

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions.

### Religion and the Vote.

The *Nation* and the *Daily News* have set out on an attempt to discover what it is that people believe in the matter of religion. A set of questions have been drawn up, and Mr. J. M. Robertson, Mr. H. G. Wood, Mr. Augustine Birrell, and Mr. Bernard Shaw have been "consulted" as to the form they should take. These amount to just fourteen, as issued by the *Daily News* and the *Nation*, and only a plain "Yes" or "No" is permitted. For that reason the enquiry is not likely to be very illuminating. It is quite certain that however plainly questions are framed, different people are certain to understand them in different senses, and their Yes or No will not tell us much unless we know the reasons that determine the reply. If that were done, we might be able to get some idea of the mental types that accepted certain doctrines and rejected others. But the mere statement that so many thousands believe in the divinity of Jesus and so many thousands do not, will not tell us much. One can well imagine many smiling at the idea of putting such questions as the divinity of Jesus or the doctrine of transubstantiation up to the vote. If a complete census of the nation were taken we have not the slightest doubt but that there would be an overwhelming vote in favour of the more absurd Christian doctrines, if only because the fools always outnumber the wise men. As the results only of the enquiry will be published, and not the names and quality of the voters, apparently not even the occupation or profession, we are left still further in the dark. One or two of the questions certainly require rather expert knowledge to give a reasoned reply, and in these cases the vote of the most ignorant clodhopper will count for just as much as that of the greatest living thinker. It is politics applied to opinion.

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### A New Fourteen Points.

Here are the fourteen questions as set out in the two papers named:—

(1) Do you believe in a personal God? (2) Do you believe in an impersonal, purposive, and creative power of which living beings are the vehicle, corresponding to the Life Force, the *élan vital*, the Evolutionary Appetite, etc.? (3) Do you be-

lieve that the basis of reality is matter? (4) Do you believe in personal immortality? (5) Do you believe that Jesus Christ was divine in a sense in which all living men could not be said to be divine? (6) Do you believe in any form of Christianity? (7) Do you believe in the Apostles' Creed? (8) Do you believe in the formulated tenets of any Church? (9) Are you an active member of any Church? (10) Do you voluntarily attend any religious service regularly? (11) Do you accept the first chapter of Genesis as historical? (12) Do you regard the Bible as inspired in a sense in which the literature of your own country could not be said to be inspired? (13) Do you believe in transubstantiation? (14) Do you believe that Nature is indifferent to our ideals?

The questions are to be answered with a plain "Yes" or "No." Any attempt to give reasons will disqualify the contributor. Of these fourteen questions all but numbers 2 and 3 do admit of a plain affirmative or negative, and two of the twelve—5 and 12—are put so as to prevent the usual quibbling over such words as "Divine" and "Inspired." On that the compilers are to be complimented. We have so often pointed out the dishonesty of talking of the divinity of Jesus and the inspiration of the Bible while meaning something entirely different from what men and women have always understood by these words, that we are naturally pleased at seeing this guarded against in the present case. Jesus must be radically different from other men, the Bible must be radically different from other books, if the claims of Christianity are to be honestly upheld. That should be plain to all except Bishops and the bulk of the Christian clergy.

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### Clotted Bosh.

The questions that do not admit of a straightforward "Yes" or "No" are numbers 2 and 3. Judging from the note which accompanies the Questionnaire No. 2 looks as if it owes its existence to Mr. Bernard Shaw, and it is as delightfully confused as anything which hopes to serve as the basis of a new religion ought to be. Just look at the terms of the question—"Do you believe in an impersonal, purposive, and creative power of which living beings are the vehicle?" etc. If we are to make common sense out of such a farrago of words, we have to assume—in the complete absence of evidence—that there is a "life force" which exists apart from the rest of the universe, but which uses the rest of the universe to its own ends. We are thus landed with a crude dualism thinly disguised in sonorous phrases. There exists forces that are not alive, there also exists a "life force," of which we can form no conception whatever. But what is force apart from the vehicle of which it is the function? No one knows anything about it, or can form any conception of it. Or if there is a force behind the cosmic process why are not inanimate objects its "vehicle," as well as living beings? And if all the phenomena of the inorganic world—preceding the advent of living beings—can have come into being with the assistance

of the "life force," why not living being themselves? One suspects that the "vehicle" of the life force had to be restricted to living beings in order to preserve its dignity. Or, again, what intelligible meaning can we attach to such a word as "purposive" if we are prohibited using the conception of personality? A purposive action is one performed with a view to a conceived end. My action is a purposive one if I consciously walk down stairs in order to get into the street. It is not a purposive action if I slip and roll down stairs into the street, even though the end may be the same. But what idea of purpose can we form apart from personality? One may as reasonably speak of its being the purpose of a lump of rock to smash a man's head because it rolls down on him while he is passing along a mountain path. An impersonal power working out a purpose is equal to a brainless animal working out a problem in the higher mathematics. One would dearly like to have Mr. J. M. Robertson's candid opinion of this hash of contradictory terms which its authors doubtless believe to be the product of profound thinking. The older Theism was at least intelligible in its candid irrationality. The new Theism lacks even the elementary quality of coherence.

What is Matter? \* \* \*

Question number 5, "Do you believe that the basis of reality is matter?" is shockingly confused, and no one could give it a clear answer without knowing exactly what was meant by "matter." As it stands we could reply either "Yes" or "No," and be misunderstood in either case. Apparently what the framer of the question had in his mind was to discover whether people believed that the substance of things was "matter." But if he meant that, matter would become the "reality" and "phenomena," the expression, and the question should have been differently drawn. As it stands, the question can only suggest a conception of "matter" that is unwarranted by both a sound science and a sound philosophy. As we have often pointed out, "matter" is a working conception of certain aspects of phenomenal existence, and whether "reality" be finally and more completely expressed in terms of matter or in terms of some other conception, does not affect the final issue between the ultimately rival conceptions of the world. To get at the truth of the matter it would have been far better to have enquired whether one believed the world to be finally explainable in terms of Determinism or not? If the answer is in the affirmative, we have cleared out of the way all the talk about a purposive impersonal power, a life force, etc., and have brought the discussion down to a clear and tangible issue. Of course, the objection here is that if this is done there is no room for religion, which can only exist in half lights and with ill-understood formulæ. The *Nation* might have done better if it had asked its readers to suggest the form the questions should take, and then availed itself of the best that were offered.

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Man's Greatest Conquest.

On the whole the putting forth of this series of questions may be taken as a further instance of the growth of Freethought. We are far removed from the time when the spread of "infidelity" was used as the ground on which to base new legislation for its suppression. It is now being accepted as an established thing, the only thing is to what extent does it exist. On that head the enquiry will leave people very much where they were, beyond the bare fact of the significance of the enquiry itself. Mr.

Leonard Woolf, whose article in the *Nation* led to the enquiry being instituted, spoke with justification of the "liberal scepticism, Atheism, or Agnosticism," which is characteristic of most educated moderns," and in saying that he was expressing what all know to be the truth. But educated moderns are, in this country, at least, not in a hurry to let their neighbours know where they are in religious matters. Even the *Nation* has to promise those who reply to the questionnaire that their names shall not be made public. We are still in the stage where people are more or less afraid to let it be known that they are without religious belief. "The educated modern" still moves in some fear of the less educated majority. The "life force," the "impersonal purposive power," etc., are largely disguises by which many hope to avoid confessing that they are without religion. And this paltering with conviction will continue until education is accompanied by moral courage and all recognize that the whole value of the search for truth resides in making the results of the search public property. John Stuart Mill—although even he kept the book unpublished during his lifetime—said that the time had arrived when everyone should speak the truth about their religious beliefs. If that statement had any force behind it sixty years ago, it surely has infinitely greater strength to-day. It is nothing on which to congratulate oneself that the *Freethinker* is to-day probably the only paper in this country that dares to speak the whole truth about religion, and opens its columns to a considered attack upon all forms of religious belief. That in itself is an indictment of present-day culture. We have conquered the terrors of the sea and the air. We move at our will forces at the sight of which our ancestors grovelled in childish terror. We have almost annihilated space, and traced even the atom to its innermost retreat. We have not yet conquered the average man's fear of the opinion of the bigoted crowd. That is humanity's greatest obstacle to-day. When it is overcome it will mark man's greatest conquest.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

"Science and Theology."

SUCH is the title of an important sermon by the Rev. Dr. E. O. James, vicar of St. Thomas', Oxford, preached on the occasion of the British Association meeting in Oxford, 1926, and published in the *Church Times* of August 13. Dr. James mentions the interesting facts that the Association came into existence in the year 1831 at York, and that its first meeting afterwards was at Oxford in the following June. It has had several sessions since that time in the famous University city, and the one in 1860 was of so astonishing a character that it can never be forgotten. It was then that the dialectic encounter between Huxley and Bishop Wilberforce occurred, when the latter said: "I should like to ask Professor Huxley, who is sitting by me, and is about to tear me to pieces when I have sat down, as to his belief in being descended from an ape, Is it on his grandfather's or his grandmother's side, that the ape ancestry comes in?" Huxley replied in the following words:—

I asserted, and I repeat, that a man has no reason to be ashamed of having an ape for his grandfather. If there were an ancestor whom I should feel shame in recalling, it would be a man, a man of restless and versatile intellect, who, not content with an equivocal success in his own sphere of activity, plunges into scientific questions with which he has no real acquaintance, only to obscure them by an aimless rhetoric, and distract the attention

of his hearers from the real point at issue by eloquent digressions, and skilled appeals to religious prejudice.

That was only sixty-six years ago, and practically the whole Church soon assumed the same attitude of bitter hostility to the theory of evolution as interpreted by Charles Darwin in his *Origin of Species*, and the Bishop of Oxford gloried in it before the British Association, and yet to-day practically the whole Church accepts that theory. Sixty years ago the conflict between religion and science was characterized by humiliating fierceness, but now the breach has been almost completely healed. As Dr. James says, "the old battle has spent its force, and there is scarcely a scientist or theologian who would be prepared to reopen it. He continues thus:—

Science claims the whole universe as its field, and its material is co-extensive with the whole life of the universe, physical and mental. But it makes no attempt to reach complete knowledge in every department. Certain domains of research are manifestly outside its scope. It is not within its province to refer facts of experience to any ultimate reality. It is not concerned with values, and the scientist, when he knows his business, leaves to the philosopher and the theologian the task of interpreting the facts discovered by observation and experiment in terms of validity or worth.

Dr. James is a theologian who believes in the existence of a supersensuous world, or "a higher order of reality than is reached in sense-experience." He goes further, and indulges in specific assertions concerning that alleged "higher order of reality." For him philosophy and theology mean infinitely more than science at its very best does. And yet the subjects which both philosophy and theology contemplate possess no objective reality. Dr. James asserts that "as we pass from science to philosophy and religion, we have to assume the existence of a universal mind in order to bind together the sequences of phenomena which science observes and describes. By philosophy Dr. James understands metaphysics, and as Mr. Hugh Elliot observes, "Metaphysics is like a house built upon the sand; its foundations are for ever shifting with every new exponent of the art," whilst "science is like a house built upon a rock; so firm are its foundations that each generation of workers adds a new storey to the edifice" (*Modern Science and Materialism*, p. 135). Now, "mind" is a metaphysical invention. What we call mind signifies "certain elementary and associative processes occurring in the nervous system." From the scientific point of view, the existence of a universal mind is absolutely inconceivable. The following statement by Dr. James is wholly absurd:—

In the last analysis it is the activity of mind that makes the universe, so far as it is capable of being the object of our knowledge, both real and one; it must ultimately be explained in terms not of mechanism, but of mind. In the higher orders of experience we reach a level where purely biographical conceptions cease to apply, for, in addition to the processes of Nature, there exist values, such as goodness, beauty, and truth, which seem to express the quality of this mind to Whom all processes are due; and just as there is a unity between the human mind and the processes of Nature—a unity which makes science possible—so there is a unity between the moral and aesthetic judgments of the human spirit and the God to Whom that spirit owes its creation. With such an interpretation of the universe science can have no quarrel, for, like the question of absolute origins, it belongs to a different category of observation.

The activity of mind has nothing whatever to do in the making of the reality and unity of the universe. The universe had been in active exist-

ence for millions of years before breathing and thinking beings made their appearance. Of the active existence in the universe of an infinite mind, operating in the absence of an infinite brain, there is absolutely no evidence. All the processes of Nature are caused and governed by physical and chemical forces which we call laws. It is a literal impossibility to interpret the universe intelligibly in terms of mind. In point of fact, there are no terms of mind, for mind itself is but the name of one of the processes of the universe. All that we can see and study is marvellous mechanism, the universe being nothing other than a huge machine. Dr. James tells us that goodness, beauty, and truth are values which seem to express the qualities of the universal mind. You may call them *values*, if you like, but be well assured that they are perfectly natural values, or relations. Goodness, for example, is a relation, essential to peace and comfort, between beings which live in herds, groups, or in what we now call Society.

Dr. James dwells with apparent delight on the fact that science cannot explain everything, saying:—

While the scientific method unquestionably has achieved astounding results in the comparatively short time in which it has been seriously applied to the study of natural phenomena, it admittedly has its limitations. Thus, as Lord Salisbury remarked in his presidential address in 1894, the term "evolution is one of those indefinite words from time to time vouchsafed to mankind, which have the gift of alleviating so many perplexities and making so many gaps in our knowledge." To the riddles which Nature propounds to us, the profession of ignorance must constantly be our only reasonable answer. A cloud of impenetrable mystery hangs over the development and still more over the origin of life. If we strain our eyes to pierce it, with the foregone conclusion that some solution is, and must be, attainable, we shall only mistake for discoveries the figments of our own imagination.

That is true enough, and no genuine scientist has ever claimed to have solved all mystery. But the actual achievements of modern science are far greater and more numerous than most people are aware. We ask, how many clouds of mystery has Christianity blotted out? Not one; but it has created a large number of new ones. The greatest of all mysteries is the loving Father in heaven who permits his world to live on in hopeless misery and ruin. To redeem this lost world Christ is said to have died a shameful death, risen from the dead the third day, and then ascended to heaven that his redeeming grace might be set in operation; and yet after nineteen hundred years, the world is still in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. Throughout all the ages the Christian God has been at once silent and inactive, and there are those who are convinced that the world instead of getting better is gradually growing worse. In any case, the Christian religion has always been and is a gigantic failure. Consequently there is no escape from the conclusion that Christianity has so significantly failed because there is no truth in it. Probably Jesus Christ never lived at all; but whether he did or not he was not a Divine being, nor did he become the Saviour of the world. The only possible saviour of the world is scientific knowledge. Hitherto mankind has been the dupe of ignorance and superstition; but the day of its complete emancipation is at dawn, and already it is learning to walk, no longer by blind faith, but by the light of ever increasing wisdom. J. T. LLOYD.

If only education were more copious and more excellent we should all be both intelligent and moral.—*Prof. Julian Huxley.*

## Cheerful Atheism.

That cheerful Atheism which is a characteristic of my countrymen.—*Rupert Brooke.*

Not one man in ten thousand has strength of mind and goodness of heart to be an Atheist.—*S. T. Coleridge*

ONE of the favourite arguments of the clerical caste is that, if the world were deprived of religion, all the glory and wonder of life would be removed. That may sound all right to a suburban London congregation, who, it is highly probable, know only the invertebrate Christian Religion as professed in Suburbia. There are, however, so many other religions, ranging from Abyssinian Christianity to the revelation of the Latter Day Saints. So the clerical argument is really bigger than it looks upon the surface. Better be a Cannibal in the South Sea Islands than have no religion at all is actually implied in this priceless piece of Christian apologetics; which, as old Euclid would say, "is absurd."

The funny thing is, that, whether he admits it or not, the religious man is actually fifty per cent. an Atheist, and a haughty one, too. With a wave of his hand he dismisses all the scores of religions and thousands of gods in the world, excepting the one which his neighbours use. The foreign deities are all wrong, utterly worthless. Mr. William Brown's god is the only decent and respectable one in the whole bunch. He never takes the trouble to examine the matter, but he is quite emphatic about it. And the only vital difference between a devotedly religious man and a thorough Freethinker is that the sceptic rejects the lot and the believer keeps one back, sometimes to hang on his watch-chain.

Atheism leaves a man everything in the universe, except Superstition, and it is precisely because the clerical caste lives by superstition that they have to bolster their position by some show of argument. Now I doubt very much whether a religious man has any reason to crow over an Atheist, and I also wonder whether scientific knowledge is not just as wonderful, and beautiful, as any of the imaginings of religious fanatics and mystics. Take an instance. That great poet, George Meredith, has an exquisite poem, describing the procession of the planets of the solar system, which he finely calls, "the army of unalterable law." In what way is this magnificent conception inferior to the musing of the Christian that "God" stopped the sun in order that one handful of savages might murder their enemies?

As a matter of fact, science, which, after all, is only ordered knowledge, does contradict the priestly conventions of two thousand years ago, but it opens up the wonders of the universe in a manner which the priest, who scorns science for professional reasons, cannot even imagine, much less understand.

Knowledge is power, and the more knowledge possessed by mankind the better. The priestly convention that they are the solitary repositories of wisdom in these days is contemptibly silly. Sixth century ignorance has nothing in common with twenty-sixth century knowledge. Was it, for instance, a greater feat to have jotted down on manuscript the legend of the prophet Elijah going through the sky in a fiery chariot, than it was for Alan Cobham to have actually flown sixteen thousand miles to Australia a few days ago? The theory that Freethinkers' lives are more barren and prosaic is a mere piece of clerical impudence. Because a man pins his faith to common sense rather than to the fairy-tales of religion is rather a proof that a man has wider, rather than less, knowledge. The Freethinker's life is fuller and wider than that of the Christian, for he finds out things for himself, and does not take ad-

vice from the mouth of the priest. Usually, the Christian knows only one religion, and that most imperfectly, and, in proportion to his innocence, so is his dogmatism and fanaticism.

The idea that the religious man is richer mentally than the sceptic is simply a statement fostered by the clergy in order to feather their own nests. Quite the reverse is true. In nearly every instance a Freethinker was once religious, but thought himself stage by stage out of his original beliefs, a process at once lengthy and painful, because breaking with convention in England is not viewed with complacency. And the English Christian is not even a good specimen of the religious class. The Englishman has the disease of religion slightly; so many nations have it badly. Here it has become, not a question of belief, but of convention and fashion. This state of affairs has arisen through the waning of faith, and the vast vested interests of religion. What these are may be gauged by the simple statement that the Anglican Church alone has about twenty millions' worth of property; and the larger and better-known Free Churches have large resources. It is this financial aspect of the entire matter of religion that makes the contest between Freethought and Superstition so unequal. The Freethinkers are not only fighting for mental liberty, but they are attacking a most heavily endowed system of religion. And men can always be found to profess and call themselves Christians provided they receive the thirty pieces of silver.

Every generation looks at the wonder and glory of the world with fresh eyes, all the fresher if not obscured by superstition. A long line of Freethought poets from the far-off days of Shelley to those of our own Swinburne give the lie to the priestly contention that life to those without religion is but a mockery and a delusion. These glorious poets were keenly alive to the beauty and the glory of the world, and gave exquisite expression to their sensibility and culture.

Freethinkers are not orphans of the religious storm. They may not look as romantic and as dirty as the Crusaders, or regard the world with the morbid eyes of the hermits of old, but in reality they are "the unacknowledged legislators of mankind," and others follow where they lead.

MIMNERMUS.

## Sunday by the Seaside.

RECENTLY I spent a part of my annual holidays at dear old Ramsgate, one of the finest seaside resorts on the South Coast. In weather of brilliant sunshine one can from the cliffs get a view of the coast that is strikingly beautiful from Broadstairs to Deal, and one evening nature favoured us with a sunset that lit up all the prominent buildings along the coast line with wonderful effulgence and beauty. But when it is wet, Ramsgate can be as dull as any other watering-place, although there is always something to interest one in the splendidly constructed harbour, with its massive stone piers a mile or so in length on either side. There are plenty of entertainments going on every day from morning till evening; yachtsmen on the sands, a London band in the Pavilion, entertainers on the East and West Cliffs, and a military band performing dance music while the young folk exercise their light fantastic toes on the lawn three nights a week to jazz music, and high-class music for the remainder.

Nor are the bands silent on Sundays. They give high-class and classical selections on that day also.

But there are no entertainments on the sands, except what the young folk can provide for themselves while bathing in the sea. This year I did not go in search of religious gatherings either on the sands or on the cliffs. It was a glorious day and I walked along the East Cliff in the direction of Broadstairs, and sat in a large shelter and read an interesting article by Robert Blatchford in a London journal.

I felt in no mood for religious sermons which informed me that I was a miserable sinner, and that my only chance of salvation was in the acceptance of Jesus as my Saviour, who was alleged to have shed his precious blood to blot out the sins of mankind, mine included. On the contrary, I felt that the only salvation mankind needed at such a time was complete emancipation from an old and effete superstition; and I was glad to think that the great masses of the people at this watering place were no longer under the domination of these primitive and absurd ideas, although some no doubt still thought that they believed them. But I daresay if I had gone down on to the sands I should have found some obscure evangelist holding forth on the glory of being "washed in the blood of the Lamb," notwithstanding the fact that the young people had already taken their bath in the sea, as a more healthy and invigorating exercise.

However, I should not have minded listening to a few old melodies on the Salvation Army band, for it is one of the best bands of its kind on the South Coast, though the melodies it performs are almost as primitive as the theology its captains endeavour to expound. But I had a copy of the *Freethinker* in my pocket and I was anxious to see what Mr. Cohen, Mr. Lloyd, and other well-known contributors had to say before I went home to dinner. In the afternoon I got a good seat on the East Cliff and listened to the band of the 1st Royal Ulster Rifles, conducted by Mr. W. Allan, L.R.A.M., A.R.C.M., with fine selections such as the overture from "Zampa," a musical survey from Wagner's "Die Meistersinger," and "Three Dale Dances" by Wood; and then I met two Ramsgate Freethinkers and arranged to go with them to the West Cliff Concert Hall to an entertainment in the evening.

On my way I paused for a few moments near the harbour to listen to a Welsh Miners' Choir while they sang some stirring songs in aid of the unemployed miners. I was sorry I could not stay longer, for this choir sang with real power and precision. The concert on the West Cliff was one of a series presented by John Henry of wireless fame.

Now John is a Yorkshireman with a fine sense of humour. He can tell good stories with an imperishable countenance; and he has a very large store of such stories to draw upon. Later, when assisted by his wife "Blossom" in a parody on "The Pied Piper," he simply convulsed the audience with laughter, but when he had given several selections in response to applause, he apologised to the audience for not giving more as he had no other "Sunday stuff" with him. All I can say is that his "Sunday stuff" suited the taste of the audience to a nicety.

All the items in the programme were extremely good. Harold Knudson played some violin solos with consummate skill, Miss Barbara Mason and Miss Rita Irving both sang charmingly, and Mr. John Patterson, a tenor of exceptionally good quality, sang "On with the Motley" (Leoncavallo) with great power and pathos.

As we came out from the concert the heavens were lit up with constant flashes of vivid lightning in the distance. We could hear no thunder. Far into the night from my window I watched the lightning;

some of it forked lightning of wonderful spectacular effect in the heavens; and I knew then that some poor creatures were being thrilled and frightened by the thunder crashes from the heavenly artillery. Nature is, indeed, wonderful, but in some of its aspects it is no friend to man, and often kills him with as little compunction as it does the most insignificant creature that crawls the earth. And it will behave in this fashion as much on Sunday as on any other day, although Christians tell us that God is behind directing its movements all the time. *But is He?*

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

## Glimpses of the Moon—and of Early Man.

THE moon was at the full the other night and, after some days of storm, rising slowly in the calm clear supernatural beauty of the skies, a bright planet following in its round, a few stars dimly peeping in the higher dome; underneath, the dusky plain and hill, sea and promontary; the immediate horizon whence the orb arose steeped in softer effulgence of the risen queen of night. One leaned by the doorpost and gazed awhile entranced, enraptured with this all too beautiful illusion of the skies, over a world all too irrational and unhappy—the world of men and women as one knew it, and loathed it, even one's own part in it.

This, the coast town of Saltcoats, the Glasgow Fair week just over, and the poor mortals returning to their toils, to their villas, decent tenements, and alley slums. Our righteous township had helped to relieve all of what little money they had, giving them in exchange little rooms and kitchens and crowded beds, and what was not ours, sun, sea, air, and space, and the glimpses of the moon—with glimpses of the human form divine of man and maid and child in the bathing carnival along the shore—with her meagre sister, muscular men and merry children, from the tiniest to the adolescent—how shapely fair and tender were most of the sex in body and limb, if not all in mind—the Church, careful of that imaginary soul, is largely responsible for the ill-shapen mind: its topsy-turvy morality is worse than none, while Pope might have taught it that—

Reason's whole pleasures, all the joys of Sense,  
Lie in three words, Health, Peace, and Competence.

These, in general, would be easy of attainment were they not confused by a "supersense," which, in a word, is—nonsense. Tired, or bored-looking, but sweet singers on the shore tell forth sweetly the beauty and happiness of being with Jesus, while a respectable and very assured and unctuous old gentleman (in lulls of the "praise") assures the crowd of the one thing needful—to get Jesus—quite oblivious apparently of the Labour troubles, etc., of the present hour—such things as Jesus cannot, and is not expected to cure. The Rt. Hon. — how are the lowly exalted! John Wheatley says that in this coal strike Christ is locked out! Now, really, we know the mine-owners and the Government, as they did in the war, all call upon his name, as does Mr. Wheatley's party. Freethinkers, also, can tell spirits from the vasty deep, but.....

And again, but—suppose this Christ cure was applied in the present coal struggle, would not the cure aggravate the disease? Is not the worker suffering from too much Christ already, from laymen, "leaders," and parsons? Would not this spirit of Christ make him still more a slave and non-resister?

Surely the very opposite of a Socialist. Would it soften the heart—and the head—of the worker and leave the masters obdurate; or would the master class, Christian at last, obey the command, Leave all and follow me? We know the worker too well, and his master, to expect such a miracle; and we know our Wheatleys too well to hope from them undiluted common sense.

Alas, our little essay has trailed away into the sawdust. Yet it had a diviner inspiration: Let us return: In a little glen, on a fringe of the moorland, in a homeland we know and revere, there has just been laid bare some rude stone-built graves of primitive man, probably of the early Stone Age. A rustic philosopher of our acquaintance, with the inquisitive stoop of age, a keen eye, and a well-stored mind, had just been scratching away the soil from one or two of those rude and ancient tombs—of how many thousand years ago? That they are actual antiquities there can be little doubt, even a sort of stone axe has been found, and in two cases a hollowed stone for the dead man's ablutions or libations; but he is no longer there, in shape, at least; only the "narrow bed," and the metamorphosis of perhaps richer mould. One "up-to-date" grave has not yet been disturbed: the front end and outlet of which consists of two uprights and a horizontal stone, embedded in the green sward, with a healthy thorn growing over it. So much in brief, prosaic detail, of the actual scene, but what awe and wonder of the mind is awakened by those rude memorials of kindred but so ancient dead; the lapse of time and change, the silence of the centuries have a strange dignity all their own. They could not come to see us, those rude forefathers of the Stone Age, but we have just visited them. We tread the little glen where they lived and loved, hunted, hated and made war; with hairy, sinewy hand, hurling the stone, or holding in its embrace the object of its love. What self-effacing love, where love was found; what fears and tremblings, terrors real and imagined; even the glimpses of the moon, in his hours of reverie, at the door of hut or cave, agitating his mind in a complex of peace, hope, beauty, admiration, fear. Then death and its obsequies, fears, hopes, griefs, superstitions; not death, either, but change, immobility, silence; the dead lived, he would come back, or his friends would go to him—how faithful to its original is modern Christianity! How silent those "souls" of the cave men through the centuries, how eloquent of their Nirvana this little valley of the tombs, with its green slopes and bushes, its rivulet that goes on for ever while the dead men stir no more. Even so, in ornate and modern vault and cemetery, however civilized the race:—

How poor, how rich, how abject, how august,  
How complicate, how wonderful is man!

the minutest insect as "complicate" as he.

But to our mind the dust of the little glen is enriched. One could envy such a resting place for the time when life's fitful fever, its poor play is over: or that corner of the wood, one loves to remember, where one might sleep in peace, visited only by the passing suns, the glimpses of the moon, the gentle rain, the wind in the pine tree, the largesse of the leaves enriching the brown earth.

So much, and sufficient for us, for death, but Wordsworth has "A Simile" for life of which we remember only a few lines, which we read long, long ago, when the moon was not only a spectacle but an intoxication, and which we have not seen since. The lines recur each time we see a rising moon, full as they were of beauty and philosophy. We repeat what we remember. Perhaps some

"George Underwood" can supply the whole and so enrich the mind's anthology:—

As the ample moon, in the deep stillness of a summer  
Rising behind a thick and lofty grove, [eve,  
Burns with an unconsuming fire of life,  
And, kindling on all sides, turns the dusky vale  
Into a substance glorious as her own.  
Yea, with her own incorporate; virtue thus  
Sets forth and magnifies herself; thus feels  
A deep, a calm, a holy fire.....  
From the encumbrances of mortal life:  
From error, disappointment, yea from guilt;  
And, sometimes, so relenting justice wills,  
From palpable suppressions of despair.

ANDREW MILLAR.

## Acid Drops.

Dr. Moffat has completed his translation of the Bible into current English, and he does not appear to have pleased anyone but himself. Some of his renderings are likely to strike some people as peculiar—particularly the one, "Give us this day our bread for to-morrow," in place of "Give us this day our daily bread." It looks as though it is part of a crusade against eating freshly baked bread. It is a wonder that he did not make it read, "Give us this day our wholemeal bread," which would have won the approval of Sir Arbuthnot Lane, and other food reformers. For ourselves we shall continue to prefer eating to-day's bread in spite of all authorities dietic and divine.

The *Evening Standard* repeats the nonsense that "as a piece of English literature the Bible is one of our most precious heirlooms, when it is nothing of the kind. It is not English literature, but a translation into a special form of English, which is not quite the same thing.

Moreover, the Bible is not translated honestly, even by Dr. Moffat. The Bible is an Eastern book—or collection of books—and right through it is put into English so as to give readers a desired impression. In one direction "slaves" is made to read "servants," so as to hide the New Testament endorsement of slavery. And in another the phallic significance of numerous parts of the Old Testament are carefully hidden so that the taste of readers shall not be offended. We fancy it was Max Muller who once said that if the Bible were correctly given in English there would be an outcry from those who now denounce similar passages in other Eastern "Scriptures," unaware that the same thing exist in their own sacred writings. A correct translation of the Bible would do for it what the great Elizabethan translators so often did for their authors. It would put into modern speech what the writers wished their readers to understand. But the truth about Christianity is never likely to be told by believers in it.

Bishop Gore thinks that the Fourth Gospel was either written by John, or by someone who claimed that he were John. We should not be at all surprised if this were so. Neither should we be surprised to find that a forged cheque was signed by either the person whose name it bears or by someone who claimed to be that person. There is nothing like a first-class clerical mind to clear up a difficulty.

Dr. Hensley Henson, Bishop of Durham, points out that he knows nothing in the New Testament to justify the coal conflict. With the political side of the question we have, in this paper, no interest, but the statement from one in succession to Bishop Butler is pathetic in its appeal to the authority of a book. We may as well look for common sense from a Bishop as we should look to the yard stick of a draper to measure the contents of the Atlantic Ocean.

The *Daily News* is publishing letters under the heading of "What Youth Thinks." For youthful optimism and youthful dreams that we hope will find generous acceptance, we take the following extract: "My greatest asset is a firm belief in the world. The world seems to me to be an admirable place to live in. The 'average man' predominates everywhere and the 'average man' is a very decent sort." This, we might say, is a good broadside for the no-sayers, the men in black, who conceived man as being born in sin and shapen in iniquity—and according to their methods were determined to keep him in that state for their own advantage.

Mr. Hiliare Belloc, in his article on "Marriage in 2026," unconsciously admits the growth of ideas in spite of obscurantism. When we remember that only a little over a century ago a man could sell his wife for eighteenpence, mankind has not much to fear from the too rapid growth of sane ideas in any direction. "Things which were abominations and blasphemies," he writes, "within living memory to Catholic and non-Catholic alike are now commonly admitted by a good half of the European world and by a very large majority in this country."

A little more faith in our own kind so that there is none left for speculative matters worried about by clerics, is to be welcomed. A woman correspondent in a daily paper asks to take a miner's child into her home, and apologises if she makes too bold an offer. She evidently has no use for the vague sentimental stuff about watching the sparrows fall.

The Rev. H. Claude Harland, vicar of Christ Church, Chelsea, in a letter to the *Times*, writes as follows of the Church: "The history of her successful intervention in social questions will, I think, show that she has been told to do that over and over again. Had she listened to this cry, reforms of lasting benefit to mankind would have been postponed." It would be throwing light on a dark subject if he had specified the reforms he takes for granted, but, in writing for a daily paper, the rev. gentleman evidently thinks that he is in the pulpit. Less than a hundred years ago the Churches' representatives did not see anything inhuman in little boys being forced to go up chimneys. And then history in the matter of slavery is too well known to be forgotten. It is possible that the reforms mentioned are so important that they are overlooked, but the Church should not be deprived of its rightful share of honour. Let us know them by all means.

The *Church Times* is looking over its machinery with a view to bringing it up to date. Instructions are printed on "How to Hold Street Corner Meetings," and the following extract is too good to spoil with comment:—

Two workmen were overheard at an outdoor service, and as they listened to the familiar *clichés* one said to the other: "Come on, mate! It's only the old gag!" We must "depolarize" our terms, and resolutely avoid the sing-song voice which too often accompanies their utterance.

In the same paper is an article, "How to Enjoy the Bible." This grist to the mill would have pleased the late G. W. Foote, who found it waiting for him in prison, as a result of having more than a nodding acquaintance with it.

With a sympathy that may not be understood we extend it to the writer of the Summary in the *Church Times*. He writes as follows in the defensive mood:—

It is a task far beyond our power to correct week by week the amazing misstatements concerning the Church that regularly appear in newspapers of all opinions and every character, Tory and Labour, responsible and sensational. The *Yorkshire Post*, to take one example, has printed an article on the "Dearth of Clergy," giving all sorts of fantastic reasons for the falling off in numbers, without one reference to the

fact of supreme importance that there is no lack of men with vocations, and if the laity will find the money there will be no lack of priests.

There are other tasks that we can suggest—more difficult, and without the privileges of authority, but the above is a sample of the tone of a rider thrown off his horse without a chance of mounting again.

From reports it may be seen that there is tremendous activity in naval construction. All countries more or less are planning programmes which will lead to work in dockyards and other allied industries. Many centuries have been spent in wrangling about the forms and rituals of religions with doubtful results. Organized religions might profitably spend a few years on the problem—we do not call it a mystery, of why the human race can only live by killing each other. In the search for the solution, it will be a happy day when Archbishops, Bishops, and lesser lights toe the mark and the other world business is placed in abeyance.

Time will probably surround with the cobweb of myth the circumstances attending the hoax in connection with the affair of "Kitchener's body." In another thousand years there will probably be the pro-Kitcheners and the anti-Kitcheners, and reference to our draper's catalogues called newspapers will be as useful for light as a box of damp matches on a windy night.

The Bishop of Barrow recently made a plea for brighter religion. The message of Christianity was one of tremendous joy and gladness, and one of the happiest books in the world was the Bible. Novels and other books were always gaily bound, yet the Bible was always bound in funereal attire. It was partly the Churches' fault that people get a gloomy idea of religion. We think the Bishop is mistaken in regarding the Bible as a happy book. It always struck us as being about as gloomy an affair as a yard of ditchwater. The Bible worthies seemed much too busy trying to fathom the meaning of God's little antics to be able to find time to be merry. And we can search the whole of the New Testament and not discover that Jesus ever cracked a joke or was guilty of a piece of pleasant wit. We think the Bible publishers exhibit a sound judgment when they bind the "glad tidings" in a colour to match the contents.

In the *American Congregationalist* Dr. T. D. Jones records his impressions of English Congregationalism. He declares he finds everywhere in England widespread neglect of public worship and less and less respect for the Sabbath as a day of worship. He recalls the late D. L. Moody's statement that the chief enemy of Sunday is the bicycle. We think that what the evangelist said is every bit as true to-day. One has only to note the thousands of enthusiastic cyclists streaming out of the big cities on Sunday, with the intention of spending the whole day in the open air, then one can appreciate how effectively the bicycle is keeping the masses out of the Churches. Unfortunately for the kill-joys, cycling is the one Sunday pastime their Sabbatarian prohibitions cannot hinder. They can close the public parks against games and lock up the theatres and libraries, but they cannot bar the King's highway.

Our contemporary, the *New Age*, appears to be regaining its former outspokenness in those matters relating to the difficult art of calling a spade a spade. There has always been a theological frame to the political picture which explains the Churches' power in dealing with the pioneers of Freethought, but, as the forces of real power shift and veer from governments to high finance, and priests may not altogether agree with the policy, the notes of the *New Age* are an acute criticism when they suggest that there is a Geddes Axe waiting for superfluous priests. This may have the effect of bringing the other worldsmen actually into the life-stream of facts, and we trust that High Finance will, in the

words of Macbeth, "lay on," for there can never be too many men engaged in making this life worth living.

A compliment is paid to the Rev. Edwin Smith, who is described as a brilliant missionary of the new type, that thinks as well as feels. This gentleman stated that the rule of Europe has brought Africa a measure of peace, but maintained that it has also brought depopulation and disintegration. From which we gather that it is the peace that passeth understanding.

Sir Ernest Rutherford, President of the Royal Society, declares that another thousand years of research may be required for an understanding of the highly complex physico-chemical basis of life. He must beware of the dust-throwers and side trackers of theology who will not or cannot help in a search of this kind, but are ever ready to stick a ramrod in the other fellow's wheel.

The life that is lived religiously is nothing but movement set to music, declared a speaker at a Fellowship meeting. Well, if that is so, we earnestly wish the Lord would kindly make the music to which Christian movement is set a little less discordant.

A Baltimore pastor, the Rev. O. C. S. Wallace, writing about the American pulpit to-day, says that remarkable skill in advertising has been acquired by a considerable number of preachers who lay under tribute the methods of modern business. They have a genius for publicity. What strikes us is that these preachers appear to have a genius for vulgarity. Still, we admit they probably know their public better than we do.

The Baptist Union is busily preparing a new campaign. This is to be no special effort lasting only a few weeks, but something really big. The Union is out to Christianize all England, "to win and to hold our land for the kingdom of God." Our Baptist friends are nothing if not optimistic. Still, after all, their optimism may be justified; there is nothing very much standing between them and complete success. They have merely to convince people that God actually does something, that prayer is not useless, and that Christian dogmas are really not so silly as they sound.

Dr. William Brown, of Oxford University, told the Psychology section of the British Association that we should probably be right in saying that normal human nature had a religious sense, not in the out-of-date sense of the faculty psychology, but in the form of a primitive tendency towards the religious attitude—to feel the mystery, the beneficence, and perhaps the sternness of the spirit of the universe. In other words, the so-called religious sense is, according to Dr. Brown, nothing but a feeling of fear—fear of the rude forces of nature, fear of the unknown, and fear of the Big Bogey which man pictures as being behind nature. Of course, it would not do for an Oxford don to state things so bluntly as that. The more alert-minded might infer that the Christian practice of worship was not prompted by love or adoration, but rather by a desire to placate a mysterious and vengeful deity, and that the Christian Churches were simply institutions for propagating a gospel of dread. Once people get thinking along these lines they find the parson's eternal guff about love more than they can swallow, and the Churches lose a few more clients.

One of the requirements of a good citizen, recently declared Mr. M. I. Jacks, headmaster of Mill Hill School, was the cultivation of a type of mind accurate enough and sensitive enough to the truth to be able to discern the true meaning of things, the facts of a case as distinct from the inferences. Quite so. But we very much doubt if the average school does much to assist the cultivation of that type of mind. And we are certain the Sunday-schools and Churches do not.

In these, all kinds of statements, primitive inferences, and weird imaginings are served up as "facts" and are required to be accepted without question. One might well describe such institutions as places devoted to rendering men, women and children insensitive to truth, and unable to discern the true meaning of things. This being so, one need not wonder over much that our popular daily and weekly journals find it so very easy to satisfy a credulous public with the shallowest of intellectual wares, silly exaggerations, puerile inferences, and muddled logic. The proprietors of these journals owe to the Churches a debt they can never repay—the Churches have created the kind of mentality which makes large circulations possible. Perhaps it is a feeling of indebtedness which makes the proprietors willing to give the Churches so much free advertisement.

The Rev. D. J. Hiley, in an address at Park Road Church, Rushden, Northants, declared that there were far too many people who said they were not at Sunday morning service in person, but they were "in spirit." We can understand the reverend objection to this. There's no profit to be made out of persons who attend only in imagination.

We have to repeat once again that almost any kind of nonsense will serve so long as it has some connection with religion. The latest exhibition is offered by the *Daily Express*, which solemnly publishes brief accounts of children who distinctly remember having lived before. It is true that the miracle of having lived before we were born is no greater than to go on living after we are dead, and they who believe the one may well be able to believe the other. As Voltaire said, it is the first step that counts.

A fourteen-year-old boy was recently bound over by a Sutton magistrate on condition that he attended Sunday school for two years. It might do this magistrate good to find out what proportion of boys charged with theft have already attended Sunday school. But common sense with some people appears to be a total stranger.

Says Mr. Hammen Swaffer, in *Nash's Magazine* :—

I find to my surprise that, in the middle of middle age, I still believe in God, although I have received every organized inducement not to believe in anything. I believe in Him although I do not see His purpose working itself out anywhere, nor have I ever noticed any proof of His existence. The evidence in the minds of men is all to the contrary. If we were made in His likeness, that alone would seem to disprove it.

A curious confession, and we should also be surprised at Mr. Swaffer still believing in God—or professing to believe in God—if that state of mind were not so terribly common. And all it means is that Mr. Swaffer lacks the strength of mind to give up an established belief even though he is aware there is no justification whatever for holding it. It is a terrible comment upon the intellectual calibre of some of the writers of to-day.

The *New Leader* is acquiring boldness. And it emphasizes many points made in this paper. Political parties are interested in the raw material for their power. The Labour Party in its handling of the question of Birth Control is afraid of alienating the Catholic vote, and the following pronouncement may cause the papal chair to rock on its legs :—

The officials of the Labour Party, exaggerating, as we believe, a small electoral risk, are deliberately offending the strong, even passionate, opinion of the women of the Party, who know what misery and degradation is caused by ignorance in this matter. Unless we are to become a mere vote-getting caucus, the honest mass of the Party must over-rule its officials.

The result will be awaited with not a little interest, and for those with eyes to see, there is a picture of science and religion in a struggle which we are so often assured does not exist. That the Labour Party is in it is only incidental.



### 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.

ONE of our readers enquires if anyone can tell him the author of a poem entitled "Man," commencing:—

Spark of infinity,  
Germ of Divinity.

Perhaps someone may be able to supply him with the desired information.

H. ROBERTS.—Quite an interesting history, although hardly of sufficient interest now that so much has appeared on the subject. It is amusing to find these Christian preachers complaining of the narrow outlook of some of their co-religionists. These are what the preachers themselves have made them, although naturally not so alive as their leaders to the need for modifying doctrines in face of opposition.

W. J. RUSSELL.—We have every admiration for the work of Dr. F. Hall-Edwards. We believe we wrote an article on him some considerable time ago when his work in Radiography, with its unfortunate consequences, was made known to the world. If science were to boom its martyrs as religion has done those in its own department, we should not perhaps hear so much of the latter. The work of the former is of far less selfish character and of infinitely greater value to the human race.

D. MACCONNELL.—Thanks for portrait. The baby is very bonnie, and we wish her the brightest of futures with an easy passage through the troubles of babyhood.

J. VANDER HOUT.—Thanks for securing new subscribers. That is the kind of help we greatly appreciate. Copies are being sent to the addresses received.

P. CLARKE.—The complete edition of Ingersoll's works is in 12 volumes. A good secondhand copy might be purchased for about £5.

ESQUIRER.—The quotation is from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans iii. 7, "For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory, why yet am I also judged as a sinner." The small concern for truth shown by early Christians has been noted by many historians, and deliberate lying and falsification soon became a general policy in Christian advocacy.

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

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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.

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

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

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

The modern trouble is not to accept (or to invent) a theology, but to believe in God.—Mr. Middleton Murray.

### Sugar Plums.

Miss Vance has, we are pleased to say, sufficiently recovered from her recent illness to be able to go away to the seaside for a couple of weeks, dating from August 30. During her absence it will help in the dispatch of business if those who write on matters requiring immediate attention will be good enough to mark their letters "Urgent." Otherwise there may be some delay in replying.

Mr. J. W. Marshall writes us that he would like to see a Branch of the N.S.S. formed in East Ham, and would give what help he could in the matter, if others would join. There is, of course, the West Ham Branch, not so far away, but the district is a very large one, and there ought to be enough to run an independent Branch. At any rate, if those who are willing to assist would write the N.S.S. Secretary, something might be done. Mr. Marshall is a very old worker in the N.S.S., and we know has the interests of the movement at heart.

In the opinion of the Rev. Silas K. Hocking, the novelist, the law relating to marriage will, a century hence, be based on common-sense and common humanity. It will be swept clean of ecclesiastical superstition. It will be a contract entered into in a dignified way before some civil authority. And it will be binding as long, and until, one or the other breaks it. Once the contract is broken it automatically ceases to exist. From all this the reader can see that Mr. Hocking has travelled far along the road to common sense since he first earned the right to label himself "reverend." He appears to have dumped a load of Christian notions, and seems content to stride forward with but a secularist script in his wallet. We note that the article expressing his opinions was labelled copyright. It is hard to discern on what grounds this can be claimed, since most of the views expressed have long ago been stated by Free-thinking writers.

We are asked to announce that the West Ham Branch has arranged an excursion to Kew Gardens to-day (August 29), and that the train will leave Bow Road Station (Underground Rly.) at 9.30. The fare is 1s. Arrangements have been made for tea. All Freethinkers are cordially invited.

Mr. W. J. Locke's play, "The Light on the Mountain," does not find general acceptance. It appears to be a skit on "high-brow" philanderings with new religions, or a polite satire on those who are anxious, in historic language for something "to put in its place." Mr. Locke's close connection with the late Anatole France gives him a certain lightness of touch, but we should not like to think that he has joined the crowd of mis-interpreters of Buddha; there is a difference between saints of earth and saints of heaven; between those who hold a light for guidance in this world, and those who cleverly succeed in blowing it out to enable them to climb on the backs of the wanderers.

Mr. George Whitehead commences a week's open-air lecturing at Manchester on August 30. The place and subject of each lecture will be announced in the Manchester City News and the Manchester Evening News of the 28th. The local Branch makes an earnest appeal for assistance from all Manchester Freethinkers in making this "Mission" a complete success.

It appears that we were misinformed in attributing to Mr. Andrew Millar the production of a book of Memories, as stated in last week's "Sugar Plums." These autobiographical sketches are being contributed to the Ayrshire Post in the form of articles. Mr. Millar is a frequent contributor to the Ayrshire papers, and will be writing for a body of readers who are quite familiar with his work.

## Christianity and Citizenship.

FREETHINKERS are often accused of being too critical. We are said to attribute bad motives to religious well-doing. It is suggested that churches cannot, in our opinion, do anything good.

There is some sort of basis for these old accusations. It is impossible to believe in the good motives of people who themselves often admit that their motives are far from being disinterested. There is all the difference in the world between an objection to murder and an objection to being murdered. There are many clerical protests against the alleged persecution of Christians in Russia and Mexico. There is a complete absence of orthodox opposition to the persecution of Freethinkers (in Spain, for instance).

Freethinkers have never been chary in their appreciation of some splendid exceptions. Many of the Quakers, clerics like the late Rev. Stewart Headlam and a few courageous laymen, have proved that men and women may be Christians and lovers of religious liberty.

Moreover, outside questions of religion, it is part of the Freethinker's creed that religious creeds do not prevent, although we think they do not assist, good citizenship. There must be Christians in this country who are exemplary citizens. It would be strange if it were not so. To believe that Christ rose from the dead, or to believe in evolutionary science, will not feed a hungry man or build houses where they are wanted. Sensible citizens realize this and we all meet on common ground, as sensible citizens.

Speaking from long experience of Freethinkers and the Freethought press, I never yet met with Secularists who called into question the religion of a worker for the common good, or who objected to work with Christians or other religionists on a common basis of citizenship.

In other countries experiences may be otherwise, but I strongly advise readers not hastily to accept the one-sided views of journalists in this country anxious to please the religious public at home by exaggerating and suppressing in the familiar way "for the greater glory of God."

Experience here is overwhelming from every part of the country that the "professional" religious element rarely allows the sense of citizenship to prevent proselytizing and the narrowest kind of religious propaganda and procedure.

Look at the disgraceful manner in which the War Memorials have been "wangled" in the interests of the Christian sect. Even the big central memorials like the admirable Cenotaph have gradually sunk into opportunities for clerical exhibitions, postures, prayers and sentiments. But the bulk of the local war memorials, where they are not actual new churches, or additions to existing churches, are almost equally new pulpits for the old superstitions to use.

The war memorials are a complete and obvious answer to those who glibly suggest that the churches teach good citizenship. They outrage the sentiment of citizenship by dragging down a national ideal to the level of a sect.

A similar sectarianism characterizes every attempt to obtain co-operation for good work in any locality where clerics of any kind are found, with the few admirable exceptions already noted. If a church sends delegates to a conference of a reform movement, one almost invariably finds that such representation is solely, or almost solely, in order to further religious interests. Education, for instance, might as well cease to exist as far as the clergy are con-

cerned, except as an opportunity for sectarian propaganda. Actually these religionists boast of their "unsectarianism" when two sects of evangelical Protestants agree together.

But, one will say, what about the Industrial Christian Union, which managed to rope in the Archbishop of Canterbury, to present a somewhat hopeful suggestion for stopping the Mines dispute? I am not aware that any Freethinker has prejudged the Church's suggestion on account of its rather mysterious origin. It needs to be pointed out that the people who know these Christians best are telling them not to meddle with things they cannot understand. The Tories, who have always patronised religion, do not seem to be impressed with the political wisdom of their creatures, the bishops.

The Church is in difficulties.

Its history and traditions oppose the idea that it is suddenly inspired by a disinterested wish to benefit society. And yet the latter may be the fact. If so, the Church has so many ready-to-hand tests of its sincerity, that an optimist might look for very remarkable developments in the near future.

The use of the episcopal voice on behalf of labour may fail. Let the Church try the effect of the use of the episcopal purse. Surely nobody is going to reply that a voice costs nothing!

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH.

## Mithra at Borcovicus.

BURRELL and I left the military highway, built about the middle of the eighteenth century, after the Pretender scare, and climbed up through the tussocky grass to where the Roman station of Borcovicus lies on the eastern slope of a rift in the Northumbrian whin-sill, just inside the Wall. It was to be the starting point of our holiday tramp along the Roman barrier, and a more desolate taking-off place could hardly be imagined. Stretching away to the Scottish border lay a succession of swampy moors and fells destitute of life, apparently, save for the whistling curlew or a mountain sheep, while to the south were rolling downs with a shooting box or shepherd's shack, far apart. Yet Borcovicus, in the days of its glory, must have been a populous place. Remains of villas have been found round the station, and an even more conclusive piece of evidence is the bronze tablet found further east along the Wall, bestowing Roman citizenship on the soldiers of some dozen nationalities and authorizing them to marry as a reward for meritorious service in the field. Although to most folk the Roman occupation of Britain is but an incident in English history, they were here between three and four centuries and their influence is real enough if the only outward and visible sign of their presence is a crumbling ruin. To anyone who finds in the past some measure of refuge from the present, lonely Borcovicus is one of the most interesting spots in Britain. There the gods of Paganism were worshipped by generations of men. Mithra, "son of the morning," had a temple there and Jupiter and other gods heard the hymn of praise ascend from there to their thrones on high Olympus. It is rather humiliating to know that Paganism flourished in this land of ours for so long. One gets the impression of a hitch in the management, especially as along the Wall no monument extolling the virtues of the Nazarene has been found, while numerous altars to the great rival of Christianity in the early years of our era have been discovered.

This fact has been a stumbling block to the writers on the Roman Wall, most of whom are concerned to

boost up Christianity as against the older Gods. Dr. Bruce, the author of a standard history of the Wall, suggests that when the mythologies of Greece and Rome had lost hold of the sympathies of the community, "the worship of Mithra was pressed upon the attention of mankind in opposition to the verities of Christianity." He also suggests that the worship of Mithra involved "human sacrifice and various other abominations." The compiler of the Black Gate catalogue goes further in saying that when Christianity had destroyed the Paganism of Rome, the stiff-necked among the Romans "who would not submit to the humbling doctrines of the Cross betook themselves to the worship of the vague and indefinite thing called Nature." And as the sun is the chief agent in the indefinite thing, Mithra was identified with it and so became the deity of the irreconcilables. And in another catalogue of the things found along the Wall, the monuments to Mithra are cited as evidence that Christianity had established the worship of the one God, at least. Some of the altars are dedicated to Deo Invicti, and the writer clings to the hope that it might mean the Christian God, seeing that some of the Roman commanders, but his own quoted authority on Mithra, Abbé Banier, in speaking of the games consecrated to the sun and Mithra, says, "'Tis true the kalendar does not name the god, but only says, '8 Kal Jan N Invicti,' that is to say, the nativity of the Invincible, but the learned have very well judged from the epithet of Invicti, so often applied to him in inscriptions that Mithra is here intended." There may have been Christians along the Wall during the occupation, but there is no concrete evidence of their existence.

Mithra was an ancient sun-god from somewhere out of the East. Glimpses of his being has come down to us from remote antiquity, although his entry into the Roman world, according to one authority, dates from a hundred years or so B.C. He arrived, so it is said, along with some Cilician pirates, whom Pompey had conquered and incorporated in his army, and it is as a soldiers' god that he flourished among the garrisons on the Wall. His birthday was at the winter solstice, which is an old-established natal day among sun-gods, and he was virgin born. That means that he came along without the intervention of a human father, and not, as many people imagine, that he was simply the first born of his mother. Tracing the pedigree of a god, however, is a delicate matter. Most of them, in the popular account of their lives, seem "a little loose in the affections," as Miss Jezebel Pettyfer would put it, and probing their origin and history anyway thoroughly only leads to disillusion and unbelief. Mithra, then, came to England as a god beloved of soldiers, and a little to the south of Boreovicus they built him a temple where, if the evidence from the altars be taken, he had worshippers down to at least the year A.D. 252.

The temple itself was excavated in 1822, and a rich collection of altars was found, many of them now being in the Antiquaries' Museum in Newcastle. The inscriptions on them testify to the piety of the adherents of Mithraism, and certain phrases are curiously reminiscent of Christian feeling. When J. M. Robertson, in his book on *Pagan Christs*, printed a detailed study of the parallels between Mithraism and Christianity he was subjected to a venomous attack by a Roman Catholic priest. Robertson was once likened to a small boy who could never go a message on time because he was forever stopping on the way to fight other boys. On this occasion, however, the other fellow started it and got a trouncing for his pains. Not only had the author of *Pagan Christs* to repel attacks by Father

Martindale; other Christians of varying kinds rushed in to kill the idea that there was a close resemblance between their creed and a pagan religion, and, as it was shown that their defence of the unique purity of Christianity involved some rather questionable tactics, it is morally certain that some of the thrusts had gone home. The parallels begin at the very root of both systems, the common root, it may truthfully be said, for Christianity is no more the fruit of heavenly wisdom than any other religion. Mithra was "the god out of the rock"—the ancient Egyptians conceived the earth as being male and symbolized the conception in the form of a living rock—and his mysteries were celebrated in a cave or underground temple. Jesus Christ was born in a cave; so it was before it was converted into a stable in the records, although even in that form it has a connection with Mithra, in whose ritual the lowing of heifers had a place, and he is described in the Gospels as the Rock of Spiritual Excellence. That he was, and is, the Rock of Salvation is a commonplace among the more vociferous Christians. Both of them were laid in a rock tomb after death, the recording of which has little significance other than mythical. Both of them rose again from the dead, as did a score of others. In Mithraism there was a symbolical eating of the god, the precursor of the Christian sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In the older system the day of the sun entering into the sign of the Ram or Lamb was a time of special significance. Mithra was identified with the Lamb, just as later on Jesus was the Lamb of God, and, later still, the centre of the orgiastic antics of the Salvation Army's soldiers. Both religions promised a happy immortality to their adherents; both of them used the sign of the cross on the initiates. Although the early Church was late in deciding that Christ was born on the 25th day of December, the same probably applies to the rival creed, for Christmas as a religious festival long antedates both gods. And Mithraism had a trinity of gods before Christianity.

To explain these close resemblances the suggestion was made that Satan had been along parodying the Christian truths before the advent of Christ and to the frame of mind underlying that idea is due to the charges made that Mithraism involved human sacrifice and licentiousness. There is no evidence worth the name to that effect. Mithraism preached the general virtues; the monuments have come down the years to testify to that, and as there is extremely little mention of women in connection with the creed, the licentiousness which characterized the early Christian love feast is absent from the history of Mithraism.

Burrell and I moved off towards the setting sun. We passed through the western gate of the station, which is partially built up; an eloquent testimony to the fighting qualities of the Picts and Scots. The Tungrian cohort which garrisoned Boreovicus would often bewail the fate that exiled them to such a remote outpost of Empire, but it would be as nothing to the curses bestowed on the half-naked warriors who came out of the forests of the north and who had such a profound belief in the military maxim that the best means of defence is always that of attack. Nothing could stay the onrush of the Scots, intent on plunder and full of the sturdy independence which has carried them south ever since. Twice they sacked what was the strongest station on the Wall, and weaker portions were often stormed and the defenders put to the sword. The only other raiders that come across the Barrier in these days are the hoodie crows and maybe a peregrine falcon now and again. But both of them are as competent as the raiders of old and ever ready to ride when the larder is empty.

To the south of Borcovicus lies the site of a British camp and a mound under which a Britain chieftain is probably sleeping "awaiting the trump of God." Some fine day the archæologists will come along and dig him out and measure his skull and finger curiously his bones and put what is left of him in a museum where he will never hear the bugle calling. So it is with men and nations and religions. Walking along the Wall one cannot help wondering what was the factor that downed imperial Rome. That which put finis to Mithraism was simply the thieving propensities of Christianity—apart from the wholesale taking over of doctrine, there is reason to think that even the chair of St. Peter at Rome is none other than the chair of the Mithraic pope—but the decay of Rome involves something more obscure. There was a maggot inside her system in the shape of a moneylender, the progenitor of the credit brigands who are strangling Europe to-day. Not only did it appropriate the material wealth of the community, it steadily encroached on the life and freedom of the people so that towards the end Rome was a nation of slaves owned by usurers and decay inevitable. So, at least, thought Burrell, and when the present state of Europe is considered, where the dealers in financial credit are seen dominating governments and peoples to their detriment, his theory has the support of some important if unpleasant facts.

But don't let it ever be said that great Cæsar with his legions came to Britain in vain, for had we not a right royal holiday time? H. B. DODDS.

### A Ballad of Imperfection.

(To Ellen, who plays Beethoven's music imperfectly.)

WHEN keys are touched and melody expands  
To fill the room with coloured shafts of sound;  
When sweetness and all pleasure yield to hands  
That reach high heaven from this our breathing  
ground,  
Then is the time, when ecstasies abound  
That overlook uncertain touch that may befall,  
For time is fleeting and the perfect round  
Must wait—take this—mistakes and all.

Away we float to lands of steady light  
That makes all clear and free from fret or care;  
We wander by bright gardens where the night  
Smiles at the break of day whose face is fair  
As Helen's when she gave a vision rare  
To Troy's old men above the city wall—  
But you, if faults should cause you to despair,  
Must wait—take this—mistakes and all.

The virtuoso is a plant not found  
Like mushrooms in a marshy autumn field;  
The perfect man was not with gold once crowned,  
Nor will perfection in a lifetime yield  
To all her gift—to few revealed.  
Musician, play, and let the critic bawl;  
Do and not talk, for he, his fate now sealed,  
Must wait—take this—mistakes and all.

Prince, you can see, we sorry bits of things  
That want the moon to make a lovely shawl,  
And stars to flicker in our golden rings,  
Must wait—take this—mistakes and all.

WILLIAM REPTON.

### In Defence of Egotism.

Our natural tendency is to exhibit our best to others. We are constantly wooing. There is probably not a single charm of manner, character, or accomplishment which we do not aim to display. Even modesty is exhibited. The soul exults in seeking praise and appreciation.—George Bedborough.

MR. HAROLD BAYFORD (familiar to Manchester Freethinkers) was once discussing with an acquaintance the merits and otherwise of my contributions to this journal. "Oh!" exclaimed the friend, "Hands' articles are interesting enough, but he's so damned egotistical." Or words to that effect. Mr. Bayford assures me that he spoke kind words in my defence; he said that I wasn't at all a bad sort of chap when you knew me, but that I was an incorrigible leg-puller who was sometimes misunderstood. In short, he hinted—as one damning with faint praise—that I was quite all right, but I didn't want taking too seriously. There was, however, really no need for this defence. My plea to the charge of egotism is one of guilty. Whatever sins have been mine since I attained maturity, I have certainly never been guilty of hiding my light under a bushel. On the contrary I have endeavoured to act up to the letter and the spirit of the scriptural injunction, and have assiduously let my light shine before all men with exceeding refulgency. I have never attempted to conceal the fact that I consider myself a darned fine fellow. I have always endeavoured to make it clear that, for me, the universal process—the stupendous drama of "world on world for ever rolling from creation to decay"—derives its entire meaning and significance from the fact of my connection with it. I trust the qualification "for me" has not been overlooked. I do not deny that the universe may have figured, and may yet figure, in incidents—not devoid of importance—with which I am in no way connected, but, nevertheless, my own interest in it is a purely personal one. In fact, I'm so thoroughly delighted with myself that I wouldn't change personalities with the Prince of Wales—not even if he took over my small parcel of ailments in exchange for his "winning smile." From which it will be seen that I regard myself as the dog-gone, cutest guy this side of Ostikosh. Pass the jam!

In general we are all subject to vanity in varying degrees, and Darwin has demonstrated that human beings are not alone in this—it extends far down into the lower forms of sentient life. It could not well be otherwise. Egoism—as distinct from egotism, which is a social product—is the driving force that enables an organism to maintain itself in the struggle for existence; it is the fundamental basis, or starting point, of those social adjustments which we term morality. "Man always acts from desire," and the highest altruism is, in the last analysis, no more than an enlightened self-interest. And it is none the less praiseworthy on this account. Martyrdom is none the less worthy of admiration because it springs from the conceit of the martyr in assuming that he is right and the rest of the world wrong. "Even modesty is exhibited," says George Bedborough, whose moral support I have enlisted at the head of this article. A profound utterance, exhibiting a keen insight into the springs of human action. How much more frank and honest life would be if we all candidly admitted that we delighted in the admiration of our fellows, instead of assuming a pose of modesty and self-deprecation, like a politician pleading his utter unworthiness from the platform, and pausing expectantly for a chorus of "No, no's." Here, as in so many other directions, cant is the order of the day.

Comedy is possible only in a highly civilized country; for in a comparatively barbarous one the people cannot bear to have their follies ridiculed.—G. B. Shaw.

There are, of course, egotists and egotists. There are some forms of egotism one would not care to be identified with; and I trust I wear my halo—"with a difference." My old guide, philosopher, and friend, the late James Farmer, of Nottingham, always insisted on the value of criticism; he urged me to take my medicine without flinching, be it ever so unpalatable, and added, "your critic is your best friend, he will reveal your faults to you, and put you right where you are wrong—criticism is an invaluable corrective to the pride which goeth before a fall." He was himself a merciless, yet kindly, critic. I have endeavoured to observe his wise counsel in all things, but fear my egotism continues unabated!

Is there, in all literature, a more despicable figure than that of Uriah Heep? In fact, the works of Dickens abound with "humble" characters—mostly pious—whose "humility" is but a cloak for arrant pride; and in everyday life—especially in the religious world—such mock modesty is common. Yet these self-avowed "miserable offenders" do not find their humility incompatible with a "Thank God, I am not as other people" attitude to those who do not share their narrow views. There is no field like the religious field where egotism of the most objectionable kind may flourish. The whole Christian scheme is a piece of colossal conceit, and our social life will never be a thing of beauty while it persists.

And so I return to the personal charge. To the plea of guilty I would plead also extenuating circumstances. The consideration that I really cannot help it is one that should appeal to Blatchfordian determinists. Life—and by life I mean life as it affects, and is in turn affected by, me—is so tremendously interesting; and the only way I can adequately express its wonders, its glories, its delights and disappointments is in the first person—thus leaving myself open to the charge of vainglory. For the rest, I frankly confess that I court admiration and delight in it (not, I trust, in an overweening manner), because, without it, there would be neither satisfaction nor joy in any human endeavour—"my true intent is all for your delight," and nothing is worthy if it be not shared with others.

Believe me, I am under no illusion as to my place in the scheme of things. I recognise that I am—relative to the struggle for existence—of less consequence than the "ubiquitous germ" who wars within me; whilst the very ubiquity of the said germ again renders him relatively unimportant—a germ that is everywhere is, in a sense, nowhere; he can never play anything but a secondary part in evolution; if the germ theory was half as true as its sponsors claim the human race would long since have disappeared. In which case this planet would never have had the honour conferred upon it by the lordly presence of your, by no means humble, servant!

When I awoke this morning the bed next to me was empty.....its late occupant was.....in the mortuary. Even as I slept the old drama of life and death had repeated itself anew. The germ had again triumphed. For a moment I felt nonplussed. Then the old egotism reasserted itself and I determined that, so far as I was concerned, there should be no more concessions to nature. Even egotism can have its compensations! And "life is very sweet, brother."

VINCENT J. HANDS.

## Correspondence.

### ATHEISM OR AGNOSTICISM? TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Mr. Vincent Hands—whose illness we all regret and for whose speedy recovery we all hope—is good enough to say that if he is ever elected Pope, he will appoint me his Jesuit-in-Chief. Perhaps we could gather "Medicus" to ourselves and make a sort of Holy Trinity of it; Mr. Cutner, who has a well-developed power of affirming contradictions, could play Athanasius, and all would be well. Though perhaps there would be ructions, and one of us would have to go and get crucified or something.....

It is gratifying to have a somewhat belated definition of what is Mr. Hand's "main point"; it is, apparently, "that Agnosticism has to do with certain problems in philosophy and not with the God-idea at all, for Theism, in its essence, is pre-philosophical." With this *dictum* I entirely disagree. Agnosticism is concerned "with the God-idea," and if Mr. Hands's definition of "pre-philosophical" implies that Theism is not "in its essence" a philosophical question, I also beg to differ. Theism, as a philosophic belief, is certainly the basis of a number of myths, legends and general unreasoned guesses about the universe; but it is essentially a philosophy, and I cannot agree with the statement that the philosophic Theism of Thomas Paine and Voltaire is "too absurd for rational discussion." Theism is a very legitimate and sensible philosophy; as expounded by such a brilliant and progressive thinker as Dr. Walter Walsh, it is not half so absurd as some of Mr. Hands's ideas.

The worst of your contributor is that he, like the Christian theologian, is content to make absolutely unproven assertions with an air of stating something quite obvious when he is only stating something quite obviously wrong. And really, Mr. Hands's point of view is somewhat obscure. He quotes Mr. Chapman Cohen's *Theism or Atheism?* as saying: "All that Atheism necessarily involves is the rejection of all forms of Theism." How does this differ essentially from my statement that "to be Agnostic.....is to reject Theism"? I am fairly well acquainted with the English language and I cannot see that it differs at all. Lastly, as regards Mr. Hands, "even" I do not "see that you can't apply common sense or anything else to that which lies 'beyond and above human experience.'" You can. If you apply common sense to the question of Ultimate Reality, you become an Agnostic—or an Atheist, as defined by Mr. Cohen and Ingersoll; if you apply "anything else," you start making assertions and denials, and finally end up either as a Bishop or as a convicted "blasphemer," both of which are quite admirable persons, but whom I do not wish to emulate.

Coming to the letter of "Medicus," I regard your correspondent's analogy of a closed bag as an exceptionally good one, and "Medicus" must not blame me if it turns out, as I think, to his disadvantage. There is one important point, however, to note—we are generally acquainted with bags and their likely contents, and, to that extent, the analogy does not hold, as we have no analogous knowledge concerning Ultimate Reality. Still, apart from this, has it not occurred to "Medicus" that if we admit we do not know what is in the bag, how much less likely are we able to be certain what is not in the bag? And what does that leave of an "Atheism" different from Agnosticism? Nor do I agree that the statement that "no human answer can possibly be the right one" is a correct description of my opinion; what I do hold is that no human answer can possibly be known to be the right one. Think of three blind men—one of whom fires a shot at a target and says triumphantly that he has hit it by supernatural aid. A second denies stoutly that he has hit it; a third—an Agnostic—hears an awful lot of noise and comes to the conclusion that none of them really knows whether the target has been hit, and then adds cautiously that he is not at all sure that there is a target. There is the whole situation in the proverbial nutshell.

He that will not reason is a bigot; he that cannot reason is a fool; and he that dares not reason is a slave.—  
Drummond.

As regards my "classification of theological propositions" with which "Medicus" so emphatically disagrees, I would point out that my contention is entirely missed by him when he concentrates on "a question of possibility," as he puts it. I regard it as an utterly useless and futile procedure to speculate on questions of "possibility" as regards alleged occurrences such as floating lead. The only really impossible thing is to prove anything to be really impossible. Hence, I suggest that we appeal to the supreme court of Fact. If a man says lead did float on a past occasion, let us just ask for proof. If he says it is going to float some fine day, let us just wait and see, whilst expressing a mild *interim* credulity. And if he says lead is in the habit of floating on water, let us bid him tie a large piece round his neck and go floating on the Thames with it. But what else could he say beyond these three propositions concerning the flotation of lead? And what better answers could be given to them?

Finally, as regards "suspension of judgment," there are no grounds for "Medicus's" uncertainty as to what I mean. To revert to his "bag analogy," I suspend judgment as to its contents; I contend that, in so doing, I must also suspend judgment as to whether any particular type of article is among those contents. That is to say, once we admit Agnosticism as regards Ultimate Reality, we must logically admit Agnosticism as regards any form of purely philosophic Theism. If a man gives me a sealed box, and says there is an apple in it, am I justified in saying there is not, and cannot be, an apple in, if I am aware that neither of us knows what really is in it? Yet that is what "Medicus" would have me say, if he sticks to his principles!

EPHPHATHIA.

SIR,—Abstract scientific truth is applicable only under abstract conditions, but contact with concrete environment modifies its application. Therefore the liberal-minded Rationalist, who "guided by reason" remains in his historical camp—is quite consistent; which cannot be said of the "orthodox" Atheist. It is very doubtful if Rationalists object to opprobrious names, but, in general, understand the significance of them, and therefore can afford to ignore petty questions. There is certainly no necessity for them to expose that which cannot be seen by D. S. Rogers.

Rationalism, Atheism, and Christianity are the offsprings of class rule, and the principle of "rational rights" will not present their acrid vituperations and balloon bursting.

A. S. E. PANTON.

### Mr. G. Whitehead's Mission.

Mr. Whitehead writes: "The first of the two weeks spent at Bolton has passed off very satisfactorily. In spite of attempts made by one or two Catholic bigots to prevent our meetings by monopolising the Town Hall steps, which are practically the only two outdoor pitches in the town, we got in the usual seven successful meetings. Our opponents had publicly affirmed we should have no meetings on the Saturday and Sunday, and for hours before the advertised time they were on the steps, the rule of the police being that the first comer has a monopoly of the pitch. I managed to obtain permission to use some waste land, however, and this defeated the attempt to suppress our propaganda." Mr. Whitehead's second week at Bolton ends on Sunday, August 29, and the week following will see him at Manchester.

E. M. V.

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NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Regent's Park, near the Fountain): 6, Mr. A. D. McLaren, a Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Brockwell Park): 3 and 5, Mr. H. Constable will lecture.

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WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S.—Outing to Kew Gardens. Train 9.30 a.m. Bow Road (Underground). Cheap fare 1s. return. Lunch to be carried. Tea will be arranged. All Freethinkers invited.

### COUNTRY.

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