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## Views and Opinions.

### Religion and Natural Selection.

A correspondent who has been reading my *God and Evolution* hits back at me with what he considers a strong argument based upon the theory of Natural Selection. The test of survival, he says, is utility. An organ increases in strength because it is of service to the organism of which it is a part. An animal survives because it is better fitted to its environment than other animals who are crushed out. But, he points out, the survival of Christianity during all the centuries is a fact. In spite of all that may be said we are faced with the fact that religious beliefs survive, Christianity as a religious system survives. This being the case, are we not bound to conclude that in some way religious ideas and beliefs are of service to the race? If we accept Natural Selection he thinks we are bound to come to that conclusion. If we argue they are of no service to the race, then we must admit there is at least one department of life to which Natural Selection, even evolution, does not apply. It is true there are numbers of people who say they do not find in themselves any need for religion, but the overwhelming majority take up quite an opposite position, and we might reasonably conclude, therefore, that the majority represent the norm of the race, while they who reject religion may be taken as a variation that may or may not establish itself in the future. At any rate the survival of religion, in spite of all that has been done to destroy it, is a fact the evolutionist must face and explain.

### The Play of Evolution.

We have put our correspondent's argument quite fairly, and we think he will admit we have put it in an even stronger form than he did. And there is just one point to be borne in mind with regard to the question of utility as the basis of Natural Selection. The theory of Natural Selection does not assume that everything that persists does so in virtue of its utility. That is presenting the process in too positive terms. In the struggle for existence an endowment which gives its possessor an advantage over competitors will tend to be preserved, and may become a fixed and characteristic endowment of the

species. But on the other hand qualities and organic variations will persist so long as they are not of positive harm to their possessors, or harmful to the point of imposing a disadvantage. As a matter of fact there are all sorts of variations that occur, and which are transmitted from generation to generation that are of no great use, and may be of some slight injury. Discrimination will only occur when a variation is either of extreme disadvantage or of some decided advantage. And we may remind all who are interested that the body is plentifully endowed with structures that are of very little use, or of none whatever, but which are reminiscent of an earlier stage in which they displayed considerable activity. But to visualise the process of Natural Selection aright we must banish from our minds altogether the idea that it preserves anything at all. What it does is to eliminate organs or structures that fall below, or rise above, a certain mean, provided the rising or falling brings with it a necessary amount of disqualification.

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### Religion as Hypothesis.

What is the correct reading of religion in the light of evolution? If we pass over what may be described as a twilight stage in the history of the human mind, religion is first clearly defined as rooted in an idea. Man assumes himself to be surrounded by a number of superhuman forces which hold a definite relation towards him. Religion—primitive religion—thus takes rank as an hypothesis, and the chief distinguishing characteristic between this hypothesis and those which we embrace to-day under the name of science, is the elimination of personality and intelligence. Science knows nothing of any personal or intelligent force controlling the world, the primitive mind sees that kind of control everywhere. And so far as this conception of natural forces led men to take concerted action it would stand for a force that might be taken to be of service to the tribe. But the religious idea, as a matter of fact, never stands alone, and never works alone. If men believe that by certain incantations they can hasten the growth of corn or other foods, they do also take certain measures apart from these incantations. They plough, they sow, they reap. A warrior who looks to the power of his medicine man to give him victory, takes the precaution to see that his spear, or his club, or his bow and arrow is in order. And provided the religious idea does not lead to the neglect of the essential things there is nothing against it persisting, and even growing in strength up a certain point. How many tribes may have ceased to exist, or fell before other tribes and became merged in them, because their religious ideas placed them at a disadvantage, we have no means of telling, but it is not a wild supposition on the basis of what we actually know, to assume that this has often occurred. Religion, then, may persist, without doing any good on its own account, provided it does not too seriously interfere with the necessary work of life.

### Our Tailed Minds.

When it does this, what happens? The history of civilization supplies an answer. Last week I pointed out that it was a mistake to talk of growth in religion. So soon as we get beyond the earlier stages this does not occur. There is not a growth, but a dwindling. What goes on is a continuous conflict between developing knowledge and the scientific theory of things. In every branch of knowledge as man becomes better acquainted with the true nature of the processes at work, he places less and less reliance upon the religious formula and finally drops it altogether. In certain directions this is now substantially complete. No one nowadays associates the action of superhuman powers with the phenomena that meets us in the departments of physics, or astronomy, or geology. In biology, in psychology, in sociology, where our knowledge is not nearly so complete, the religious idea still has a certain sway, but there is no mistaking the fact that the movement is in the same direction as that we have seen actually occur in other directions. So far the persistence of religion is substantially on all fours with the persistence of such physical structures as the rudimentary ear-muscles, or the rudimentary coating of hair which covers the human body. There is no proof that religion is of use or of value to mankind, but only that it has descended to us from a state of society where it was once active. Religion is a survival pure and simple. And to the scientific student it is as interesting, and carries as many lessons as any other survivals.

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### Artificial Selection.

So much for religion in the light of evolution. The other part of my correspondent's argument is concerned with the survival of Christianity as proof of its utility, if we are to apply the principle of Natural Selection. But Natural Selection in its pure form implies a contest with competing forms, and one would much like to know where in the history of Christianity this competition has existed? From a very early date in the history of Christianity it has existed amid conditions that has prevented anything like a struggle on equal terms. In place of meeting competing ideas and defeating them, it has met them with sheer force and crushed them out of existence whenever it was able to do so. The survival of Christianity is not an illustration of Natural Selection, but of artificial selection. On the one hand it has created an artificial environment, by eliminating forces that threatened its supremacy. This took the form of suppressing scientific and other ideas whenever possible. And when it had done its best to perpetuate an environment favourable to the survival of a set of ideas such as Christianity embodied, it next set to work to breed a type of organism suitable to the environment by suppressing the human variations that threatened its supremacy. The constant persecutions of the Christian Church, the elimination of heretics and Freethinkers generation after generation, the social and political boycott that exists even to-day, has this biological significance. So on the one hand while the Christian Church strove to perpetuate an environment to which its teachings should bear some vital relation, on the other hand, it sought, by its control of the educational machinery of the State, and by its active suppression of the heretical type of mind, to develop a type of mind to which its teachings would be agreeable. And to say in the face of this that Christianity has persisted because of its value to people is about as unscientific a judgment as could be passed. It implies the existence of conditions that have never existed in the whole history of Christianity.

### A Changing Creed.

But that is not all. We have written as though the Christianity that now exists is the Christianity that has always existed, and that is decidedly not the case. In spite of all attempts to maintain a primitive psychological environment, in spite of the attempt to breed a type of mind to which Christianity would be acceptable, the history of Christianity is the record of one retreat after another. Can anyone say with justice that the Christianity of the sixteenth century was the Christianity of the first four centuries? Was that the Christianity of the eighteenth century? Was the Christianity of the eighteenth century that of the late nineteenth? The name has persisted, certain formulæ have persisted, but so far as the meaning of these is concerned we have had a different Christianity with each century. It does not matter whether the Christianity that exists is a truer Christianity or a falser Christianity. It is enough for my argument that it is a different Christianity. The Christianity of the earlier centuries has not survived. The teachings of Christianity are not what they were: its attitude towards life is not what it was. Life has proved itself too strong for the Church. The forces of social existence could not altogether be denied. Christianity—if by that term we mean the actual beliefs of the early centuries—has not shown itself able to survive. It has not shown itself able to conquer in a struggle for existence because it has never had the courage to meet its enemies under equal conditions. Given the perfectly free play of instructed ideas, given a generation allowed to grow to maturity without Christianity, and the Christian religion, even in the modified form in which it exists to-day, would prove itself as acceptable to men and women as would the religious beliefs of the ancient Mexicans.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### The Pulpit in a Quandary.

THE dictionaries tell us that "quandary" signifies "a state of hesitation or perplexity; puzzling predicament"; and this, without a doubt, is the state in which the Church and its pulpit are at present. Let us boldly face the facts. Christian missionaries landed in the Isle of Thanet in 697, and were formally welcomed by King Æthelbert, who sat in the open air on the chalk down above Minster. From Minster they proceeded to Canterbury, where the English Church was founded. From that dim, distant date down to the present moment the Church and its pulpit have been diligently endeavouring to win England for Christ, and yet a few weeks ago Dr. J. D. Jones, speaking from the chair of the Congregational Union, at its autumnal meeting, held at Bournemouth, made the following, from his point of view, humiliating confession:—

What strikes me often with wonder and amazement is the complacency of the Christian Church in face of the actual situation. For what is the situation? The situation is this: the great mass of our people seem to be drifting away from religion, the habit of worship is falling into disuse; the Sabbath is rapidly ceasing to be a day of rest; seventy-five per cent. of the manhood of this country, it has been estimated, are clean outside all the churches.

Curiously enough, with that disturbing fact staring them in the face, there are some who have the audacity to declare dogmatically that Christianity has conquered and transformed the world, knowing full well that it has done nothing of the kind.

Here is another fact of profound significance, illustrating the truth of the saying, Extremes meet. At

a recent meeting of the House of Bishops the subject under discussion was the revision of the Prayer Book. The majority of the Bishops seemed either to belong to, or to be in deep sympathy with, the Catholic party, while the Modernists were represented only by the Bishop of Birmingham. In a somewhat bitter debate on the Holy Communion the antagonism between the two parties found clearest expression. *The Book of Common Prayer*, unrevised, rejects the doctrine of Transubstantiation, not only because it cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but also because "it is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture," but the Anglo-Catholics accept and teach it as a fundamental and all-important doctrine of grace. The Bishop of Birmingham said that "there was a body of clergy who wished to go beyond the Reformation and to re-establish the superstitions of the Middle Ages." The Bishop of London absolutely repudiated that charge, and maintained that the Anglo-Catholic clergy did not take a superstitious view of the Holy Communion. To our minds any view of the Lord's Supper, except our own, is essentially superstitious; but we must confess that the Catholic conception of it brings it into line with Pagan sacred meals. The Catholic teaching is that after their consecration by the presiding priest the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of the Saviour, a conception evidently based on these words attributed to the Gospel Jesus: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and brake it, and he gave to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat, this is my body. And he took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, 'Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood.'" Now, there was a Cannibal sacrament almost identical with Catholic eucharist. The God was put to death, and then his worshippers partook of his flesh and blood. Our point is, however, that the prevalence of these antagonistic theories of the Holy Communion necessarily puts the pulpit in a quandary, and to a man of the world its conflicting utterances are incredibly absurd.

In the *Guardian* of October 23 there is a sermon, entitled "Spiritual Cleansing," by the Rev. I. E. Binns, in which the preacher dwells on the necessity of adapting Christianity to the age. Mr. Binns is Vicar of West Ham, but this sermon was preached in Westminster Abbey. "Partly in honour of St. Luke," he took his text from his Gospel xvii. 14: "And it came to pass that, as they went they were cleansed." There is very little connection, however, between the text and the discourse nominally founded upon it. It is with the sermon itself that we are now concerned, near the beginning of which we find these words:—

We are an impatient and a restless generation. But not only are we impatient and restless, we are weary and disillusioned too. We have, as a consequence, come to believe with the pessimist that if this is the best of all possible worlds, everything in it is a necessary evil. For the disease of the whole race man has no universal or infallible nostrum; nor can he frame clear-cut schemes which will, by anticipation, provide for every possible contingency. We must be content to sail under sealed orders. Observation of the present, and even only a slight knowledge of the past teaches the necessity of this.

Unintentionally, no doubt, Mr. Binns misrepresents the present generation. Whatever impatience, restlessness, and weariness it manifests, we are absolutely convinced that the cause is not lack of religion, or trust in God, but the persistence of conditions of life which are a disgrace to our humanity. We have no right to be happy and cheerful and to sing merry songs as long as unnatural and unjust economic and social conditions are allowed to continue. The

remedy for all evils in the world must be purely natural. Christianity claims to be a supernatural panacea; but unfortunately it has never proved itself effective; and naturally belief in its efficacy has enormously retarded human progress. Of course, being a clergyman, Mr. Binns is unable to agree with that statement. In fact, he deliberately contradicts it, saying:—

There can be no doubt that the restlessness and impatience of the race appears not least in its attitude towards the things of the spirit. Some find in this want of intellectual adjustment the reason for the separation of large numbers from organized religion. That it plays a large part in bringing about such a separation, I do not deny, especially amongst the younger generation, but I am far from convinced that intellectual difficulties are entirely responsible for the absence of older people from our churches—the cause lies much deeper. In some cases such difficulties first show themselves during the period of adolescence, when the growing boy or girl is beset by novel temptations, arising from the development of new powers within. At the same time come questionings in regard to the faith, which in a blind sort of way has been the support of the life hitherto. The connection between unbelief and sin is often a close one, and a moral lapse, though by God's grace it need not be, is in many cases the prelude to the abandonment of any Christian profession.

That passage is fundamentally wrong from beginning to end. The things of the spirit are beyond doubt creations of the religious imagination. They have no objective existence at all, being real only to those who believe in them. The number of people who no longer regard them as real is rapidly increasing, and as an inevitable consequence our churches and chapels are alarmingly emptying. We know what Mr. Binns means when he proclaims his conviction that "intellectual difficulties are not entirely responsible for the absence of older people from our churches"; but it is stupendously false even to suggest that men and women become Freethinkers because they want to be released from bondage to what is called the moral law. The overwhelming majority of unbelievers became such through the sheer conviction of the utter falseness of the Christian faith. There are scores of Freethinkers in West Ham, and if Mr. Binns will take the trouble to make enquiries about their moral characters he will certainly discover that they compare very favourably with the most ardent Christians in the parish, and what more can he require?

The Vicar of West Ham does not seem to realize that convinced Freethinkers can be as honest, truthful, just, sympathetic, and altruistic as, and possibly more so than, the very best and noblest Christians on earth; but his ignorance does not excuse him for making false witness against them. Some of them were once as fervent believers as he himself is to-day; but they now see that they were such only as long as monarch reason slept. The moment he awoke the supernatural, with all its fancied contents, began to vanish, and ere long all was gone. Furthermore, genuine Freethinkers do not bemoan the departure of their faith, nor wish they could recover it again. The death of their supernatural beliefs was the luckiest and happiest thing that ever happened to them.

J. T. LLOYD.

The aims of Christianity and Freethought are as the poles asunder. Christianity seeks serfs, but Freethought seeks freemen. "Kindly allow me to know," says the priest. "Permit me to find out," retorts the Freethinker.

—D. P. Stickells.

## The Moans of Mr. Jones.

I have never claimed for myself the divine attribute of justice.—*Bernard Shaw.*

The way of paradoxes is the way of truth. To test reality we must see it on the tight-rope. When the verities become acrobats we can judge them.—*Oscar Wilde.*

SINCE the far-off days of the "eighties" of the past century, Mr. Bernard Shaw has been the most pugnacious and tenacious of critics. Hardly a phase of English society has escaped the shafts of his sharp satire, and no reputation has been too august for his caustic criticism. Now a brother dramatist has ventured to attack Mr. Shaw, and he has done it in no half-hearted fashion.

Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, the distinguished dramatic author, has written a fierce denunciation of Mr. Shaw under the title of *Mr. Mayor of Shakespeare Town*. The circumstances of the attack are curious. Mr. Shaw was the principal guest at the Shakespeare Festival at Stratford-on-Avon in April last, and the book is really a protest in the form of an open letter to the mayor of that town against the honour paid to Mr. Shaw on that occasion.

Mr. Jones is anxious to assure his readers that he has no personal malice against Mr. Shaw, but he describes his open letter as a "search into the pretensions of Mr. Bernard Shaw to be received by the English people as a teacher and leader of thought in these perplexing and dangerous days." Mr. Jones points out, firstly, that Mr. Shaw has a high-sniffing contempt for Shakespeare, and quotes Shaw's own words:—

With the single exception of Homer there is no eminent writer, not even Sir Walter Scott, whom I despise so utterly as I despise Shakespeare when I measure my mind against his. It would positively be a relief to me to dig him up and throw stones at him.

Then Mr. Jones, with a plentiful lack of humour, actually contrasts Shakespeare's full-blooded patriotism with the cosmopolitanism of Bernard Shaw, and adds, plaintively:—

I cannot but suppose, sir, that you, and your fellow townsman were entirely ignorant of Mr. Bernard Shaw's history when you invited him. There is no other conceivable explanation of your offering him honour and welcome on such an occasion.

And Mr. Jones tries to make the blood of the inhabitants of Stratford-on-Avon creep by quoting some of Shakespeare's finest patriotic bombast and a passage from Shaw which is drenched in vitriol. He contrasts Shakespeare's warlike outbursts with Shaw's:—

It is only the English that require more than the normal life to attain wisdom. The Scotch, Irish, and coloured races already possess it. The Englishman alone has not an adult intelligence.

Mr. Jones's writing, it will be seen, is coloured, and not plain, and his methods almost justify Shaw's contemptuous criticism of our countrymen. Does Mr. Jones imagine that many of the worthy inhabitants of Stratford-on-Avon have read all the thirty-six plays of Shakespeare, to say nothing of the sonnets and poems? Does he think that many Stratfordians have read Shaw's twenty volumes? Mr. Jones could as easily have selected a score of saucy and salacious quotations from Shakespeare's works and asked "Mr. Mayor" if it were worth while to commemorate the memory of a man whose books contain such purple passages. Mr. Shaw is entitled to better treatment, but genius is so often misunderstood by mediocrity. Even young Socialists think Shakespeare a very wicked man because he made Hamlet a prince instead

of a buck-navvy. But Mr. Jones is no longer young, and he has not the same excuse with regard to his very partisan criticism of Shaw.

The bare fact is that Mr. Shaw was rightly invited to the Shakespeare Festival, for he is the most brilliant of living dramatists using our language. To say this is not to throw bouquets at the author of *Man and Superman*. It is the concensus of opinion from Madrid to Moscow, and the New World but echoes the opinion of the Old. The purely parochial success of an ordinary writer sinks into insignificance beside a reputation of this kind. And Shaw is so much more than a merely brilliant author, for he is as great a humanitarian as Charles Dickens. Underlying all his wit and irony, you find a sanity, a balanced good sense, which mere smartness lacks. Occasionally, of course, as an Irishman, he justifies his reputation as a Celtic Mephistopheles, and grins under his cock's feathers, as in his attack on Shakespeare, and the Elizabethans, and his somersaults on the subject of religion. But the total impression left by his work is of a humanitarian grappling with serious problems, not of a country bumpkin grinning through a horse collar. And that impression is very welcome, for, as Heine says, finely, "unless wit is based on seriousness it is only a sneeze of the reason." Bernard Shaw is really an apostle, and is too much in earnest to be impartial. "I have never claimed for myself the divine attribute of justice," he says blandly.

As for Shaw's utterances on the war, they were always dictated by his love for his fellow men, a somewhat novel point of view in those hectic days. His famous retort: "Sir Edward Grey is himself a Junker," was only one example of his brilliant and incisive wit, which stung like a thousand wasps. And so was his advice to the Nonconformist Churches that, if they were wise, they would place busts of Voltaire in their places of worship.

Poor Mr. Jones has done no disservice to Bernard Shaw. He is only a comic figure when he writes: "Will you not arouse yourself, Mr. Mayor, to do what you may to purge your town?"

All the governments of the world could not suppress Bernard Shaw during the great war. Does Mr. Jones think that an excommunication from the mayor of a very small country town would do anything but provoke roars of laughter? Could a country tradesman snub a great writer whose plays have crossed all frontiers, and have been played in all the chief cities of the civilized world? Shaw is, in fact, the only man-of-letters of world-wide reputation that we have. And the only chance of immortality that poor Mr. Jones has is that he should be impaled by Shaw's lightning wit, and be preserved for future generations like a fly in amber.

Shaw's life work is a siege of many years laid to the social and religious abuses of his time by a writer of real and unmistakable genius who had to cut his way into them at the point of his sword, and throw some of the defenders into the moat. Poor Mr. Jones is quite angry because Bernard Shaw's printed utterances do not square with the regulations governing branches of the Primrose League, and other associations of reactionary busybodies. Shaw has fought a good fight for freedom, and, if, occasionally, his works exhibit this warfare and this perplexity, we judge with the forbearance springing from that larger wisdom which tempers justice with sympathy. Shaw's first claim on us is, indeed, genius; but we should be hardly less interested in that splendid man who has done more for Human Progress than any other writer of his generation.

MIMNERMUS.

## Fighting for a Free Sunday.

*Fights for Freedom*, by Francis William Soutter.  
Published by Fisher Unwin, Ltd. Price 6s.

FRANCIS WILLIAM SOUTTER, a veteran fighter in the cause of human liberty and progress, has followed up his very fine work, entitled *Recollections of a Labour Pioneer* with an equally stirring account of fights in which he played a prominent part for human liberty in the middle and later part of the nineteenth century in his latest work entitled *Fights for Freedom*. Of these the most important perhaps to Freethinkers were the early fights for a Free Sunday. Early in the seventies he joined the "National Sunday League," and soon found himself member of the Central Council, honorary secretary of the South London Branch, and honorary editor of the *Free Sunday Advocate*, the League's monthly journal. But he had not been a member long before he realized "that the Central Council was a somewhat conservative body addicted to a strict adherence to old methods coupled with a shrinking timidity of new proposals." So he joined a reform party, and at once set about attempts to accomplish the aims of the society. He soon found that it was dangerous in some parts of the metropolis to declare oneself in favour of a free Sunday, "for the ranks of the Society having for its object the better observance of the Lord's Day" contained many muscular Christians, some of whom were of a peculiarly ferocious type. In fact, in some parts of the North and East of London it was quite impossible to hold meetings in favour of even the opening of libraries and museums on Sunday afternoons without being prepared for all emergencies. However, greatly daring, the South London Branch resolved upon holding a big demonstration at the "Horns Assembly Rooms," Kennington. "When they approached the Central Council for a contribution they were met by appeals to forgo the meeting on the ground that it would be dangerous to hold it." However, they persevered with their efforts and, strangely enough, had a most successful meeting under the chairmanship of Viscount Amberley, a pronounced Freethinker.

The following year the Central Council induced Mr. P. A. Taylor to challenge the opinion of the new Parliament on the subject and to move a resolution, which was seconded by Mr. Thomas Burt, and such was the effect of the latter's speech that it was estimated that the addition of some twenty-five votes were recorded in its favour.

However, all over the country the clergy and ministers of every denomination opposed the opening of museums and libraries on Sundays, and they were even more hostile to the proposal for Sunday concerts in various halls under the auspices of the League.

But Mr. Soutter continued in his work of reform. On October 18, 1874, he helped to found the Sunday Shakespeare Society, to meet on Sunday afternoons for the reading of the plays of Shakespeare. Dr. Furnival, the great Shakespearean scholar, was the first president, and when he died in 1910 he was succeeded by Sir Sidney Lee.

Since the passing of the Bill in favour of the opening of museums and public libraries on Sundays a good deal of progress has been made. The Sunday League has extended its work, and now in many parts of London and the suburbs, music halls and other large buildings are open on Sundays, and concerts of a fairly high-class character are given before large and appreciative audiences. At first these concerts consisted largely of what is called "Sacred music," but to-day the songs and music are almost

entirely Secular, and not only so, but "Entertainers," and even those who call themselves "comedians," are numbered among the most popular items in present-day programmes. And so, despite the hostility of the priest and the parson, we are making some progress towards a Free Sunday year by year. But when shall we have the Theatre and the Opera house open on Sunday? Picture palaces are open, and you can enjoy "the silent drama" in peace; but you must not witness the spoken drama unless you belong to some fashionable dramatic society, when you may witness a play on Sunday evening providing no money is taken at the doors. Is this not an absurdity? Why should not the plays of Shakespeare, Sheridan, or Shaw, or any other famous writer, be performed on Sunday, and the performance open to the public, as well as plays of a classical character on the screen? And why should we not be able to hear the operas of our great composers on Sunday as well as on any other day? The answer is that it is merely Sabbatarianism that stops the way. The priest and the parson fear that if theatres were open on Sunday their audiences would diminish almost to the vanishing point.

But to turn to Mr. Soutter's book once more. He fought for great questions of principle in political and social matters, and was never afraid of a physical encounter on behalf of a cause that he believed to be just and true. He gives an account of a meeting organized by Charles Bradlaugh, which took place in Hyde Park in February, 1878, to protest against the action of Lord Beaconsfield and Lord Salisbury in their attempt to drag this country into war with Russia. The "Jingo" fever at the time was rife all over the country, and in response to a general appeal made by the Hon. Auberon Herbert, the meeting in question was arranged. It was expected from previous experience that rowdiness was likely to take place on such an occasion, and Bradlaugh therefore made arrangements to resist any form of ruffianism. According to Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner's account of the matter, in her *Life of Her Father: Charles Bradlaugh*, she says that:—

Mr. Bradlaugh's special contingent was to consist of fifty marshals and five hundred deputy marshals, who wore his Northampton colours and were furnished with "wands of office." It was not thought right to ask unarmed men to confront the brutality of the war-at-any-price men who come armed with all manner of weapons yet it was not desired to provoke an attack by any show of force, so, after some deliberation, it was decided that the marshals should be armed with short staves similar to the constable's truncheon. (*Charles Bradlaugh: His Life and Works*, vol. 2, page 82).

Mr. Soutter in his book says he was appointed one of the marshals.

In due course I found myself in Hyde Park. Mr. Bradlaugh put in an early appearance, asked how many stewards I expected, and explained to me his plan of campaign. He had staked out the ground he wished to retain control of, and the stewards were to form a ring six deep and were to stand facing the two speakers. Now came the curious part of the arrangement. This circular band of supporters were to link arms, with a truncheon in the right hand, and stand thus facing the speakers and backs to those attacking. Thinking I had misunderstood his instruction, I approached Mr. Bradlaugh, when he assured me I had made no mistake, and on my suggesting that the position of the defenders should be reversed, Mr. Bradlaugh in his most imperious manner said: "Young man, if you are not prepared to carry out my instructions I will relieve you of your task."

Mr. Soutter then calls in question the wisdom of

the tactics of Mr. Bradlaugh, which, he says, surprised him, considering that Bradlaugh had been in the army. The medical students, led by Lieutenant Armit, made a most terrific attack upon the meeting; the ring was broken, and both speakers had to fight desperately to avoid capture. But surely Mr. Soutter must recognize that Bradlaugh in adopting these tactics had to make it clear that his party were not the aggressors, but were fighting in the interests of peace and order. However, it was a glorious fight in the cause of peace. Mr. Soutter is now eighty-two years of age, hale and hearty, and he has the proud satisfaction of knowing that he has fought in many good causes, and, in my judgment, in none better than when he stood by Mr. Bradlaugh on that memorable Sunday afternoon in Hyde Park.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

### Elspath, the Innkeeper's Daughter.

At a small wayside inn in the east of Scotland was born, about 1738, the innkeeper's daughter Elspath, or Elizabeth, Simpson. A rough life she had as a child; she herded cows; she learned to sew and read. A rough life she had in marriage; her husband, a potter, found her temper difficult, and she, with two daughters aged 19 and 21, parted from him, and for a while lived in Glasgow. In March, 1783, a young carpenter happened to visit the house in which Mrs. Elspath Buchan lodged, and he was thrilled by the sound of her voice as she, in the adjoining kitchen, was telling a friend how King Hezekiah showed his treasures, in a spirit of vanity, to the messengers of the King of Babylon, and how he suffered for it. The carpenter, Andrew McInnes, learned that Elspath was full of zeal for the Lord of Glory, that she corresponded with holy priests in various parts of Scotland, and inspired not a few people with intense admiration. Andrew was smit with the same admiration, and he remained devoted to her doctrines and to her memory till his death in 1846. He and the other disciples were known as Buchanites (though Elspath was divorced from Buchan in 1784), and she bore the title of "Friend Mother in the Lord." In fact, she was so much a friend of Heaven that she announced herself as the Third Person of the Godhead; and she also declared that she, Elspath, the innkeeper's daughter, was the woman who, clothed with the sun and moon, would bring forth a man-child to rule all nations with a rod of iron. Her coming to Scotland had been foretold in the 12th chapter of the last book of the New Testament, the Apocalypse.

At the town of Irvine, a certain minister, named Hugh White, shook his congregation with a singular and fiery preaching; and this evangelical soul, becoming acquainted with Elspath, believed her gospel, and hailed her as the divine Woman of Revelation. She came to live in Irvine. Crowded meetings prayed, wept, hoped, and looked with rapture into the face of Elspath. White's more respectable supporters rebelled; he was expelled from the Church at Irvine. Then he shouted his evangel in his own house and garden. Robert Burns, the poet, beheld the wonders of the Buchanites, and thus, in a letter (August, 1784) described Elspath and her comrades:

She pretends to give them the Holy Ghost by breathing on them, which she does with postures and practices that are scandalously indecent. They likewise dispose of all their effects, and hold a community of goods, and live nearly an idle life, carrying on a great farce of devotion in barns and woods, where they lie and lodge all together, and hold like-

wise a community of women, as it is another of their tenets that they can commit no mortal sin.

Irvine people got up a riot, smashed the doors and windows of a house in which the devout sect assembled, and chased Elspath for miles along the road to Glasgow, until darkness fell. Hours later, she returned to Irvine, and entered Hugh White's parlour, bareheaded, barefooted, ragged, and bleeding; yet she smiled, and exclaimed: "I suffer all this freely, for the sake of those I love!" Irvine continued its rage and brick-throwing, and in May, 1784 (three months before Burns wrote the letter just quoted), she was banished from the town by the local magistrates. She triumphantly cited a Bible verse: "Verily, I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom!" In procession, the Buchanites departed amid the jeers of the citizens. They felt they fled from Sodom; they felt they were going to the New Jerusalem. Mrs. Buchan, clad in a scarlet cloak, sat in a cart with Hugh White. On foot, followed peasant girls and saintly men—some forty-six in all. At times they halted at a farmhouse to buy cakes, or drank from a streamlet. "Friend Mother" now and then distributed food, and then "lighted her pipe and took a smoke of tobacco" (so runs the record of the loyal Andrew McInnes). Thus they trudged through hamlets and villages of unbelieving Scots, sleeping in sheds or hay-lofts at night, and greeting the sunrise with loud hymns. At New Cample, near Dumfries, they paused. Farmer Davidson, piously inclined, granted them a large barn for dwelling-place, and the Buchanites performed field labour and other services for him and his neighbours. Later, by Davidson's permission, they built a house at Closeburn, near by, and sixty men, women and children made the place ("Buchan Hall," the countryfolk laughingly called it) their temple, their restaurant, and their bed. Hugh White often preached, and crowds came to mock, or to listen in reverence, as their mood might lead, and White, who had a poetic enthusiasm, expressed his feelings in the following delightful lines:—

The people in Closeburn Parish residing,  
Came often our sermons to hear;  
And rudely they questioned our words, though most pure,  
Our persons they threatened to tear.  
They often with batons and cudgels combined,  
With billets of wood and with stones,  
But HE who has power all men to control,  
Prevented them breaking our bones.

I have cited this little poem, so that readers who collect the "Curiosities of Literature" may annex the gem for their collection. Poet White also issued (1785), "The Divine Dictionary, or a Treatise indited by Holy Inspiration, containing the Faith and Practice of the people, by the world called Buchanites, who are actually waiting for the second coming of our Lord, and who believe that they alone shall be translated into the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall be ever with the Lord. There appeared a great wonder in heaven—a woman.—Rev. xii. 1." The volume of 124 pages was revised by Friend Mother, and printed at Dumfries. I cannot here describe its beauties, and must content myself with a line or two from Andrew McInnes, which shortly states Mr. White's "plan for redeeming the earth from corruption":—

We who were waiting with our Friend Mother at the second coming of Christ, would be personally raised, by supernatural power, like Elijah or Jesus, till we were above the ethereal heavens, where we would have a resting-place with the angels and all redeemed saints; and, in the presence of Father and Son, to be spectators of the consuming by fire of all polluted objects.....Christ is to reign with the saints for a thousand years.

One evening an old disciple fell down the ladder that led to the loft; the whole of the Buchanites burst into their favourite hymn: "Oh! hasten translation, and come resurrection!" for in the excitement they imagined the tremendous last moment had arrived. But Friend Mother knew the time was not yet. She called for a tobacco-pipe and puffed, and, in a statesmanlike manner, appeased the hubbub. Another remarkable episode was the attempt (not properly completed) to fast forty days, and the Buchanites loafed about, sang hymns, and dozed for several days on the strength of sips of treacle and water. A certain Mrs. Hunter could stand the strain no longer, and rushed away with her two children, pursued by Elspath's Scriptural threat of the Devil's portion, "Where the worm dieth not, and the fire is never quenched." Hunter (the old fellow who tumbled down the ladder) tottered after his wife and children. When the fast was more or less finished, the Buchanites gathered on a hilltop early one morning, and Mrs. Buchan, with her hair flowing long, stood in the centre; and, as the sun rose, all expected to be borne, in the "hastening translation," to the regions above. The miracle was postponed, and the believers, like pale skeletons, returned to their earthly dwelling. The faith of some failed, and they quitted the sect. Public opinion bore heavily against the elect people. In March, 1787, by order of the local magistrates, the Buchanites left Dumfriesshire, and settled on a wild moorland farm at Auchengibbert, in Galloway. They eked out existence by hired labour, and by the women's spinning-wheels, which wove green cloth costumes for the saints. On one occasion, Friend Mother visited a harvest-field where her disciples were using their reaping-hooks. They surrounded her, and raised the hymn: "Oh, hasten translation." She touched one after another; each fell prostrate; she uttered pious words; she touched each person in turn, and each rose; and they all burst into the divine psalm:—

By us Auchengibbert has only been taken  
To rest in, as onward we march to our home.

The march became somewhat painful when Mr. White developed doubts. He had hoped to fly to heaven at the end of the Great Fast already described; and he fretted under the disappointment. Glooms gathered. In March, 1791, Elspath fell ill. She told her friends that she was dying, but would return six days after death; but, if their faith failed, she would be obliged to delay her advent fifty years (that is, till 1841). Elspath died, and her body rested for a time under the farmhouse kitchen floor.

The Buchanites gradually passed from the earthly scene. White went to the United States, and became an ordinary Universalist preacher. Of other emigrants, one died fairly rich; the rest lapsed into obscure poverty. A few women who remained in Scotland continued to spin green cloth of good quality. Andrew McInnes was the final survivor of the holy clan. To the last, he eagerly pored over old manuscripts left by the brethren, and readily chatted with enquirers after Buchanite truth. Shaggy brows shaded his grey eyes; his strongly-marked features told a tale of courageous fanaticism; a portrait shows him seated in an arm-chair, his head crowned with an aged and tall chimney-pot hat, his feet in clogs perched on the ribs of the fire-grate; and thus he awaited "translation." He died in January, 1846, and with his own remains was reburied the coffin of Elspath, the innkeeper's daughter. In March, 1841, a half-century after her decease, Andrew McInnes—who kept her coffin in his house—had spent many

hours beside the dead mother, hoping for her living reappearance. He still hoped to soar to heaven without dying.....

It may interest the reader if I add a line or two about Joseph Train, who recorded the strange story of the Buchanites. An Ayrshire labourer and weaver, he attracted the notice of Sir Walter Scott, and it was Train's diligent antiquarian research which supplied the poet-novelist with a large mass of legend and local lore, afterwards imbedded in Scott's famous tales. For example, he gave Scott the materials and hints which took shape in *Old Mortality*, *Edie Ochiltree*, and *Madge Wildfire*. In 1845, he published his *Account of the Isle of Man*, and, in 1846, his history of the amazing Buchanites.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps we may even assert that nothing in Scott's fictions surpasses the weirdness of the Buchanite chronicle. With a smile, not untouched by sad thoughts of past human errors, we may trust that our antiquarians may soon know nothing of such vagaries except as things gone by, and not see them, as Train saw them, alive in their deformity.

F. J. GOULD.

### Acid Drops.

Mr. E. H. Bass writes us that we were unjust to Henry Arthur Jones in classing him along with those of the *Express* writers who dwelt upon the ideal figure of Jesus Christ. Mr. Jones did not refer to Jesus at all. But we must point out that we did not mention Mr. Jones in this connection, and, in any case, what we have written does not affect the strength of the criticism offered against those who use this "nose of wax" to strengthen their own views. Mr. Bass thinks we should acknowledge the close approach Mr. Jones makes to Freethought in proclaiming himself a Pantleist, and reminds us that in this respect he is in the company of Giordano Bruno. On that we may remind Mr. Bass that Bruno lived three centuries ago, and views that were advanced then cannot be called such to-day. Moreover, while all the writers, with the exception of Mr. Compton Mackenzie, made some approach to the Freethought position, a great deal of the value of the approach was spoiled by their needless concessions to Christian and theistic views. And in the case of Mr. Jones himself his assertion of "design" in the world, the belief in a "Pervading Force," which displays intelligence in sustaining the universe, the dogmatic statement that "all this vast universe is living intelligent spirit," really gives about all the average apologetic Christian asks for nowadays. And the use of such quite nonsensical phrases, which will certainly be used to bolster up a still more nonsensical religion, hardly compensates for having given up the cruder aspects of orthodox Christian belief.

We see that *John O'London* is publishing Hardy's "Tess" in serial form. The editor advertises the fact with an apologetic note to the effect that he knows his readers too well to feel that they will find their moral sense offended by anything in the story. One of our readers well asks whether in view of this, *John O'London* would have published "Tess" fifty years ago, and wonders whether the editor recognizes how much he is indebted to Freethought for the larger and healthier liberal tone that obtains to-day. Well, he might recognize this much, but we are quite certain he would not avow it. The popular gag is to attribute it to the existence of a healthier Christianity—created largely by avowed Atheists.

Some weeks ago in this paper the majority of daily newspapers were described as "Draper's Catalogues." Like ozone, a little of truth goes a long way, and we are

<sup>1</sup> Engraved in Joseph Train's *Buchanites from First to Last* (published by Blackwood, 1846). From this book I have drawn details.

<sup>2</sup> See article, "Joseph Train" (1779-1852), in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

pleased to see Mr. St. John Ervine popularizing the real idea of our numerous dailies. The press and the pulpit have more in common than the initial letter. Speaking at a meeting Mr. Ervine said that large circulation papers were not newspapers at all, but draper's circulars. The loud laughter following this was a sign that the shot had gone home, and his statement that clergymen can get larger stipends from the newspapers than from the Church will lead to a serious crisis. Churches, we are told, are sacred buildings; if there is a great lurch by clergymen to the newspapers, the printing houses will have to be consecrated.

The ten writers on religion in a popular daily have all been judiciously sub-edited. At the back of it all is advertisement for religion. That it needs it is beside the mark. A pamphlet has reached us showing that the true commercial spirit of "follow up" is taken by the profession. With a lack of clear thinking, F. Chalmers Rogers, the minister of East Hill Congregational Church, Wandsworth, has proceeded to draw his own particular moral from the press discussion as follows: "The series of articles on religion recently published by a prominent daily newspaper have shown that when they face the subject seriously, men have no satisfactory alternative to offer to the religion of Jesus." This conclusion is very neat, and very clever, but it is not true. The editor of the *Daily Express* had the final say in the matter, and because he did not ask or allow anyone to put the case against Christianity, we get the above conclusion, which cannot be right. But it is a fair sample of theological reasoning, not new, not true, and dates back to the time when the feelings were allowed to rule the intellect.

Bad carpenters always quarrel with their tools. The Rev. T. P. Stevens, of Southwark, states that most churches are too big for good sermons. We suggest that churches should be built with elastic walls so that a congregation of three could be called a "full house." That there is a falling away from church and chapel going is a fact. That the profession cannot deny it is another; but the editors of newspapers have not the courage to boldly declare it, give the public something better, and leave the human race to fight its own battles with the guidance of common sense.

For the artistic merit of blowing hot and cold commend us to the Bishop of Norfolk. In a book, *The Nation and the Church*, we find the mark of the casuist. We are told that: "In dealing with the subject of marriage, the Bishop refuses to acquiesce in the proposal that constant cruelty, desertion, and habitual drunkenness should justify divorce." Further on we are also informed that "Freedom of thought should be welcomed, but the truth of the Bible, and the response to its truth in the heart, must be the test of a man's faith." Both of these extracts leave Christianity where it always has been, and the freedom spoken of is about as extensive as that given to a goat tied to a stake. We believe it was a Labour Cabinet Minister who confessed that politics had taught him the art of speaking without saying anything. The Bishop of Norfolk is a past master in the art.

In a leading article in the *Daily Express* the writer, evidently enthused by the series on the religious stunt, concludes by stating of the Armistice celebrations:—

Those of us who subsequently betake ourselves to the festivities which mark the evening of a solemn day will, by the fervour of our jubilation and the outbursting of our gladness, display a sentiment which symbolizes no less religiously our gratitude to God for a great deliverance.

This is excellent journalese; but it would not impress a cat. For the love of Mike, or any other national deity, we should like to know what this twaddle has to do with some millions of dead, and their living relatives. Or is the journalist merely the parson with a pen in his hand?

Preaching in Clithero Parish Church Canon Wrigley said that we cannot any longer close our eyes to the fact that as a nation we are gradually ceasing to be Christian. He also says that this has a bad effect on the clergy themselves. "They find people less and less interested in what they have to say when they deliver the simple message of the Gospels, and so there are those who either take up some fad, or fill their sermons with chatter about work or wages, or the latest scientific theory or the latest novel—subjects on which their opinions are seldom worth much." So with a people who are believing less and less in Christianity, and a clergy who, in order to attract, fill their sermons with chatter that is not worth much, it looks as though the Christian Churches are in a bad way. We have often said this much, and we are glad to have our opinion endorsed by Canon Wrigley.

The British Drama League is to make an attempt to obtain a relaxation of the ban upon biblical plays in which Christ is a character. For our own part we consider it would be very dangerous for the Church to admit such things. The realities of life gain by good stage representation, the shams are always likely to suffer. And consider what might be the effect of putting New Testament plays upon the stage divested of the mentally stupefying atmosphere of a Church. Why people might be led to think of the reasonableness of it all. And what would then become of the Christian scheme of salvation?

Curious broadsides are being poured into the hulk of Christianity from most unlikely places. In the *Saturday Review*, a writer practically paraphrases a paragraph of the *Freethinker* of a fortnight ago. Here it is:—

Now this memorial was dedicated, by a minister of the Christian religion, in the name of the Christian God. Nobody seems to have felt it was incongruous or anything but decorous and fitting. It chimes exactly with that other outrage, the inscription on the pedestal of the David—in itself a beautiful and fitting symbol—lately erected by the Machine Gun Corps, which has raised such choruses of protest as should have instructed the official mind. I have no wish to criticize the Chaplain-General, whose position is exceedingly delicate, but we have here, surely, raised the whole issue: of what kind are the gods we really acknowledge?

So much for the stone howitzer. When the writer has finished the demolition of the obvious humbug associated with religion, he may dig a little deeper and find that the reality of it is a "ghost."

Mr. J. B. Priestly, in writing of Mr. G. K. Chesterton, states:—

The last twenty years seem to have added little or nothing to his mind; he appears to have spent his time outside experience, elaborating but seldom improving his old arguments; until there are times when he seems to us to exist no longer in this world at all, but simply in the world of his own opinions.

It was the late H. P. Barbellion who stated that Mr. Bernard Shaw was old-fashioned; it is just possible, however, that G. K. C. will go down as the playboy of history who treated serious things whimsically and whimsical things seriously but a newspaper public will always find him an audience.

Mr. E. B. Osborn, in reviewing a book on "Ghosts," and all the flora and fauna connected with this sort of thing, gives us a reminder of a very practical test that he successfully used. It appears that at a Shoe Lane seance two miners brought to London by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle were respectively called "White Eagle" and "Prairie Wolf." Mr. Osborn could not, however, get either of these mediums to talk the "Red Man's" language. He also suggests that there must be trouble in the Trade Union of Ghosts when members are provoked to "walk" instead of appearing just when they thought they would.



## "Freethinker" Endowment Trust.

ABSENCE from London over the week-end prevented our dealing with the letters received in connection with this Fund, but we are pleased to note that those we had were of a very cheerful and encouraging order. Mr. C. Rudd writes:—

I was very pleased to see on my return from holidays that you had started an Endowment Trust, and the strides it had made in so short a time. The originators are to be praised by all Freethinkers for such a brainy scheme. I little thought last year when sending my subscription and saying what a pity something could not be done to relieve you of financial worry that a scheme would materialize so soon.....You have kept the flag flying all through the years of the war, and very often it makes me feel ashamed of the little I do for the Cause.

Another old friend of the paper, Mr. A. G. Lye, says:—

There are many of us who find it difficult to capitalize fully their usual contribution, and I am glad to see that it will be possible to add to initial sums through the Trust being kept open. But I hope that everyone, rich and poor, will do their best in the first stage and back up your devoted and unselfish work for "the best of causes....." The Endowment Trust is the finest thing ever started for the paper. There are great possibilities before the *Freethinker* if it is generously supported.....The forces of sentimentality in religion, of spiritual quackery, of confused thinking, of vague thinking, of vague misrepresentation, and of distraction, are hindering persistently the growth of knowledge and clear thinking on the great issues of life, while the loss in misdirected effort due to irrational views of life is colossal. The *Freethinker* is the friend of every man or movement honestly desiring a better informed and more rational society.

Our old friend, Mr. L. W. Willis, says it is a pleasure and a duty to send his subscription, and is glad that a way has at last been found to lighten the financial anxiety attendant upon carrying on. Mr. M. Barnard, in the course of a very flattering letter, says he would rather have our "rational ability" than be a millionaire. Well, we would not change whatever capacity we possess for money, but the latter element is essential to carrying on where printers' bills are to be met.

Mr. J. W. Wood says it is a duty of all to help as a means of giving to others the mental freedom we have ourselves achieved.

Mr. H. J. V. Templeman thinks:—

The promoters of the *Freethinker* Trust are to be congratulated on the conception of the Fund and the start already made. Although the success of the Sustentation Fund has been a tangible proof of the esteem in which the paper is held by Freethinkers and of the determination to maintain the useful work it has done, and is doing, the fact of an annual deficit meant an absorption of your energy which could have been utilized to better purposes in other directions. By placing its finances on a sound basis those of us who derive pleasure and profit by its perusal will feel they are discharging a long overdue debt to the paper.

There is not a large amount to acknowledge this week, but this is only a pause, and we hope to see the tide flowing stronger with our next list of subscriptions. The following is the total to date:—

Previously acknowledged, £3,293 5s. 6d. G. Smith (2nd subscription), £20; T. R. White, 5s.; R. B. Davison, £1; H. Sharp, 2s.; J. Butcher, 2s. 6d.; T. C. Riglin, 5s.; W. Wright, 10s.; J. G. Hardie, 5s.; F. Gatheshill, 5s.; E. Lechmere, 5s.; E. L. Bishop (2nd subscription), 2s.; J. Burrell, 2s. 6d.; F. Taylor,

2s. 6d.; A. J. Marriott, £1 1s.; "Poor Old Nixie," 10s.

Per F. Collins: D. Aberdeen, £1; Vic Collins, 5s.; W. Burrows, 2s. 6d.; A. Vanderhout, £1; W. Andrews, 5s.; T. Stevens, 5s.; F. Collins, 10s.; F. Howell, 2s. 6d.; "A Friend," £1 12s. 6d. Total, £3,323 9s.

Corrections: "J. N. Prownes, £10," in the issue dated October 11, should read "J. Brown, £10." "R. Balsman, £10," in the issue dated October 25, should have read "R. Bulman, £10." We shall be glad if subscribers will call our attention to any errors in acknowledging that appears.

Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to the "Freethinker Endowment Trust," and crossed Midland Bank, Limited (Clerkenwell Branch). All letters should be addressed to the Editor, *Freethinker*, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## 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.**

M. BARNARD.—We are not alarmed about the future of the *Freethinker* when we are no longer able to look after it. We have, we hope, many years' more work before us, and great causes have a knack of finding the man when he is needed. More help just now is mainly a question of the finances of the paper being in a stronger position. The way to help is for each reader to get another one. Thanks for your good opinion of our work.

E. L. BISHOP.—We are very pleased to learn that, having found someone to take your extra copy of the paper, you are ordering another to get rid of in the same way. That is a very valuable form of help.

L. W. WILLIS.—Your reminder that you heard us lecture "well over thirty years ago" is suggestive of advancing years, and while we must count that number to our credit, we cannot say that we feel it. And we commenced lecturing before we were of age.

M. J. WADMAN.—The cuttings to which you refer were not in the envelope. We have handed your order to our shop-manager.

A. GARDNER.—A man may affirm on the ground that the oath is contrary to his religious belief. This would be the reason for Mr. Lansbury's affirmation.

J. E. ROOSE.—Your criticism of Spencer's *Survival of the Fittest* appears to be based on the idea that by the fittest is the best. But the expression as Spencer used it has no moral implications whatever. It means merely fittest in relation to a given environment. The moral quality of what survives is quite another question.

J. MCKENZIE.—Mr. Cohen would be very pleased to visit Plymouth early in the New Year if arrangements could be made to that end. We are glad to see that the Freethinkers there are beginning to bestir themselves in the matter of propaganda.

T. EMRIGHT.—Both Holyoake and Bradlaugh were avowed Atheists. Agnosticism became fashionable in the later stages of their lives, when it served as a respectable escape from the more heartily hated term.

W. WRIGHT.—Pleased to hear from you. The appreciation of old friends is very acceptable.

J. HARDIE.—There is no need whatever to apologise for the smallness of the contribution. The will is shown in the gift, not necessarily in the amount.

W. G. DAVIS.—Thanks for cuttings. We quite agree with your diagnosis of the B.B.C. religious gentleman. The cuttings will prove useful.

W. J. BUTCHER.—If all adopted your motto of "little and often" with regard to the Fund we should not be long in reaching our total.

G. BEDBOROUGH.—Next week.

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

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

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.

To-day (November 8) Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Broughton Town Hall, Salford. In the afternoon, at 3, he will lecture on "Religion and the Press," and in the evening, at 6.30, on "Evolution and God." The hall can be reached easily by tramcar from the centre of Manchester, and Freethinkers should make it a point to bring a Christian friend—or two—along with them.

Mr. Cohen has arranged for a return visit to the Picton Hall, Liverpool, on Sunday, November 22. At the last meeting we were pleased to note several new workers who were assisting the Secretary, Mr. McKelvie, but if the arrangements are to be properly carried through, the greater the number of helpers the better. These can assist at the meeting itself, and—more important still—before the meeting is held, when their help will go a long way towards making the gathering a success. Mr. McKelvie would, therefore, be glad to hear from anyone who is willing to assist. Will they please write at once to him at his address, 29 Claremont Road, Seaforth, Liverpool. There is plenty of work for all.

We are well aware that a number of our friends are always on the look-out for obtaining new readers for the *Freethinker*, but we are afraid that a great many do not take this matter as seriously as we would wish. Of course one can never expect a colossal circulation for a paper such as this one, it is not sensational, it does not pander to popular prejudice or passion, and—perhaps the greatest drawback of all—it asks people to do their own thinking. But all the same there are large numbers in the country who do not even know—after forty years—that such a paper as the *Freethinker* exists. We know that to be the case by letters from new readers who only recently became aware that it did exist. So we ask those of our readers who are interested to see what they can do between now and Christmas towards getting some of these potential subscribers. Success not only means a new reader, it may also mean a new worker for the Cause.

The West Ham Branch is holding another of its Social Evenings on Saturday, November 7, at the Earlham Hall. There will be dancing and music, and the function will commence at 7 o'clock. All Freethinkers and their friends are welcome.

Apropos of our paragraph concerning the refusal of the Glasgow magistrates to permit political meetings to be held on Sunday in any hall which carries a licence,

Mr. Hale, the President of the Glasgow Branch of the N.S.S., writes informing us that under Acts of Parliament which apply to Glasgow, the Magistrates have this power, whether the hall be Corporation property or not. At present the action of the magistrates is directed against political meetings, but it is quite evident that it may at any time be directed against other movements to which the magistrates are opposed. In the circumstances Mr. Hale draws the correct conclusion that Glasgow Freethinkers should endeavour to get a meeting place of their own as soon as possible, if they wish to make their propaganda secure.

When we wrote the paragraph to which Mr. Hale refers we did so on the assumption that in this respect Scotch law was on all fours with English law. But if our information is correct, that is not the case. But even in England the authorities take it upon themselves to licence certain meetings on Sunday, and that, as we have often pointed out, they have no power whatever to do. Any meeting to which admission is not charged, is quite legal, and any meeting to which admission is charged is illegal, and that is the sum of the whole matter. The way in which the authorities overcome the holders of music or dancing licences is to threaten opposition to a renewal of the licence, and the licensee in order to avert this, bows to what is an arbitrary assumption of power. But if someone were to defy the authorities, and then carry their case into a higher court if their licence was refused, we fancy an end would be put to this kind of thing. At any rate it is intolerable that magistrates should take upon themselves to say what opinions should or should not be advocated on Sunday.

On Sunday next Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Town Hall, Stratford. His subject will be "Evolution and Christianity," and the usual full hall is expected. The Stratford Town Hall is easy of access from all parts of London. It is in Stratford Broadway, and trams and buses pass the door. It is also within a few minutes' walk from the Great Eastern Railway station. Admission is free.

The Paine Historical Association of New York, is issuing a new edition of Paine's works in ten volumes. We presume there will be additional matter in the shape of what new material has come to hand since Conway's edition was issued. The issue will be sold at forty dollars, but a discount of 30 per cent. is promised to all who subscribe before publication. We do not know whether any arrangements have been made for their sale in this country.

One of our readers writes from China:—

In your issue of August 2 you have allowed a most universal blunder to pass uncorrected. Your contributor, arguing with a Christian preacher, nobly concurs in the claim of the latter that Bishop Wilberforce ("Soapy Sam"), of Winchester, was influential in the abolition of slavery. This is supposed to be a feather in the cap of the Church. "Soapy Sam" was born in 1805. His father, William Wilberforce, the intimate friend of William Pitt, son of the Earl of Chatham, was the leader of the abolition movement from 1787. The blunder needs clear public correction. Churchmen make it too often, and not always in ignorance.

We thank our correspondent for the correction, and express regret for permitting the error to pass, particularly as it is a confusion we have corrected more than once from the platform.

In 1871 Professor Seeley delivered a lecture before a Peace Society on "The United States of Europe." Among the sweet truths of wisdom in it we may find the following: "We must cease to be mere Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, and must begin to take as much pride in calling ourselves Europeans." Nietzsche took this up, and to-day we find in the *New Age* an article on the same theme by Signor Francesco Nitti, translated

from the *Euro-päische Revue*. From a capital reading of it, the writer is a statesman without illusions, and, most important of all, he has not taken refuge in cynicism that retreat of infirm minds. He is able to look over the dictatorial barriers of his own country in what relatively is a passing phrase in history. And although we may weary of waiting for the world teacher that Mrs. Annie Besant has up her sleeve, we are convinced that there will soon be sufficient noble spirits to put an end to Europe as constituted at present as a menagerie of wild animals in separate cages.

Following these notes we print an article which was sent by Dr. Gouklesbrough to the *Daily Express* in the course of the appearance of the various articles on Religion. The editor declined publication, and so managed to keep up the pretence that there is no serious rejection of religion, even though many object to certain Christian doctrines. Probably Lord Beaverbrook thought it might offend some of the drapers and other advertisers, in whose interest the paper appears to be conducted.

### The Religion of the Future.

SCIENCE and religion can never be properly reconciled. Every attempt so far to "kiss and make friends" has been brought about by the use of that old political subterfuge, the compromise, which means that neither party has been thoroughly honest.

The reason is quite simple. Religion relies solely on an appeal to the lower mental instincts, such as the promise of rewards, fear of punishment, and love—instincts that are developed in the dog and the cat. An appeal to the higher mental attributes would be fatal to the dogmatists.

The invariable reply to the serious enquirer is that he has no "faith." Faith in the religious sense is the ability blindly to believe certain principles, founded on legends, of which there is no certain proof. This deliberate evasion of reasoning has been brought about by a species of self-hypnotism—a chloroforming of the higher powers of the brain, the stultifying of an organ, which has taken thousands of years to develop.

Religion probably will not exist in five hundred years time, and would not exist now, were it not for man's conceit (founded on ignorance) of his importance in the universe. It is curious that the rapid progress of science has been confined so far to teaching the laws of nature in relation to each particular subject, without the fact being universally recognized that by a co-ordination of the elementary truths derived from the sciences—a driving force for mankind has been evolved, which must eventually supplant all superstitions.

We have in some respects advanced little from the times when the Christian Church persecuted Galileo, because he dared to state that the Ptolemaic theory of astronomy was wrong, a hypothesis founded on the belief that the sun and stars were planted in the heavens for man's benefit alone and that the whole of the visible universe revolved round the earth.

An elementary knowledge of astronomy, geology, and comparative anatomy teaches us that we are—each of us—a microcosm, a filter-passing organism in size, crawling about a very small planet, which circles round a smallish star. In the heavens are millions of stars, and thousands of those which we can see are bigger—some thousands of times bigger—than our sun. A certain large percentage of these suns most probably possess planets like the earth and are inhabited by life, which may be, in some cases higher, in others lower, than ours. The size of the earth compared to that of the universe is roughly

that of a small pebble, lying on an enormous tract of beach, covered mostly with large boulders and huge pieces of rock. Therefore using the anthropomorphic idea of God, taught by the Bible, is it not the most ineffable conceit to imagine that the influence, which evolved this most wonderful system took the interest and trouble to send down to our miserably insignificant planet his only son? Why should we be so signally favoured to the exclusion of all other worlds?

This is presupposing, of course, that this power has a mentality of the same kind, but infinitely superior to ours, which latter alone seems to be probable.

A great point made by religion is that Christianity has lasted 2,000 years. As far as we can gather, man, after being evolved, has inhabited the world for at least 100,000 years. Astronomy teaches us that the earth will last at least five million, possibly ten million, years, or possibly much longer still.

Christianity, Mohammedanism, Buddhism, and all the other religions—so far, what sway have they held, or are likely to hold in the vast conceptions of time required to consider this problem? Already they are losing ground rapidly. In considering the achievement of *real* happiness, which is the ultimate object of our existence, we must make certain that our minds are not diseased, drugged, or worn out.

It is very sad to contemplate eminent men like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle publishing an article recently in a daily paper, one half of which deals lucidly with facts and logical conclusions, and then suddenly switches over to the realms of the wildest supposition. We can only explain this on the grounds that he is a sufferer from a much more common trouble than is generally known, a disease, which is likely to occur in highly specialized brains towards late middle life, a condition we might term the "Male Climacteric," which implies a sudden change in the mental outlook, in which the brain runs riot over one or more subjects, while preserving its normal balance on all others.

We will discuss the achievement of real happiness in a minute, but for the moment let us return to Christianity. Two thousand years ago the mental condition of mankind was vastly inferior in both its knowledge of science and consequent outlook on life to what it is at the present day. Something was wanted to supplant the early demonology, which even then was found to be getting out of date, so Buddha, Christ, and Mahomet all came forward, not contemporaneously however, with a code of ethics and morals, which were a great improvement on the old ideas. We think it is doubtful whether Western civilization would not have benefited more by Buddhism than Christianity; certainly there would have been more tolerance, but there were other difficulties in the way.

Anyway Christ laid down an excellent set of rules (except in a few particulars), and had his followers observed the letter and spirit of his advice, we should now be in a more advanced state than we are.

His death at an early age was a deplorable event, a real tragedy in the history of the world, from the point of view of practical philosophy. A great deal of the good, however, which might have accrued from the Christian philosophy has been negated by the persistent opposition of the Church—even to this present day—towards the advancement of real knowledge.

With the awakening of the mind to the opportunities of investigating the laws of nature by scientific methods and the immense results which have been and will be reflected thereby on our moral and social conduct, the Oriental superstitions and philosophies

have in their turn become too antiquated to be of any further use.

The theologians will say: "You would destroy Christianity, with what would you replace it?"

To answer this question let us once more revert to what we have done and what we are likely to do. The progress of science within recent years has been prodigious. For over thousands of years we were limited in the method of our progression to the pace of the horse, as being the fastest method of journeying from one place to another. A little over a hundred years ago the steam engine was invented. Now we have got so far as aeroplanes, travelling over two hundred miles an hour. This is only one small instance of what has recently been accomplished.

Compare the progress during last century with what has been accomplished during the first twenty-five years of the present century, then during the last ten years. We are seeking out and discovering truth at a pace corresponding to the principle of compound interest in money matters. And we have at least five million more years to go on doing it.

Astronomy again teaches us that the possibility of a sudden catastrophe to the world is practically nil.

We use the word Truth in its widest sense—not only scientific truths, but truth as it affects our moral, social, and political codes; these are bound to follow as a necessary corollary of the former. This then is the ultimate religion. And what is to be the end? I perceive man, or the much more highly organized being, which will evolve from man, eventually achieving his own immortality by his own efforts—each generation pursuing the truth and giving way to a succeeding race better in every respect. Probably in a million or two million years time, the superman will have discovered the secret of the organization of the universe. The only possibility we can see of this dream not being realized is that at the present time the social and moral progress of man has not kept pace with his scientific discoveries. There is, therefore, the danger that, with the vastly increased powers of destruction which the world is beginning to possess, some clever criminal, or nation of criminals, may involve the whole of civilization in a fatal calamity. Being very doubtful myself of the existence of any future life—there is no actual evidence either way—I am amused at the compassion of some of my friends, who profess this belief. Surely the laugh is upon me? I die, and I believe that death is the end. Should I be wrong, what a pleasant surprise. Should they be wrong—and here comes a beautiful Irishism—won't they be disappointed when they "wake up" and find that they are wrong!

Believe me, Secularism is a very comforting creed. We think and we work and we know, and what we don't know we try to find out and we don't worry!

CLAUDE GOULDESBOUGH, M.B.

### A Pure Assumption.

PASSING a little chapel the other evening, I noticed a placard which bore this legend:—

THE MOST MISERABLE MOMENT AN ATHEIST  
HAS IS WHEN HE FEELS THANKFUL  
AND HAS NOBODY TO THANK.

How my friend and I laughed. I suppose the words had reference to the widespread orgies in the churches and chapels being held just now, called "Harvest Thanksgivings," and which are indulged in every year, whether the harvest is good or bad. Of course, it may be said that it never is so bad as it might be, and in any case it is good for the parsons to get a periodical "stunt" of the kind, to interest the congregation, and increase the collections.

But why bring the Atheist into it? If a person does not, or cannot, believe that there is any proof of supernatural influences in the universe; why should he be miserable because he has nobody to thank? The author of that placard is quite unable to enter into the feelings of an Atheist, evidently. It is a pure assumption on his part.

But what is this feeling of thankfulness? If someone does a kindness to another, the latter thanks the former because he feels that he is benefiting by an action done without obligation, and his happiness is increased by receiving it. The feeling of satisfaction, which the religious call "thankfulness" is merely a mode of self-congratulation.

"Thank goodness" is a common expression, when things go well with an individual, and "curse my luck" is the antithesis of it. Yet those who use these expressions do not personify either goodness or luck. Why then should we imagine that some god in person "gives the increase," as the Apostle puts it. Even if, as naturalists, we cannot tell how corn grows and increases, we know that it is a natural action and does not occur because mankind needs it. If the human race were to die out the plants would still reproduce their kind, and it is only because men have evolved in a certain direction that they benefit by the harvest.

If any should be thanked at all, it should be the toilers in the fields, both of the present generation, who spend themselves in the arduous work of ploughing, digging, sowing, and cultivating the crops; and those of the numerous generations which have been, for ages, developing the various kinds of foodstuffs to supply us with these things.

Yet do the religious people give thanks or gratitude to those toilers? No, as a rule they beat them down to the lowest possible scale of life. The farm labourers are probably the worst paid of all the working classes and they are sneered at, called "clod-hoppers," kept in their places and only allowed to live in miserable cottages. They must take off their hats when a "gentleman" or his lady passes by, and in all ways hold themselves "lowly and reverend before their betters." It is a mad world, my masters!

ERNEST ANDERSON.

### Society News.

#### NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S.

It was rather disappointing to find that more of our North London friends did not take advantage of the opportunity given them last Sunday to hear and see Mr. Hornibrook. Those who were there received much valuable health information and an exhibition of some wonderful exercises, which they would not have obtained in a West End consulting room for less than three guineas. One can only hope that if we can induce Mr. Hornibrook to come again, those who were there last week will make others understand what they missed, and give him a bumper audience. To-night (November 8), Mr. H. J. Adams, B.A., who is a newcomer to our debating circle, will open on "The Imperfections of Nature and their Theological Bearing," a subject which gives promise of great interest.—K. B. K.

#### GLASGOW BRANCH N.S.S.

A very enjoyable social evening was spent in the D & E Café, Glasgow Cross, on October 31, by the members of the Glasgow Branch and friends. After the tea and whist we had some very racy remarks by Mr. George Whitehead, who was the guest of the evening. The remainder of the evening was spent in song, story, and dancing. As far as numbers are concerned, this has been the most successful event since their recent inauguration, and should go a long way in fostering Freethought in such a city as Glasgow, where the great majority of Freethinkers are taking things too easy in the face of the intolerance shown by those pseudo Christian social reformers who are trying to run the affairs of the city.—J. RUGG RAE BURN, Secretary, G.S.S. Social Committee.

## Correspondence.

## SCIENCE AND LOGIC.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I see I failed to make Mr. Barnard fully understand my position, so I will make one, and *only one*, more attempt.

The basic postulate of my unorthodox creed is that all human knowledge derives its certainty and truth, not from its psycho-physical embodiment in speech, nor yet from the ideas, whether concrete or abstract, which language thus embodies, but from the realities which ideas and their verbal expressions symbolise. And as a corollary to this, that the alleged inference in syllogistic reasoning (ratiocination) is artificial—a verbal shadow and often very distorted. I even go further, and state that "formal logic" has been a bane to mankind during the whole long period of its mental adolescence: that from first to last it never increased the stock of human knowledge by one jot or tittle; but, on the contrary, that it maintained, intensified, and fixed the pall of superstition and ignorance that perpetually blackens our mental sky. I hope one day to have time to substantiate this contention.

My doubts were first stirred on reading, again and again, cynical statements to this effect: Your empiricism has no "certainty," no "finality," no "clinching proof" like that implied in deductive reasoning! At best, you have only probability; you are not certain that "the sun will rise to-morrow," or that the cycle of the seasons will again recur!

Now, as these happened to be the most absolute certainties in the realm of inferential knowledge, the challenge made me reflect and my heresy is the outcome of my reflection.

Before I answer that challenge I beg to submit that the psychic cosmos is a complete replica of the physical one and that what are causally linked in the outer world are likewise linked by experience in the inner. It welds them together so intimately and indissolubly that the presence of one phenomenon instantly recalls its causal correlate. On this causal linkage all *practical* inference rests. For example, such a correlation exists between the phenomenon of a footprint of a certain shape and size and a human being, and it is so welded in our experience that the sight of the former instantly compels the latter to appear in consciousness. That the passage is made via the process of ratiocination is to me as whimsical as to go to France via America and the Pacific.

But we are in another realm—man's artificial realm—when we come to theoretic generalizations (inductions) distilled by self-consciousness out of human experience through his having stumbled upon the device of using his senses (especially that of sight) as mere recording instruments in the service of mind for the acquisition of theoretic knowledge. These inductions include not only wide generalizations like the conservation of energy and the permanence of matter, but all the characteristic attributes of ultimate substance—the source of the million and one physical and chemical uniformities met in Nature. Of any object or event which can be subsumed under any of these you can predicate its characteristic uniformity. You may, of course, if you like, label these uniformities "major premises" and the subsumptions as "minors." And though it appears to me wholly purposeless and pedantic, there is no harm as long as it is not assumed or insinuated that the "form" imparts to the inference some magic certitude. The warranty of truth is not in the "question-begging" syllogism, nor in the abstract ideas it embodies, but in the physical realities which these conjointly symbolize.

Now let us return to the poser: Are you sure the sun will rise to-morrow? Absolutely. And the certainty arises not from consistency of meaning given to the terms employed as in mathematics. The sun will rise to-morrow and the next day because it cannot avoid doing it; it must rise; and the necessity implies the certainty. The three most absolute certitudes known to man are concerned in the process—viz., *inertia, gravity, and the forces of cohesion.*

The certainty of the sun's rising, or put otherwise, its impossibility of not doing so, is the inevitable outcome of the fact that these three act in unison in a way that *involves no dissipation of energy from the system.* As I said in my last article, inertia is an absolutely uniform and inalienable attribute of matter; and so are gravity and the cohesive forces under present conditions. Now, in the case of the earth's diurnal spin, gravity and cohesion jointly compel one component of the motion to possess in virtue of its inertia to be *circular* instead of linear, a fact that prevents its kinetic energy from undergoing any change, *i.e.* any redistribution; and *any phenomenon which involves no loss of energy is of necessity a constant.*

Or, to drop metaphor and simile, and express the fact in strictly accurate terms, as Mr. Barnard invariably does his well informed and assimilated knowledge, the last paragraph would be worded thus: The orbital energy of the earth (except that portion due to the component of its motion at right angles to its radius vector) rhythmically alternates between *static* and *kinetic* forms. At the solstices, it is wholly static, and at the equinoxes it is entirely kinetic.

In the case of its annual revolution, there is a redistribution of energy, but it does not quit the system. Inertia and gravity act just like two cups into which energy is poured alternately from one to the other *without any spilling.* Hence the phenomenon of the season is likewise a constant.

Mr. Barnard alludes to Mill's *Logic*; and, possibly, as I have made no reference to any, he thinks I have confessed my heresy in ignorance of the consensus of high opinion arrayed against me. I can assure him that that is not the case. Unfortunately I was compelled, willy-nilly, to make at least a tangential acquaintance of practically every standard text-book (then current) on logic, psychology, and ethics, as I took these subjects as one of the three branches of knowledge prescribed by the University at the time (1890) for the science degree. So I fear the verdict must be *felo de se* without the usual extenuating circumstance in respect to the state of the mind!

KERIDON.

## THE PROBLEM OF EVIL.

SIR,—I have read with great interest Mr. J. T. Lloyd's kind references to my sermon preached at Westminster on October 11. The *Guardian's* report was correct, but not complete. I had explained at the beginning that the problem of evil only arose for those who saw grounds for believing in a good Creator and governor of the world. Here, then, Mr. Lloyd and I are one in agreement.

At the crucial point of the argument, however, I cannot think him quite convincing. I had suggested that certain things evil in themselves might be good as seen in the context of the whole, and this because without them some of the best of good things would be impossible. I gave as an example pain or suffering, and argued that a world without troubles would be a world without patience; since patience, and heroism generally, just *consists* in meeting troubles rightly. Mr. Lloyd replies that as I have "never seen a world devoid of suffering," I have "no right to assert with such cocksureness what it would be like." How, he asks, do I "know that it would be able to display neither patience nor courage"?

But, surely, it needs no special experience to teach us that, if a man has no sufferings to bear, he cannot bear his sufferings patiently. If I held myself up to my parishioners as an example of patience, and pointed out how heroically I submitted to the providential decree which laid upon me an ample income, a happy home, and an excellent digestion—Mr. Lloyd, I am sure, would be one of the first to see the logical weakness of my position. In that connection he would see that trouble is a condition of patience.

This was the main contention of my sermon. But I go further. Some of the best developments of human character take place only when we fight (as Mr. Lloyd would wish us to fight) against the most hideous and heart-breaking evils. Thus I feel that even earthquakes, and worse things than these, may play an ultimately

greater part in human history. With some of the difficulties of such a faith I dealt in the sermon as published. In the sermon as preached I was particularly careful to say that there remained other grave difficulties with which I could not deal on that occasion.

Mr. Lloyd discusses my views so lucidly and keenly that I am emboldened to refer him to a discussion in which I took part with my friend, Mr. Joseph McCabe. The discussion was published in England by the R.P.A., under the title of *The Revelation of God in Nature*. This book would at least show him that my belief in God has not been accepted without thought.

CHARLES J. SHEBBEARE.

#### RELIGION AND MYTH.

SIR,—You say the evidence of the nature of religion is drawn "from the study of the mental habits of primitive races existing to-day." You beg the question. The question is: "Are modern savages like early man?" They live 50,000 years after him, so it seems likely they are not. Hence it is very unsafe to reason from their beliefs to his.

You complain that the *Express* writers ignore the origin of religion. Why should they mention it? They were asked to describe their *own* beliefs, not those of 10,000 B.C. In a discussion on the habitability of the planets, would you expect mention of Maori or Sioux theories of the sky? In a discussion on the nature of the electron, would you expect mention of early Greek theories of the atom? The very reason for discussing any of these three matters is that we want to know certain things, and our forefathers' answer is not good enough.

"If we find the medicine man prescribing fasting for epilepsy....." you attribute it to pure ignorance, apparently. In front of me is the *British Medical Journal*, September 16, 1899, page 714, long article by Dr. Haig, M.D., recommending for epileptics a diet free from uric acid. As this excludes meat and legumes, most folk would call it fasting. Are you prepared to look down on Dr. Haig with the same supercilious vanity with which you look down on the Sioux medicine man?

"We do not to-day discuss whether witches ever rode through the air on broomsticks." True, you don't discuss it. You refuse to. This is the safest plan. The Christians know it, so do you. C. HARPER.

#### National Secular Society.

##### REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON OCTOBER 29.

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

Minutes of last meeting were read and confirmed. The monthly cash statement was presented and adopted, and the pass book produced.

New members were received for Birmingham, Leeds, South London, and West Ham Branches.

A letter was received from a reliable source, reporting the condition of the Bradlaugh statue in Northampton. Much regret was expressed, and the Secretary was instructed to obtain further information.

The Propagandist Committee reported upon Resolutions 13 and 15 remitted from the Conference, and, after some modification, it was agreed that a special circular be drafted and sent to the Branches.

Mr. Cohen reported a highly successful lecture at the Picton Hall, Liverpool, which bade fair to revive the propaganda in that town. Another visit would be paid in November.

The Secretary was instructed to arrange for a Social Evening at the Food Reform Restaurant, Farnival Street, on Tuesday, December 8, the programme to include music, dancing, and short speeches. Tickets, including refreshments, 2s. each.

Instructions were also given for a lecture to be arranged in West London, towards the middle of January.

E. M. VANCE,

General Secretary.

#### 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.

ETHICS BASED ON THE LAWS OF NATURE (Emerson Club, 14 Great George Street, Westminster): 3.30, Lecture in French by M. Deshumbert on "La Psychologie Pratique." All invited.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W.): 7.30, Mr. H. J. Adams, B.A., "The Imperfections of Nature and their Theological Bearing."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (New Morris Hall, Middle Floor, 79 Bedford Road, Clapham): 7, Mr. J. H. Van Biene, "Not Wanted—Education."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): 7, Mr. Arthur Linecar, "Mr. Ingle-side" by E. V. Lucas."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., D.Lit., "What I heard in Germany."

STANLEY HALL (Hallam Street, Great Portland Street, W.1): 8, Mr. E. C. Saphin, "The Passover, The Camp, and The Law." With Lantern Illustrations.

##### COUNTRY.

###### INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (70 Lionel Street): 7, Mr. Ratchiffe, "Evolution and Religion; Facts and Fallacies." Questions and Discussion cordially invited.

GLASGOW BRANCH N.S.S. (No. 2 Room, City Hall, "A" Door, Albion Street): 6.30, Mr. E. Hale, "Some Ancient Mysteries." Questions and Discussion. Silver Collection.

LEEDS BRANCH N.S.S. (Trades' Hall, Upper Fountain Street): 7, Mr. Simpson, "Agriculture from a Labour Standpoint." Questions and Discussion invited. Admission Free.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Hon. Bertrand A. W. Russell, M.A., "What I Believe."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Broughton Town Hall): Mr. Chapman Cohen, 3, "Religion and the Press"; 6.30, "God and Evolution."

PLYMOUTH BRANCH N.S.S. (Labour Club Hall, Richmond Street): 7.30, Mr. John McKenzie, a Lecture.

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