

# The FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions.

### Freethought.

“Freethought in the Nineteenth Century” is a very attractive title—to a Freethinker, and as Lord Oxford, better known as Mr. Asquith, was to lecture, I seized the opportunity of hearing him. The address was an annual one arranged by the Unitarian Association, and I had some notion that it would deal with matters in which all Freethinkers are interested. In that I was disappointed, although I am too old a performer on the lecture platform to make that a complaint against the speaker. Every speaker must be permitted to choose what he shall talk about, or from what angle he will deal with his subject. The fault was entirely mine in expecting, or hoping, for something different. And at the outset Lord Oxford ruled out theology and all questions pertaining to it. He was concerned, it turned out, with political Freethought, and with that in only a rather narrow sense. A wider sense of even political Freethought would have run Lord Oxford up against some pretty heresies in the political field, and that to an active politician might have been distinctly awkward. As it was the address was, in the main, a sketch of two very remarkable men—Robert Owen and William Cobbett, with a slighter sketch of Malthus, and a few general reflections on the progress of science and man’s love of truth. The two thumb-nail sketches of Owen and Cobbett struck me as well done. The only false note struck was when he incidentally said that Owen was what would be called nowadays an Agnostic. I am afraid that humanity’s love of exactitude is not quite so strong as his love of truth is said to be because that is not correct. What a man is must be taken in relation to his time. And Robert Owen, who roundly declared that all the religions of the world were so many forms of geographical insanity, and who said deliberately and definitely that he believed in nothing but Nature, which was the alpha and omega of things, was in the correct sense of the word an Atheist. But perhaps Lord Oxford thought he was dealing kindly with so great a man in giving him the more fashionable term.

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### Authority and Opinion.

Frankly I was not greatly impressed with the philosophic grip Lord Asquith showed in dealing with

his subject. To be quite fair he explained at the outset that the title was rather too ambitious, and that a more correct one would have been “Some Aspects of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century,” but even with that qualification, it remained unsatisfactory. It inverted the order of things. Freethinking, the play of opinion untrammelled by authority, does not originate in the political field. It commences elsewhere. In ancient Athens we can see it beginning in the field of general philosophy, and in modern Europe, thanks to the oppressive and coercive action of the Christian Church, it nearly always began in the field of religious controversy. This was strikingly the case in one of the greatest political and social outbursts of modern times—the great French revolution. There, as it has been shown, the fundamental issues were stated, and the revolutionary principles and theories and sentiments coined that were afterwards applied to the field of politics and sociology. Political conditions generally supply little more than the opportunity for a concrete application of the intellectual ferment that has been at work. And in our own country, it is not difficult to trace the same processes at work in the reaction of the various scientific discoveries—geographical, physical, and otherwise—in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, with the inevitable attack on the power of authority as represented in the Church. Lord Oxford might even find a first-class illustration of this in the mental development of Robert Owen, whose contribution to the social development of the nineteenth century he evidently—and deservedly—ranks very high.

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### Paine and Owen.

The *Principles of Population*, by Malthus, appeared towards the close of the eighteenth century, but Lord Oxford included it in his survey of the nineteenth century because it did its work then. On that ground it is difficult to see how a politician could properly leave out Paine. Paine’s writings appeared only a very few years before the work of Malthus, and if their influence was more immediate than that of the “Principles” they effected their greatest results in the nineteenth century. And great as was the influence of Owen, I venture to say that that of Thomas Paine was far greater. Among the masses of the people it affected those whom Owen appeared to touch but little. The number of societies formed for the discussion of his writings were very great, and both the *Age of Reason* and the *Rights of Man* were at once marked down by the Government of the day as presenting dangers of the gravest description. For many years there was hardly a radical reformer in this country who did not derive his inspiration openly, or otherwise, from Paine. All the reforms, political and social, which Lord Oxford rightly praised Owen for advocating, are to be found in Paine. One wonders when writers and public men in this country will have overcome their fear of Paine’s religious heresies sufficiently to acknowledge the deep debt the democracy owes to him.

### Our Benefactors.

Quite recently there has been a deal of talk in the press about Huxley's work in enabling people who live now to say what they think on matters of religion and science. By far the greater part of the talk is verbal moonshine, and leaves out of sight another very important point. I do not know of any forlorn or struggling cause with which Huxley associated himself. It was the work of the many generally unnamed, and mainly unhonoured Freethinking reformers of the nineteenth century that made it possible for Huxley to speak without loss of position or influence. The praise of Huxley only accentuates the injustice to these others. And one had much the same feeling in listening to Lord Oxford. It is a curious, but suggestive, fact, that men such as Carlyle, Francis Place, Patterson, Haslam, Hetherington, and many others who fought and won the right of Freethinking and free speaking for the democracy of this country were preponderatingly unbelievers. During their lives these men did receive the affection of many thousands of those for whom they worked, but from those who control the educational machinery of the country their reward was mostly hatred. And once dead it was seen to that they should be safely buried. So far, too, as the ordinary publicist is concerned, it is not profitable to resurrect them. There is nothing to be gained by pointing out where our reforming ideas have come from. To the ordinary politician there is far more to be gained by appealing with the undeveloped brains of the average Christian voter by clotted nonsense about the power of Jesus, and to the more intelligent it is safer to select one who already has an undeniable place in our annals. All the same, one longs for the public man with enough originality to step off the beaten track, and to point out the debt the world owes to these—so far as the rank and file of the people are concerned—unknown men and women who sowed that we might reap, and who now lie in unknown graves.

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### The Search for Truth.

I am only giving an impression of Lord Oxford's address, it is to be printed, and then one can deal with it at length if necessary. Needless to say there were many fine passages in it, and the careful listener cannot but have noted that the names recited in pointing out the epoch-makers in science were almost to a man Freethinkers. There was also a strong insistence upon man's quenchless thirst after, and search for, truth, which is only true of man so long as we consider him as a species, or have only rare individuals in mind. For, unfortunately, the average man does not care very much for truth. What he is after is comfort, ease of mind and of body. How many are there, in spite of their loudly professed interest in religion, who really care about getting the truth concerning it? What they want is to be let alone, in a state of ease. Why disturb people who are content? is the common question asked the one who will have the truth at any cost, and to the majority it is conclusive. It is only the few who care enough for the truth to face discomfort and hardship in its getting. Largely this is due to the influence of Christianity, surely the most cowardly religion—intellectually—the world has known. For the insistence was here all in the one direction, on the need for safety, for comfort, for achieving security by way of acceptance of a set of incredible doctrines. Had the influence of Greek civilization, with its questioning, critical spirit, or the Roman with its broad toleration, remained supreme the history of the past sixteen centuries would have been far different.

### The Value of Freethought.

But in one thing I found myself in cordial agreement with Lord Oxford. This was in his emphasis on the value of Freethinking in life. The ultimate justification of the search for truth lies, of course, in its proved value to the race. But that value is not always apparent to the many, and it is not usually immediate. But the development of the love of truth, considered as an end in itself, is, I am convinced, one of the most valued endowments of the human race. Carefully analysed it has the greatest of survival values, since it adds enormously to man's capacity for dealing with the problems, natural and human, that confront him. The truthseeker may never discover, he may be wrong in his methods or in his conclusions, but his example, the sense of abstract justice for which he stands is of incalculable value to all. Huxley said that on a merely material basis the education of Faraday would have been cheap at a million, even though to a good Christian like Gladstone there was no special value in his labours. And how is one to calculate the social value of a movement such as that represented by the National Secular Society which for the past sixty years has stood as a society devoted wholly and entirely to the search for truth. That value, it must be remembered, does not depend upon whether the particular views advocated are right or wrong. It is the example set, the spirit enforced, that is of value. Heresy is of necessity confined to the few, and it is one of the social paradoxes ever with us, that when the few become the many, there is need for another few to arise in opposition. So the work and function of Freethought proceeds, a fermenting, fructifying force in life. It is good to have a prominent politician stressing its value in his own particular field. It is well to remind him, and others, that but for the work of Freethinkers in other fields, Freethinking in politics would not be nearly so common as it is.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### "The Appeal to Sound Learning."

FREETHINKERS are not in the least degree afraid of such an appeal. As a matter of fact, it is an appeal which they themselves have been most earnestly making in all ages. It is the Church that ought to dread any appeal to true learning, for of all institutions the Church has done the most to oppose and suppress secular knowledge. Peter Abelard and Arnold of Brescia, both belonging to the first half of the twelfth century, made their appeal to reason, the former against the doctrines of the Church and the latter against its institutions, and both were effectually silenced. The truth is that the Church has always been the sworn enemy of scientific investigations and discoveries. In France, for centuries, the study of chemistry was strictly forbidden. And yet in the *Guardian* of May 29 there appears a sermon entitled, "The Appeal to Sound Learning," by the Rev. E. C. Rich, priest-in-charge of St. Mary's, Bourdon Street, London, W. Mr. Rich tells us that "we may well believe that St. Paul had often desired to devote himself freely to pour out his mind undisturbed by controversy to this high theme of the unity of all things in Christ." Is not the reverend gentleman aware that there is no historical evidence whatsoever of "the unity of all things in Christ"? Furthermore, there is not the shadow of historical evidence of the unity of all believers in Christ. Writing to the Corinthian Church Paul said:—

Are ye not carnal? For whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal and walk after the manner of men? For when one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not

men? What then is Apollos? and what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed; and each as the Lord gave to him (iii., 3-5).

Unity in Christ is a dream that has never come true. Mr. Rich is quite mistaken when he asserts that Paul saw the realization of his theory that Gentile converts should stand on an equality with Jewish believers in their enjoyment of the privileges of the Gospel; but as a matter of fact Paul never beheld anything of the kind. What he really did see was endless quarrel, strife, more or less open war between Jewish and Gentile Christians, never unity between them in Christ. Judaizers followed him everywhere, denouncing him in angriest terms, calling him a false Apostle, and declaring that the Gospel he preached was of the Devil.

Let us now watch Mr. Rich's interesting process of climbing down. Imitating Paul, he defines the Church as the body of Christ. He maintains that "the Catholic idea demands that no one shall be left outside the claims of Christ." He affirms also that in the Church there are no privileged classes, which will be an amazing surprise to multitudes, especially to those who attend country churches where squires abide. But here follows an astounding admission:—

This is St. Paul's great theme; and yet it was no empty vision. In outline at least it was true in fact. The Catholic Church is the only means that God possesses by which he may work out his purpose. Yet Christian history is sad reading when we turn from St. Paul's picture of what should be to what is. How impoverished has our conception of Christ's Church become when we would try to reduce our membership to a dull uniformity of expression! Thus, to take one signal instance from the Renaissance, cannot we see in the task of the Church in the Middle Ages a great achievement of Christ's purposes in the establishment of the nations and their being brought up in the Catholic faith? And yet when these same nations grew out of their childhood and became conscious of their nationality, how lamentably did the Church fail in handling the situation! The break up of the outward unity at the time of the Reformation was to a large extent due to an impoverished idea of Catholicism.

Poor God! So inadequate are his resources that "the Catholic Church is the only means that he possesses by which he may work out his purpose," and by Mr. Rich's own admission the Catholic Church has been and is a stupendous failure. In fact, the Church has lost its Pauline ideal. In other words, the Church, as conceived by Paul and his followers, practically no longer exists. Meantime, what has happened to Christianity, whose custodian the Church is believed to have always been? What inference, for example, are we to draw from the statement that we are now living "amid the wreck and disaster of a shattered Christendom"? Is Christianity dead and have all the high and proud claims of the Church been falsified by its history? Though admitting gigantic failures Mr. Rich will not answer that last question in the affirmative, thereby proving that last question in the affirmative, thereby proving how very blind, after all, his belief in Church and Christianity really is. What is the use of telling us that "a national Church, or rather a Church which expresses a nation's share in the universal Body of Christ, is not incompatible with Catholicism," when we are face to face with the harrowing fact that the world was never in a more deplorable and ruined condition than it is at this moment? Mr. Rich very properly declares that "the only question which really matters about a Church doctrine or practice is not whether the fourth or the twelfth or the sixteenth century allows it, but whether it is true." But how are we to find out whether it is true or false? It is at this stage in the discourse that the appeal to sound learning is for the first time introduced.

It is called Bishop Creighton's formula, of which Mr. Rich gives the following account:—

The authority in which we believe is intelligible though it may not be easy to define. We take our stand upon the Catholic faith with a firm grasp upon the Catholic sacraments and ministry. In defence of that faith we have ever appealed to sound learning in its support. We have no infallible oracle to answer our many inquiries. We do not seek for such. But the Holy Spirit who inhabits his Holy Catholic Church has not deserted us.

We need go no further to learn that the appeal to sound learning is a perfect farce. We are not even told what sound learning is, though we naturally infer that it signifies theological learning which, strictly speaking, is no learning at all. Theology deals exclusively with purely imaginary subjects, whose very existence is absolutely incapable of any demonstration. They are objects of faith, not of knowledge. Meredith calls them "Fables of the Above," and such they are. No one possesses the slightest knowledge of them, though many still believe in them as realities. And yet the preacher of this sermon characterizes the appeal to sound learning thus:—

What the formula does allow in the question of the creeds is that no English Churchman need fear the light of science and enquiry into the Church's title deeds. Free enquiry is the best ally of truth. This has resulted in a new understanding of ancient truths contained in the creeds. Yet it is one thing to regard the descent into hell and the ascent into heaven symbolically because we no longer regard hell and heaven as places in space. We do not thereby doubt the fact of heaven and hell. It is quite another matter to interpret the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection symbolically, for this would be to regard them no longer as facts. Matters which transcend earthly experience must of necessity be expressed symbolically. This does not apply to the Virgin Birth and the empty tomb for human language can well express the truths. Sound learning demands the strictest scrutiny into their claims to historical truth. Should that enquiry prove them to be false, then the Christian claim is destroyed.

That extract shows the Church at its intellectual worst, in which sound learning is conspicuous only by its absence. "Matters which transcend earthly experience" are completely outside the realm of knowledge. Mr. Rich believes in them, not because he knows anything about them, but because the Church believes in them. He accepts the Virgin Birth for the same reason, for he is fully aware that no human virgin has ever given birth to a child. In the human family such a miracle has never happened. The same remarks apply with equal force to the alleged Resurrection. There are no empty tombs anywhere on earth, and there never have been. No sound learning has ever spoken of a resurrection as an historical fact. But a Christian believer may ask, "If all the stupendous miracles recorded in the Four Gospels never occurred at all, how do you account for the existence of the Christian Church?" No question easier to answer could have been put, and we answer it by asking another, namely, Why has the Church so utterly failed to accomplish the wonderful moral and social transformation of the world which its founders so confidently predicted it would certainly do ere long? The direct cause of its colossal failure through all the ages has been the terrible fact that it was founded on a series of tragical lies, which lies it has kept on persistently repeating from the very beginning until now. It is not a supernatural institution, it has never performed any supernatural deeds, and whatever good it may have done from time to time it did in its own human strength alone, without aid or succour from any other world whatever.

J. T. LLOYD.

## The Courage of Carlile.

A willing slave for years,  
I strove to set men free;  
Mine were the labours, hopes, and fears,  
Be theirs the victory. —Gerald Massey.

"THE old guard dies, but never surrenders." The famous saying leaps to the memory at the mention of the name of the lion-hearted Richard Carlile. The story of his struggles is a part of the history of Free-thought, and it is a romance of a hero fighting at fearful odds against the oppression of Priestcraft, and leaving an imperishable name. Carlile's was the true soldier's temperament, supported by the unshakable principles without which no great purpose can be achieved. No misfortune disconcerted him; no defeat cowed his indomitable spirit. He could not be bullied nor frightened, although Freethought was then fighting for its very existence. Superstition, effectively disguised in the ermine of the judge, was strong in the land, and contemptuous enough of the little band of heroes and heroines, whose evangel has revolutionized knowledge, and is rewriting the intellectual history of the world. In the darkest days of the Freethought movement, Carlile and his comrades never lost courage, for they knew the longer they lay in prison the greater triumph would be won for the great cause they had at heart.

Recall what happened! Richard Carlile himself suffered nine and a half years' imprisonment for championing freedom of speech. His brave wife, courageous members of his family, and stalwart shop assistants, divided among them many years' confinement in gaols. And what a man was the leader, that vivid, vital, dynamic personality, all aglow with enthusiasm, who diffused energy around him, and whose very presence was an inspiration.

A son of the West Country, Carlile was self-educated. As a boy, he collected faggots to burn in effigy "Tom Paine," the Guy Fawkes of that period, whose virile writings were in after life to influence him so greatly. For he was twenty-five years old before he actually read Paine's books. The irony of it all! Henceforth he was the dauntless champion of Freethought and free speech. Taxes were then placed on knowledge, and fines and prisons awaited all who dared to speak or write of political or religious liberty. England was then ruled by a mad king, a profligate regent, and a corrupt, despotic government; but Carlile, a poor man, defied Authority, and broke the fetters of despotism. For, bear in mind, the newspaper press to Carlile was not a mere purveyor of sensationalism, dirt, and scandal. To him it appeared a vehicle of ideas, a platform from which the evangel of liberty could be proclaimed daily, a trumpet whose clarion note would summon men and women to the great battle against despotism in every shape and form.

Carlile was the very man to carry a forlorn cause to victory. Handcuffed and in prison, he roused the public conscience, and compelled Authority, with its tens of thousands of police and hundreds of thousands of soldiers, to cry "halt." Short of murdering him, it was impossible to suppress Carlile. To attack him was but to punch a rock. He was imprisoned, his wife was imprisoned, a score of his assistants went to gaol, but the Freethinkers were still undefeated. When they were nearly all in prison, the gallant last line of defence sold the prosecuted books through an aperture, so that it was difficult to identify the seller. Then they hit on the bright idea of the slot machine, and identity was no longer possible.

Among the books for sale were Paine's *Age of Reason*, Annet's *Life of David*, Voltaire's pamphlets, Palmer's *Principles of Nature*, and other thunderous engines of revolt. When his stocks were confiscated

by the Authorities, Carlile read nearly the whole of the *Age of Reason* in his clever defence, so that publicity should be ensured to the very book sought to be destroyed. Prison was not the only punishment, for fines, amounting to thousands of pounds, were imposed, and literature was destroyed wholesale. To show his contempt for Priestcraft, Carlile dated his letters from gaol "the era of the carpenter's wife's son." Superior folk may lift their eyebrows in the safe seclusion of their own sheltered homes at such audacity, but the fiery, restless courage which accounted for it is a quality which the world can very ill spare. What it can achieve needs no record; it is recorded on history's page in a life and actions as courageous as any recorded in the immortal pages of Plutarch. Fighting the embattled hosts of Superstition, the victory remained to Carlile. Writing from prison in the sixth year of his imprisonment, he was able to say, "All the publications that have been prosecuted have been, and are, continued in open sale." What matchless courage! "The sound of it is like the ring of Roman swords on the helmets of barbarians." Small wonder that the two greatest poets of his time, Shelley and Keats, recognized that he was a hero battling for liberty.

Carlile's victory was so complete that his later years were spent in comparative peace at Enfield, where he died in 1843. True to the end in his devotion to science and humanity, he bequeathed his body for dissection and the advancement of medical knowledge. The hero's funeral at Kensal Green Cemetery was the occasion of an exhibition of Christian bigotry. At the funeral the Rev. Josiah Twigger appeared and insisted on reading the burial service of the Government Religion. In spite of protests from the family, the priest persisted, and the last insult of Priestcraft was hurled at the dead Freethinker. Carlile's brave wife survived him only a few months, and she was buried in the same grave. Thus ended the career of one who, as Browning has it, was "ever a fighter," strenuous, eager, unsparring, often hard; but he had, as was said of Byron, the "imperishable excellence of sincerity and strength."

Such heroism left its mark on history's page. Twenty-five years after Carlile's death organized Freethought was an accomplished fact, for, in 1866, the National Secular Society was founded, the first President being the able and courageous Charles Bradlaugh. Under his leadership, and those of his gallant successors, this Society has ever been in the vanguard of progress, sheltering behind it all the weaker heterodox people, who otherwise had been crushed by the sheer weight of Orthodoxy. Behind militant Freethought all forms of advanced thought have advanced to some measure of freedom. It has been a prolonged battle through the years against enormous odds. As the little *Revenge* earned an undying name by hurling herself against the great battleships of Philip of Spain, so the Secularists have displayed extraordinary courage in attacking the more formidable Armada of Superstition. The greater the perils, the greater the victory, and in the ripe years to come recognition must be given to the superb courage, which, disregarding any material reward, was satisfied with the proud knowledge that their action would diffuse the blessings of liberty to their fellow men. For in that happy time to come the stormy notes of struggle and contention will be changed to the unfaltering trumpet-notes of ultimate victory. In that proud hour Carlile's dream will have come true, and the Secularists will share with him a lasting place in the history of intellectual progress by bringing it within the realities of life.

MIMNERMUS.

## Preachers That I Have Heard.

I WILL only trouble the reader with a few that probably the young people have heard of but never seen. The Strict, or Particular Baptist ministers were not very brilliant, but there was one exception, a Rev. James Wells. He held forth at a large chapel at Walworth. He was a very rapid speaker, and even his prayers were taken at express speed. He made a curious slip one morning. I am not joking. I heard him say it. Telling the Lord that we knew that we were sinners, he remarked: "We have been very bad all the week, and I don't suppose we shall be any better next week." And then he rattled on again, for he had a lot to say to the Lord and he said it. He was a Greek and Latin scholar, and I often wondered why a man of his ability should take up with such a narrow creed.

His interpretation of the Book of Revelation was interesting but unconvincing. Some views of his on Rahab and the two spies (see Joshua) made quite a stir in a section of the Christian world and the chapel was crowded for some weeks.

I also visited a large Presbyterian chapel in Marylebone. The minister, the Rev. E. Fraser, was very fond of quoting, and as nearly all the congregation had Bibles, the effect of hundreds of leaves being turned over at the same time was startling. His favourite author was St. Paul, and his observations panned out something like this:—

If you turn to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Episcopalian (flutter, flutter go the leaves), you will find in the third chapter that Paul says, "It is shameful that women should wear such large hats in church."

Again, if you look at the Epistle to the Malthusians (flutter, flutter), you will see that he says, "A woman should be seen and not heard." Mind, I am only giving you St. Paul's sentiments, not my own. And now finally, if you will turn to his Epistle to the Phillistines (flutter, flutter), you will find that Paul confirms what I told you last Sunday. Let us pray.

I am afraid that I have mixed up St. Paul's Epistles a good deal, but my excuse is that I have just been to see Mrs. Malaprop in "The Rivals."

Of course I went to hear Spurgeon. It was a nice walk across the parks and over the bridges. On the way I was continually meeting young men offering tracts with invitations to come and be shaved (beg pardon—saved). In self defence I armed myself with a few Freethought pamphlets, and as exchange is no robbery we were both satisfied. Once I gave a young man a copy of the *National Reformer*. He looked at it shyly. "Thank you very much," he said, "but I will read it to-morrow; not to-day, because it is Sunday."

Spurgeon at that time was one of the sights of London. Country folk visiting us went to the Tower of London, the British Museum, the Christy Minstrels, and Spurgeon's Tabernacle. Spurgeon was a great preacher. His earnestness, his fine voice that filled that immense building, and that he produced without any apparent effort, were all in his favour. And he did give sinners a chance. With tears in his voice he implored them to take his advice, and come to Jesus, but if they refused, well, damn it all, he would not be answerable for the consequences.

The Strict or Particular Baptists only gave sinners an *off* chance to be saved.

But the last time I heard Spurgeon he told us that a day or two ago he had been praying to the Lord on behalf of an orphanage that he was interested in at Stockwell, and, lo, and behold, a letter came the next morning with a hundred pound cheque enclosed. This plainly proves the power of prayer "without a doubt or possible doubt whatever." (See

"The Gondoliers.") The singing of the "old hundredth" by that vast congregation made one sit up, or rather perhaps I ought to say, stand up. The Handel Festival Choir (of which I am a member) was not in it. Ah! Spurgeon was great. Peace to his ashes. We shall never look upon his like again.

The Rev. H. R. Haweis was also a very popular preacher of a different type. Very refined, and full of ideas. His books on *Music and Morals* and *Old Violins* are still read. On Sundays the streets around the church were lined with carriages awaiting their occupants. One very wet Sunday morning I dropped into the chapel in Crown Court where Dr. Cummings (the prophet) held forth. Two or three young men followed me in. Dr. Cummings did not prophesy on that occasion, not even fine weather, but he spotted us, and hoped that those who had come in out of the rain would come again and "pray to stay"—pardon, I have got it wrong—stay to pray. It would do them good. The following week I found my way to the Meeting House of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, in St. Martin's Lane. It was disappointing, as there was nothing doing. We sat in absolute silence for a very long time. I was a good mind to rise and ask if anyone would oblige with a song or a recitation, but I thought perhaps I had better not as it was Sunday.

At length a benevolent looking gentleman was moved to read a chapter and make a few comments, and then we gathered up our umbrellas and went home to dinner.

I must not forget the Holy Catholic Church. Visiting St. George's Cathedral one morning I had to pay one shilling at the doors (no entertainment tax). I heard some beautiful music perfectly rendered. Some of the soloists I feel convinced were not unknown in the concert halls. Standing room only when I was there. The Catholics know how to do the thing properly. They appeal to all the senses. The old Irish woman was quite right when she said, "When I goes to Church I like to hear summat, to see summat, and to smell summat."

Mr. Murphy, at the Borough Road Chapel, was very popular with the artizan class and Mr. McCree, at St. Giles, was very much liked all around the Seven Dials. They called him the Bishop of St. Giles. All that part of London was very slummy and objectionable. Mr. McCree did his best to draw the poor people from the taverns. He instituted concerts, and Penny Readings to cheer them up, and they had quite a nice entertainment for one penny.

Coming down to just a few years ago there were Stopford Brook, Hugh Price Hughes, and Dr. Parker. The Lord's Prayer as delivered by Stopford Brook was very impressive. Dr. Parker was an excellent preacher, but he had one rather disconcerting peculiarity. He would fix his eagle eye on some sinner in the chapel and make him feel quite uncomfortable. I only heard Mr. Hugh Price Hughes once, at the old St. James's Hall. I don't know if it was done on purpose or was only accidental, but the surroundings on that occasion were rather picturesque. On one side of the platform were six veterans entirely bald; no wool at all on the place where the wool ought to grow. On the other side there were six venerable greybeards, and Mr. Hugh Price Hughes stood in the middle.

I daresay some readers have heard a yarn about Mr. Hughes. Here it is, but it can't be true. He was invited to speak at a provincial town, and the attendant, a rather illiterate man, gave out the notices in place of the secretary, who was indisposed:

My friends, next Sunday we shall be favoured with a discourse by Mr. Hugh Price Hughes M—A—well, so it is, I declare, Mr. Hugh Price Hughes Ma will speak to you next Sunday. I hope you will all come and hear the old lady.

I knew Mr. Truelove, the veteran Freethought bookseller, and often had a chat with him. He was treated rather badly at the Courts when he had books stolen, for he would not take the oath. I assisted as time permitted in Mr. Bradlaugh's fight for his seat, and, of course, I always affirmed when I was called on the jury. There never was any difficulty but this, that your fellow jurymen expected you to be foreman, which has its drawbacks, especially in a murder case. A good deal of time is wasted on this oath business.

One more reminiscence and I will conclude. I stood with hundreds of people on Westminster Bridge for two hours or more to welcome Garibaldi to London. I might say that some of his volunteers in his memorable campaign were members of the John Street Institute.

ANDREW CLARKE.

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

### Evening Public Meeting.

THE public meeting which followed the Conference of the N.S.S., held on Whit-Sunday in London, was held in the Scala Theatre, Charlotte Street, Tottenham Court Road. At 7 o'clock the President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, took the chair, and was supported on the platform by Messrs. A. B. Moss, C. E. Ratcliffe, and George Bedborough, Miss Ettie A. Rout, and Messrs. G. Whitehead, J. T. Lloyd, R. H. Rosetti, and E. Clifford Williams.

Mr. Chapman Cohen, who was warmly received on rising, said that he thought most of the audience would be sufficiently familiar with the principles of the Society. It had managed to make itself sufficiently well known and probably those who benefited mostly from its influence were least aware of the fact. Those who could recall what the world was like theologically sixty-five years ago and what it was to-day could appreciate that. If the Christian was a little more humble than he was, if the clergy were inclined to be a little more reasonable and a little more humane, if people could enjoy themselves without the historic choice between the Church and the public-house, it was largely due, he thought, to that band of workers who call themselves the N.S.S. There was a large platform of speakers, and as the time was strictly limited he was afraid the audience would have to be content with speeches in tabloid form. He would only say one thing before he called on the first speaker.

There were in the world in relation to Christianity three kinds of people. There were a large number of people who felt that all was not right with Christianity but who don't know what is wrong; there were a number of people who knew what was wrong but can't put it into words, and there were those who knew what was wrong, but were afraid to say so.

The Society existed to tell the first class what was wrong, to help the second class to put into words what they thought, and to say for the third class what they would not say for themselves. One class would get vocal, another intelligence, and the third courage. (Applause.)

Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe, who was also warmly welcomed, said that Secularists have a very great justification for congratulations on progress made.

St. Paul's Cathedral needed £250,000 to put it on its legs again; it would need a much larger sum to put what St. Paul's stands for on its legs again.

Middlesex Hospital is falling down! If we were to divert the time, energy, and money now spent on religion, into secular channels, there would be no need for flag-days and pitious appeals for charity to prop up hospitals and other necessary institutions.

Secularism was a happy combination of science and humanitarianism. Christianity unfortunately was based upon superstitions which were gradually decaying. It was the business and pleasure of Freethinkers to hasten the process. All valuable contributions to humanity were secular in character—industry, commerce, politics,

science, hospitals, etc. The fallacies of religion are, and always have been, an obstacle to social evolution.

The aim of Secularism is to remove the incubus by education in the form of lectures, literature, discussion meetings, and personal conversations. By these means past successes would be maintained and further conquests won.

Mr. George Bedborough, whose inimitable manner put him at once on good terms with his audience, quoted a recent absurdity from the religious press about "Cheerful Christians and Sad Secularists." He instanced Miss Vance as the most cheery optimist of his acquaintance. He asked if hunting witches, baiting Jews, and burning heretics were not the historical "humours" of Christians. He quoted some amusing instances of modern Christian humour (of the unconscious sort), including the Rev. F. R. Horton's decision about "not wearing clothes to distinguish us from our fellows"; Mr. Arnold Lunn's "God means business"; the Bishop of London's "Nothing is as good as religion." He ridiculed the idea of enlisting Christian bishops on the side of what was called "clean" plays. Mr. Bedborough welcomed recent signs that modern men were ceasing to believe in God's omnipotence. Everything pointed to the recognition of the great Freethought doctrine that without man's efforts God is powerless.

Let there be light, says man; and though for years  
He toil in darkness, light at length appears.

Miss Ettie Rout said that it gave her great pleasure to be present with so many members of "The Old Brigade." The men and women who in the past had borne the burden of the battle for Freethought had made possible to-day the holding of dignified and orderly open meetings, such as the present one. It required no courage now in the ordinary way for a man or a woman to come on the Freethought platform. But it should be remembered that Freethought did not consist in Bible-banging or throwing stones at any Joss. It was necessary to destroy idols before they could be replaced by ideals, but Freethought, as a principle, was constructive: it meant simply thinking freely and clearly about all aspects of knowledge. The aspect of knowledge in which she was specially interested in was Birth Control and the medical prevention of sexual disease. There were, unfortunately, some Freethinkers who did not yet think freely about sex problems. They had had a good Christian upbringing—and had not quite escaped from it. The Puritan was the most poisonous form of organic life, and whether he was Christian Puritan or an Atheistic Puritan did not matter. That was only one direction in which Freethought should prove itself on the side of Light and Knowledge. The Freethinkers were not on the side of the angels: they were on the side of Mankind, and on the side against Priestcraft. In the *Sunday Chronicle* of May 31, there was a review of a book by a French professor entitled *Man, the Idiot*, and the sub-heading was "A Professor's Startling Indictment of the Lord of Creation." This did not mean Jehovah; it meant Man: and the Professor claimed that mankind was much more stupid and destructive than the lower animals, and as proof he instanced the treatment given to Socrates, Columbus, Galileo, and many others on the long list of those who, it was alleged, suffered poverty, persecution, and even death at the hands of mankind. No! At the hands of Priestcraft. It was not men who were the "idiots"—it was the "Men of God." Mankind, under the guidance of the Freethinkers, had gradually deprived the Men of God of their power for evil; and thereby the Freethinkers had helped to ensure the safety and comfort and reward of the great scientists and discoverers of the present time. In past centuries Marconi would have been dubbed a magician—and destroyed; Edison would be a heretic and possessed of devils—he made voices come from nowhere—kill him; Nansen and Amundsen had blasphemed against the Holy Ghost by proving that the earth was round—burn them or boil them, or torture them. It was because of the liberating power of Freethought, because of the decay of the sacerdotal religion, because of the advancement in our knowledge of Natural Law, that these great men were honoured and rewarded to-day. But still there remained the need for that

eternal vigilance which was the price of safety and success: the small men—the shopkeepers and others—were not yet free. England never could honestly call itself a free country while a single newspaper seller was penalized for displaying copies of the *Freethinker*.

Mr. George Whitehead entertained the audience with a lengthy parable, in which the crudity and immorality of the Christian creed was vividly depicted, and which we should only spoil by compression.

Mr. J. T. Lloyd, who was heartily greeted, said:—

I want to say something about Secularism which I have been wistfully yearning to say for some time, but to which hitherto I have not been able to give adequate expression. The first thing is that my conversion to Secularism was not an act of renunciation, abandonment, or desertion, but distinctly an act of acquisition. That is to say, I never consciously or by an act of my will became a Christian, but was artificially made one in earliest childhood. Christianity was forcibly dropped into me, and the dose was repeated daily for many years until I was made a professing Christian. I held a multitude of supernatural beliefs, but it never occurred to me that I had a right, and that it was my duty to examine them carefully in the light of reason. I held them sacredly, though blindly, as long as ever I could. But I must confess that never did I cling to them *intellectually*, but always, from first to last, *emotionally*, and the emotions which they begot were often exquisitely sweet, ecstatic, almost if not actually bordering on lunacy. Ultimately, however, sauer, more rational, and wholly natural beliefs became regnant within me, with the inevitable result that the supernatural ones dropped out of their own accord. The presence of the new intellectual convictions made it impossible for them to remain, and they took their departure without asking my leave. Indeed, I never gave up religion; it was religion that gave me up. And so I became an advocate of Secularism, which to me has been, and is, a *system of revaluations*. It revalues human nature. Under Christianity man is a despicable worm, a fallen and degraded sinner, without virtue and without strength, but in Secularism he shines as the highest and noblest product of evolution. In Christianity time is of no value whatever except as a gracious opportunity to prepare for eternity, while in Secularism time is of inestimable value as our only chance to live. Knowing no other world, it teaches us to make the most and best of this. It seeks to convince us that the only life worth living is one of love and service.

Mr. Rosetti, while expressing a contempt for Christianity, said:—We must bear in mind that mental poverty is one of the greatest factors in the survival of Christian religion. Making no tax on the intellect Christianity contains the elements for popular acceptance, appealing as it does to the unthinking majority, and is deliberately perpetuated through the ages by the Church. Thus Christianity is largely responsible for the superficial mentality operating in society to-day, the wretched results of which are apparent everywhere. The stampeding of thousands of votes from one political party to another, resulting from a grotesque poster during election times; the savagery inspired by the bogey of a single word such as Bolshevik, Communist, Atheist are examples. (Applause.)

Mr. A. B. Moss said that he was pleased to have an opportunity of speaking on Freethought in that beautiful theatre. To him Freethought meant the natural and rational interpretation of the phenomena of the universe. In this country we had a State religion which we were asked to accept, and it was our duty to investigate its claims, to think freely on the subject, and to be equally free in the expression of our views. When he was a young man the Bible was regarded as a God inspired production; indeed, as Bishop Burgon said, "Every word of it was the direct utterance of the Most High—absolute, perfect, supreme"; in short, it was supposed to contain the last word on Science, history, and morality. Very few dared to question it. He was glad to know, however, that the men who helped to destroy the idolatry of the Bible were brave men like Thomas Paine in his *Age of Reason*, and a learned clergyman, a

(Continued on page 379.)

## Acid Drops.

A serious mistake has occurred in the spirit world. A communication was recently received from the spirit of Commander Joseph Honner. Commander Honner was shipmate with a certain Admiral some years ago, and it is with this Admiral that the conversation took place. But the Commander writes to the *Daily News* that he is still on this side of "Summerland." His name does not, however, appear in the current Navy List, and this has probably led to the error. So it is interesting to know that even though a man may come back and speak through a medium, that is not a decisive proof that he has "passed over." But probably Sir Arthur Conan Doyle may be able to show Commander Honner that he is not so much alive as he thinks he is. Commander Honner is now curious to know what it is he talked about.

A discussion has been going on in the columns of the *Broadstairs Echo* on the question of Sunday games, and we notice the usual well written letter from our old friend, Latimer-Voight, in their defence. But we are rather more taken with a letter from some pious ass who signs himself "E. M. H." He writes that the "beneficent Creator" has "provided one day in seven" that man "might have rest of body and time for thought and spiritual refreshment." "Provided" is very good. And if we assume that E. M. H. reserves one day out of seven as the time for doing any thinking, it may go some way towards explaining his letter which, one assumes, was written on one of the other six days. We would suggest to E. M. H. that it might be better if he stopped doing any thinking at all Sunday, and tried the effect of it on the other six days in the week—not too much at once, say, about five minutes per day. The time could be lengthened as the patient got stronger.

It is very easy to set a myth going, and persistence is all that is required to keep it in being. "In the name of Christ, the lover of children," is a sentence in a paragraph by the editor of the *Christian World*, and as the manner in which it is said assumes that no opposition will be offered, it is unlikely that any will be given. And yet there is no evidence that the Jesus Christ of the New Testament had any special love for children. He selected them as a type, but that is all. His disciples were to be as children—that is, they were to be as trustful, as innocent, and as easily taught as children. If that proves his profound love for children, we may also remind Christians that he also selected sheep. His followers were his sheep. And sheep are not really remarkable for the strength of their intellect or the independence of their character. On the whole, though, we think sheep is not a bad figure. For Christians are apt to herd like sheep, think like sheep, follow like sheep, and it is only fitting that their pastors and masters should see they are sheared like sheep when the proper time arrives.

Ohio is in America. The land of stars and stripes is making a bold bid to be the biggest noise in world politics with its navy, army, air-force, and control of gold. Ohio Senate, through the Buchanan Bill passed by a vote of 21 to 14, make it compulsory for at least ten verses of the Bible to be read daily. On the assumption we presume that every little helps.

A Liverpool vicar has been writing to the local papers expressing his conviction that people are sometimes possessed by devils—literally, not figuratively. Some other folk have written expressing their surprise that anyone should have these beliefs to-day. But, after all, the only real cause for surprise is that one should find a Christian vicar in these days who really believes in true Christianity and is honest enough to make the fact public. Moreover, Jesus Christ was a firm believer in possession by devils, and he is supported by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. And as the Deity continues to exist in the minds of a great many people on account of

the testimonials handed him by divers scientific men, Jesus may not feel hurt at having as backer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Mr. George Bernard Shaw in his preface to *Getting Married* was not hampered by the religious *mort main* that appears to disable Christian critics of divorce. We were reminded of his free lance attitude after a reading of an article by "A Liberal Churchman" in the *Evening Standard*. It is the aim of any writer worth his salt to write with a purpose, to make his meaning clear, and address the world. This is how the Liberal Churchman does it; we have no records of how a Churchman of the opposite kind would state the case:—

Christian citizens who value liberty ought to be on their guard against the closing of the Church's doors by law against all divorced persons. This is a real peril. The Church's attitude already inflicts hardship on poor people who are often more sinned against than sinning, who have had the courage to face the courts in order to escape out of a miserable marriage into a happier one, and who ask for the Church's blessing on their new venture.

This cry of liberty, and warning of real peril, is a good example of stupefaction induced by Christian dogma, and incidentally the passage is an illuminating criticism of a doctrine of brotherly love, together with faith in the second blessing of the Church.

In Spain, where bull-fighting is an elevating pastime for the masses and the classes, we see that a priest refused to proceed with a wedding as he objected to the bare arms of the bride. The retort courteous would have been that the Church might put more clothes on the figure on the cross and set an example—but the retort effective would be the Registry Office.

A note of humility is to be found in the *Times Literary Supplement* by a writer, who, in a consideration of Milton, makes a confession, presumably safe for its 28,000 readers. As will be seen by the extract below, that lofty arrogance of a perpetual flow of assertions that cannot be refuted because they cannot be proved, now gives place to something more within the purview of fact. At first glance it appears to be pessimistic, but a closer examination will prove that it contains the beginning of wisdom. Here then, is the lion of clamorous Christianity, in a chastened mood:—

We know no longer nor expect to know how the world or how ourselves were made, nor can we set limits to the existence of either; we stand by merely and observe the inexpressible mystery of the fact that it and we are here, that life proceeds out of itself and creates itself illimitably.

Milton is to be found on the bookshelves of all Freethinkers, and he may be regarded as one of the last morning stars that disappeared in the firmament of a Christian ethic. When rewards and punishments in a future life are finally dropped he will still be venerated as a genius in the music of words and one of the least objectionable figures that appeared on the murky horizon of religion.

Dean Inge says that while in America his "informants" told him that the nation was becoming more religious. We imagine that the value of that information depends upon who his informants were, and what they meant by that elastic and hazy word "religion." It is the kind of thing that a parson would say who wanted to impress a visitor, and Dr. Inge is hardly likely to have met with those who would tell him the cold truth about religion in America. We do not notice that he called at the *Truthseeker* office, for instance, to get their view of the matter.

On the other hand there is, as in this country, a very great deal of religion, of one sort or another, and one might have expected one of Dean Inge's reputation for thinking to have reflected upon the reason why forms of religious extravagance, and of ignorance in relation to religion, such as were common to Jesus, the Apostles, and early Christian leaders flourish so easily and so

widely in the United States. We do not profess to be well versed in American conditions, but off-hand we should be inclined to say that this is because the better and the more honest brains in America are leaving Christianity, and the keen and dishonest ones find it easy to exploit religious ignorance to their own ends. But then an enquiry along these lines would lead to an examination of the social and intellectual value of Christianity, and that is not what we should expect a Dean of the English Church to welcome.

Dean Inge does make an attack on the Roman Catholic Church in America, and we should be the last to say that the onslaught was undeserved. That Church is more dangerous than any other precisely because it is more Christian than any other. He quotes statements from Catholic organs to prove that there is being carried on a campaign against all education that is not under Church influence. Thus, "It will be a glorious day in this country when under the laws the school system will be shattered to pieces." "The common schools of this country are sinks of moral pollution and nurseries of hell." "The public schools have produced nothing but a godless generation of thieves and blackguards. We would rather our children grow up in ignorance than be taught in a school that is not Catholic." "The State has no right to educate, and when the State undertakes the work of education it is usurping the power of the Church." "The children of the public schools turn out to be horse thieves, scholastic counterfeiters, and well versed in schemes of devilry. Catholics stand before the country as the enemies of the school." And here is a perfect gem of traditional Christian love and brotherhood: "Protestantism is not a religion. Protestantism, the murderous hag, is slowly dying of corruption and congenital rotteness, and she will not much longer encumber the earth. Protestantism—we would draw and quarter it—we would impale it and hang it up for crows to eat; we would tear it with pincers and fire it with hot irons; we would fill it with molten lead and sink it in a hundred fathoms of hell-fire." There is not the slightest doubt that Dean Inge could compile very much the same kind of quotation from the extreme Protestant papers, and together they form quite a nice bouquet of Christian flowers. They represent Christianity unchained, unconfined, free to express its real nature; but we cannot expect Dean Inge to see this—or at least to say it.

When the Lord gets busy he throws his attentions round in a quite promiscuous manner. He rains on the just and the unjust, which may display impartiality or downright carelessness. He will destroy a city by earthquake because he is annoyed with some of the inhabitants, and will let loose a plague which may settle both those who offend and those who please him. Lately he has been busy striking people dead who have been delivering addresses, which looks as though he has a special grudge against public speakers. The latest case is that of the Rev. Dr. Park, ex-Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, Ireland. He had been addressing the Assembly, and died directly after resuming his seat. If he had been a Freethinker, the Christian would have said his death was a judgment. As he was a Christian they will probably call it a reward. Heads I win, tails you lose.

When a man in the position of Sir Oliver Lodge can use a sentence such as "There is a spiritual world, it may be there is room for the existence outside space altogether. We don't know what space is," we can—if he is correctly reported—only gasp. It is the language of a Gypsy Smith, not that of a scientific thinker. Space is not a thing that can be looked for, handled, and analysed when found. It is a condition of thought created by the existence of objects, and so long as two separate things exist, whether in this world or in any other, space is created. It is a pity that some men will use a deserved reputation gained in one sphere as a warrant for making simply grotesque remarks about another sphere in which they would show far more wisdom in remaining silent.



### 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.

"FREETHINKER" SUSIENATION FUND.—E. Truelove (per Miss Vance) 10s.; J. McMillan, £1.

J. FRAZER.—Pleased to know that you find the *Freethinker* so interesting. We have many readers in Canada and the United States. We daresay you will have come across some of them in your travels.

H. LEESON.—There is no other subject on which men and women take so much pride in displaying foolishness as in connection with religion. It would almost seem that a rooted, but unexpressed, article of their faith is that the Lord loves an idiot.

J. HARTING.—Why should we feel the need for God? We can understand God feeling a need for us, because unless he does get someone to pay attention to him he is like an actor performing to an empty house. But we feel sure that if God does not feel the need for us more than we feel the need for him, there will be no ill-feeling on either side.

S. C. BATH.—Such letters in the public press as yours are bound to do good. We have to say over and over again that a large part of the strength of Christians is derived from the passivity of Freethinkers. As to the death of Mr. Whale, we cannot for the life of us see why any Freethinker should feel hurt when it is said that God killed him because he was attacking Christianity. It is quite the kind of thing one would expect the Christian deity to do—if he exists. A man who believes in a God might be upset about it, but why should one who does not?

C. BENTLEY.—A *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers* was issued some years ago by J. M. Wheeler, then sub-editor of this journal. It is now out of print. A larger volume, *A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Rationalists*, was issued by Joseph McCabe in 1920 at two guineas.

C. LATHAM.—Thanks for promise. Will see what can be done to liven things up. Meanwhile, if anything occurs shall be glad to hear from you.

W. THOMPSON.—Received, and shall appear. Thanks.

J. STRINGER (Manitoba).—Thanks for cutting. The verse has the usual religious mixture of egotism and foolishness.

E. R. PIKE.—Received, and shall appear. Yes, the meeting at the Scala was a very fine one. Glad you enjoyed it so much, although everyone appeared to be thoroughly happy.

W. SCRIVENER.—Quite a fitting quotation, but pressure on our space prevents it appearing for the present.

J. M. HINLEY.—We are flattered to learn that what we wrote so long ago has been of comfort to you. For the rest, we always try to say what we feel, no more and no less. And so long as one writes with sincerity that is the best and safest guide. The man who writes with one eye on this or that section of the public, or with some ulterior purpose in view is certain to ring hollow to those of discernment.

A. G. B., "JOHN'S GRANPA," AND J. BRYCE.—Next week, crowded out of this issue owing to space taken up with Conference matter.

R. ANDERTON.—There is only one word that fits Mr. Hamilton Fyfe's article. It is vulgar in the truest sense of the word. We deal with it next week. No space in this issue.

PAMPHLETS.—We think a hawk's licence would be required for the purpose. If you will write your requirements our shop-manager will give you all the necessary help and information.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Sugar Plums.

Once more we are moved to remind our friends that during the summer months there are offered many opportunities of passing the *Freethinker* into the hands of those who are not yet acquainted with it. Somewhere in the British Isles there are, we are convinced, enough of the right kind of people to make the *Freethinker* pay its way by sales. The trouble is to get them, or to get others to see about them. That is why we want our readers to start on the search.

Mr. James Taylor, a nine-years' reader of the paper, writes from Exeter that he intends taking seriously the task of getting at least one new reader. To that end he has adopted a novel plan. He says he has ordered one extra copy of the paper each week. He will continue to take, and pay for that copy so long as he has not found someone else to do so. When he has found this person he will stop. And he rightly says that if each reader followed this plan our troubles would cease. He says the extra threepence per week is a self-imposed fine for not having got his new subscriber before now, and he will pay it until he has "purged" his offence. Mr. Taylor's plan seems quite a good one, and perhaps he may find many imitators.

We continue to hear good reports of the progress of the Michigan Rationalist Association, of which our occasional contributor, Mr. Howell S. England, is President. So far as an outsider can judge, there is even greater need for an active and uncompromising Freethought campaign in the United States than there is in this country. We wish our Michigan friends every possible success, and so long as they are content to go about their work without troubling whether they gain social favour or not, they will achieve it.

We have often had some very unflattering things to say of the B.B.C., and we therefore the more readily acknowledge the pleasure with which we listened to a very good appreciation of Thomas Paine on June 8, the anniversary of Paine's death. The speaker—one of the staff who mentions noteworthy anniversaries—pointed out the greatness of Paine's character, his nobility and "lucidity" of character, mentioned, only to brush on one side, the stories circulated by religionists about him, and said if Paine's critics had thought more and written less, the world would have been wiser. What we are now waiting for is the Christian clergy to openly and boldly say what liars these earlier Christians were, and when they have done that they might set about explaining why it is that men who are normally truthful and honest in their ordinary relations with people, become reckless and unscrupulous in their lying when Christianity is in question.

We have a deal of our space taken up this week with a report of the N.S.S. Conference proceedings, and the evening meeting, but it was better to get all this in one issue. Some letters and other matters are held over in consequence.

## In the Lake District.

Life in itself is neither good nor evil: it is the place of good or evil.....And if you have lived one day, you have seen all: one day is equal to all other days. There is no other light, there is no other night. This sun, this moon, these stars, and this disposition is the very same which your forefathers enjoyed, and which shall also entertain your posterity.—*Montaigne*.

It is given to few to so combine business with pleasure as to make every day, more or less, a holiday. Being one of the fortunate few, to-day found me motoring through a hundred miles or so of the most beautiful country I have as yet had the good fortune to encounter. I have elsewhere stated that I am no lover of solitude, even in the midst of the most beautiful surroundings, but the first real touch of spring compensated me for the lack of human companionship, and, although I am an inveterate materialist ever striving to reduce all phenomena to mechanical laws, I found myself echoing the words of John Drinkwater:—

A miracle! A miracle, I sing;  
The everlasting miracle of spring.

Besides, I was not altogether alone, for I had my two-seater, in which I have covered many thousands of miles, and for which I entertain the liveliest affection. Anthropomorphism dies hard, and I doubt if Dick Turpin ever entertained a livelier affection for Bonny Black Bess than I for my "Tin Lizzie." My attitude towards it is similar to that of a savage. Knowing very little of its mechanism I seek first to cajole and then to threaten it if anything goes wrong. If I do not offer up a sacrifice it is because I have a keener sense of the ridiculous than my progenitor. However, to-day she has been on her best behaviour: full of an indefinable *joie de vivre*, so we will forget her occasional lapses from efficiency, and muse on pleasanter things.

Nestling at the foot of a mountain a little to the north of Lake Windermere is the pretty old-world hamlet of Grasmere. Here, in a meadow that lies close to the quaint old church, gladiators meet in the August of every year; runners, disc and javelin throwers, and mighty-limbed giants who wrestle in the good old upright Westmorland and Cumberland style. Close to Grasmere may be seen the cottage in which the poet Wordsworth dwelt. Wordsworth you will recollect is the gentleman who wrote that monument of imbecility: *We are Seven*. Not even the musical lilt of *The Daffodils* can make me regard with favour the creator of that little monstrosity with the curious mathematical kink. As a determinist I endeavour to temper all my judgments with a genial tolerance, but *We are Seven*—! These and other thoughts were mine as I gently glided along with a range of mountains on one side and the blue sea on the other. Primroses grew in abundance at the roadside, whilst betwixt me and the sea the gorse bushes flowered in a blaze of golden glory. It was good to be alive: to breathe the pure air and feel the rush of the wind about one's temples. My thoughts turned involuntarily to the workers and workless doomed to a stifling existence in the festering hovels that constitute the major portion of our "great" cities, knowing next to nothing of, and—greater tragedy still—caring less for, the great natural heritage that human stupidity and human cupidity has rendered almost inaccessible:—

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.

Is there, in all nature, anything so pleasing as a field of staid and dignified ewes with their pretty, frisking lambs? I pulled up at the roadside to have a chat with an aged farm labourer who was at work

hedging. I gathered that the current rate of wages in those parts was twenty-five shillings, with a little extra at the lambing and harvesting seasons—a damning commentary on our "great and glorious empire." I recalled the fact that my own first experience as a wage-earner was on a Herefordshire farm, where I worked seven days a week for the princely sum of three shillings!

My business taking me into the village of Holmrook, near the Cumberland coast, I had an enjoyable chat with the local parson. I observed the obsequious way in which the yokels touched their hats to him; and I was seized with a keen desire to kick them—and him. Although he was a decent sort of chap, the clerical régime with its sinister suggestion of Ireland, or the Middle Ages, made me grit my teeth. I wonder if we ever really appreciate all that the pioneers of Freethought have done for us? If I had to live in a place like that I'd hold a Freethought meeting every night in front of the paltry, inartistic war memorial. As it was I could not leave that parson without indulging in a little blasphemy; and when he mentioned the fact that he had been a chaplain at Carlisle prison, I asked him if he'd ever heard the following story:—

A condemned man was sitting dolefully in his cell awaiting the call to execution, when a knock came at the door.

"Who's there?" growled the condemned man.

"The chaplain!" piped a squeaky voice.

"Charlie Chaplain?"

"N-no! the prison chaplain, come to administer the last rites and ceremonies."

"Then go away, damn yer! I shall be with your Boss in twenty minutes!"

The effect of this story exceeded my anticipations. The vicar opened his mouth and closed it again; changed colour; and sniggered—a horrible, mirthless snigger—"I haven't heard that one before," he murmured, and hastily withdrew. I'll bet he doesn't forget it in a hurry!

Night finds me in the rather dreary town of Millom, esconced in a still more dreary hotel. Despite the company of an old Baptist minister life still has its recompenses, for above my head is an old-fashioned picture portraying King Edward VII., looking very plump and pious, gazing up at the likeness of his mother, Queen Victoria, and saying: "*I will follow in her footsteps!*" It's too funny for words!

VINCENT J. HANDS.

Never forget that if you leave your law to judges and your religion to bishops, you will presently find yourself without law or religion. If you doubt this, ask any decent judge or bishop. Do not ask somebody who does not know what a judge is, or what a bishop is, or what the law is, or what religion is. In other words, do not ask your newspaper. Journalists are too poorly paid in this country to know anything that is fit for publication.—*George Bernard Shaw, Preface to "Getting Married."*

Prayer and miracle are twin sisters of Superstition, Fear falls upon the earth and prays—Courage stands erect and thinks.—*Ingersoll*.

### MR. WHITEHEAD'S MISSION.

Mr. Whitehead is breaking new ground on his Mission to the Provinces this year. He reports excellent meetings in Wolverhampton. This week he is in Birmingham, and on Saturday, June 13, he will get to Ashton-under-Lyne, where there are many sympathisers, who only want a little organizing to make a good branch. The weather is ideal for propaganda.—E. M. V.

## Evening Public Meeting.

(Continued from page 375.)

great scholar like the Bishop of Colenso, in his critical work, an *Examination of the Pentateuch*, and he submitted that a large measure of praise was due to men like Charles Bradlaugh, G. W. Foote, Joseph Symes, their Chairman, Mr. Chapman Cohen, and many others, in popularizing the teachings of these works, which proved that the Bible was a book full of blunders, of legends, of incredible stories, and of barbarities, and was in no sense a rational guide for man. Then came Darwin, with his *Origin of Species* and his *Descent of Man*, and Hæckel and others, who taught the doctrine of evolution in relation to animal life. Some clergymen, like Dr. Barnes, Bishop of Birmingham, are prepared to admit that the story of the alleged Fall of Man, as narrated in Genesis, is merely an allegory. But it is undoubtedly the foundation of the Christian religion, and yet these clergymen still talk of the Atonement as though it was valid and beyond dispute. Moreover, he ventured to submit that the doctrine of the innocent dying to blot out the sins of the guilty was repugnant to the best feelings of humanity. The death of the innocent could never blot out the sins of the guilty. Once a deed was committed it was written indelibly in the book of nature from which no leaves can be torn and nothing expunged. (Applause.) He urged his hearers to think for themselves, and act upon their judgment like men in all the concerns of life.

Mr. Clifford Williams gave a brief, but eloquent, speech in which he contrasted the high aims of Freethought and the hopelessly confused state of the Christian world. Under Christianity we had seen liberty destroyed, and ignorance and superstition flourish. It was left for the pioneers of Freethought to win back freedom of speech and of thought, and it was for the present generation of Freethinkers to carry on the work they had so nobly and so successfully begun.

Mr. Chapman Cohen, in closing the meeting, delivered a speech which was received with much laughter and applause. He said he hoped that enquiring individuals would take home with them some of the varied selection of literature on sale. They might not only wish to hear but to read, and it would serve as a material memento of what he trusted had been a pleasant evening.

Continuing, he said it was now his duty, as Chairman, to say something in the nature of a benediction (laughter), but after eight speakers had gone over the freethought track, he didn't feel there was much smooth ground to walk on. But whilst they were listening to the speakers it did strike him that they had been listening to the story of the progress of humanity. It began with man in the cave and ended with man in the study. At first we saw man in the cave surrounded by gods of his own creation, afraid even of their smiles and always on his knees, and then, step by step, we find that the cave man had ventured to look up and question a little. And then comes the final picture of mankind—not man on his knees in the cave, but man in his study—a master where he was once a slave. Yes, that is the story of man.

On one occasion after I had been lecturing a lady came to me and said, "I am quite sure that if you look for God, you'll find him." And I replied, "Maybe, but the question that bothers me is, if I found God what could I do with him?"

There is not a single thing in the world that God does. He no longer rules the stars—he no longer rules disease; he doesn't even rule the weather. Surely our volume of unemployed is large enough without adding to the list.

The Unemployment pay was large enough without having the biggest "dole" of the lot to meet. Nearly everyone drawing the "dole" could say that he had done an honest week's work at some time, but where was the God who had done even an honest day's work? We had nothing for God to do. I sometimes think that if there is a God, his only good friend is the Atheist. George Jacob Holyoake once said that Secularism was the religion that gave God no trouble. An Atheist is a man who doesn't slander the deity. If a man

drops down dead suddenly they say, "That is God's hand." If to-morrow or to-night a meteor were to come flashing through the heavens and killed some inhabitants the insurance company would say that it was an "Act of God." You know, of course, pestilences, wars, and famines have been called "acts of God." They know they are God's acts because they are unpleasant. It is just like the plagues in the Bible. The Egyptians had various plagues, but when at last they had the plague of lice they said, "Now we know this has come from the Lord."

The Atheist doesn't say anything of the kind. He declines to slander even God Almighty. I decline to indict God Almighty unless I have proof, and when the clergy say that they are moved by the spirit of the Holy Ghost and when I look at them I say that it is a disgrace to saddle God with a responsibility of that kind. At the day of judgment, if God is capable of any feeling about it, the Atheist is the only one who will get good treatment.

Miss Rout mentioned the subject of freedom of speech. I want to say that there is not an advanced movement of the last 150 years that has not been initiated, and brought within sight of success without Freethinkers. They had worked up movement after movement, brought them to a successful issue and then their former opponents took the credit. The whole of the movement for the rational treatment of the criminal was initiated by Beccaria, an Atheist, who denounced the brutalizing influence of our prison system, and pointed the way to reform. His work was brought to the notice of the public by Freethinkers like Voltaire, Mill, Bentham, and others.

The movement for the education of the working class was brought forward by Robert Owen, who said that all the religions of the world were so many forms of insanity.

Less than a hundred years ago woman was in a position of gross inequality as compared with the male sex. The Church said that man and woman when married were one, and man was that one. The movement for a better, more enlightened and rational Sunday was initiated and brought about by Freethinkers. The movement for a free press was fought largely by Freethinkers. Little more than a hundred years ago Richard Carlile sold Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* at his shop in Fleet Street, and that great heroic figure was sent to prison for it. Altogether he spent nine years in prison. His wife, his sister, his shopman, and others went to prison man after man, woman after woman. At one time twenty-one persons were in prison for selling that book. And after all this there is no educated parson in the country who is not preaching what Paine taught. It has taken years and years for the parsons to put on the baby linen which we have thrown off. That is the story of Freethought—the fight against superstition and ignorance.

The Church always went for the helpless; the child at one end and the old and dying at the other—anything under nine and over ninety. "We can tackle you there and there," say the clergy, "but we cannot deal with you successfully after you have become used to thinking for yourselves." To such a man they would say, "Wait till you come to die." Well, I don't care how a man dies. I was never interested in those stories of Freethinkers who die Christians. When a man is dying and his mind is weakening, and his body is losing strength, that would be just the time I should expect him to become a Christian. What I am interested in is how a man lives, and I submit it is better to live sensibly and die stupidly than to live stupidly and die sensibly. It is your own business how you die—it is everybody's concern how you live. If Freethought can have a man whilst he is alive the Churches are welcome to him when he comes to die.

My friend, Mr. Lloyd, said one thing to which I must take exception. He said the world had never had a God that had not done harm. Well, a little time back I read of the only decent god I have ever heard of. Some years ago there was discovered among some old Roman ruins an altar, "To the God who takes no heed." That is the only altar known of its kind. If there is a good God that is the one. The trouble has been, not

that God takes an interest in man, but that man takes an interest in God.

After all, a Christian is a very egotistical person—he thinks he is living in the most important planet in the universe, and that God is interested in *him*, and that if he went to bed with his socks on instead of taking them off, God would be looking at him. Yes, they really think that God is looking after them; they exhibit the most perfect and tremendous piece of egotism the world has ever known. The God who takes no heed is the only God who cannot be accused of working harm. One of the speakers mentioned the fact that man did not live for ever, but in the best sense of the word man does live for ever, or as near ever as we can get. Man is only the representative of the race, and all that man is, is the sum of the intellectual and moral life of the race.

Our feelings and our knowledge have a history and traditions just as all other things have. We had inherited the past, and it was because we *had* inherited the past that we owe a duty to the future. Man had not finished his evolution by any means. He is only a figure in the rough, pointing to the time when he may control his own destiny. We could all do something to further the life of the race. That was the essential work of Freethought—not to build up that party or the other party, but to work in such a way that we could make man a king where he was now a slave. This we could do now by industry, intelligence, and co-operation, and we should then realize something of that happiness which was promised us only beyond the grave. (Loud applause.)

The meeting closed at 9 p.m. The various speakers had been followed with evident appreciation, as the rounds of applause testified. A good deal of literature was sold and a further consignment had to be brought before the meeting closed.

## N.S.S. Annual Conference.

HELD IN THE PALM COURT OF THE GRAFTON HOTEL,  
TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD, LONDON.

Whit-Sunday, May 31, 1925.

### Business Meetings.

THE following localities were represented: Bethnal Green, Messrs. James Neate and T. H. How; Birmingham, Messrs. E. Clifford Williams and W. Simpson; Finsbury Park, Mr. A. H. Thomas; Glasgow, Mr. George Whitehead; Huddersfield, Mrs. Alice Lee; Hull, Mr. T. Goriot; Leeds, Mr. George Bedborough; Liverpool, Mr. John Ross; Manchester, Mr. F. E. Monks; Newcastle, Miss K. B. Kough; North London, Mr. S. Samuels; Plymouth, Mrs. Rosetti; South London, Mr. E. Coles; South Shields, Mr. A. B. Moss; Stockport, Mr. H. I. Bayford; Swansea, Mr. T. Gorniot; West Ham, Mr. and Mrs. R. H. Rosetti.

Amongst the members and visitors present were noticed: Mrs. Chapman Cohen, Miss L. Underwood, Mrs. C. Williams, Mr. G. Shanbrook, H. Silverstein, Henry Spence, E. T. Brewster, Mr. and Mrs. Quinton, Junr, J. G. Dobson, C. G. Quinton, Mr. and Mrs. Aust, A. Heath, S. Cohen, W. H. Baker, Thomas Judge, J. T. Lloyd, A. D. McLaren, H. C. White, J. Lazarick, E. C. Saphin, F. P. Corrigan, W. Leat, Mrs. F. E. Monks, F. Williamson, A. Millar, Miss Mary Ross, Miss Bristow, Mrs. Hammer Owen, Mrs. George Wood, Mr. F. A. Hornibrook.

The Minutes of the previous Conference were taken as read.

F. E. Monks (Manchester) enquired whether any steps had been taken with regard to the acquirement of a central building in London, and whether the Society would be represented at the International Freethought Congress in September?

The President replied that unfortunately it was found impossible to hold the Conference in Rome—it was now to be held in Paris, and, after consideration, it was decided not to take special steps in the matter. Paris was not

Rome. With regard to the acquirement of a central building several enquiries had been made, but as yet nothing satisfactory had been found.

A question was asked concerning Mr. Whitehead's remuneration. The President explained, and Mr. Whitehead said that in the present position of the Society he was content.

Miss Vance occupied the chair during the election of The President. Mr. C. Cohen was re-elected President unanimously, and receiving again the one insignia of office—the historic hammer—said: "Ten years ago, when I was first elected I made but one promise—that was to do my best." This he had done and would continue to do.

Miss E. M. Vance was re-elected Secretary on the motion of Mr. Cohen, speaking on behalf of the Executive. The election was unanimously agreed to.

Mr. C. G. Quinton was also unanimously re-elected Treasurer.

Messrs. Theobald & Co. (Incorporated Accountants) were re-appointed Auditors.

The new Executive was then elected as per Agenda. Motion No. 9 was then moved by Mr. Neate on behalf of Bethnal Green Branch:—

That this Conference, bearing in mind the great importance and propagandist value of the public exercise of those legal rights won by generations of hard fighting, calls upon Freethinkers everywhere to exercise them to the fullest possible extent.

Mr. Moss, seconding, said, we must uphold the rights won by Bradlaugh and others. He instanced his experiences in public life. Mr. Dobson supported, and the Conference approved whole-heartedly.

Motion No. 10 was moved by Mr. Clifford Williams (Birmingham):—"That the delegates' Conference expenses should be paid by headquarters," was put, and, after discussion, lost.

The President, on behalf of the Executive, then moved:—

That the attention of all concerned in the propaganda of the National Secular Society be directed to the need for keeping such propaganda in line with the avowed aims and objects of the Society.

In moving this, he said that the Executive had no desire to interfere in the least with any political or social opinions members might hold. But it was because their opinions on these matters were so varied, and because they invited all to join with them on the basis of a common belief, that both as a matter of principle and expediency it was advisable to restrict the platform to the uses for which it was intended. Mrs. Grout, and Messrs. Schaller, Bedborough, Thurlow, Coles, and Keeling also spoke on the motion, and in reply to a question of whether the Society would not run a member for Parliament if it were possible, the President said the view of the Executive was that the House of Commons was a citizen's chamber, and they who go there should go as citizens, not as members of a sect. We objected to Christians playing this game, and we should not imitate them. The motion was carried unanimously.

Motion 13:—

That this Conference recommends the adoption by Branches of a rule whereby Branch Secretaries shall receive an agreed portion of the members' subscriptions towards the out-of-pocket expenses incurred in the discharge of their duties, and also suggests that the Executive, where necessary, be asked to make a donation, annually or biennially, towards this honorarium, provided that the membership does not fall below a given number, local conditions being taken into consideration, and that the details having been worked out by the Executive and accepted by the Branches, the rule be carried into effect forthwith.

was moved by Mr. S. Samuels, and seconded by Mr. Bedborough. The Manchester delegate opposed, as did Mr. R. H. Rosetti, both being of opinion that secretaries' expenses should come directly out of the Branch funds. Another point of view was suggested by Miss Kough and Messrs. Heath and Whitehead, and eventually the recommendation was carried.

## Motion 14 :—

That this Conference, while recognizing that the political situation has not been favourable to any direct action for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, welcomes the action of Mr. George Lansbury in introducing a private measure to that end, and strongly urges Freethinkers everywhere to keep the existence of the Bill before their representatives in Parliament, and to continue the work of educating public opinion to the utmost of their power.

having been moved, the President pointed out that the Bill introduced into the late Parliament had borne the name of Mr. H. Snell. Mr. Snell was as keen as ever on this matter, and the Society owed him thanks for all he had done. But it is advisable to have the Bill introduced from different quarters if possible, and they would all appreciate Mr. George Lansbury's action in fathering this measure.

## On moving Motion 15 :—

That in the opinion of this Conference a systematic literature campaign should be adopted and carried out in such a way that it would supplement the ordinary propaganda where such exists, and take its place where it is absent.

Mr. Whitehead felt it was better if the literature was not given away, but sold at cost, or even less than cost price. Messrs. Bedborough and Shallor approved. Mr. Rosetti said that a psychological point entered there and made a valuable suggestion. The motion was adopted unanimously.

## Mr. Rosetti moved Motion 16 :—

That this Conference, while noting the rapid disintegration of orthodox Christianity, is also awake to the great, and in some respects, growing, prevalence of gross superstitions among all classes of the community, and is of opinion that a more outspoken policy on the part of those who have rejected all religious beliefs would do much to check the growth of what it regards as a serious threat to the better elements of our civilization.

He illustrated the motion by citing one or two instances, and dwelt particularly upon the growth of the use of mascots and the prevalence of various superstitions. Mr. Williams seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

In connection with the resolution from Manchester regretting the non-publication of reports of Branch news, and the addresses of Branch Secretaries, the President said that as editor of the *Freethinker* he was quite willing to put in any news that was sent him, and did so. The matter was in the hands of the Branches themselves.

Mr. H. R. Clifton was unable to be present owing to ill-health, and the motion in his name, advising the bringing together of local groups of Freethinkers for social intercourse was carried unanimously.

Mr. A. B. Moss moved the final resolution on the Agenda :—

That bearing in mind the frequent occurrence of cases in which the desire of witnesses and others to avail themselves of the provisions of the Oaths Amendment Act of 1888 are frustrated through the ignorance or bigotry of magistrates or magistrates' clerks, this Conference urges upon the Home Secretary the desirability of circularizing police, county, and coroners' courts in order that those concerned shall not be denied or prevented from exercising the right to affirm as conferred upon them by the law.

He said it had often been his lot to instruct magistrates and their clerks on the rights of Freethinkers, but by courteous insistence he had always got his own way. He considered it to be of first-rate importance for all Freethinkers to insist on their legal rights.

Mr. Whitehead read a letter from the Glasgow Branch, pointing out the great distance Glasgow was from London and that it was now twenty-four years since a Conference was held there. The President said that the venue for our Conferences was in the hands of the Branches by vote, and the Conference could not settle where future ones should be held. He had pleasant recollections of the last Conference held there and hoped that one day, at least, the Conference would again be held in the commercial capital of Scotland.

The business of the Agenda having come to an end Mr. McLaren read a deeply interesting paper on "True and False Ideals," which drew a very warm compliment from the President, and was greatly appreciated by all present. Messrs. Bedborough, Thurlow, and others contributed to the discussion of the paper, but there was not very much scope for controversy among an audience of Freethinkers. It was an appeal to the best in man, and a philosophic survey of the play of true and false ideals in life.

Mr. R. H. Rosetti explained there was some mistake about the title of his paper, for which he apologized. Freethinkers had, however, evinced a growing interest in the subjects of Vaccination and Inoculation, and he thought he might with advantage provoke a discussion on the matter. Whilst not taking a definite stand, he looked favourably on these medical measures. The discussion which followed proved a stimulating one, in which, amongst others, the President, Secretary, and Messrs. Thurlow, Williams, and Bayford also spoke, the latter introducing some valuable experiences and statistical matter.

The President, in closing the discussion, said this was just an instance of how we could disagree on matters outside the scope of the Society. This would not matter at all, so long as we never lost sight of those principles upon which we were in common agreement.

In declaring the business at an end, Mr. Cohen said that this was his thirty-fifth Conference. He trusted that the spirit in which the proceedings had been conducted would bear fruit in the coming season.

H. I. B.

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## Correspondence.

### WHA'S LIKE US?

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I am a Scotsman, and proud of it, and my heart goes out to Mr. H. B. Dodds, who, I think, is a Scotsman too! He has the true humour of the scholar, the humane and sympathetic mind, the balanced artistry of the best minds—which are all more than tinged with Freethought—if that be a definite substantive. His last week's article was refreshing even in a paper so surprisingly varied as the *Freethinker*. Pleasing also, perhaps, because it opened up for me memories and an opportunity. My mind went back some thirty odd years to a song of my youth, which, like a hundred other things of that richer past, is remembered only in a fragmentary way. Here are some "boastful" lines :—

Let the proud Indian boast of his jessamine bowers,  
His pastures of perfume, and rose-coloured skies.....

or of Italy :—

Her sons drinking love from the eyes of her daughters,  
Where freedom expires amid softness and sighs.....

a great line that! but—

Scotland's blue mountains wild  
Where hoary cliffs are piled,  
Towering in grandeur, are dearer to me!

and then :—

O' poets, tae, we hae the best,  
Altho' their banes are laid at rest;  
There's Waltie Scott an' Tannahill,  
An' far-famed Rabbie Burns!

But, there! to sing the praises of Scotland—her mountains and her men, her sweet horizons, clouds, and skies; in summer when the fog lift from the face and heart of man and nature, in winter when her rugged form is swathed austere in the stormy mists; would need a long article, not a brief letter.

As a parallel to William Lithgow's, my mind, irrelevant but impressive, recalls the language of the gentleman (of what country?) at the inn door :

Unyoke that quadruped from the vehicle, stabulate him, denote him an adequate supply of nutritious ailment; and when the aurora of morning illuminates the Oriental horizon I shall award you a pecuniary compensation for your amiable hospitality!

The stable boy rushed inside to tell his master there was a drunk Dutchman at the door.

Just yesterday I culled this from Anatole France: "Thou obscene star," said the Abbe Coignard, seated on the fountain trough, and trying to read his *vade mecum*, "mischievous and libidinous moon, thou never weariest of holding the candle to the wicked ways of men and thou grudgest a ray of light to him who seeks a virtuous maxim!"

All of which is a Scotch mixture of flour and oats we used to call "mashlum," or bannocks; and which the editor may pass or not as suits his severely scientific and Southern palate.

A. M.

#### CHRIST AND MIRACLES.

SIR,—Of the obstacles met by Freethinkers, ambiguity is not the least. Mr. Knapp-Fisher excels in this, and it would be unreasonable to expect a vague and nebulous doctrine to be productive of clear and definite thinking. The claims that the God in whom Christ believed was not man-made, and that evolutionary process from the simple to the complex demands the introduction of a constant fresh vital element, only open the door to vain imaginings to which Mr. Knapp-Fisher's Freethought seems peculiarly attracted. How in the presence of these can one avoid the useful suggestion of misquotation or misunderstanding? The Freethinker is not so foolish as to attempt to explain Evolution on any basis, he can at most understand it, and at least perceive that different conditions produce different results.

The question-begging reference to the uses of electricity through research, and Christ's "just man made perfect" through the moral and intellectual efforts of men, resembles the language of the pulpit rather than Freethought. It is this kind of reasoning which is behind the Christian who points to all good as resulting from Christianity. The moral and intellectual efforts of the greatest men enable us to form a definite conception of the inutility of the Christ doctrine, of its impossibility, and of the degradation in attempting to conform humanity to a mental barrier.

The numerous and increasing sects alone constitute a revolt, and variations of Mr. Knapp-Fisher's accommodating themes yet receive the adoration for which neglected humanity itself craves.

Mr. Knapp-Fisher's Freethought inhibits the experience of history and the essentials of a true, and therefore useful, judgment.

A Freethought which desires to solve modern problems in terms of modern knowledge he claims merely to gratify an undefined emotion. We may have a missionary in our midst, at least the aspect lends to that possibility.

J. G. BURDON.

#### Obituary.

The South Shields Branch of the N.S.S. has lost a worthy and useful member by the death of Mr. William Hopper, aged 66, which took place at his residence, "Ravenswood," Borough Road, Jarrow, on the 2nd inst. In a highly appreciative press notice he is described as being "of great independence of character, ever ready to stand for the right." An unbeliever himself, he never pressed his views upon others, but held to his convictions though he suffered as a consequence in public life, which he found out when a candidate for the Town Council. Mr. Hopper was born in South Shields, and had been an active member of the Branch for over thirty years. The remains were cremated at Darlington on Saturday, and when the cortege passed along the thoroughfare on the way to the Jarrow cemetery it was through a crowd of sympathetic friends and spectators. The chief mourners at the graveside were Mr. and Mrs. Ewart Hopper, Messrs. W. Walker (nephew), and W. Dodds (son-in-law), Ald. Geo. Johnson, J.P. (brother-in-law), Mr. G. Johnson (Town Clerk), Mr. Scott Weir (Borough Surveyor), Ald. J. D. Rose, Councillor C. Reaveley, Dr. Lillie Johnson, and others. There was such a large gathering that the outsiders heard little of the Secular service read by Mr. R. Chapman, representing the members of the South Shields Branch, and was supported by a number of Jarrow members, including Miss Webster, Messrs. Arnold, Carr, and others.

#### 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 postcard.

##### LONDON.

###### INDOOR.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): 7, Mr. Joseph McCabe, "Are We Better than Our Children?"

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2.): 11, Prof. von Schulze-Gavernitz, "The United States in World Politics."

###### OUTDOOR.

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

FINSBURY PARK BRANCH N.S.S. (Finsbury Park): 11.15, a Lecture.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Hyde Park): Every evening at 8; every Sunday at 3. Speakers: Mrs. Tring, Messrs. Brayton, Ryan, Burns, Keeling, Vickers, and Baker.

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