doubt if the Devil was ever guilty.

F. J. GOULD.

Acid Drops.

In Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* the author puts into the mouth of the Archbishop a definition of a miracle. It is "an event which creates faith." This was quoted with approval at the Modern Churchmen's Conference, and it would seem as though the definition expresses Mr. Shaw's present opinion of a miracle. But as is quite common with him, he reaches this definition, and attracts attention, by simply turning a thing upside down and inducing a number of people to stand on their heads to see what it is. A miracle is not an event which creates faith, it is faith which creates the event that becomes a miracle. The event of Christ walking on the water, or turning water into wine, or raising dead men to life were not events which created faith because these things never happened. It was faith in the ability of certain people to do these and similar things which created the events. Mr. Shaw's definition is bad history and worse psychology. That may have been the reason why it commended itself to the Modern Churchmen's Conference.

A rival preacher has challenged Canon Barnes to publicly debate the subject of science and religion. He offers to prove that the Bible cannot be reconciled with evolution and that the Canon is quite wrong in trying to harmonize Christianity with evolution. Of course, the Canon has declined. But if it came off we would back the more orthodox gentleman. It is one of those cases where all the logic is on the side of the fool, and the man with more sense—because he is afraid to trust his reason—occupies an indefensible position. If Christianity is true Canon Barnes is wrong. If Canon Barnes is right Christianity is wrong. That is the whole of the situation.

We do not know whether the *Outlook* considers its regular issues to be non-religious or anti-religious, but it recently issued one number with "Religious Number" written across the top. Perhaps, however, it was only done to warn readers what to expect. And there were several articles dealing with the present position of religion. There was, for instance, an article on miracles by the Rev. T. F. Royds. Mr. Royds has got near enough to the truth to write that "When people believe in miracles, miracles are believed to happen. The demand creates the supply." But he goes on to say that if science one day discovers a method of multiplying loaves and fishes indefinitely, "then the historicity of at least one miracle will be vindicated." That by no means follows.

Because science can now flash a message round the earth in a few seconds, it by no means follows that someone who merely said that he did it two or three thousand years ago was telling the truth. If science can tell us how to multiply loaves and fishes, it will remain to be proven that an ignorant Jewish peasant, superstitious to the last degree, also knew how to do it. Mr. Royds also says that "No one now attempts to defend the story of the Virgin Birth solely on historical evidence." He does not believe it, and says that "The doctrine of the Virgin Birth can be quietly dropped." That last expression is quite charming, and quite in accord with Christian ethics. After teaching it for centuries as the most certain of truths, parsons are now to be honest and to publicly proclaim they were wrong. They were quietly to drop it, in the hopes that most people will not notice the omission. Is there anything quite so hopelessly crooked as your professional Christian?

Another writer in the same issue says that "true Christianity has survived many revolutions of thought, not by opposing them but by accepting them." That, too, is quite charming. We should like to know what is the true Christianity that has survived, and above all, whether it is not possible to survive any change of opinion by giving up the one for which one has fought and taking on with the one which conquers? It is equally true to say that the special creationist survived evolution, the belief in witches survived the growth of a sane medical science. It is quite splendid. By this plan everything survives everything. And even though someone may say, it is so much clotted nonsense to talk in this way, someone is not everyone. For one sensible person there are scores of fools, and in religion it is the number that tells. The Bible tells us of the multitudes of angels that are round the heavenly throne, but it is discreetly silent as to their quality.

Our dear Press! The *Sunday Express*, whose editor is, we believe, full to the neck with religious aspirations, publishes the alleged prison experiences of the Bungalow murderer, Mahon. One moment protesting against the crowds of people who go to see the scene of the murder, the next pandering to the same unhealthy taste by publishing the prison experiences of the murderer himself. What a fine type of character these centuries of Christianity has given us!

On Sunday last Canon Barnes gave it as his deliberate opinion that unless he is to live for ever the universe must be regarded as an absurdity. We should not have thought that Canon Barnes was of such tremendous importance to the universe, and some might be wicked enough to suggest that a universe with Canon Barnes would not be less absurd than one from which he was absent. Having said that much we hasten to point out that the Canon did not express himself directly in the words we used, but they amounted to that. What he did say was that "human life was an absurdity unless man's personality was destined for eternal life," and that we submit justifies our paraphrase. The statement that the universe is absurd unless *man* persists is a mere cover-in for the foolishly egotistic statement "the universe is an absurdity unless *I* exist." It is true the Canon admits "our entire inability to imagine the existence of consciousness apart from some living material organism," but that is a trifle to a properly religious man, and the Canon would not have gained the reputation—among journalists and Christians—of a scientific thinker had he allowed this trifle to stand in his way. A man who is unable to believe something he is entirely unable to conceive is no good as a Christian. And as a parson, well, as the coster said, "language aint ekal to it."

The professional advertiser is getting to work with the churches. Thus we note that a Smithfield church has it announced that "An empty seat in Church means a vote that God has forgotten." Well, forgotten, but not bothered about. But assuming that churchgoers sometimes think while in church, we do not think we should have put it in that way. A God who can be easily for-

gotten hardly seems a God worth bothering about. When people really believed in God he was the most tremendous fact in their lives. They saw his handiwork in all the good and the evil things in life. They could not have forgotten him if they had wished. But a God who can be forgotten! A God who really did anything worth bothering about simply could not be forgotten. That is why, assuming that churchgoers think while in Church, we should not have put it that way. But perhaps the advertiser knows best.

Here is another religious advertisement, but it is difficult to imagine the most case-hardened journalist keeping his face straight whilst writing it:— "The Deity's presence is shown by the presence of a light, and sin by a well-trained python specially commissioned from South America.....the audience thought that the Ark was rather too much like an Army hut." This is part of a description of an American film, "Great Stories of the Bible," shown at the Marble Arch Pavilion Cinema. The journalist who wrote that up had better look out; when Lord Danesfort returns from York Races the knight of the pen may be cited as an example to justify the Lord's prospective bill.

We really must ask Mr. George Lansbury to be more careful in his choice of words. In an article on "Loafing," he states that those who call work blessed are guilty of the sin of blasphemy. Further on he writes that there is a deceptive game (it sounds like "hoop-la") which causes both men and women to blaspheme not loud but deep. In both cases we think the plain word of swearing would serve. Blasphemy as defined and understood by twelve good men and true consists in saying something about one member of a family that is permissible about another.

Quite clearly the deity does not approve of Wembley Exhibition. Apart from this atrocious summer he seems to have visited the exhibition with his special wrath.

Three of Queen Elizabeth's maids of honour and a number of other performers at the Pageant of Empire, at Wembley, had an exciting adventure.

They had taken refuge in the tunnel, and at the end of 20 minutes the tunnel—which is steeply inclined, to act as a drain for the Stadium—was transformed into a torrent of running water, the large gates acting as a dam.

The women, who had come in their satin costumes from Harrow, had to wade with the water over their knees through a small postern gate. In their fifty yards' dash to the Stadium entrance they were drenched to the skin, and their costumes were ruined.

The storm turned the Stadium into a lake, and the average depth of water was one inch, though on the racing track, which is below the level of the grass, a depth of six inches was registered.

Possibly the suggestions made by the ungodly that the exhibition should be opened on the Sabbath have piqued the deity.

"I protest against the idea that parsons are not members of the working-class. The majority of them are paid less than the municipal dustmen," says C. F. G. Masterman. *Justice* commenting on this, remarks, "So Mr. Masterman thinks it is low wages that make the working man." Exactly; but can you expect such a materially-minded association as the Christian Church to realize that it is how and what a man thinks that determines his class, rather than the size of his wages or salary? Besides, just at present, with a powerful working-class movement reaching out towards political power in this country, it is popular to represent the parson as poorly paid, and as being at least a sentimental Socialist. No doubt the priesthood in Italy can justify their inherent Pacism by a plentitude of biblical quotations; whilst in Russia they have probably discovered that the Lord is a Bolshevik, and Moses his first Red commissar.

According to the *Outlook*, "Religion in the old conception was thought to be a revelation once for all given,

in the new acceptance of the idea it is a discovery that is continuously being made." We are not quite clear what this means; but we assume that the writer's intention is to reconcile the continual change of religious beliefs with the old theological theory of divine revelation. We doubt, however, whether this conception of a revelation which is given in the ordinary way in which knowledge of mundane things comes to the human race, is likely to commend itself to the religious-minded; whilst the sceptics will, we imagine, smile quietly, and be reminded of the rather pathetic attempts made by bewildered Christian apologists to explain the "inspiration" of the writers of the Bible as being analagous with the "inspiration" that made Shakespeare write his plays, or any poet produce his lyrics and epics. So long as religion demands in a bullying fashion that its dogmas shall be accepted on faith, as being removed beyond the world of reason, it will find adherents. But when it begins to water down these haughty demands, and suggests that religion is "natural," and governed by the same laws that operate in the natural world, it ceases to appeal to either the bigot, or the reasonable man. Its supporters, then, can be drawn only from the ranks of those timid souls, who like to keep a foot in either camp, and whose intellectual diet is a queer mixture of dogmatism and quasi-science.

We fear the wicked infidel Reds of Glasgow have been corrupting that city. At any rate the *Glasgow Eastern Herald* tells the following story in a recent issue: "At a Salvation Army meeting lately a sister began the hymn, 'My soul, be on thy guard; ten thousand foes arise.' She began too high. 'Ten thousand,' she screeched, and stopped. She tried again, 'Ten thousand,' and cracked on a top note. 'Start her at five thousand,' cried a converted stockbroker who was present." Alas! what must the shade of Calvin think?

There seems to be no limit to the enterprise of Mr. Morris Gest. For the past six weeks he has been paying a rental of over £1,000 a week for the lease of the New Century Theatre in New York, which he transformed into a Gothic cathedral for the purposes of the production of "The Miracle." Now he wishes to produce it in a church in London. After all, churches are usually put to less useful purposes than theatres.

The recent controversy as to whether Mars is inhabited by intelligent beings or not, ought to have brought the theologians to the fore with a rush. Quite clearly there is no life on Mars: if there were, the biblical story of creation would have something to say on the matter. Perhaps the parsons are learning caution, and have decided to allow science to solve this problem before offering their dictum.

Less than a hundred years ago Dorchester labourers were deported to Australia for being pioneers of trade unionism. We wonder if all the clerical chorus round the present Labour Government remembers on which side their ecclesiastical predecessors ranged themselves in the movement that challenged orthodoxy in those far off and good old days!

"I have always regarded it as a duty of mine as a minister of religion to teach people to observe civil laws, and possibly a warning, with a bit of practical advice from the police, would have been more likely to have the desired effect than a public example for such an offence." The Rev. Stuart Snoxell, of Riverside, Brandon (Suffolk), who was summoned at Luton for driving a motor-cycle without two independent brakes, wrote this letter to the Bench. He was fined 10s. The magistrate's clerk, Mr. F. W. F. Lathom, rightly described the letter as impertinent. But priests are so accustomed to assuming a hectoring tone where questions of morals and conduct are concerned, that this letter is not altogether remarkable. Nevertheless, we would suggest to this professional purveyor of ethics, that example is always more effective than precept.

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.

W. BILLINGSLEY.—We do not see anything in the letter you enclose which calls for special notice. Your own communication to the Press is in excellent form and will do good. When our delightful Press can be induced to run the risk of losing the sale of a few copies by inserting anything in favour of Freethought good is certain to be done.

H. BRASDEN.—Paul's advice was that women were not to be permitted to speak in Church. If only the advice was given as regards men—and carried—a great deal of nonsense might have been saved the world.

J. BREESE.—We had already written a paragraph on the matter, and you will see we pay special attention to Canon Barnes in "Views and Opinions." That such men should acquire the reputation of thinkers is evidence of the low level of Christian intelligence at its best. The truth of the Darwinian theory has no vital connection with the truth of evolution. Darwinism might be altogether wrong without it in the least affecting the truth of evolution.

T. K. SCOTT.—We are afraid that the Freethinking of your friend who has become converted by Pastor Russell cannot have been of a very robust description—unless, as you suggest, the case is a pathological one. We cannot promise to deal with Pastor Russell seriously. Those who could be affected by such propaganda would certainly not read the *Freethinker*, and a series of articles dealing with the nonsense labelled out by such men would be an insult to the intelligence of those who read this paper week by week.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

Last week we published an obituary notice of Dr. C. R. Niven. We are sorry that a reference of an unpleasant kind is now made necessary. Dr. Niven was, as the obituary stated, a close friend of many years' standing of Mr. Cohen's, he was a Freethinker of very firm and decided opinions, and it was quite in accordance with his desire and that of his widow and children that a secular service should be held at his grave. When Mr. Cohen arrived in Liverpool he was informed that an old friend of Dr. Niven's, Rev. W. Williamson, of Leicester, had expressed a desire to hold some sort of a service in the house. The brothers and sisters of the dead man also had the same desire, and Mr. Cohen said that as it was quite a private affair among themselves, and referred to themselves only, no objection need be made. A room in the house was set aside for their use, neither the coffin, nor

Mrs. Niven, nor the children were present, and a more or less formal service was held. It was, we repeat, a quite private affair. The real service, the one desired by the dead man and his family, was held at the graveside and consisted in an address by Mr. Cohen. This emphasised the nature of Dr. Niven's opinions, and the speaker was afterwards congratulated by several members of the family on what they describe as a "beautiful" address.

So far we had hoped the matter would have ended there. But on the day after the funeral a lengthy obituary notice appeared in the *Liverpool Post*, from "A Correspondent" In view of the nature of the communication we must admit that the writer by concealing his name showed that a small sense of decency still survived, unless the anonymity was due to sheer moral cowardice. The notice made no mention of Dr. Niven's opinions on religion, it did not say that the real service—a secular service—was held at the graveside, but it mentioned—and this seemed to be the main motive for writing—that a service was held in the house by the Rev. W. Williamson "prior to the interment in the presence of a large number of prominent medical men." And it went on to say that the two books the Doctor knew best were his Bible and his Burns. We cannot say which books he knew best, but we could name a dozen that he loved better, and which had had a greater influence on his life. But one can tell a lie in more ways than one, and we have no hesitation in saying that this communication, by mentioning the religious service, without explaining that it was quite opposed to the dead man's views, and suppressing all mention of a secular service, is a peculiarly mean and contemptible one—for the meanest lie that can be told is one that uses a dead man as the occasion for uttering it.

More than that, we say that this is a peculiarly and characteristic Christian falsehood, since it lacks the moral courage of telling the lie plainly and openly. It tells the falsehood by suggestion and by suppressing the truth, and that is a form of falsehood which is an easy first favourite in Christian records, and owes its favouritism to the way in which Christian teaching and influence robs the moral nerve of its edge and precision. We have a strong suspicion as to the authorship of this communication, but we refrain from saying more for the present. Still, we owe it to the memory of one who hated shams and falsehoods to say what we have said. The incident enforces the lesson that no matter how a Christian may act in the ordinary affairs of life, where Christian feelings are aroused, and where Christian interests are at stake, a Freethinker can seldom trust a Christian. He will forget all the ordinary rules of decency and courtesy and allow all that is worst in his nature to have full play. To lie about the living is bad enough, but in the name of friendship to lie about the dead surely touches the lowest level of contemptibility.

Since writing the above we have heard from Mr. Williamson, to whose attention Mr. Cohen called the *Post* article, and we have his assurance that he is in no way responsible for its appearance. We are glad to have that because Dr. Niven had a high opinion of Mr. Williamson's character, and it is good to know that his respect was not misplaced. Mr. Williamson also says that the statement was "unfair" to Mr. Cohen. But Mr. Cohen was not in the least concerned about any unfairness to him. That could neither injure nor trouble him. He is only concerned about correcting a peculiarly contemptible piece of dishonesty, and we are glad to have Mr. Williamson with us in that.

While Mr. Cohen was in Liverpool he was approached by several friends as to the possibility of his lecturing in Liverpool during the coming season. He would be pleased to come, but it is a question of getting the Liverpool friends together. Will all those who are interested, and who see this paragraph, be good enough to drop Mr. Cohen a line and he will see what can be done? If necessary he would come to Liverpool and hold a meeting of those interested to discuss possibilities. There are large

numbers of Freethinkers in the city if they could only be brought into co-operation.

It is a general custom among N.S.S. Branches to devote a lecture, or a short address, to Charles Bradlaugh on the Sunday which falls nearest to the date of his birth. All interested are, therefore, reminded that September 28 is "Bradlaugh Sunday," and it is fitting that Freethinkers should do what they can to see that the work and fame of one of the greatest reformers of the nineteenth century is kept before the people. Christians, and "advanced" politicians who move with one eye on the chapel vote, will certainly not do so.

As a result of Mr. Corrigan's lectures in Stevenson Square, Manchester, on Sunday last, a debate has been arranged with Mr. Bowen, a local Wesleyan preacher, on the subject, "Is Christianity True?" The discussion will take place in Stevenson Square to-day, September 7. We hope these proceedings will be quiet and orderly enough to allow all who wish to take an intelligent interest in the discussion.

We are asked to announce that the meetings of the South London Branch in Brockwell Park will for the future commence at 3 o'clock and 6 instead of at 3.30 and 6.30. We are pleased to learn that in spite of the wretched weather the meetings are very successful at this station, and also that Mr. Corrigan's Tuesday evening meetings on Clapham Common are also meeting with the approval of the large audiences which listen to them.

Does It Matter?

Nature exists independently of all philosophies.—*Engels.*

Human groups have always lived as they could, without caring about theories; their social conduct inevitably results from a sort of compromise in the conflict between their appetites, their aptitudes, and the necessities dictated by their physical environment.—*Letourneau.*

OF the memories that enrich my life, there is none that has a more whimsical appeal than the recollection of an old gentleman, with whom, and beneath whose hospitable roof, I was wont to discuss the problems of life, whilst waiting for my train in a little town in Lincolnshire. Having "debated with no little heat our various opinions" mine host would usher me to the door, and with a twinkle in his eye would ask: "Well, what does it all matter?" To a youth on the threshold of life, of course, it mattered tremendously; and I said so—vigorously. Nevertheless, there have been many times since when I have paused in the midst of a passionate appeal on behalf of some cause dear to my heart, and the vision of the old gentleman with the twinkle in his eye and the taunting question on his lips has come to me, and I have resumed my discourse with a much abated fire. There is nothing like the wisdom of age for cooling the ardour of youth.

To the cobbler there is nothing like leather, and to the philosopher there is nothing like—his philosophy. Just as moralists invariably fall into the error of regarding the preaching of maxims as a primary agent in evolving the higher life—forgetting that morals were implicit in practice long before they became explicit in theory—so do philosophers invariably assume that without them and their 'isms this 'il old world would soon go to the "demnition how-wows." It is not at all so. The majority of people get along tolerably well on a minimum of philosophy. If happiness be the aim of existence—and all philosophies say it is, in this world or another—then I will back the gentleman who removes my dust against any high-brow living. If my wife has a philosophy of life I have yet to discover it, but she is a much more agree-

able person to live with than would be, say, Carlyle, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, or Tolstoy. If I am a philosopher it is from necessity not choice; if I obtain enjoyment from philosophizing it is not because of my philosophy—if I had none I'd be just as happy—it's just my carnal inclination.

If there is anything that provokes my mirth and excites my derision, it is the sight of a well-fed grown-up congregation sitting very stiff and solemn whilst a gentleman with his collar fastened at the back tells them how to behave themselves! After all, one gets a little tired of being harangued from street corners by soap-box orators who think they possess the patent rights of the one and only specific for the ills of humanity; or accosted by pale, pathetic souls who beseech you to read for them the Riddle of the Sphinx. Away with all such! They are an abomination. Why cumber they the ground?

Historically there is no warranty for assuming that philosophy can promote the happiness of humanity, or hasten human progress. Quite the reverse. Man's attempts at framing a satisfactory theory of life, as registered in the mythologies and religions of the world, have been a prolific source of misery and woe. From the hieroglyphics of ancient Babylon to Mrs. Eddy's *Key to the Scriptures* they have been a monument of fatuous error. They have resulted in wars and persecutions, and a tremendous wastage of human energy and emotion. What a blessed thing for humanity if Jesus of Nazareth (Bethlehem?) instead of feeling himself inspired to save humanity, had remained in his father's workshop—or taken quietly to drink. Look at the tremendous wastage of human energy and ingenuity entailed in such metaphysical wordspinning as meets us in the works of the Idealists and the Schoolmen. Then, just as man seemed as if he was emerging from the twilight of metaphysics into the daylight of Science, his development is arrested by a respectable and inept agnosticism. It is heartbreaking. I am blaming no one, I admit that humanity has acted as it must, but one can't help having regrets.

It would seem that the really vital functions of life have been discharged unconsciously or in response to irresistible impulses—and consequently effectively. Wherever man has attempted consciously to control the course of human evolution there error has crept in. Man, the philosopher, perceives this and yet urges upon us the necessity of a philosophy—his philosophy. Man, the religionist, perceives it and still assures us that it is religion—his religion—and still more religion that we want. There is nothing like leather! And the cynic smiles and says: "Well, what does it all matter?" He perceives that even where we might be said to have made progress, in the material sciences, in increased productivity, it has not made for the happiness of humanity to any appreciable extent, it has not lightened the human load commensurately, and he feels that a what-does-it-matter cynicism is justifiable.

Does it matter? Do we need a philosophy of life? The answer is supplied by the desire of every thinking person to possess one. We feel—and I believe rightly—that if life is to be worth living we must have a rational appreciation of it; and we feel still further, with Huxley, that if our increased knowledge and consequent dominion over natural forces is not going to make for the amelioration of the human lot, then would we "hail the advent of some kindly comet, which would sweep the whole affair away, as a desirable consummation."

Sir Ray Lankester has shown that to-day our dominance over natural forces is such that we must go on or go under. There can be no half-way course. It is imperative that we take conscious control over

the course of human evolution, or be tossed like flotsam and jetsam upon the seas of chaos. What then are the obstacles in the way of this realization: this consummation so devoutly to be wished? They are numerous. There are so many philosophies clamouring for our attention. Which is the true one? Obviously, the one that is based on an impartial survey of the facts, and which follows the inferences from the facts to their logical conclusion. Superstition (which includes religion), Metaphysics, and all forms of Obscurantism are the obstacles in the pathway of the realization of our destiny. No wonder the average man is abashed. No wonder he loses himself in the labyrinths of the metaphysicians and theologians. Before we can face impartially the facts of life we must clear away the incrustations. And they say that the aims of the Freethinker are negative! In further articles we will endeavour to deal with some forms of obscurantism, thus following in the wake—but at a very respectful distance—of Mr. Arthur Lynch; taking, first of all, the power of words and phrases in seducing the human intellect from the paths of knowledge.

VINCENT J. HANDS.

A Note on Comedy.

There has been fun in Bagdad. But there never will be civilization where Comedy is not possible; and that comes of some degree of social equality of the sexes.—*Meredith.*

THE sphere of comedy lies somewhere near the hatband that encases the head; the region of tragedy is under the waistcoat, and there appears to be a feud between these two as to which shall be master. In a library one may hear the battle taking place on the bookshelves between *Rabelais* and *The Anatomy of Melancholy*—*Don Quixote* and *the Imitation of Christ*, or that nonsense called *The Confessions of Augustine*. If we have our moods and our moods do not have us, these grave and gay books—and moods—fall into their proper places; but the feet of tragedy if it take one false step will bring down on its head the house of Comedy like a ton of bricks. Remembering the function of handkerchiefs, and the downright stupidity of Desdemona, the grin of Comedy appears like a seraphic gesture that something is wrong in *Othello*. Five acts about Lucy Lockitt losing her pocket is just as convincing; and a tragedy founded on sex in the popular novelist sense of the word will once more invoke the divine malice of comedy to prevent us taking seriously that crowd of modern writers who dance round the maypole of sales.

As the world to some people is always going to the dogs (this, my readers, when the mood has the speaker), there are a few choice spirits, who will see that it goes gracefully in the opposite direction. In the world of illusion will be found Mr. Nigel Playfair, whose taste never misleads him, and Mr. Clifford Bax, who amused himself by writing *Midsummer Madness*. As happiness was born a twin, those who see this comedy may share it.

"All that is good is easy, everything divine runs with light feet," was the first principle of Nietzsche's aesthetics, and Mr. Bax, in his story of four people falling in love, carries his burden lightly to the end, when all the characters find themselves. On the way we are treated to many flashes of wit. Our author has anticipated the advertising of religion. Pantaloon, the "business man," who compares himself to a pillar of fire by night, is neatly countered by Mrs. Pascal, who tells him that he is a column of figures by day. Further, if our modern Jeremiahs, whose chief concern is to tell man that he is a fallen creature, persist in this

lunacy, they must not complain if they are taken at their word. In an excellent duet Pantaloon and Harlequin regale themselves on cider, and the first unfortunate lover sings:—

If man be a sink of iniquity
Why should we bother to think?

We pause for a reply, in the words of Sankey and Moody—or is it Barnum and Baileys?

"Fancy reading a paper when all the flowers are out!" exclaims Columbine to Pantaloon, who is everlastingly consulting the financier's barometer, and as a reward for saying that flowers are inessential, he has the stalk of a rosebud pinned in his coat.

There is a story—your mercy if you have heard it—that when all that was worth saving was in the ark, Noah was called upon in an emergency to stop a leak. The first think handy was the front end of a dog, and that is why dog's noses are cold. The leak became worse, and he next used the upper part of a woman's arm, and that is the origin of the cold shoulder. This, however, would not answer, and Shem or Ham or Japhet were forced against this leak—which explains why men stand with their backs to the fire. In some remote way it also explains the refrain of Pantaloon when flouted:—

The colder the shoulder, the more do we burn.

We shall not spoil any intending visitors pleasure by recounting the whole of the story which gyrates on the axle of laughter. The linch-pin is found in the words of the concluding quartette:—

Read history books and you will find
How all the ages through,
Men have made wars;
But bear in mind,
How they made gardens, too.

Mr. Clifford Bax would bring healing to a sick world by laughter and song. Beethoven is reported to have stated that those who understood his music would be free from the miseries that affect other men; that strange figure in journalism, Gissing, had an idea to reform the world by music; Shakespeare's use of music is a more interesting study than parthenogenesis or the lost ten tribes. The face of history could be looked at after a few generations of the use of music; and during the war when common people made money, the worst thing that our canine press could say of them was that they spent it on pianos. They ought to have been wise and cornered the world's wheat, oil or coal supply, and qualified for peerages.

This little play is slender—like a volume of Max Beerholm's works—it is not unlike the flower having the same name as one of the characters, Columbine. Not once does it side-step from the path of pure fun, lightness, and brightness.

Miss Marie Tempest, "who was married at the font," is happy in her part of the widow Mrs. Pascal, and she acts with all her charm and captivating style. Mr. Frederick Randalow fits his part like a glove, and Mr. Hubert Eisdell and Miss Marjorie Dixon complete an excellent quartette that will convey the freshness and fragrance of comedy over the footlights to delight the hearts of those who sit in darkness. When they leave the Lyric they take with them Mr. Bax's outlook on life as it might be, and refreshment of spirit from the exuberant music of Mr. Armstrong Gibbs. The birth of common sense might choose a worse president than Comedy, with her pair of luminous-eyed companions Laughter and Song.

WILLIAM REPTON.

Each believer in turn disbelieves the doctrine which contradicts him; and just as the Christians spoke of the "unbelieving Moslems," so the Moslems spoke of the "infidel Christians."—*J. M. Robertson.*

So Near and Yet so Far.

I HAVE a friend, typical of many better-class people in my neighbourhood, yet outstanding in personality, one who presents to my mind one of the many paradoxes of social and intellectual life, such as I have often wished to express in writing. My friend keeps noticing my little effusions in the local press and sincerely, if mistakenly, praises them now and then. I find him at all important meetings in the town, political and other, but only at those to which everybody goes; or I meet him bustling in the street, brisk, bonhomie, debonaire, well-groomed, shining-spectacled, full of happy and enthusiastic talk when he meets my humble self. I feel he may have read, remembered, even understood more and better books than I, had a better "education," more leisure, comfort, calm, perhaps a wider, more varied experience, and yet, amazing paradox, remains a child mentally at middle age, an eager and ingenuous infant, "pleased with a rattle tickled with a straw," a Peter Pan that will never grow up; never, never, never. Why, men have become Prime Ministers of the greatest empire the world has ever seen with just such qualities and such refusal to grow any bigger. My friend is laird, factor, lawyer, what you will, something in the City, something *in situ*, yet a good hearty friend, well met, in the crowded street, as if fearing no man's censure for low acquaintances; such as he, indeed, may touch pitch and not be defiled. But—always a friend at arm's length, close and cordial, uncondescending, still, only the saluter of my person, not the companion of my soul! And I would so much like to have been invited to his mansion, to share his good fortune in that, to think more of him for asking me—not that I *want* to go there, where I might have honoured my host as much as he honoured me; no, for in my father's house, in my intellectual, even in my social round, are many mansions. Indeed, I am only too glad to be spared conventional calls; but those of nature and the heart, sincerity and social aim, attract me still. With all my friend's outward optimism—I do not know—I am only sympathetically, curious—there may be a skeleton in his cupboard; but, if so, he keeps it triumphantly hid, no shadow of a grim reality is allowed for a moment to dim his outward guise. He may be rich—I hope he is very well off in this respect—but that again is only my sympathetic concern, and as it might shed light on his social and philosophical protestations. I expect also he is a Freethinker—like Baillie Nicol Jarvie's Highland relative, "only seven times removed." The paper I give him now and then does not seem to stir his soul. He is far from being alone in this among our local "intellectuals." I do not suppose my friend was ever very deep or daring in anything that really mattered to the world at large; but dared, no doubt, and strained intensively, and has been very successful in things of immediate personal concern. He has been no martyr—why should he be?—or philosopher—why be that? as rebel, reformer, denier, philanthropist—he that is without sin in so many counts, let him throw the first stone! Let him not disturb the amenities of the respectable street of *Laissez Faire*. There a good man may dwell aloof in his comfortable suburban villa, rich in material things, profoundly complacent in a care-free existence, with always at hand inexhaustible stores of moral and intellectual platitudes. What is it, then, my neighbour lacks that leaves my heart unmoved to the friendship he may still deserve? He seems to me to lack all the things he has; and having what he lacks would make us both mutually richer and better men, more useful to the world, more wholesome and hopeful in our common interests, happier even in our differences.

So very much depends on the gods we worship—hence the *Freethinker*, in preference to a leading article in the *Glasgow Herald*, or in any of the best papers, or the purely literary columns in these organs of public opinion. I am here reminded of a recent and amiable aristocratic acquaintance of mine, say, "a fine old English gentleman," an ancient and uncorrupted Tory, reminiscent of the spacious days of Elizabeth and her pirate captains. He is eloquent on the blessings of "Capital," and while ignorant of its economics, is the most knowing in its manipulation, in the Stock Exchange, for instance. Asked what created capital, he said, "brains and labour." Well, I replied, without over-estimating mine, I have brains, and I have laboured all my days, and I am not rich. And, yet, I said, it is the easiest thing in the world to be rich; only begin young, and keep on saving, and mere acquisitiveness, with man's other commonplace faculties, and—so rapid and bewildering is the flight of time—a quite ordinary person may be a capitalist at middle-age. Nor do I stress the loss of spiritual values in this material accumulation, but only wish to show how a very ordinary person can become very rich: Indeed, is it not a commonplace that extraordinary persons are more likely to die poor than rich? I must not be construed as making an "attack" upon my friend or his class; far from it, and equally remote from envy, egotism, and all uncharitableness. I am thankful even for small mercies, grateful for little courtesies, and have no desire to sever any social or intellectual bond, however cheap and feeble that may be, but would merely examine and appraise relationships, affinities of mind and station, necessities of a growing mental and moral stature and an increasing "visibility," abhorring the light bread of a superficial convention, because, one hopes, one's greatness is a ripening: writing, it may be, on the strength of a revelation born of a study of the heart of man—or his want of heart. Weary of the large yet meagre content of the comfortable classes, typified in the present, and by no means the extreme instance of a harmless and decent, even humane person, but one in whom is realized in every detail all I have suggested, as noted in countless individuals belonging to all classes: to whom, in moments of nobler irritation, one might exclaim with Brutus: "Away, slight man!" yet in the merciful and magnanimous soul, knowing Cassius, according to his lights, might be as good a man. But so at last the spirit of the obscure man, the man with "no stake in the country," no social niche in the community, thirsts for equality and recognition, and looks not up but down upon the sons of material fortune and social standing—having, in its native magnanimity, fondly and foolishly, wastefully worshipped at many false or feeble shrines, turns at last to the strong tower of its own right mind and from there beholds and judges human worth and human activities, commanding at last a true perspective, affording an ever open refuge and fortress for every fugitive, beleagured, intellectually honest soul! All of which is but a meagre outflow from this castle of the spirit: no language can express its deep, abiding loathing for the cynical superficialities of social, intellectual and religious life. I do not exhort; I leave that to the parson and the politician. For the unshaken, unawakened souls I neither hope nor fear. A man's mind is his kingdom; if he cannot rule there someone else must rule it for him, and there is no lack of would-be kings. Realities often make me sad and humble, yet I do not envy the rose-tinted visions of others that make them happier in their illusions than I can ever hope, or even wish, to be. My friend is the best, and not the worst of these, but still one of these, not "one of us," and so as yet innocent of the true significance of the very best in literature and philosophy.

A. MILLAR.

Correspondence.

WHY THE BIRTH-RATE FALLS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Mr. Kerr's "reply" to the incontrovertible body of facts set forth in my three articles in the FREETHINKER provides a rather dubious compliment to the intelligence of its readers, for he ignores every point of importance and concentrates upon the merest trivialities. Thus he argues that the total number of children of the five ex-premiers is not 24 but 25. What effect has such a difference upon average fertility when divided between six marriages? Surely it is the most illuminating illustration of the argumentative bankruptcy of any cause when its protagonists are compelled to evade a mass of decisive evidence in order to waste space upon such trivial equivocations.

Mr. Kerr contends that the fact that his figures for the Peerage of 1878 do not include dead children vitiates my argument. I say that it is not affected in the least since it was an exposure of Mr. Kerr's error in comparing the fertility of the peers who had "completed their families" (Mr. Kerr's own words in a letter to me) with the average fertility of the rest of the population, which included those who were married only the day before the census was taken. The addition of a small fraction to the fertility of the peers to allow for dead children would merely bring their average into line with that of the rest of the wealthy class, thus completely refuting Mr. Kerr and showing that the facts are just what my views demand.

Mr. Kerr gives what purports to be a statement of my views, but which is, of course, a complete mis-statement. I do not maintain that "a low death-rate causes a low birth-rate," but that a high or low birth rate is produced by the same combination of causes as that which produces a low death-rate—a very different thing. If Mr. Kerr maintains that such a view is "childish" or "intellectually absurd" I may point out that he is flying in the face of the whole results of organic evolution and the basis of his own philosophy of birth control. For the very basis of birth control propaganda is the argument that there can be no reduction in the death-rate or substantial improvement in social conditions without a reduction of the birth-rate. Moreover, the facts of organic evolution show that the degree of fertility has been graduated down to compensate the falling death-rate. But perhaps Mr. Kerr will gravely argue that all this was accomplished, from unicellular organisms up to man, by voluntary birth control!

There is no necessity upon my hypothesis for a reduction in the number of rabbits shot to cause a fall in the fertility of rabbits. The innumerable checks and balances provided by Nature do not react successfully to every abnormal combination of conditions, as the extermination of countless species shows, and the reaction between birth-rate and death-rate is usually indirect. Thus I was asked before the National Birth-Rate Commission if successful surgical operations affect the birth-rate. I replied: "No; but the social conditions which produce a highly developed surgical science will powerfully affect it. It has been conclusively proved that the favourable conditions of captivity reduce the fertility of wild animals, and the effect is greater the more completely they are protected from the hard conditions to which they are subjected under Nature. But these facts Mr. Kerr finds it convenient to ignore. Readers interested in this question, by the way, would do well to study my views at first hand, and not accept second hand statements distorted by prejudice.

What are the facts in regard to human fertility? They are that human fertility falls immediately whenever the death-rate begins to fall. Does Mr. Kerr seriously suggest as the explanation of this coincidence that the population concerned carefully study the quarterly returns of vital statistics, and that when they detect a decline in the death-rate a suitable proportion immediately take to the use of contraceptives? Were I to copy his amiable terminology I should be justified in characterizing such a view as "childish." Not unconscious of this birth controllers have fallen back upon the almost equally

naïve contention that the fall in the birth-rate produces the fall in the death-rate. To this the reply is that any reduction in the death-rate so caused would be but a trifling factor, and that there is not a single instance in our modern history in which a falling death-rate is not directly traceable to improved hygienic conditions. Thus when Dr. Halford Ross, by drastic hygienic measures, brought about a big fall in the death-rate of the Suez Canal zone there was an immediate corresponding fall in the birth-rate without any help from contraceptives. Birth controllers may be safely challenged to produce a single instance of the reduction of birth-rate and death-rate without the aid of improved hygienic conditions. So long as insanitary conditions prevail a swarm of such diseases as smallpox and typhoid will prevail, and birth control is entirely powerless under such conditions to affect either death-rate or birth-rate—as Mr. Kerr well knows.

The contention that the existence of two birth control clinics in London for the past three years would have been accepted as adequate proof by Galileo, Newton, and Darwin is little less than a libel upon those eminent men. Would they have accepted the existence of two birth control clinics to-day as proof that the fall of the birth-rate in France at the end of the eighteenth century, without any contraceptive propaganda and without the aid of any reliable contraceptives, was due to birth control? These men were never known to enter into a tacit conspiracy to ignore all the most significant facts relating to a scientific question or to make dogmatic assertions unsupported by a single trustworthy piece of evidence. Let Mr. Kerr quote, if he can, a single statistical return from his clinics adequately analyzed and showing that they have had the effect of reducing the average fertility of their clients below the average of those who use no contraceptives. As the average family of those who use no contraceptives only numbers two or three the coincidence between taking to contraceptives and the cessation of child-bearing is inevitable in a large proportion of cases. But Mr. Kerr omits to mention the equally large proportion of cases where the use of contraceptives has been followed by conception, though I can supply him with abundant illustrations from birth control literature. The overwhelming majority of people who use these devices take no expert advice, and they are often imposed upon by the merest fakes. Yet they are satisfied on the whole because child-bearing ceases, as a rule, after one or two failures, and their families adjust themselves to the same average as that of those who leave contraceptives alone. And this result is then attributed to contraception by those who should know better, without the slightest attempt at critical analysis, merely because their preconceived ideas and prejudices are involved. When invoking the shades of Darwin and the rest Mr. Kerr would do well to remember that he challenged me some months ago with an ostentatious display of evidence and much lip-service to fact as opposed to authority, and that he has now been completely refuted upon every point, has failed to produce a single fact which will bear examination, and has been compelled to fall back upon the most unblushing dogmatism and appeals to authority.

CHARLES EDWARD PELL.

A CORRECTION.

SIR,—In my article on "Chemical Energy" in your issue of August 31, page 555, second column, the first paragraph should read as follows:—

The yawning gulf that separates a sandbank from the Wembley Exhibition is but a trifling difference in comparison with that between an earth without its atomic elements and our present world. Now when everyone of the elements on this globe had found its affinity and slept in peaceful wedlock, the earth was chemically a bankrupt, for it had parted with all its free atomic energy save that represented by our atmospheric oxygen which obviously is only a surplus over its correlates. Had hydrogen been in excess our seas would be a trifle fuller but life and combustion, as we know them, would not be phenomena on this earth. The other element, nitrogen, which forms the major part of our atmosphere, is wedded simply on account of its weak affinity, as is evident from the great instability of most of its compounds,

KERIDON.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON AUGUST 28.

The President, Mr. C. Cohen, in the chair. Also present: Messrs. Corrigan, Moss, Quinton, Rosetti and Samuels; Mrs. Quinton, Miss Kough and the Secretary.

Minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed.

The monthly cash statement was submitted and adopted.

New members were received for Finsbury Park, Hull, Newcastle, South London and the Parent Society. All conditions having been complied with, permission was granted for the formation of a Branch at Blackburn.

A satisfactory report of Mr. Whitehead's mission was received and requests for a return visit were made by Blackburn, Bolton, Nelson, Hull and Finsbury Park, but having regard to the fact that all dates were filled to the end of September and in consequence of the financial position and the lateness of the season for outdoor work after that date, these were deferred for further consideration.

Winter propaganda was discussed, and it was decided to make enquiries *re* Stratford Town Hall and possible halls in North London.

An invitation from the Ahmadia Community of London to their forthcoming Conference of Religious Organizations was received, and the Secretary instructed to reply that a representative speaker of their Society would be willing to attend.

The meeting then adjourned.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary.*

Milton for Freethinkers.

FEW men have done, or may do, more for the cause of Freethought than the zealous Puritan, John Milton; for he embalmed in permanent literary form the great mythology of Christianity, crystalized in two magnificent epics the spectacular, fantastic, and momentous cosmology of his day.

Paradise Lost and *Paradise Regained* stand side by side with the *Illiad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid* and the *Divine Comedy*. And a comparative study of these, the world's great epic poems, can hardly fail to impress upon the mind of the reflective reader the idea that while they are much alike in grandeur, in breadth of concept, and in æsthetic excellence, they are much alike also in a blind credulity in current superstitions, in an uncritical exposition of a traditional outlook, and in a naïve acceptance of fabulous chimeras.

This dawns upon the mind of the *littérateur* as a gentle extending of sympathy, a broadening catholicity of taste, and a calm deepening of understanding, with little offence to whatever refined and cultured susceptibilities may be his. And men love to be thus enchanted and lured by truth; but will not be driven to it.

Thus *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, once citadels of the Christian faith, become strong strategic posts for the astute Freethinker. Great is the metamorphosis time has effected on the literary and philosophic significance of Milton's great Christian epics. To Freethinkers I say: Read them! Popularize them! To admire and appreciate their fine poetic qualities is to show an admirable breadth of mind; and to stress their historical and philosophical significance is to exercise a judicious acumen.

OSWYN J. BOULTON.

Science is the real saviour, because it helps us to know ourselves and our world. By its help humanity, dust-begrimed and darkened, shall become radiant. Under its benign reign race and religious castes and class prejudices shall vanish. To a world torn and bleeding with religious wrangles, and worn to the bone by barren speculation about gods, ghosts, and the hereafter, science brings the olive-branch of peace. Knowledge, translated with love, reverence, justice, beauty, shall only change the world's night into day.—*M. Mangasarian.*

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

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

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, John A. Hobson, M.A., "Eve's Crime."

OUTDOOR.

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

FINSBURY PARK BRANCH N.S.S. (Highbury Corner, Islington): Every Friday at 8 p.m., Mr. F. P. Corrigan, a Lecture.

FINSBURY PARK.—11.15, 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. J. J. Darby, a Lecture.

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

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S.—Excursion to Upminster. Train: 10 a.m. from Plaistow, calling at all stations; return fare 1s. 6d. Bring lunch; tea will be arranged.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BOLTON SECULAR SOCIETY (Socialist Club, 16 Wood Street): 2.15, Mr. Arthur Crane, "The Illusion of Progress."

OUTDOOR.

NEWCASTLE BRANCH N.S.S. (Town Moor, near North Road entrance): 7, Mr. F. Carlton, a Lecture.

MR. G. WHITEHEAD'S MISSION.—September 7, Hull, 11, near the Pier; 7, New Cross Street or Grainger Street; Rest of the week, 7.30, New Cross Street or Grainger Street; September 13 and 20, Swansea.

ELIJAH FLYING in a chariot of fire is hot stuff, undoubtedly, but the cool, calm conclusion of scores upon scores of your fellow-Freethinkers is that we accomplish with ease something that may look to you as difficult as the Elijah stunt. We can fit you perfectly by post. We guarantee to do so. We go further still—we send you indisputable proofs along with our samples, whether you have asked for such proofs or not. A postcard will fetch the lot, if you will just say which of the following you would like us to send: *Gents' AA to H Book, suits from 54s.; Gents' I to N Book, suits from 99s.; or our Ladies' Costume and Fashion Book, costumes from 44s., frocks from 36s.*—MACCONNELL & MADE, New Street, Bakewell, Derbyshire.

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Principles and Objects.

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