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Views and Opinions.

The Decline of Faith.

By the courtesy of the *Manchester Evening News*, and in response to many requests, there is reprinted in this issue our article on "Have We Lost Faith?" with the official reply of the Manchester and Salford Churches, and the brief comment we were permitted to make on that effort. We feel pretty confident that we shall not receive the thanks of the Churches for giving their reply further publicity, but we are not studying their wishes or their convenience. In the circumstances we hope we shall be acquitted of any suspicion of conceit if we repeat the phrase of a well-known Manchester journalist that the article was one of the "biggest bombshells" that have ever fallen upon the churches in that district. This is not because of any peculiar brilliancy or excellency of the article, but simply because, for the first time in these controversies the "Other Side" has been given a hearing. In all the symposiums that have appeared this has been carefully excluded. The game has been to invite only those writers who were known to be favourable to religion, or very occasionally to set up a show of fairness by asking a very meek and safe unbeliever to express an opinion, knowing full well that he would give Christians all they required by senseless babble about the sublime figure of Jesus, the grandeur of the Christian ideal, or the inestimable value of true religion. The real Freethinker, whom it was known would speak out plainly and without disguise, was carefully excluded. In this way the public was fooled into believing that all was right with religion, even though there might be some dissatisfaction with certain of the churches. It was very contemptible, very cowardly, but quite in line with Christian tradition.

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Playing for Safety.

It was quite a new departure to ask so notorious a person as the Editor of the *Freethinker*, and the President of the National Secular Society, what he had to say on the subject. It attracted considerable attention, but we are not sanguine that other papers will have the courage to follow the example of the *Manchester Evening News*. The pressure that the

Churches can bring to bear is very great, and they will certainly work to prevent a perfectly honest policy becoming general. They know that their only hope is not to let the other side be heard if it can be prevented. If anyone doubts that let them carefully read the reply of the five representative Christians—a Dean and an Archdeacon, the head of a theological college, and two ordinary clergymen—and see what they make of the Freethought case. The combined wisdom of the five was unable to face a single issue that had been raised. We do not say that a better reply than theirs could not have been made; we believe we could have replied to it better than they did. But, then, we have the advantage of knowing both sides of the case, and evidently they do not. Still, we do not think any intelligent supporter of Christianity can call the production an answer. Something had to be said, and the elected five said it. But we do not wonder, after reading it, that of late years the Churches have shown so great a disinclination to take part in public discussions with Freethinkers. They have no case, and they are beginning to realize it. The most they can do is to try to keep the truth from their followers as long as is profitably possible.

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The Hush-Hush Game.

Why is the question of "Have We Lost Faith?" raised at all? People cannot lose faith unless they once had it, and if the clergy were satisfied that the people still had faith in Christian doctrines, would they dream of asking such a question? Obviously not. The very putting of such a question supplies the answer. Religion in general, and Christianity in particular is losing its hold on the masses as it has already lost its hold on large numbers of the educated classes. And this decline in belief has gone on in spite of every possible obstacle being placed in the way of the propaganda of Freethought, and every possible artificial assistance being given to Christianity. The Freethought movement fights, as it always has fought, with one hand tied behind its back. Its financial resources are of the most limited character, its literature suffers from the most extreme and the most vigilant of boycotts, the press generally sees to it—thanks to the influence of the clergy—that it shall not get a fair hearing and that no reports of its meetings shall appear. On the other side Christianity enjoys practically unlimited wealth, its buildings are freed from taxation, it has free access to the press, and unlimited advertisement, it satisfies the socially well-placed with the prestige of position, it bribes the poor by getting control of charities, it relies upon the general ignorance of the nature of religious beliefs to protect it from attack, and on occasions it calls in the aid of the police, in the shape of the Blasphemy Laws, when the pressure gets too great. Above all, it sees to it that the chil-

dren in the public schools are tampered with and their minds infected with religion before they are old enough to know what is being done, and before they are able to hit back.

* * *

The Retreat of the Churches.

On the surface there were never two opponents more unequally matched. And yet, in spite of this loading of the dice in favour of Christianity each generation sees the number of unbelievers increase, each generation sees the Churches compelled to drop doctrines for which they once fought, and which they told the people were directly authorised by God. Putting on one side the cosmological absurdities once taught by the Christian Church, a little more than two centuries ago the Christian Church was burning old women—on the strength of the Biblical teaching, "Thou shalt not suffer a Witch to live," and less than two centuries ago John Wesley declared that to give up that belief was equal to giving up the Bible. Little more than a hundred years ago men and women were being sent to prison for teaching that the Bible was a composite production written at various and uncertain dates; that its history was undependable, its ethics faulty, its science that of an unscientific age. To-day most of the leaders of the Churches are denouncing other Christians for believing otherwise. Sixty years ago Christians as a body were denouncing the doctrine of evolution as atheistic and false. To-day "advanced" preachers are tumbling over each other to assure the world that they accept it. A hundred years ago the doctrine of eternal damnation was being taught with all its primitive brutality and barbarity. To-day, if a Freethinker refers to it as a Christian teaching he is told he is misrepresenting Christianity. One could fill a volume with the discarded and discredited doctrines of the Christian Churches, rejections which have been forced upon them by the activity of Freethinkers and by the unconquerable strength of Freethought. And if the teachers of Christianity were wrong in what they then taught, who shall say they are right in what they are teaching to-day? Is it not probable that the Freethinking truths they deny to-day they will admit to-morrow, as they to-day admit the Freethinking truths of yesterday which were denounced by them as so many falsehoods? History everywhere enforces the lesson that priests of all religions will tell the truth—when it no longer pays them to preach the lie.

* * *

Life and Freethought.

Now a man would be but a poor student of history and of life who claimed this tremendous change in opinion as due wholly to the work of a limited number of men and women. Christianity was compelled to swallow so much of its teaching because it stood for ideas that were born of the ages of comparative ignorance, beliefs that stretch back in an unbroken line to the fear and ignorance of the primitive savage. It stood for the past as against the present. And Freethought gained because it stood for the present against the past, for the present with its developing knowledge, its truer view of nature, of life, and of man. Every new truth was an implied threat to Christian teaching, every new truth was a fresh source of strength to Freethought. Christianity had a vested interest in the maintenance of what was, Freethought values the truth that is as a stepping-stone to the larger truth that is to be. Christianity owed its strength to the degree to which it could control and direct life, Freethought was content to draw its strength from life itself. Every new discovery, every invention, every new understanding

that man gained of the forces of nature, every new measure of control he established over their operations, contributed to its growth. Nothing but the fact that the Freethinker stood for ideas which drew their nourishment and their warranty from life itself can explain its triumph over one of the strongest and one of the most unscrupulous enemies that developing mankind has had to fight.

* * *

Christianity and Mythology.

We indicated this much in our contribution to the *Evening News* discussion, and awaited with some curiosity to see if any attempt at reply would be made. None was made, and we believe no adequate answer is possible. Again, this is not due to any personal quality in the drawing of the indictment, but because, if fairly stated, there is no answer to the Freethought indictment of Christianity and religion. If the miraculous events related in the New Testament are not historic events there is no ground for belief in Christianity. And the mere fact that the stories of a miraculous birth, of the miracles worked during the life of Jesus, and of the death of the God with his resurrection, are much older than Christianity, proves that we are not dealing with history, but with mere mythology. The talk of the moral beauty of the alleged teachings of Jesus Christ—even if granted, and even if their originality were admitted—is quite beside the point. Christianity is not based upon moral teachings, it is not a question of ethics that is at issue, it is the Saviour-god that is the issue, and by that Christianity must stand or fall. That point present-day Christian leaders will not meet. That issue they cannot meet. They can only procrastinate and evade, trusting to the repetition of familiar phrases, and hardly concealed appeals to religious prejudice to prevent their dupes seeing what a poor case is theirs.

* * *

Religion and Delusion.

Still more fundamental is the issue raised within the last two or three generations by what is known of the origins of religious ideas. There is no denying the fact that the religious beliefs of civilized people are in the nature of an inheritance. And there is a very substantial agreement among anthropologists all over the world that these religious ideas have their beginnings in the ignorance of uncivilized humanity. The world was peopled with gods and ghosts because men in their lack of understanding attributed life and intelligence to natural forces. We have all the facts they had, but we interpret them differently. And in every direction save that of religion when a correct interpretation of natural happenings is found the false one is given up. Why do we not act in this way with religion? All our life we have been asking religious apologists to face this issue. Hitherto we have never found one who would do so. The five representative Christians might have done so, but they preferred to pass it in silence. They know that no answer is possible. Yet, if they would act honestly with the public they must either disprove the universal teachings of anthropology or give up their religious ideas as being nothing better than elaborated delusions. We do not discuss whether the New Testament Demons were possessed of devils or not once science explains to us that ignorance of the nature of neural disorders led to that false interpretation. We do not discuss whether certain old women in previous ages actually had intercourse with the Devil once we realize that this was a delusion common to the ignorance and superstition of the age. So with religious ideas, with the belief in God and a Soul. It is not a question of discussing

whether these ideas are true, but only that of settling the conditions which led people to believe they were true. The issue has been changed from history to psychology, but the defenders of religion are still living in the eighteenth century instead of the twentieth. The history of religious ideas is the history of a delusion. That is the real verdict of current science. It is a verdict that religious leaders will not face; one they dare not face. The less intelligent ones feel, the more intelligent ones know, that no answer to that verdict is possible.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

"Is the Tide Turning?"

SUCH is the question which the Christian pulpit is at present seriously discussing, but the answers to which vary considerably. The form of the question is most significant, because, when asked by Christian believers, it implies that hitherto for some time religion has been losing ground, which is undoubtedly true. Religion and knowledge have always been diametrically opposed to each other. For many centuries the Christian faith was technically triumphant, while secular knowledge suffered almost a total eclipse. Then man's chief duty was to *believe*, not to *know*, and if at any time he betrayed the least inclination to advocate the claims of reason he was tyrannically silenced. For the last three or four hundred years, however, science has been slowly but steadily winning its way to a position of increasing power, with the inevitable result that religion has been getting more and more under a cloud. In other words, the tide of public opinion has been running against it, as the irresistible outcome of the spread of scientific intelligence and culture. Naturally this growing decline of religious interest in the world is painfully disappointing to earnest Christian ministers. The editor of the *British Weekly* sorrowfully, if not angrily, admits, in the issue of February 11, that such is the case. His statement is that "religion is a weariness to the natural man." He says:—

We forget that whatever may be true of Heathen lands where Christianity is not understood, in an ancient land like our own, what keeps people back from being Christians is that they don't want to be Christians. They are quite satisfied with the world of interests which modern life offers them (though modern life was made possible only by the fidelity of generations of belief in God, and ultimately by the Cross of Christ). Or they see quite clearly that Christianity is going to entail upon them an entire way of life which at present they are not prepared to adopt. But it is sheer folly for us either on the one side or the other to go on supposing that it is only some slight misunderstanding or ignorance which keeps people from becoming unworldly, devout, self-denying. Religion is a weariness to the natural man.

Dr. Hutton's admission is perfectly true, though the way he puts it is radically false. It is not true that "modern life was made possible only by the fidelity of generations of belief in God, and ultimately by the Cross of Christ." Modern life was rendered possible by the failure of Christianity any longer to prevent learning from gaining an ever increasing share in the government of the world. Does the editor of the *British Weekly* glory in the fact that the Church in its attempt to become and continue mistress of the world did not hesitate to persecute, imprison, or cruelly murder all who had the courage to disapprove of and actively rebel against its wicked methods of aggrandizement? Is he not also aware that the majority of professing Christians are woe-

fully worldly, undevout, and self-seeking, while many non-Christians, even avowed Atheists, are distinguished for their unworldliness, humility, and self-sacrifice? It is easy enough, no doubt, for a clergyman to speak familiarly of what he calls "the great truth about Christ," but it is somewhat cowardly to talk down to non-Christians, as if they were inferior beings, to be either pitied or despised. It would be quite as easy for convinced unbelievers to return the compliment by describing Christians as the hopeless dupes of the greatest superstition the world has ever seen.

Our present point, however, is that for some reason or other only some thirty-five per cent. of our population take any interest whatever in religion. Religion does not attract the masses, whose attention is fixed upon other matters, which in their estimation are of much greater importance. Whether they are right or wrong does not now concern us, the important fact being that they are non-religious and cannot be persuaded to alter their attitude. Not long ago the Rev. Hubert Simpson, M.A., contributed an article, entitled, "Is the tide turning?" to the *Glasgow Citizen*, in which he endeavoured to prove that "in his travels, near and far, he had observed an awakening interest in religion." But the Rev. W. E. Blackburn, M.A., of the Renfield Street United Free Church, Glasgow, is not so optimistic. In a sermon in the *Christian World Pulpit* for February 11, Mr. Blackburn takes an extremely gloomy view of the religious situation, in the holding of which view, we are convinced, the facts abundantly justify him. He too, asks, "Is the tide turning?" and says:—

To begin with, I do not like the phrase. It suggests an ebb and flow in spiritual life which man can neither hinder nor help. Yet the question challenges us to consider whether the moral and spiritual barometer is rising; whether there is evidence of growing interest in religion. The question itself is an admission that vitality has been low in the Church. What caused the ebb tide, or better, what lowered the vitality of the Church and the power of her influence? The Church suffered the spirit of the world to swamp the spirit of the Master. She is reaping what she sowed.

Assuming the historicity of the Four Gospels there is no escape from the conclusion that the Church has not only allowed the spirit of the world to swamp that of the Master, but also exchanged the simple religion of Jesus for the complicated and abstruse religion of St. Paul and the sacramentarians, which was morally and intellectually a step downwards. But to-day the historicity of the Gospels is being seriously and successfully assailed, in which case Christianity must be regarded as only a humanly fabricated religion, like Mithraism, which it so closely resembles, and that mankind are at last slowly outgrowing it. Dr. Hutton has no toleration for such a conception. He maintains that "the mischief has all arisen from supposing that Christianity is a thing of mere opinion." He says:—

There would never have been such a mistake had it always been clear to men that Christianity is a life of holy love which rests upon and ever refreshes itself in a great gratitude to Christ. Had we always recalled that *Christianity is life keyed up to its highest moral intensity* it would never have occurred and would not now occur to anyone to say that that was a thing so easy to achieve that he could do it any time he liked.

We boldly assert that Dr. Hutton's definition of Christianity, as given in that extract, is certainly "a thing of mere opinion." Had he stated that Christianity is a religion which claims to be able, if taken seriously, to produce such a life as he describes, or which points to a Divine-human Person

who through his cross and resurrection, if truly believed in and accepted, engenders and inspires such a life, he would have been nearer the mark. But then he would have been confronted with the indisputable fact that, as such a religion, Christianity has been a stupendous failure. In any case, and from any point of view, the failure is incontrovertible, for it has neither been nor inspired, in the world at large, "a life of holy love," or "life keyed up to its highest moral intensity," and it is this glaring failure that accounts for the present ebb tide, or lowered vitality and influence of the Church. Mr. Blackburn anxiously asks:—

But is "the tide turning?" Are there signs that the Church is rousing from her lethargy, rousing herself to follow afresh the all-conquering Christ? Too long has she preserved a guilty silence, and shown cowardly discretion in tolerating the Liquor Trade, the brothel, and the gaming-house, in the perpetuation of slum dwellings for "brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus," and worse than all, the glorification of war. These she could end in a generation by loyalty to her Lord, rolling back like an ebb tide monstrous iniquities that have blinded men to their own highest good.

We have no doubt but that Mr. Blackburn verily believes that what he preaches is really true; but we would call his attention to the fact that the same Gospel has been perhaps as earnestly believed and preached for countless generations, but that the evils it so justly denounces are still persisted in as much as ever, which, to our mind, is adequate proof that the all-conquering Christ is a fictitious character fondly created by the religious imagination, and who in consequence has never achieved anything at all. The Church might succeed in destroying multitudes of evils and in effecting many genuine reforms if it only learned to rely upon itself, instead of vainly praying for supernatural interventions, which have never yet occurred and never will materialize. If we but realized that we are the only saviours of the world, vast social reforms would ere long transform the face of the earth and convert it into a place fit for heroes and heroines to live in. The Church has prayed and waited for the exercise of a Power that never existed. Long ago a North of England local preacher indulged in a saying which was infinitely truer than he was able to conceive: "My friends, the world needs to be turned upside down, and we are the chaps to do it."

J. T. LLOYD.

Christ and Commerce.

This mystery of vending spiritual gifts is nothing but a trade.—*Jonathan Swift.*

Gold will knit and break religions.—*Shakespeare.*

THE alluring advertisements of such religious bodies as the Young Men's Christian Association and the Church and Salvation Armies, besides the numerous appeals of other pious organizations for cash for secular purposes, reminds us that the Christian religion is now a business and is worked on strictly commercial lines. Missions and meetings are advertised in the same way as liver pills, or the latest musical comedies and blood-and-thunder melodramas. Preachers and revivalists adopt similar methods to circus proprietors, and the central figure of the Christian religion is honoured with three-coloured posters just as the fat woman from Borneo, or the dwarf from Battersea, and with the same pleasing financial results. The purely business side of religion, however, is seen clearest in the methods now adopted in order to "raise the wind" for a super-

stitution alleged to be "without money and without price."

The extent to which ordinary commercial means have displaced voluntary contributions so long in vogue in connection with Christian congregations is very significant. The old-fashioned method of collecting coppers, threepenny bits, and brace-buttons (the gifts of schoolboys) during the services is no longer considered adequate. Even the amateur sale of work is being superseded by more up-to-date and efficient substitutes. So much is this the case that trading by religious bodies is considered by business men as a menace to the welfare of the trading community. Bazaars, conducted on a strictly business basis are held for the reduction of church debts, and the erection of tin tabernacles and other depots of the bagmen of Orthodoxy. Missionary and other propagandist societies owe a good deal of their large incomes to sales of goods, and many thousands of pounds are raised annually in this manner for religious interests. At a bazaar held at Lincoln over £1,000 was realized recently, and a week's missionary exhibition at a seaside town brought over £200 clear profit. A sale of work in South London produced £250, and a dozen similar functions brought the promoters nearly £3,000.

Imagine the many similar exhibitions and sales held annually throughout the country for the various religious organizations, Bible and tract societies, and other similar institutions. Add to these the 13,000 parish churches, and 10,000 chapels, mission-halls, and tin tabernacles, all of which now look to bazaars, exhibitions, concerts, and sales, as an easy and legitimate means of raising money, and we begin to realize the extent of the practice. Where is all this to end? The logical outcome is seen in the vast trading organization of the Salvation Army, which sells regularly among its members tea, clothing, children's toys, musical instruments, and all manner of requisites, and uses the profits for its "blood and fire" propaganda. The Salvation Army is, indeed, a universal provider, a sort of spiritual Selfridge, and few things come amiss to its business men. The army touts for emigrants at the usual charges, and quietly pockets the agents' commissions. Insurance business is also encouraged, thus justifying the pleasantry that Salvationists are insured against fire in both worlds.

Indeed, the Salvation Army excites our admiration by the completeness of its trading and business methods. Periodically commercial houses are requested to give waste paper to the Army, which disposes of it at the market value. Householders are also asked to give clothing, crockery, furniture, and household effects. At their annual "Self-Denial Week" the lasses of the Lord are let loose on an unsuspecting public outside railway stations, at street corners, and even in public-houses. At the street doors the Army uniform jostles the "gentleman from the Prudential," as a little girl once quaintly described an insurance agent. So thorough are the Army's methods that it is impossible to distinguish one side of its activities from a "slim" commercial undertaking. To-day the shadow of sheer commercialism is over the entire organization, from its general to the youngest cadet.

So we might go on, but enough has been said to show that, whilst Christians pretend to rely on prayer, they get their money in just the same manner as the tens of thousands of other tradesmen in this country. Commercialism, however, like all human things, has its defects. This inclusion of Mammon as the fourth person of the Christian Trinity has had results which would have shocked the sincere and simple-minded Christians of the ages of faith. It has

led to one untoward result in making religion a pleasant as well as a profitable pastime. To attract paying audiences the Christian Religion has had to be truncated of all its horrors, and all its unpleasant features hidden. Painful Sabbaths have been replaced by Pleasant Sunday Afternoons. String bands and soloists take the place of preachers with throats of leather and lungs of brass. Vocalists, who overnight were delighting festive audiences with bacchanalian songs, chortle hymn tunes, and wallow in the pious pathetic. Labour Members of Parliament, and other tame publicists, share the pulpit or platform with reformed policemen and converted burglars. It is all very unsettling, and makes a Free-thinker feel that he is fighting a phantasm, or a kaleidoscope, so unreal is the transformation from the beliefs of a generation since. Indeed, the jelly-fish pretensions of the invertebrate believers of to-day make the boldest iconoclast feel like Alice in Wonderland.

We sometimes wonder how the spiritual work of the Christian Churches was conducted before the introduction of these worldly attractions, so much more suitable to the cinema proprietor than to the exponents of a so-called spiritual faith. Faith, we must suppose, was stronger in those days of old, not needing the artificial impetus of secular amusement. Our believing ancestors went to a place of worship, and their families with them. It was a painful duty, but it had to be done. Now Mr. Everyman either stays away from church, or he has to be bribed with amusements lest he goes golfing, or to some other form of mild relaxation. The explanation is simple:

The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the fold of a bright girdle furl'd;
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear,
And naked shingles of the world.

MIMNERMUS.

Saint Cuthbert's Risk.

ONE of the most interesting episodes in Northumbrian history is the devoted service rendered by the monks of Durham to the body of Saint Cuthbert. The story of its wanderings over the barren moorlands of the north, under pressure of the conquering force of Scandinavian sea-rovers is a record of heroism scarce matched in the annals of the Church. And when the time of peace came the men of God carried the Saint to the Gothic Church on the banks of the Wear and laid it reverently to rest in the place it should be, awaiting the last dread trump. Cuthbert sleeps in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection, for he was an aggressive soldier in the army of the Lord and had many tokens of his Master's favour. Yet one shudders to think what would have happened if that event had come along some time before the middle of the last century.

It was like this: Desiring, no doubt, to do the utmost honour to the departed saint, the monks of the church ransacked the riches of their treasury for fitting apparel and chose a gorgeous pallium, a kingly, purple-coloured garment, made of silk brocade and heavily interwoven with gold thread, for his shroud. There was curious ornamentation on the robe; a grape pattern and a grouping of animals and birds in pairs. There was also pairs of fishes in the design and an inscription which upon examination proved to be of Arabic origin. It runs thus: "There is no God (Allah) save the One," so that

besides being Arabic, it is definitely Muslim. Saint Cuthbert had, in fact, slept for seven and a half centuries wrapped in a sort of passport to the Mahomedan paradise, and, to a saint who had a full measure of the early churchman's dislike for women, the risk was prodigious. Prompt recognition by Saint Peter would be the only thing that stood between the celibate and

Gardens and vineyards,
And damsels with swelling bosoms, of an equal age,
And a full cup.

Where this wonderful shroud came from is the question that Professor Buckler, of University College, Leicester, sets out to elucidate in the current volume of the Newcastle Antiquaries' *Proceedings*. In the days of the Crusades, when, according to orthodox historians, all Christendom was panting to drive the Saracen from the tomb of Christ, the Christian nations were not above entering into alliances with the infidels; sometimes even directed against their brothers in Christ. And more often than not the Muslim was the dispenser of the favours and the outward symbol of his superiority took the form of the bestowal of ceremonial cloaks, which in colour and ornamentation were similar to that which Saint Cuthbert was tucked away in. The simplest and most likely way in which the Durham cloak reached the North of England would be by the hands of some pious and looting Crusader, but the Professor negates that idea; it has never been suggested, and he goes on to relate some extremely interesting history.

In 1751, just when the Abbasid Caliphs had overthrown the Ummayyad dynasty in Damascus, Pepin the Great succeeded in raising himself to the kingship in Spain. A grandson of the deposed Caliph escaped to Spain, where he set up a State of his own in protest against the usurpers at home. He thought to ally himself with Pepin, but the ambassadors of the Abbasid stole a march on him by getting there first; so, warrior-like, he sought out an enemy of Pepin, and fixed up a fighting treaty with him. The Pope of that time was intriguing as well, having a difference with the Byzantine Emperor, so he and Pepin sent an embassy to the Abbasid Caliph suggesting that the three of them had a common enemy in the emperor and the refugee grandson, and inviting the help of the Muslims. The Mohammedan sent back handsome presents in token of agreement, among which the shroud of Saint Cuthbert probably figured. Later on, another combination of feud-waging princes brought the Muslim into contact with Spain. The ambition of Karl, the Frankish leader, led to an exchange of visits between the East and the West. Karl sought an alliance against Constantinople, and again the Muslim agreed, and Karl was confirmed in the position of *de facto* leader of the Abbasid cause in Muslim Spain. That, in effect, was assuming the office of vassal to the Caliph, and the obligation was clenched, as usual, by the bestowal of a robe of honour, a custom started by Harunul-Kashid at Baghdad. The garments would be treasured in the family of Karl, and when the English Æthelwulf went across the Channel to wed the daughter of Karl the Bald, he most probably carried some old clothes back with him. The fortune of Æthelwulf ultimately came to Alfred the Great, whose generosity to the saint at Durham is a tradition in Church history. Still later on—60 or 70 years later—an embassy came from France to negotiate a marriage with the English King's sister, and the gifts included many from the treasury of Karl the Great. So that there were more ways than one in which the saint could have got his winding-sheet.

The risk run by Cuthbert was complicated some-

what by the fish design on the robe. That linked him up with gods who were swaying the destinies of mankind long before Jesus walked in Galilee or Mahomet preached his fiery gospel in the streets of Medina. Professor Buckler says that the fish emblem was a sign of sovereignty in Persia. That may be so. It was, however, also closely connected with many of the religions of the East. "By tracing lines from the head of the top left hand fish to the head of the bottom left hand fish by way of their tails, and similarly the right; also by tracing a line from tail to tail of the middle pair, by way of their heads, it will be seen that the conventional sign for the constellation Pisces emerges." Thus the professor in relation to the design on the robe, which points to a zodiacal origin, and half the gods of ancient times were symbolized as the Fish.

The idea of the sun as a fish which plunged into the sea at night and rose again in the morning is a simple enough explanation of the myth, and at that time the sun's place at the spring equinox—the birth time of gods—was in the constellation Pisces, hence the connection of gods with the sign in the heavens. There was a Philistine Fish God, Dagon, and Horus in Egypt was identified also with the Fish. There was even an attempt in the first centuries of the Christian era to identify Jesus Christ with the Fish, probably, as J. M. Robertson points out, to counter the influence of Mithraism, whose central figure, born under the sign of the Ram=Aries, was referred to as the Lamb. "The catacomb banquet scenes, in which fishes figure as the food, are probably due to this motive, and the story of the sacred meal of fish in the fourth gospel was probably shaped in part under the same pressure." It was touch and go as to which religion came out on top, and naturally the border line between them was kept distinct. Being washed in the blood of the Lamb did not originate with the Salvation Army; it was a Mithraic rite of purification, so perhaps after all the pallium was a fitting garment for the saint and the chance of sharing the joy beloved of Mahomet a dim menace hovering outside the fold of the Elect.

H. B. DODDS.

Acid Drops.

Who said the Christian Churches are afraid of discussion? Whoever said it, it is a libel. For example, fired by the discussion in the *Manchester Evening News* on "Have We Lost Faith?" a discussion was arranged at the Congregational Church House, Manchester—between *Liverpool and Manchester Christians*—to settle the question. And to add to the daring there was actually a vote taken at the end of the discussion, which vote declared that we had not lost faith. After that, there can be no question of the readiness of the Churches to discuss religion—provided both disputants already believe in it. No wonder the churches manage to so successfully fool a large number of people. An indispensable fact to one doing that is that one shall, as a preliminary, fool oneself. And no one can do that better than a Christian.

According to the *Natal Advertiser* of January 19, there is a serious rift in the Christian South African lute. A number of black believers are throwing over the Bible because, they say, all the angels depicted in the Bible are white. There are no black angels in heaven, and a heaven made up of white angels only will not suit them. We sympathise with the objection. What on earth will a black Christian do when he arrives at heaven and is presented with the spirit of his late wife—turned white? On the other hand how can one expect a self-respecting British Christian to put up with a heaven where black, yellow, red, and brown angels are all placed on an

equality with white ones. Above all, what will a white American Christian do if he is asked to rub shoulders with a translated "nigger"? There would indeed be "war in heaven," and a heavenly lynching party would probably be the order of the day.

Charles Bradlaugh's name appeared in the courts the other day. A Mr. Bowen Rowlands wrote a book in which he professed to relate an experience he had with Bradlaugh. The special passage was this:—

I was eating a custard at the lobby refreshment counter in the House of Commons lobby, when Mr. Bradlaugh came in. He took me to the smoking room and said: "It's 'orrible to be poor. 'Ow I could have eaten one of those custards. Poverty is bad anywhere but in the 'ouse of Commons it's 'ell."

Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner wrote a letter to the *Observer*, in which paper a review of the book appeared, saying that the story was "a pure invention, absolutely false, was wounding to the living and insulting to the dead." and the author sought to recover damages from the *Observer* for the publication of the letter as being libellous. No one who knew Bradlaugh would place the slightest reliance upon the story, but Mr. Bowen Rowlands probably thought it quite safe to repeat such a story about a well-known Atheist. It is almost an insult to Bradlaugh's memory to discuss it, and its only significance is to illustrate the absence of decency and truthfulness where Freethinkers are concerned. Lord Hewart's opinion of the whole matter was indicated in the following questions which he put to this choice specimen of Christianity:—

Lord Hewart (severely): And that is what you think is worth while to reproduce and publish to the world?

Mr. Bowen-Rowlands: Yes. Because it is a very good lesson.

Lord Hewart: And after forty years you recollected that he dropped the "h's" from the words "orrible," "ow," "ouse," and "ell," and kept the "h" in have. (Laughter.)

Lord Hewart gave judgment for the defendants with costs.

We do not suppose for a moment that this will stop the lying story being repeated—not while Christianity retains any measure of strength. But if a little more were done in the way of keeping Bradlaugh's life and work before the public, by many who call themselves Freethinkers, instead of busying themselves with praising unbelievers of a more fashionable, and a far less useful type, an atmosphere might be created in which the circulations of such slanders would offer less opportunity of yielding profit.

Here is another example of Christian tactics. From Birmingham we get a copy of a circular (we do not know whether the document has been used in other towns) which has been sent round to medical men by the Social Hygiene Council, pointing out that it "would be a great help to the clergy and other religious workers" if doctors would sign a memorial in favour of the legal prohibition of the wide distribution of literature dealing with birth control. There is, of course, nothing to be said against people either opposing birth control, or advocating, if they think fit, its prohibition. But this is a peculiarly cowardly and Christian way of doing business. It is asking medical men to sign the memorial, with the implied threat of a religious boycott if they do not. The doctors who sign will be held up to public admiration by "the clergy and other religious workers." Those who do not will be privately intrigued against by this same body. It is a slimy piece of business, and medical men, if they are wise, will refuse as a body to have anything to do with it.

Garfield Davies has attended chapel every night for five years. That is, from the religious point of view, a splendid record. But it did not prevent his being found guilty on fifteen charges of robbery, and sentenced at the Glamorgan Assizes to three years' imprisonment.

There is one good thing about it—Davies will not have his favourite exercise denied him. Where he is going he will find every arrangement made for his religious gratification, and if he cannot attend chapel every evening, he can attend with unfailing regularity.

Glancing over the exhilarating pages of the *Church Times*, we notice an advertisement announcing as wanted an Able Assistant Priest. One of the qualifications of the applicant must be that he is a "Sane Catholic." This does not rise to the level of a smile, but it proves that there is the spirit of brotherly love at work—for which please see advertisement.

For light reading on a wet day the *Church Times* supplies, according to Timotheous, or was it Nicodemus? a long-felt want. We learn from Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith that the Anglo-Catholic tracts are so decorative as to their covers that instead of three penny tracts gone from the tract case and twopence put in the moneybox, you find two tracts gone and one-and-sixpence in the box. This is like the furnace in the "Arabian Nights." At St. Michael's, Golders Green, during a consecration service, the Rev. V. L. Keelan, vicar of the parish, was wearing a chasuble of Russian gold. We trust that the *Morning Post* has not heard about it. At Bristol, where the milk comes from, we gather that all mundane affairs in that city are—arcadian—for the discussion at a conference was opened by the Rev. Edgar Rogers, and the subject was, "How we can increase the efficiency and scope of the Church Lads' Brigade." At Coventry, where people are sent to, the controversy about recasting the Cathedral bells has aroused no opposition except a little from the bell-ringers. At Plymouth, where Drake played skittles, the Bishop said their recruiting methods were all wrong, and as the sun has splintered the clouds into bits of jagged white across the blue we must go to see if the crocuses are coming to look for us.

General Bramwell Booth, in his *Echoes and Memories*, says he "cannot grasp anything tangible in the Divine purpose which permits little children to suffer." We would warn General Booth to be careful, otherwise he may find himself in the dangerous position of applying common sense to religion. No one can possibly see anything good in little children suffering. But it is the business of a good Christian to thank God for being good enough to permit something for which the law would imprison a man if his responsibility could be made plain. When common sense begins to make its appearance in Salvation Army religion, one wonders if the end of the world is at hand.

As a sample of sloppy writing commend us to the article by Mr. Austin Harrison in the *Radio Times*. He had to say something nice about wireless, poor fellow, and he could have succeeded without displaying his curious ideas. Of radio, he writes, "Here we can switch on to the infinite sources of the mind, which is man's escape from Materialism. The arts come to us through the air, and, like Cupid, we descend to Psyche. Darwin could not do that." Ordinary people do not expect an engine driver to build a railway station, but Mr. Austin Harrison must have the ecclesiastical instinct for jumping out of one category of values into another without noticing it. Or is it merely journalism? Or does he think it good enough for readers of the *Radio Times*?

The "Broadcast Pulpit" in the *Radio Times* is a good example of the damp and sodden thought associated with the garish days of antimacassars and those times when Mr. Thomas Hardy was under the necessity to write *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Mrs. George Cadbury, of Birmingham, quotes the statement of Dostoevsky's with approval that he would prefer to stay with Christ and not with the truth. The Rev. T. Wilkinson Riddle

is worried about people worrying about the future; he is an unconscious authority on the subject and should resign. The Right Rev. the Bishop of Jarrow wallows in a stream of theological phrases from which we gather there is nothing like leather, and the Rev. F. J. Bardsley, Nottingham, is merely funny. Of particular interest to the workless in Nottingham, following the decay of the lace industry, is the following: "Now we rush about in motor-cars, the telephone bell is always ringing, machinery working at a tremendous rate must do more and more." What we need, he writes, "is a calm, quiet steadfastness, which is the outcome of living touch with God." This reminds us of a passage from Remy de Gourmont: "Consider the poor wretch who, after ten hours of shoving a block of wood under the sharp teeth of a circular saw, comes back, after a picked-up supper, to listen to a gentleman address him on the holiness of justice." A little more energy spent on understanding things in this world would make the reverend gentleman's sticking plaster more humorous than it is at present. We do not solve mathematical and economic problems by a belief in the Atonement; it is only the Don Quixotes of theology who make such attempts.

It is becoming increasingly possible, affirms Prof. J. Arthur Thompson, for man to lessen the chances of infection and to increase the resistance powers of his body. We think the same might be said about the mind. For with the spread of Freethought the mind has been enabled to increase its resistance power against religion and other superstitions, and to lessen its chance of infection.

The persistent decline in Sunday School membership is serious, and our pious friends are hanging out signals of distress. For they know quite well that if they fail to inoculate with their irrational doctrines the child while immature, the chances of getting him later as a client are indeed dismal. They realize that once he has become adult and is able to think for himself there is little or no prospect that the dope will "take." In the opinion of the Rev. C. W. Screech, Secretary to the Welsh Baptist Sunday School Union, the unsatisfactory condition of affairs is not due to the war, nor to a declining child-population. The dry-rot, as he calls it, set in thirty years ago. It is due, in part at least, to the growing desecration of the Sabbath. Says he:—

During my ministry in South London before the war, I fought the Sunday opening of cinemas because I knew what a terrible menace it meant to our work among the young. Since then the enemy has come in like a flood, and now we have Sunday games, Sunday motoring, Sunday trading, and Sunday railway excursions, etc. These things are bound to tell upon our Sunday-school attendances.

Hence the weeping and gnashing of teeth in the Baptist camp.

Another good man, the Rev. T. A. Jefferies, United Methodist, moans: "We are losing scholars at a rate which will soon leave us with few schools to work." His cure for this sad state of affairs is reform of the Sunday-schools. The lessons, hymns, and teaching are out of touch with the interests of children; they "bore the scholars stiff." Formerly, he says, children were sent through the parents' sense of duty. Now, however, they mostly please themselves whether they go, and so they stay away. From this we predict the Sunday-schools, having to compete with outside amusements, will try to convert the schools into places of entertainment. Jesus and the Bible will be served out in discreet doses. The scholars will get more joy and less Jesus; more bun-struggles and less Bible. But we doubt if this manœuvre will result in more adult clients, for the method of administering the religious dope will weaken its potency.

It would be interesting to know how often at ordinary services in the churches the presence of strangers could

be detected, remarked the Rev. W. H. Armstrong during an address at a Methodist Training-school for open-air speakers. In mission services too, he said, the outsider is scarcely reached at all. The more popular the evangelist, the more do religious people flock to hear him and fill the building where he speaks, thus rendering it impossible for the outsider to enter should he even desire so to do. These remarks, we think, shed a little light on those wonderful yarns of revival meetings where large numbers of unbelievers and backsliders are said to "testify for Christ." From what the reverend gentleman says it is obvious that the testifiers are not the "outsiders." They are merely regular customers, certain pious inebriates who habitually attend such meetings to enjoy the pleasing intoxication of religious frenzy.

Ignorance, said Shakespeare, is the curse of God; knowledge the wing wherewith we fly to Heaven. If that be so we fear the Rev. J. R. S. Hutchinson, a Methodist, is not at all likely to fly to heaven. For he, good man, is comforted by the thought that he is ignorant, and that others too are ignorant. Shakespeare's curse of God he would seem to regard as a blessing. In the face of the eternal mysteries of life, he declares, it is a comforting thought that we can take refuge in ignorance. We are not required to have an explanation of everything; there is a margin of mystery still left unexplored and unaccounted for when the human mind has penetrated its farthest. The scientist, the philosopher, and the theologian, all confess there is a point beyond which they cannot safely go. That, says Mr. Hutchinson, may not be very satisfactory to a mind that wants to know everything, but it is comforting to the rest of us who are relieved to think that God has placed some of His great secrets out of bounds. He, personally, does not wish to rebel against God's decree.

Now all that, we think, quite clearly indicates what a blighting effect on progressive thought has religion. Mr. Hutchinson's point of view is that which has been held by Christianity throughout the Christian era. It is the antithesis of that of science. It is the point of view which has hindered enquiry in every sphere of thought. To every interrogation, profound or simple, it has opposed, and does still oppose, its stagnant negative—"God wills that we are not to know." An epidemic arises—God wills it, says the pious. Children are born defective, blind or deaf or dumb—one of God's mysteries, say the ignorant. But while the pious ignorant are comforting themselves with the thought that it is good not to know too much, the scientists have discovered the cause, and have indicated a probable cure, and also that which is said to be better than cure—a method of prevention. And this reveals the vital difference between the man of religion and the man of science. Both know they are ignorant. But whereas the former is contented with his present knowledge and his ignorance, the latter is dissatisfied with both. The one closes his eyes in prayer, the other invents the microscope that he may see more. The first folds his hands in resignation, the second opens them wider to grasp more knowledge. Hence the difference between religion and science is a difference of ideals. The ideal of the first is resignation; that of the other, investigation. Yet our modern clerics have the impudence to declare that religion and science are not antagonistic!

Whatever qualities we may have accused the Christian of lacking, there is at least one quality we admit he possesses, full measure and running over. And that is brazen-faced audacity, commonly called "cheek." This quality is exhibited at its best when the Christian, after noting the various signs of progress everywhere apparent, calmly has the "nerve" to claim that the whole credit of this is due to the Christian religion and Christian men and women. For example, Sir R. Murray Hyslop, J.P., addressing a Whitefield's Men's Meeting on the subject of national progress, instanced the reduction of the death-rate and the increased average lon-

gevity, the greater success of doctors in subduing disease, the countless inventions that have made life more comfortable (a most un-Christian achievement that!), and the spread of education which had widened people's lives. Sir Murray Hyslop evidently needs reminding of a few things he has omitted to take into account in claiming all progress as the result of his religion. He is conveniently forgetting the Christian opposition to the use of anaesthetics, notably in accouchement; the Christian ignoring for centuries of proper sanitation, and indifference to the cause of disease; the pious opposition to scientific investigation and scientific teaching (an opposition still in evidence). He is oblivious of the Freethinker's pungent criticism of Christian intolerance and vindictiveness among religious sects and towards unbelievers, and of criticism levelled at Biblical ethics and Christ's ideals and teachings. He is forgetting the Freethought pioneers' championing of justice for the poorer classes, their advocacy of free education, better housing and fairer treatment for factory employees; and their demand for the emancipation of women. He is unmindful of the Freethinker's plea for free speech and unfettered opinion in print, and their strenuous efforts to secure the right to affirm and to sit in Parliament. He knows nothing—or pretends to—about the Christian slave-owners' defence of slavery and their opposition to abolition. He ignores the work of Thomas Paine in advocating International tribunals, International peace and the limiting of armaments, justice for women, and other humanistic (not Christian) ideals and measures, including a real (not counterfeit) brotherhood of man.

We are glad to see that the B.B.C. is still feeling the pressure of the protests made all over the country by Freethinkers against the use of the wireless for the propaganda of Christianity. Mr. Cleghorn Thomson, of the B.B.C., speaking recently, said that Freethinkers objected to it on the ground that it was controversial propaganda. Well, that is a perfectly sound objection, although the B.B.C. appears to think it part of its duty to try and revive people's waning sense of religion. It would appear that with some 80,000 parsons and thousands of helpers religion should be able to look after itself, while a sense of decency and fair-play would suggest that—knowing how very strongly Christianity is opposed by sections of the community as being false and mischievous—opinions on religion other than Christian should be given a chance. But where Christianity is concerned we are quite used to all notions of decency and fair-play being cast to the winds. Anyway, we hope that Freethinkers will see to it that the B.B.C. will be kept aware of the fact that others besides Christians exist in this country.

The *Daily Express* reports that the Tweed salmon fishing has opened with fair catches. It also reports that Canon Roberson, instead of blessing the waters, held a short service by the riverside near Pedwell, and it was there the largest catch was taken. This is one more illustration how very little removed from the savage in his mental outlook is the sincere Christian. We wonder what influence Canon Roberson thinks his preaching had on the salmon catch? Does he imagine that his sermon drugged the fish and sent them to sleep? After all, the analogy of Church attendants may be misleading.

The Catholic Truth Society, we learn, sent out last year one million pamphlets. That's good news. In these hard times a cheap supply of shaving-paper is always useful. If one may judge from a specimen pamphlet, Catholic truth is different from ordinary truth. Some of it seems not unrelated to terminological inexactitude.

Our chief faults in this country are claptrap, contented ignorance, and intellectual insincerity, states Dean Inge. The reverend gentleman is fallaciously arguing from the particular to the general. What is true of the particular company he keeps—the parsons—is not necessarily true of the general public.

Special.

THE contents of this week's issue entitles it to be called a special issue. In that belief we have printed a very large extra edition, which will be found suitable for distribution to all those of our friends who are ready to engage in a little useful propaganda. In particular, we desire the assistance of Lancashire friends in distributing some thousands of copies of this week's *Freethinker* in their particular localities. The "Have We Lost Faith?" controversy in the *Manchester Evening News* has aroused widespread interest, and this forms a capital opportunity for introducing this paper to those to whom it has been hitherto unknown or unread. *We are, therefore, prepared to send parcels of 100 copies and upwards, carriage paid, at the rate of 6s. per 100.* There are scores of friends in the Lancashire area who should be able to take at least 100 copies and usefully distribute them. We sincerely hope they will not let this opportunity slip. They have the chance to do the Cause a real service, and we trust we shall not ask their help in vain. Every new reader gained for the paper is a fresh recruit in the army of Free-thought. We have had very many letters from Lancashire friends thanking us for our share in the controversy, and there is now a chance for all of them contributing their mite to the work. But they must write at once, and strike while the iron is hot. In this way we shall frustrate the usual policy of the churches of waiting in the hope that the interest aroused will die down, and that people will again sink into the sloth of unintelligent acceptance of superstitions which every educated man or woman ought to be ashamed to entertain.

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.

H. LEWTON.—It is of course quite safe for the parsons to be replying to Mr. Cohen in their churches and chapels. They are quite safe there. We suggest that you circulate a couple of hundred copies of the present issue of the *Freethinker* among some of their congregations and watch the result.

J. L. ROBERT-BROWN.—Thanks for cutting. Sorry we got your name wrongly in acknowledging subscription to Endowment Trust. It was evidently near enough for recognition, and the important item of the amount was correct.

W. H. T. PORTER.—*Freethinker* Endowment Trust, £1 1s.

F. H. C. writes: "Mr. Cohen asks what 'light' is apart from eyes. Anatole France, in *The Revolt of the Angels*, p. 199, is informative: 'One camp maintained that before there were apples there was the Apple; that before there were Popinjays there was the Popinjay; that before there were lewd and greedy monks there was the Monk, Lewdness and Greed; that before there were feet and posteriors in this world, the kick in the posterior must have had existence for all eternity in the bosom of God.'"

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 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 (February 21) Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Engineers' Hall, Rusholme Road, Manchester, at 3 and 6.30. The afternoon subject will be "The Way to Study Religion," and in the evening he will deal with the recent discussion in the *Evening News* on "Have We Lost Faith?" The meetings should be extra good ones on this occasion.

Next Sunday Mr. Cohen will lecture at the Town Hall, Stratford. The recent debate with Canon Storr will doubtless induce many Christians to attend, and London Freethinkers may help by calling the attention of their religious acquaintances to the meeting.

Plymouth behaved in a very ungracious manner on Sunday last, so far as the weather was concerned. It was drizzling all day, with sea fog, against the damp of which nothing seemed able to protect one. But there was a marked improvement in the audience as compared with Mr. Cohen's last visit there, and it is evident that, despite Plymouth not being so advanced religiously as many places farther north, Free-thought is gaining ground. Mr. Lyndon acted as chairman in the afternoon, and our old friend, Mr. McCluskey, in the evening. The singing of Mr. Healy before each lecture was greatly appreciated by those present, as was the performance by Mr. George Parsons at the piano. The Branch is holding a meeting to-day (February 21), in the Labour Club, 6 Richmond Street, to consider future work.

Owing to the unusual pressure on our space this week we are obliged to hold over till next issue a number of letters received. They will be none the worse for the delay.

The Glasgow Branch will hold a Social Evening in the D and F Café, Glasgow Cross, on Saturday, February 20, commencing at 7 p.m. Tickets, 2s. 6d. each, may be had at the hall on entering by those who have not had an opportunity of procuring them at any of the Sunday meetings. Programme: High tea, whist, music and dancing.

We were glad to see the following in the "In Memoriam" column of the *Times* of January 30, to which our attention has only just been called:—

BRADLAUGH—Charles Bradlaugh, 30 Jan., 1891.

A life of resolute good unalterable will, quenchless desire of universal happiness.

It is good to see a public recognition of a great Freethinker outside the pages of a Free-thought journal. Generally timidity and bigotry combine to prevent it.

We are glad to hear that Mr. Willis, J.P., delivered a much appreciated lecture to a good audience at Birmingham on Sunday last. Mr. Willis spoke under the difficulty of not having quite recovered from an accident, but we trust he was none the worse for his effort.

"Have We Lost Faith?"

(Reprinted from the "Manchester Evening News.")

EVERYTHING depends upon what is meant by faith.

We are certainly not losing faith in the fundamental human virtues, in truth and honesty, justice, and courage, the strength of human intelligence, its capacity for understanding the world in which we live, and its power to control natural forces in the interests of a better state of society. If anything, the charge here would be one of over-confidence. It might be said that we are too ready with short cuts to the millennium, forgetting that, against the rapid advance of knowledge, there is the drag of primitive instincts and passions, which are apt to find expression in the wrecking of our most attractive schemes of betterment. It is not faith in any of these things mentioned that is questioned.

It is clear that the enquiry contemplates a more restricted, a more specific use of the term. It is faith in religion, and in a still further restricted sense, the Christian religion that is the subject of enquiry. But if we are to pursue that enquiry with profit we must bear in mind what the world has always understood by religion and Christianity.

Morality Not in Question.

It will not do to take either as the equivalent of what the theologians of a little more than a century ago used to call contemptuously "mere morality." Morality is not in question. Nor will it do so to enlarge the term "Religion" as to make it cover almost everything of value. A term that covers everything explains nothing. Such a use of "Religion" begs the whole question at the outset. It is the policy of the unscrupulous advocate content to get a verdict at any cost so long as he gets it.

Finally, it will not do to talk about religion or Christianity in terms of some fanciful reconstruction or forced reinterpretation of earlier beliefs. It is possible to reinterpret a belief so as to make it the exact opposite of what it has hitherto meant. By that method people may still be made to believe in demonic possession because epilepsy and insanity are still common. To ask whether people have lost faith should mean have they lost faith in that which they once believed? If the question does not mean that it is a mere blind.

How Much is Left?

So to put the question supplies the answer. We do not ask whether people still have faith without there being serious ground for believing they have not. And the state of the world is such to-day that it is not really a matter whether we are losing our faith in Christianity, but of how much faith in Christianity is there left?

To the people of this country a few centuries ago the question would have been without meaning. Go back far enough in our history, and we reach what are called the ages of Faith. Faith was then boundless in its extent and insatiable in its appetite. The only intelligible question, then, would have been to ask "Is there too much faith?" For a long time after the question would have been hardly more intelligible. There could have been only the question whether we had lost faith in the Roman Church, or in some branch of the Protestant Church, or in some specific Christian dogma. The larger question would have brought with it no sense of reality.

To-day we are in a different position. Specific Christian doctrines no longer bear an organic relation to the intellectual life of our time. There is not one but is challenged by an increasing number of

men and women whose intellectual ability is beyond question and whose characters are beyond reproach. Christian preachers are loud in their laments at the growth of unbelief.

Highly-placed Christian leaders openly reject doctrines the mere questioning of which a while ago would have cost them their positions, if nothing more serious. Leading men of letters, prominent scientists, publicly proclaim their disbelief in a God and a future life, or are content to let such questions go with a hesitant "It may be so," and with the intimation that it does not matter much anyway.

Picturesque Survivals.

The bulk of people confess by their actions that they are not seriously concerned with the alleged operations of God in the world. They do not look to him to cure disease, to arrest an epidemic, to secure a good harvest, or to help on national prosperity. It is true there are ceremonies that would seem to imply the existence of such expectations, but no one would be more surprised at these ceremonies having any effect on the course of nature than would those who perform them. They are no more than picturesque survivals of a distant past. They have no vital relation to the life and thought of to-day.

One might continue this line indefinitely, but it is needless to enlarge where the pulpits of the country are so obtrusively vocal. It is far more helpful to indicate—it would take a series of articles to prove—the main causes that have transformed a once universal belief to a mere speculation of doubtful value, and a once all-powerful church to an institution seeking to maintain a hold on the people by testimonials from prominent laymen—whose own religious opinions are none of the soundest.

The New Testament World.

Beliefs flourish or decay as they are ill- or well-adapted to their environment. If we take up the New Testament and the historic setting of the central Christian doctrines, it is not difficult to visualize the kind of environment from which the doctrines and the narrative drew nourishment. It was a small world in which man was the principal figure, the whole stage was set for him in full centre. It was a world in which the supernatural was naturalized, where miracles were of daily occurrence, where gods and ghosts and angels and devils held full revel, and where anything might happen because so little was certain. The activity of God was open and continuous—an epidemic, a sudden death, a thunderstorm, a disaster by land or sea, all were accepted as evidence of supernatural activity. It was a world of almost unbelievable credulity, and religion stood supreme and unquestioned.

Gradually the intellectual setting changed. Men took long voyages into strange lands, and returned with stories of strange people with strange beliefs. Copernicus dethroned the earth from its central position and, as Dean Inge recently reminded us, thereby made many Christian beliefs absurd. Galileo and Newton reduced the motions of every atom of matter in the known universe to a problem in mathematics and physics. Geological science swept away universal floods and cataclysms. Philologists abolished the miraculous origin of language, and traced it back to the animal-like mewings and mumblings of our pre-human ancestors. Biologists identified man with the rest of the animal world, and did away with special creation by the establishment of the doctrine of evolution.

The world that had so clearly manifested the activity of God was being steadily transformed into a

theatre of natural forces which men could study, control, and count upon without the slightest reference to the existence of a God.

Men looked round in this new world and asked themselves whether there was anything left for a God to do? There were many replies to that question, but no answer. To-day theologians are driven to admit that God works through natural forces only, which involves the admission that we do not know him apart from natural force, and that no one is a whit the better for belief in his existence.

The Conclusive Blow.

Still further. Comparative Mythology destroyed the alleged unique character of Christian doctrines. There was nothing new in the New Testament story. The virgin-born, miracle-working, crucified, and resurrected Saviour presented nothing new. Similar doctrines had been believed in widely separated parts of the world, and the ruined temples of Egypt pictured in stone the story of Jesus centuries before the date given for his alleged birth. Even the Christian doctrine of the Sacrament, which Bishop Barnes says is magic, and which is setting him and his vicars by the ears, even this, the most solemn of Christian mysteries, was shown to have developed from the primitive and savage custom of making, killing, and eating the God—a vestige of primitive religious cannibalism.

It was left for anthropology to deal the conclusive blow. Taking the two fundamental religious doctrines, those of a soul and a God, a stream of writers, from Tylor to Sir James Frazer, have brought conclusive evidence from all parts of the world to prove that these two beliefs, which lie at the foundation of all religion, have been derived from the mistaken inferences made by primitive man. Surrounded by forces of the nature of which he knows nothing, experiencing a number of states of mind of the causes of which he is in absolute ignorance, early man peoples the world with a cloud of spiritual agencies fashioned in his own likeness. This is not a mere guess; it is a creative process that can be seen at work wherever man is found in the savage state.

And step by step one is able to trace the present-day gods of the "advanced" religions of the world from the primitive imaginings of our earliest ancestors.

If that explanation of the origin of the belief in God and a soul be accepted as substantially accurate, what have we really left to discuss? If the belief began in a delusion, how can it end in a truth? How does one get something from nothing? One thing is certain. The modern religionist must either prove that all these researches are useless and the conclusions fallacious, or he must admit that current religious beliefs have no other and no better foundation than the mistaken guesses of primitive ignorance.

Common Sense is Catching.

The modern environment is thus one that is essentially hostile to the faith of the Churches. With millions it is altogether discarded, and even with professed believers their faith is fitful and undecided. We cannot all go on believing in a deity because of what he was once supposed to do. Gratitude for past favours has its limitations, particularly when the actuality of the favours are called in question. One cannot continue to pay tribute to a deity because he is supposed to have done something once upon a time. The practice of paying an official pension because he once drew a salary ought to stop short at a government office.

The only chance for those who plead the cause of religion is to confuse the religious factor with the

social and ethical ones in such a way that the first may receive credit properly due to the other two. That is, it must be admitted, a game that is being played with considerable success. Nine-tenths of the pleas on behalf of religion are dissertations on the value of morality or of social effort about which there is no dispute at all. For a time that policy succeeds in fooling some. But, as Abraham Lincoln said, while you can fool some people all the time, you cannot hope to fool all the people all the time. Common sense is catching, even if it does not act in the riotously epidemical manner of established folly.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE CHURCHES' REPLY TO MR. COHEN.

(Reprinted from the "Manchester Evening News.")

At a recent meeting of the Manchester and Salford Council of Christian Congregations it was felt that Mr. Chapman Cohen's article was in the nature of a challenge to the Churches, and that a reply of some kind might be expected.

It was suggested that two or three of us, representing different sections of the Church, might come together for this purpose. This has not been found possible in the time at our disposal. Nor should we have attempted to answer Mr. Cohen point by point. The article contains many sweeping statements which can be condensed into a sentence, but which would each require a whole article to refute. For instance, Mr. Cohen reminds us that many of his arguments against the traditional doctrines of Christianity have been stated by Dean Inge. But the very purpose of the Dean's essay was to prove that Christianity does not stand or fall with a Ptolemaic universe. It would be absurd to attempt to cover all this ground in a very short article.

The Method of Attack.

There are one or two observations, however, which we should like to make in reply to the main trend of his argument and what appears to us its most serious defect.

Mr. Cohen's method of attack is more significant than anything he says. It used to be the custom of our critics to accuse the Churches of holding on to the old doctrines, and preaching in the modern world beliefs which were fashioned in pre-Copernican or pre-Darwinian days. We refused, they said, to move with the times. There was progress everywhere except in the Churches.

They now perceive, however, that a more modern interpretation is being placed upon many of the old doctrines. And this annoys them. That won't do at all, says Mr. Chapman Cohen. What you are preaching to-day is not Christianity.

We must have in mind what the world has always understood by religion and Christianity.....It will not do to talk about religion or Christianity in terms of some fanciful reconstruction or forced re-interpretation of earlier beliefs.....To ask whether people have lost faith should mean, have they lost faith in that which they once believed?

Now Mr. Cohen and his friends cannot have it both ways. First they attack the old doctrines, and accuse us of preaching them still. We reply: "But those are not the doctrines we preach to-day." Then they say: "But that's not playing the game: you've shifted your ground!"

Darwin and Evolution.

What would Mr. Cohen say to a man who denounced Evolution and insisted upon the precise form of the theory of Evolution set forth by Darwin? He would answer: "But have you read no scientific

book of recent years? Don't you know that scientists no longer hold the particular Darwinian theory of Evolution? And if his opponent answered: "But you can't chop and change like that! We must bear in mind what the world has always meant by Evolution. Evolution means Darwinism, and nothing else," Mr. Cohen would know what to answer.

"Everything," he says, "depends upon what is meant by faith." Quite so. Nor must faith be confused with its theological interpretation. The whole achievement of science, of which Mr. Cohen writes with such enthusiasm, is based upon faith. The scientist believes in the intelligibility of the universe, which is surely as large an assumption as any that religion makes. If the universe is not an intelligible order, how can it be understood at all?

Science, no less than Religion, is a venture of faith. So is Art. The artist believes that in his quest for Beauty he is seeking the ultimate reality. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." That is the artist's creed. So in Morals. The moralist believes in a moral universe. He, too, makes a venture of faith.

A Popular Delusion.

Where, then, does religion come in? Science, Art, Ethics; Truth, Beauty, Goodness: do not these include all the values that there are? That question illustrates the popular delusion about religion, as if religion were something apart from life, having no "organic relation to the intellectual life of our time." But religion does not "come in"; it is that which unifies and gives meaning to the whole of life. According to religious belief, Truth, Goodness, and Beauty are three aspects of the ultimate Reality which we call God.

But we are concerned here, not with religion in general, but with the Christian religion. Now from its very name the Christian religion centres in Jesus Christ.

Christianity is faith in Jesus Christ and the God revealed in Him, the Father and Redeemer of mankind. Have we lost faith? Faith in what? We ask rather—faith in Whom?

Mr. Bernard Shaw was asked some time ago whether he thought that Christ is still a living influence in the present day. He replied: "There are probably more people who feel that in Christ is the only hope for the world than there ever were before in the experience of men now living."

But lest Mr. Cohen should accuse us of "seeking to maintain a hold on the people by testimonials from prominent laymen," let us speak only for ourselves and a multitude of fellow Christians.

We have not lost faith in Jesus Christ. And that is the essential thing in Christianity. He is still to us "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Just as the scientist believes that the universe is intelligible, and goes forward on his great venture of faith, so we venture our lives upon the faith that the Power behind the universe is best interpreted in terms of Jesus.

In India.

A Brahmin lawyer recently gave this testimony to the growth of Christianity in India. "Though there have been Moslems in India for a thousand years you never hear a Hindu say to a Moslem: 'I wish you were more like the Prophet.' We have only known Christianity for a quarter of that time, but there is no educated Hindu who would not say to any Christian: 'I wish you were more like Jesus Christ.'" We feel the sting of reproach in these words, but they illustrate the essential characteristic of the Christian religion, that it centres in a Person.

We agree with Mr. Cohen that the world in which

Jesus lived, and in which the earliest Christian doctrines grew up, was a totally different world from that in which we live to-day, and that many of those early doctrines bear the marks of their age and need revision, but "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, to-day, yea and forever."

We cannot agree that modern criticism has in any way destroyed our faith in Jesus Christ. On the contrary it seems to us to be an evidence of the ways of Providence that science, which seemed at first to be a weapon against us in the warfare of faith, is more and more proving to be our advocate.

For modern criticism, which is scientific in method, applied to Scripture, has made the sublime figure of Jesus stand out before our age in clearer vision than ever.

THE DEAN OF MANCHESTER,
ARCHDEACON ASPINALL,
DR. A. J. GRIEVE

(Principal of Lancashire Independent College),

THE REV. H. H. JOHNSON

(Cross Street Chapel),

THE REV. K. L. PARRY

(Chorlton Road Congregational Church).

MR. COHEN'S REJOINER.

(Reprinted from the "Manchester Evening News.")

By the courtesy of the Editor I am permitted a rejoinder to the five representative clergymen who essayed a reply to my article of February 3. I must be brief, but in this instance I am helped by the fact that not one of my points has been met, and, willing as I am to assume the absolute honesty of the five, they do not appear to have been understood. In a sense the article is indeed representative of the difficulty of getting Christian leaders to face clear-cut issues, of the vague character of current religious belief.

If I may be permitted the expression, my most deadly point was that fundamental religious beliefs have their origin in the false interpretation given by primitive ignorance of phenomena that are now better known and differently interpreted. If that be so, there is no more room for discussing the truth of religion than there is for the discussion of the reality of seventeenth century witchcraft, once Science has indicated the social and pathologic conditions that gave vitality to the belief in intercourse with devils. The representative five have, in their wisdom, passed by that issue in silence.

Another point was that the belief in Christianity rested upon a series of historical events was disproved by the fact that the main incidents in the New Testament are part of a very widely-spread mythology that was current long before Christianity was heard of. Christianity could, therefore, rest on no better historical basis than the mythology of which it was a part. That issue, also, the five left untouched.

I also said that, if we put the question, "Have We Lost Faith?" and dealt honestly with it, we must mean faith in the religious teaching in which people have hitherto believed. To reply that Christians now interpret their doctrines in a different manner is to say they no longer believe in the older forms. It is an admission that they have lost faith in what they once believed, and my point is conceded.

I pass over the illustration of evolution, which bears no analogy whatever to the issue raised, and which discloses a quite pathetic want of knowledge of evolution. Evolution has never meant Darwinism, and the possibility of supplementary or alternative factors to natural selection has always been recognized.

My warning that we must not confuse the question of faith in religion with faith in other things is quite ignored, and with collective solemnity we are reminded that we have faith in science, in art, in morals, etc. But none of the things named is in question. The illustrations are beside the point, and even at that the proposition is put in a hopelessly unscientific manner.

I said that if we looked at the conduct of multitudes of men and women we could see that they no longer placed reliance upon God doing anything. By way of reply I am told that Christians still have faith in Jesus Christ. I never denied it, but I fail to see the relevancy of informing the world that those who believe in Jesus Christ still believe in Him. It surely did not need a general council to arrive at that decision.

But even so, Christians only agree to believe in Jesus so long as they refrain from saying exactly what they believe Jesus was, what he taught, and what was the purpose of His teaching. And one would dearly love to know whether the Jesus we are invited to imitate was Jesus the celibate, the believer in demonic possession as the cause of epilepsy and insanity, the believer in legions of angels and devils, etc.? I asked for the bread of fact, and am given the stones of mere verbiage.

I have sympathy with the plea that all my arguments could not be met in a single article. But surely the combined wisdom of five representative clergymen might have selected one point and discussed that carefully. Five to one, and not one of them able to suggest a clear reply to a single issue! The situation is worse than I had imagined.

Finally, I am left wondering whether this complaint of want of space is a reason why no answer was given, or an excuse for not attempting one? If the former, there is a way out. It may not be convenient for the editor to continue the discussion here. But there are other means of publicity. There is the public platform and there is the religious press. Surely one of the religious papers would grant space for the discussion. No one has anything to lose, save those who are afraid of the truth. And if this avenue is closed, there is my own paper in which I can promise the five liberty to say what they will. Nothing shall be denied them. And they would reach a class of people they should be most anxious to get at.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE NEXT STEP.

(The following appeared in the "Manchester Evening News" for February 10.)

The following letter has been received from the Manchester Branch of the National Secular Society:

With reference to the joint reply to Mr. Cohen's article contributed by the Dean of Manchester and his four colleagues representing the Council of Christian Congregations, I am instructed by the Manchester Branch of the National Secular Society (of which Mr. Cohen is President) to issue a challenge to a public discussion between any one of the "five"—or any other representative Christian—and Mr. Cohen, who, I have not the least doubt, will be quite willing to oblige.

Subject to the concurrence of the signatories a Joint Committee representing the Council of Christian Congregations and my Society could arrange details, and whilst in no way desirous of prejudicing arrangements we think that a discussion of this nature, arousing, as it would, widespread interest, should take place in a hall of suitable dimensions, such as the Free Trade Hall, with an independent chairman, say, Mr. Cuming Walters, if he would be willing to officiate.

The proceeds accruing could be allocated to the Manchester Hospitals.

I have issued an individual challenge to each of the five signatories, and now await their reply.

WM. COLLINS, Hon. Sec.

No. 4 The Bungalow, Stockport Road,
Hayfield, near Stockport.

Freethought Charivaria.

It has been truly said that London hides her greatest treasures in obscure courts and alleys, says the Lord Mayor. One such treasure, though, worth £10,000 a year, secretes itself in Fulham Palace.

The Government is very modest and does not like to blow its own trumpet, declares Mr. Bridgeman. Would that we could say the same of the Government religion!

A reader of a daily newspaper: "Reverent ritual is but the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." We always regard it as the outward sign of an inward puerility.

"The Gospels are fresh, compact, and bursting like the buds of May," jubilantly announces the Rev. A. E. Whitham. But the frost of Freethought criticism appears to have nipped them in the bud.

When a man says he can see no use in religion, he is simply calling our attention to the defectiveness of his own eyesight, affirms a Swansea vicar. On the contrary, he is exhibiting the acuteness of his own insight.

Religion, says the Rev. J. H. Owen, of Swansea, has been here for a good while now and it has come to stay. Maybe that is so. But the rôle it has now to play is that of the unwelcome guest—it has outstayed its welcome.

John Bull says that the average person of to-day is not concerned with rites and rubrics, vestments and candles, or with fine points of doctrinal dispute. His concern is to discover how far the ancient faith of Christendom can be adapted to the perplexities and difficulties of modern life. We should say that the average person is not concerned with the "how far." He has discovered how little it can be so adapted.

The Rev. J. J. Pigg declares: "St. Paul was at once an inspired Christian and a good humanist." This appears to imply that Christians are not necessarily humanists. They rarely are, if we can judge by the record of the Anglican Bishops' attitude towards humanist reforms.

Thanks to God's mercy, this last year we have found the spirit of conciliation, agreement, and co-operation among the nations, says the Bishop of Lichfield. Bereaved parents and wives would have more reason for being thankful had God exhibited this kind of mercy before the war.

Addressing a meeting of Anglican Evangelicals, Canon Storr said: "We are prepared to give a larger place to ritual and ceremonial than did our forefathers, but we desire that the ritual shall remain simple and intelligible to ordinary people." It's not the ritual the Canon requires to be simple. It's the people. Given that, the reverend gentleman can use what ritual he pleases.

The mother of Lord Haldane, we learn from a recently published book, once wrote to the Archbishop of York, addressing him thus: "Dear Golden Candlestick." How neatly that sums him up! Decorative but out of date—that's what it implies.

Correspondence.

CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—As one who has been criticized in the columns of the *Freethinker*, I think I am entitled to say that, as a follower of Christ, there is nothing illogical in believing that God the Father is a respecter of no caste or class, and that this is consistent with my faith as a Socialist. To anyone who reads the gospels without having been short-circuited by the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, it is clear that Christ was a revolutionary and had much to teach many conservative Freethinkers. In a word, He was a Socialist of Socialists. As to the Holy Ghost, an understanding of what the Holy Ghost symbolizes can only come by intuition and æsthetic culture. Crude though it may seem, I prefer to abide by the older conceptions rather than render homage to the dear old God who did twelve months for blasphemy in 1883, and vainly tried to build up a national reputation for himself for having thus suffered. There is still left with us at Farringdon Street, Mr. Chapman Cohen, who by race and training makes a very good Second Person in the Freethinkers' lamentable trinity. I have never look at dear old Mr. Lloyd—a dear old soul whom I have much regard for—without thinking what an admirable Holy Ghost he would make for the Secular Society.

LEONARD EYLES.

[We publish the above letter, although Mrs. Eyles appears to be under the peculiar delusion that impertinence is a good substitute for intelligence. We feel it rather cruel to thus expose a lady, but it affords a sample of the type that goes to make up that curious production, a Christian Socialist. We wish Mr. Hamilton Fyfe much joy of his contributor. The impertinence is quite Christian.—ED.]

North London Branch N.S.S.

At the last moment Mr. Ratcliffe decided to oppose Mr. Kerr last Sunday, which made the debate more interesting. Mr. Kerr's suggestions were somewhat revolutionary, but merit careful consideration. Unfortunately, our space is too limited to report fully. To-day (February 21) Mr. G. Saville will give an address on "Education and Communal Life," upon which he is highly qualified to speak.—K. B. K.

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LONDON.

INDOOR.

NON-POLITICAL METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (101 Tottenham Court Road): 7.30, Mr. Hyatt, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W.): 7.30, Mr. G. Saville, "Education and Communal Life."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): 7, Mr. Arthur Linecar, "Thomas Hardy's 'Two on a Tower.'"

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., D.Lit., "The Uses of Psychology."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

GLASGOW BRANCH N.S.S. (No. 2 Room, City Hall, "A" Door, Albion Street): Mr. George Whitehead, 11.30, "Darwin's Views on Evolution"; 6.30, "The Basis of the Penny Dreadful." Questions and discussion invited. (Silver Collection.)

LEEDS BRANCH N.S.S. (Trades' Hall, Upper Fountain Street): 7, Mrs. C. E. Thornewell, "Robert Browning." Questions and discussion invited.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Operetta—"The Wishing Cup." Performed by children of the Secular Sunday-school. (Silver Collection.)

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Engineers' Hall, 120 Rusholme Road, Mr. Chapman Cohen, 3, "The Way to Study Religion"; 6.30, "Have We Lost Faith?"

PLYMOUTH BRANCH N.S.S. (Labour Club, 6 Richmond Street): 7.30, Important Meeting; Members please attend.

SALE AND EXCHANGE.

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