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Views and Opinions.

Studies in Credulity.

We have lately been reading—among others—two books which appear to us to be more closely related than either of the authors of them appear to realize. Indeed, we should not be surprised if both of them felt offended at the comparison. Still, they both claim to be good Christians, and although that is not good evidence that they agree or respect one another, an outsider may be so far excused lumping them together. One of these two books was sent to us by a friend and is called the *Harp of God*, with the sub-title, "Proof Conclusive that Millions now Living will never Die," and is by a Mr. Rutherford, who for some time past has been bombarding the British public with free literature promising them this horrible calamity. This copy claims to be the 2,827,000 edition—probably it means copies—which, if true, is the finest monument to the ineradicable stupidity of human nature that we have yet come across. It is issued by the International Students' Bible Association, and it goes the whole hog. Special creation, miracles, and all the fantastic absurdities of prophecies are accepted, and it is quite in keeping with the mental calibre of the whole to find that wireless telegraphy, steam trains, airships, etc., are all foretold in the Bible. Against any Freethinker the book is argument proof. One might as easily, or as successfully, argue with the inmates of a lunatic asylum. Such writers live in a world of their own; a world which has its own inverted rules of reasoning, its own crazy logic, and fosters absurd superstitions that many now believe are reduced to harmless proportions.

* * *

Scratching the Surface.

In this last consideration we are all inclined to go astray. The 2,827,000 may refer, as I have said, to copies, but even at that there is something portentous in the fact of a book of this kind being circulated by the million. Even though the majority of copies be given away, the huge sums of money there must be available to make this possible is suggestive. For where there are large sums of money to hand there is usually a large body of supporters. The probability is that we are all inclined to over-estimate the progress made in relation to Christianity. On

the one hand there is the tendency for Freethinkers to make the most of the admissions and concessions made by a certain number of the clergy, forgetting that the vast majority of the clergy are as stupid and as bigoted as ever. On the other hand, the liberal clergy do what they can to keep the less enlightened ones in the background, and thus from both sides there arises a tendency to lose sight of the fact that the "advanced" clergy are only in a small minority, and the advanced layman also. Yet, if we reflect, there are plenty of things that should give us pause. The Roman Church, the great mother of modern superstitions, is unquestionably making headway in numbers and in influence, and three million copies of the *Harp of God* is proof that the Roman Church has no monopoly of superstition. The Church of England threatens to split in two on the question of the "Real Presence in the Sacrament"—as stupid and as savage a superstition as ever disgraced a civilized country. Whether Christians eat God Almighty actually or only symbolically, whether the wine and wafer is transformed into the actual blood and body of Jesus, or whether they are simply consecrated, and if so, how long does the consecration last, these things are being debated with all the gravity of some mediæval theological seminary. Mrs. Besant, who appears to be running Sir Arthur Conan Doyle close in her appetite for absurdities, gravely parades a re-incarnation of Jesus Christ, and secures plenty of support. It is well to be able to laugh at these absurdities, but it is also well to bear in mind that, as social phenomena, they have a more serious aspect. In a national stocktaking we ought to reckon the folly as well as the wisdom that is current.

* * *

Doubtful Compliments.

It is good to keep count of how much Freethought has gained. It is good to remember how much there is yet to be done if we are to keep what we have. Bishop Gore secures startling headlines in the press because he rejects *some* of the most childish of Christian doctrines. Bishop Barnes ranks as a daring thinker and startling theological phenomenon because he does not believe in the Genesiac story of creation. But without the existence of a fairly general belief in the things these men reject the headlines would lack reality and the Bishop and the ex-Bishop would lose their prominence. We do not read in the papers, "Famous Scientist Rejects Belief in a False Earth," or "Prime Minister does not Believe in Chattel Slavery," or "Well-known Historian doubts whether Old Mother Hubbard ever existed." The importance of a rejection lies in the prevalence of an acceptance. Bishops Barnes and Gore are the one-eyed men in the kingdom of the blind. Theirs is wisdom only when contrasted with the folly of the bulk of believers. In a Church Assembly their statements create a sensation; in a scientific gathering no one would dream of making them. Culture is at a low level when a rejection of savagery causes a sensation. We may regard the

concessions of Messrs. Barnes and Gore as proof of how much they have advanced; but we are also justified in taking them as proof of how much they have yet to learn.

* * *

Friends or Enemies?

We confess to having very little faith in these advanced theologians. It is to be noted that their concessions are the minimum of liberality, and these are made when it is obviously unwise for them to hold out longer. They do not lead, in even the department they claim as their own. It is from the outside world that the pressure comes. Observe, too, that in the very act of accepting the scientific position, elaborate attempts are made to belittle the scientific method and to minimize scientific victories. It is not so much the conquests of science that are praised as its limitations that are emphasized. Science is solemnly warned that there are whole regions beyond its purview, the inability of science to answer this or that question is not accepted as a defeat to be made good as soon as possible, it is hailed as a victory for religion and as affording consolation for the godly. Not even the most advanced among them will have anything to do with the scientific interpretation of religion—what they are fighting for is the religious interpretation of science, the interpretation of scientific determinism in terms of primitive animism. The beliefs they retain are as primitive in substance as those they reject, their outlook is unchanged, it is no more than a modified form of expression that they have adopted, and the circulation of three million copies of the *Harp of God* proves there are more of these primitives about than most people imagine.

* * *

Safety in Diversity.

It is a melancholy reflection that our civilization, such as it is, is not made secure by our rationality, but by discordance in irrationality. If the Christian sects in this country could only be brought to the point of agreement in matters of doctrine, very little freedom of thought would be left. What is it, for example, that prevents us getting the most dogmatic of Christian teaching in State schools? Nothing but the fact that Christians cannot be brought to agree upon what dogmas shall be taught. As it is, their agreement upon the fact that some kind of religion must be taught children if the churches and chapels are not to have their supply of clients cut off at its source, is enough to prevent a straightforward policy of secular education. Outside the Freethought ranks there is not the slightest protest against the State endowment of religion by the release of all churches and chapels from payment of rates and taxes, because all of them benefit equally from this plundering of the public purse. And even in the growth of a greater criticism of Christianity being legally permitted, this, again—while helped by the strenuous fighting of avowed Freethinkers, and by the results of their advocacy in weakening the general faith in Christian doctrines—a very important help has come from the fact that divisions of opinion among Christians themselves has prevented the legal imposition of uniform doctrines. But with the Blasphemy Laws as with education, the united support of the Christian bodies has hitherto served to frustrate the efforts made to abolish them on the grounds of either common-sense or social justice. Neither consideration has ever carried much weight in itself where religious interests are concerned. Examples from all quarters prove that Christians are not opposed to using force on behalf of their opinions, or to suppress criticism of them, but refrain only when the loss is greater than the gain.

An Ever Present Danger.

The Harp of God, with its three million circulation, thus carries with it a very valuable lesson to Freethinkers if we are inclined to read it aright. The way in which such exhibitions of superstition as faith-healing campaigns, accompanied with scenes that would befit a gathering of savages, the support given to this and similar campaigns by many highly-placed Church dignitaries, proves, not merely the existence of an enormous amount of crude superstition, but also the readiness of these same liberal theologians to take advantage of it when it pays them to do so. It must never be forgotten that all their interests, material and "spiritual," lie in this direction, and in everyday affairs action and interest have a tendency to coincide. The development of democracy makes this a grave social danger. There was never greater need than there is to-day for the people to be well informed and to have their minds freed from the sway of mere shibboleths and superstitions. One great cause of the downfall of the old Roman Empire was the irruption of barbarians. To-day the civilized world is not exposed to that threat. Our danger comes from the barbarians from within, and of this army the world of Christian belief acts as the advance guard. Freedom and enlightenment have been won in the face of the opposition of the Christian Church, and the world of genuine culture may yet find itself fighting for existence against an army under the same leader.

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We will deal with the second of the two books referred to next week.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be Continued.)

Significant Facts.

THE Rev. W. J. Sparrow Simpson, D.D., is a well-known Anglo-Catholic divine. He is chaplain to St. Mary's Hospital, Ilford, and an exceedingly popular preacher. In the *Church Times* of August 6 there appears a noteworthy sermon recently preached by him in St. Paul's Cathedral, in which he is exceptionally outspoken. The subject dealt with is Vocation, based on Luke i. 76: "Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Most High, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to make ready his ways." Dr. Sparrow Simpson frankly admits the existence of "disconcerting facts in the state of the Church of England." One is the alarming difficulty to persuade promising young men to enter the priesthood. The number who do so is steadily decreasing. Within the Church there is a difference of opinion as to the cause of this serious menace to the future of the Christian religion. Dr. Simpson says:—

This decrease is sometimes laid to the charge of the Anglo-Catholic school, which is supposed to have driven men away from the ministry by its sacramental teaching. That explanation would sound more plausible but for the fact that similar trouble exists among Roman Catholics in France, among Protestants in Germany, and among the Nonconformists of our own country. It is obvious that Anglo-Catholics are not responsible for these, and, therefore, that some less inadequate explanation must be discovered. Whatever the real cause may be, at any rate the fact of diminished numbers at ordinations is beyond dispute. Every other occupation is overcrowded. Offices in the city have their waiting lists, some of very considerable length. Men of education and ability are giving themselves to anything rather than to the priesthood.

So far we are in thorough agreement with the reverend gentleman. No particular Church, or party

in a Church, can alone be justly held responsible for the decrease in the number of the clergy. Dr. Simpson does not discuss the cause of the startling decrease in the discourse now before us. For him, "the urgent problem is how can the priesthood be recruited?" And yet there occurs a paragraph later on in the sermon which indirectly throws considerable light on the cause of the "disconcerting fact." It is as follows:—

The truth is that there are Churchmen who decidedly object to their sons being ordained. There are members of the Church who freely criticize the incompetence of the clergy, and, having capable sons of their own, send them all into secular professions. The *Benedictus*, as they would revise it, would run: "Thou, child, shalt be of almost any profession you please, but the last thing in the world that we desire is that you should be a prophet of the Highest." It is difficult to see how the Church can prosper where that attitude prevails.

We need to know no more in order to fully understand why intelligent men in such increasing numbers hesitate to become ministers of the Gospel, the reverend gentleman having unintentionally in that short paragraph, clearly dispersed the whole mystery. It is not the views held by any Church or party which prevent scholarly and thoughtful men from accepting Holy Orders, but the infinitely more important facts that Christianity itself is slowly but surely slackening its grip upon parents and children alike, and that the old sweet note of positive assurance has very largely disappeared from Christian experience. Even as recently as fifty years ago there was an intenseness of supernatural belief which is entirely missing to-day. It would have been utterly impossible then for Church members to think and speak of the ministry or priesthood in terms which Dr. Sparrow Simpson ascribes to twentieth-century Churchmen. Compare the pulpit of to-day with that of sixty and fifty years ago and you will find that it wholly lacks the fiery conviction and authority that characterized its predecessor. Then the artificial heat inherited from the Methodist Revival was still almost red-hot, especially among Dissenters, and it reacted upon the Church of England, giving rise therein to the Evangelical Revival. During the closing years of the nineteenth century a cooling off process set in, and has been active with a few set-backs, ever since. All this time the New Learning, like a mighty river, kept flowing on, drowning the germs of superstition and credulity in its healing waters. Gradually the leaders of the Church realized that Christianity's sole chance of survival lay in pursuing a policy of drastic adaptation to the new knowledge.

Let us pause here for a moment for the purpose of considering the real significance and results of this policy of adaptation. For one thing, it exerted a wide influence upon most Churches, both Catholic and Protestant. In the Church of Rome Modernism sprang from it, the main object of which was to apply scientific criticism to the study of the Bible and Christianity. Among Catholic priests and theologians who espoused Modernism, one of the most distinguished was M. Loisy, Professor at the Catholic Institute in Paris and also lecturer at the Sorbonne College. He wrote several scholarly and critical theological works in which he maintains that the Gospels, like the Pentateuch, "are a patchwork and a compound of history and legend." He says that "the Christ of the Synoptics is historical, but is not a God; the Johannine Christ is Divine, but not historical." In the Italian Manifesto, which supplies the Programme of Modernism, we find these words:—

The supernatural life of Christ in the faithful and in the Church has been clothed in an historical

form, which has given birth to what we might somewhat loosely call the Christ of legend.....Such a criticism does away with the possibility of finding in Christ's teaching even the embryonic form of the Church's later theological teaching.

Obviously Roman Catholic Modernism was a movement tending to sweep the ship of the Church from its ancient orthodox moorings and possibly calculated ultimately to wreck it upon the rocks of modern criticism. Discerning this danger looming in the not distant future Pope Pius took firm steps to prevent it from materializing by sternly suppressing all Modernist propaganda, and not a few prominent leaders, such as M. Loisy and Father Tyrrel, were ruthlessly excommunicated.

Outwardly no doubt that notorious papal encyclical fulfilled its mission, but there were numerous Roman Catholics, especially in France, who totally disapproved of it, and believed the Vatican had made a fatal blunder in issuing it. A Roman Catholic correspondent writing from Paris said: "On the public at large the encyclical has fallen even flatter than the 'syllabus'.....It was otherwise with the encyclicals of Leo XIII.; but the truth is that the majority of Frenchmen have ceased to take any interest in what the Pope may do or say; he is now regarded almost as a negligible quantity." This was in the year 1907; and we are aware that already in the Protestant world a theological liberalizing movement was in full swing. On the Continent, in America, and Great Britain Liberal Theology was spreading apace, and intellectually emancipating works were published in quick succession. Speaking of our country, in 1860 *Essays and Reviews* came out, and created a tremendous sensation and persecution of its writers was rife. In 1870, 1873, and 1875 Matthew Arnold's *St. Paul and Protestantism*, *Literature and Dogma* and *God and the Bible* made their appearance, and achieved an amazing success. In 1890 *Lux Mundi*, edited by Dr. Gore, saw the light, and in 1899 began to be published, under the editorship of Canon Cheyne and J. Sunderland Black, the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, completed in four large and double-columned volumes, the greatest work on Biblical criticism ever issued in the English language. Then, last of all, we are glad to notice the Modernist party in the Church of England, with its monthly magazine entitled the *Modern Churchman*, edited by the Rev. H. D. A. Mayor, B.D., Principal of Ripon Hall, Oxford, a theological college founded by the late Bishop Boyd-Carpenter at Ripon in 1898, and moved to Oxford in 1919.

We regret to admit that, despite the increasing activity of all these liberalizing forces in our land, the majority of professing Christians still cling to the great superstition almost in its entirety, so that when we attack it we may be assured we are by no means flogging a dead horse, as we are sometimes accused of doing. At the same time we should bear in mind that neither the Modernists nor we ourselves are labouring altogether in vain. Probably the Modernists would resent the suggestion that they are fellow-workers with Freethinkers; but whether they like it or not such they are. True they compromise themselves by the habit of using traditional terms when they have admittedly well nigh completely emptied them of their traditional meanings. Nevertheless they are our helpers in the cause of truth and freedom. That we are correct in our estimate of the significance of their work is evident from the following description of the present religious situation in Dr. Sparrow Simpson's sermon:—

You cannot fail to be aware of the pathetic confusion and bewilderment about religion by which our age is afflicted. You see the Faith of the

Church reduced to a shadow, deprived of its distinctive qualities and driving power. The belief of many men resembles chaos, for it is without form and void, and darkness dwells over the face of the deep. What is the nation's greatest need, if it is not more religion?

The nation's greatest need is not more religion. On the contrary, the nation's worst misfortune is that it has had far too much religion all along, and its only comfort is to be derived from the fact that religion is at last breaking up and being dissolved. Religion is a mental disease, and disease simply means health in trouble, or out of sorts. God rid of the disease, and health is in full flow the same instant. Religion is an obstacle to progress; remove the obstacle and progress runs on unimpeded feet. Nothing else is needed.

J. T. LLOYD.

Religion in Hospitals.

Charity covers a multitude of sins.—*Old Proverb.*

Not a fantastical fool of them all shall flout me out of my calling.—*Swift.*

Milling mallecho! This means mischief.—*Shakespeare.*

THE great hospitals of London are not only metropolitan institutions, but they have serious claims to be considered of national importance. With certain reservations, they are well managed. The doctors are not only skilful, but often have reputations of real importance; whilst the nursing staffs, from the sisters to the probationers, are the best of their kind in the world. Yet, through the generosity of the governing bodies, nearly every hospital in London is made use of by the clergy of almost every sect and denomination, and by religious cranks who take advantage of every opening for advancing their own particular views.

Every hospital of any size has its own church and its own priests, who are well salaried and are considered to be members of the staff. These are ministers of the Anglican Church, for the simple reason that it happens to be the State religion. These priests not only conduct services in the hospital church, but they also hold services in the wards, with the help of the nurses and a harmonium. In addition, they visit the patients in their beds, usually on the eve of operations, and when they are considered to be more than usually malleable. This, one would consider, would be sufficient piety for ordinary purposes, but, owing to the fanaticism of the pious, and the laxity of the authorities, the unfortunate patients have to submit to the further spiritual attentions of fancy religionists and spiritual busybodies, male and female.

A friend of ours, who met with a motor accident, said that in one big London hospital he was visited at his bedside by no less than six spiritual advisers during his first week's duress. Beside the two Anglican priests attached to the particular hospital, these included a Roman Catholic priest, a Church of England minister (from a neighbouring church), a lady visitor, and an evangelist, with tracts interleaved in more innocent back numbers of secular periodicals. These tracts were old-fashioned, and in exceedingly bad taste, bearing such titles as "Heaven or Hell?" "Where will you spend Eternity?" and were most unsuitable to patients in sickness and suffering. Not only were the periodicals old, but they were grimy, and had evidently been purchased very cheaply from a secondhand shop, so that this particular evangelist did his soul-saving campaign with a very small outlay.

On enquiry from other patients in other hospitals it was found that this was no exceptional state of affairs. One patient said that an elderly lady visitor, wearing a long cloak, carried a collecting-box from bed to bed. The box bore a printed label bearing the name of an orphanage, and had a picture purporting to represent Christ carrying a lamb. Other than this lady, the remaining evangelists did not mix business methods with their various missionary efforts.

Now, it is highly probable that the hospital authorities knew very little of these activities, save of those of their recognized staff priests. Yet as it is all done under the cloak of religion, it goes on year after year to the advantage of these missionaries and the disadvantage of the patients.

For it cannot be too much emphasized that the patients in these large metropolitan hospitals are drawn, not only from London and the suburbs, but from the whole of the country. And among so many thousands of men and women there is, necessarily, every form of creed, and of no creed. Why a Roman Catholic, or Jewish, patient, for example, should be annoyed by rival religionists during the patient's hours of suffering is a conundrum to any but religious fanatics. That such conduct goes on year after year unchallenged only serves to show that people will put up with almost anything provided that it is done in the way of religious convention.

During the past quarter of a century great and beneficent changes have taken place in hospital administration until the names of the great metropolitan institutions are synonymous with excellence the world over. Visitors come from all parts of the earth to see these institutions at work, and it is no uncommon sight to find foreign doctors and visitors being shown around. Yet in the midst of these mighty engines of mercy the captious crank and raucous religionist are permitted to work their worst. As these institutions are primarily concerned with human welfare it should be the duty of each of the governing bodies concerned to see that the patients under their charge are freed from molestation at the hands of pious Paul Prys and saponacious Stigginses, who are far more interested in grinding their little battle-axes than in the sufferings and welfare of the patients. The hospital authorities should see to it that the quality of mercy is not so strained as to permit of the entrance of public nuisances into institutions which have for their avowed object the welfare and happiness of mankind and the relief of human suffering.

This state of affairs is by no means confined to London. All over England the hospitals are considered fair game by the religious scalp-hunters. Even in cottage hospitals in remote provincial towns the same thing exists. In some of these institutions, doubtless, the very title-deeds of the hospitals provide for a certain amount of conventional religionism. In these cases the best thing to do is to restrict the supply to the letter of the law, and only permit such ministrations as are provided for by the rules, and to forbid all those who would exploit the patients for their own ends. It is intolerable at a time when the nursing staff of the hospitals demand the service of educated women that ignorant and fanatical folk should be let loose on the patients to hinder the beneficent work done in such places. For fanatics are always nuisances, and more so in a hospital than anywhere else.

MIMNERMUS.

The healthy man accepts life with its condition of existence from which nobody can escape; and, spending all his energy in deeds instead of complaining of the world, makes the world better and more beautiful by giving out around him all he can of himself.—*Clemenceau.*

The Exodus from Egypt.

In *The Date of the Exodus, in the Light of External Evidence*, by J. W. Jack (T. & T. Clark, 1925), we have yet another attempt to vindicate the historical truth of the legend of the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt and their exodus from Egypt to Palestine; or, rather, in finding a date for it.

The author tells us that he has spent many years in a study of the subject, which we can well believe, for he seems to have read everything that has been written upon the subject. He is quite at home with the highly complicated subject of the chronology of the ancient east, a subject by no means settled, at least, as regards the earlier reigns of the Egyptian and Babylonian kings. Authorities of equal weight, differing by as much as a thousand years in dating some of the earlier reigns. He seems also to have an adequate knowledge of the ancient hieroglyphic, cuneiform, and other dead languages, and of the latest developments of Bible criticism; for, as he remarks in his Preface, "when a writer on such a debatable subject asks the attention of Biblical and Egyptological students, he is required to show that by industry and research he has entitled himself to a hearing." If Mr. Jack fails in his enterprise, it is not for want of knowledge of the subject.

The historian who proposed to discuss the date of an event would begin by satisfying himself that such an event actually occurred. For, as Professor T. E. Peet remarks: "It is useless to try to fix the date and the route of the exodus unless we have first satisfied ourselves that it really happened."¹

Mr. Jack does not attempt to prove the truth of the narrative as it is recorded in the Bible, unless we are to regard his references to Josephus, Philo, Eusebius, Diodorus, who all lived considerably more than a thousand years after the event—and the testimony of faith of a few Egyptologists is regarded as proof. Among the latter is the testimony of Professor Peet himself, that "the Hebrews dwelt in Egypt for a period, and afterwards entered or re-entered Canaan, there is hardly a dissentient voice," which he immediately qualifies by the statement—not quoted by Mr. Jack—that "the sojourn may well have been on so small a scale that the Egyptians never thought it worthy of recording."² In which case it has nothing whatever to do with the story contained in the Bible, which gives the number of the Israelites, including women and children, at two million, and records the total destruction of the Egyptian army, and Pharaoh, its commander.

Whatever personal belief Professor Peet may profess, the fact remains that he shows the utter worthlessness of all the evidence that has been brought forward to prove that any such event took place. No one can rise from a perusal of his book without realizing that he has made a clean sweep of the evidence.

The Egyptologists who have dealt with the subject of the exodus from Egypt have been almost unanimous in their conclusion that, if the exodus happened at all, it must have happened during the reign of Merenptah, the successor of Ramesses II., who is regarded as the Pharaoh of the oppression. Brugsch, Ebers, Rawlinson, Driver, Sayce, Petrie, Burney, and many others gave this as their considered opinion. These two monarchs lived during the Nineteenth Dynasty, Ramesses II. about 1301-1234 B.C., and Merenptah, his son and successor, about 1233-1223. An examination of any ordinary Encyclo-

pædia, or work of reference, will show that this is the solution almost unanimously adopted. One single authority, Eerdmans, placed it in the Twentieth Dynasty, 1130 B.C., but the chronological difficulties attending such a late date put the theory out of court, and it has never been regarded seriously.

A few Egyptologists, following the Jewish historian, Josephus, have attempted to identify the exodus with the expulsion of the Hyksos, or "Shepherd Kings," who ruled over Egypt during the Thirteenth-Seventeenth Dynasties, and ended about 1580 B.C. A theory, says Mr. Jack, that can be maintained, "only by abandoning a very large part, indeed the main part, of the Israelite tradition, can we harmonize the expulsion of the Hyksos with the exodus." And, again, "the accounts we have of the Hyksos rule and of their defeat by Ahmose do not correspond with the history of the Israelites, even though great deductions be made from the latter" p. 172. A theory which proves an exodus from Egypt, and at the same time proves that the Bible account is untrue, will hardly commend itself to the reconcilers of the Bible with history.

Mr. Jack's theory is, that the Israelites entered Egypt during the reign of the Hyksos, or Shepherd Kings, about 1875 B.C., that the exodus from Egypt took place during the reign of Amenhotep II., about 1445 B.C., and that the Israelites entered Canaan shortly after 1400 B.C.

But why, it will be asked, should the Merenptah period of the exodus be thus scrapped, just as nearly all the pundits had settled down to an agreement on the subject? The answer is, because fresh discoveries in Egyptian history completely disproves it. If Merenptah could know how his name has been reviled as the tyrant of the exodus, he would smile now to see how the whirligig of time has brought its revenges. The first blow at the Merenptah period was struck when the mummy of Merenptah was discovered; when, as everybody believed, it should have been at the bottom of the Red Sea. But, as Professor Peet remarks: "Even the discovery of the king's mummy safely reposing in a tomb at Thebes failed to shake the belief, for it was pointed out that, though the biblical narrative states that the Pharaoh and all his chariots were overwhelmed in the Red Sea, there is no reason why his body should not have been recovered and brought back to Thebes for burial. Enthusiasts have even gone so far as to attempt to show from the condition of the mummy that the king died from drowning."³

The next discovery, however, completely disposed of the Merenptah period for the exodus. This was the discovery of the great Merenptah Victory Stela at Thebes, by Petrie in 1896, in which we learn that Merenptah, in the fifth year of his reign, had conducted a campaign against Palestine, that several cities had been captured, and "Israel is destroyed, its seed is not." Now, if the exodus took place during the reign of Merenptah, he could not have defeated the Israelites in Palestine *before* the exodus from Egypt, because there were no Israelites in Palestine to defeat; they were all in Egypt. On the other hand, he could not have taken an army there *after* the exodus, because, according to the Bible, he and his army were at the bottom of the Red Sea. It will not do to suppose that Pharaoh escaped and raised another army, because the Bible says nothing about Pharaoh raising another army and pursuing the Israelites into Palestine. That is why the exodus under Merenptah has had to be reluctantly abandoned by Bible apologists. But what about those

¹ Peet, *Egypt and the Old Testament*, p. 105.

² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³ Jack, *The Date of the Exodus*, p. 176.

⁴ Peet, *Egypt and the Old Testament*, pp. 107-108.

enthusiasts who professed to see, in the condition of the mummy, that the king had died by drowning! It is wonderful what can be seen by the eye of Faith.

(To be Continued.) W. MANN.

"The Salt of Life."

IN a world such as ours, a world "fertile in obstacles" as Vauvenargues puts it, how precious is the gift of humour. Not that life viewed from any standpoint affords much grounds for easy-going optimism. Even *Candide* was ultimately forced to remind the learned Doctor Pangloss that though this be the best of all possible worlds we have still to cultivate our garden. But, when all is said and done, the truly happy man is he who, in spite of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, can still "make fun of that which makes as much of him." For this reason I always feel a glow of happiness when I perceive in the antics of my infant son the early glimmerings of a sense of humour, and I mentally apostrophize him thus: "My son, in endowing thee with existence I was guilty of the unforgivable sin, for it is the duty of intelligent men to see that, so far as they are concerned, the human tragedy ends with them. But having blundered, I pray thee remember, when life presses heavily upon thee, that I who gave thee life endowed thee also with the priceless gift of humour and the courage to endure."

I sometimes think it is only the person with a sense of humour who really appreciates the stern reality of life; your misanthrope as a rule is too conscious of his own misery to realize that of others. It is, in fact, precisely the capacity for perceiving comedy in the midst of tragedy that characterizes the true humourist. I once heard Mr. Chapman Cohen declare that he was never so serious as when he was jesting. This is true of all the great Freethinkers as well as the great wits. It was true of Ingersoll and Foote; it was true of Voltaire and it was surpassingly true of the greatest Frenchman of modern times—Anatole France.

What is humour? Dr. Lyttleton has described it as "a sense of incongruous emotions," and he derives from it a refutation of determinism—forgetting that if determinism be true the incongruity is likewise determined. The definition is, however, an excellent one, for there is no example of humour which does not contain some element of incongruity. There are various kinds of humour, and the best kind is often unconscious, as in the case of the old lady who, when asked by the vicar why her husband did not accompany her to church, replied, "You see, vicar, he belongs to a different abomination!" Then there is the grim humour of the old miser who gathered his expectant sons and daughters around his bed, only to impart to them the disturbing information that as their mother and he had never married, they were a lot of bastards!

And so one might proceed until this copy of the *Freethinker* became a volume of "quips and quiddities." Humour is a recognized factor in human life, its value would be difficult to under-estimate. It enables us to surmount obstacles that were otherwise insurmountable; by its aid we are enabled to meet adversity with a smile. It is the solvent of pessimism; the enemy of cant, humbug, and all uncharitableness. It is the salt that imparts the savour to life.

There is one sphere, however, where humour is taboo. It is the sphere where most healthy, natural things are taboo. It is the world of religion. By this I do not mean that religious people have no sense of humour, but merely that they dare not apply

their sense of humour to things sacred. If they did they would soon discover that there is nothing sacred to humour. This is highly significant. If a thing be true and useful it has no need to fear the laugh of an honest man. There have been many jokes at the expense of marriage (I once heard a bachelor declare that a wife was all right in her proper place—"But when she's in her proper place, you're a widower!") yet it continues to be a fairly popular institution. Take mothers-in-law (I don't care where you take 'em, but take 'em): look at the jokes levelled at them. And yet one does not hear of a deputation of outraged mothers-in-law waiting on the Prime Minister. It is only religion that requires an Act of Parliament to protect it against ridicule. If I were religious I shouldn't feel a bit proud of it.

Just as religion is never so interesting as when one has ceased to believe in it, so it is never so amusing. I have seen an elderly lady of enormous dimensions nearly go into hysterics in the Birmingham Town Hall—and the cause of her contortions was a description in everyday language by Mr. Cohen of the wanderings of the Children of Israel in the wilderness! Beware of the so-called Freethinker who has not reached that point of development where he can laugh at the fundamentals of religion—he is liable to a relapse at any time. Beware also of the man who has no sense of humour. I have met earnest souls so absorbed in entirely unrealistic economic theories that one would think they regard humour as an invention of the capitalist class for distracting the attention of the proletariat from the realities of the class struggle. To such it would be as great a sacrilege to laugh at Lenin as it is to joke about Jesus. Yet why not? I confess it is a little difficult to picture Jesus in a humorous situation. He doesn't fit it. Try to imagine him doing the Jerusalem Jazz or the Gallilee Gallop with Mary Magdalene! I admit that if the fashion for bobbed hair had prevailed she would not then have been able to dry the feet of Omnipotence—but I have never regarded it as hygienic. The Christian will probably meet such flippant considerations with an assurance of Christ's divinity. Well, humour is a saving grace even in a God. I have never yet met a god who would not have been better for a touch of humour; most of the gods I've rubbed shoulders with have combined the petulance of a schoolgirl with the temper of a retired major (Indian Army).

Let us by all means cultivate the gift of humour. It is a pearl of great price. It maketh the whole world kin, and is the touchstone of good fellowship. One cannot forbear the reflection that the world's history might have been less bloody, more replete with the milk of human kindness, if honest laughter had been allowed to penetrate the counsels of the mighty. Happy the man who does not worship false values, who still retains the capacity for enjoying the simple delights of life, and who can say—with the gentle Ben Adhem—"Write me as one who loves his fellow-men."

VINCENT J. HANDS.

The Difference.

"—AND we shall wear a crown,"

They sing,

When earthly journeys o'er.....

It may a mite of comfort bring

To some—to others more.

Poor me! who's lost the graspless girth

Of everlasting grace,

A half-a-crown to spend on earth—

Well, I'm a hopeless case!

TOM GREENHALGH.

Acid Drops.

The *Daily News* is publishing daily brief summaries of letters received in connection with the "Your Religion" enquiry, but they are all on the usual lines. The following is a fair sample of one class from a Wesleyan at Hull:—

I believe that man is the highest product of evolution; that being so, I must agree with Aristotle that we are to interpret the beginning by the nature of the end. Man is personal, therefore the Power that created him must be at least as personal; otherwise man is greater than that which produced him.

This is just the same muddle-headed stuff that has been turned out wholesale for the last two generations. But why, because man is the latest thing in evolution(?) must we interpret the beginning by the end? If a cake of soap sends me down the stairs and I break a leg, why must I interpret the soap by the broken leg? And why, oh why, must the "power" that forms the personality of man be also personal? As a piece of scientific logic that is about as absurd as it could well be. It reminds one of St. Paul's reasoning that because man was made before woman, therefore woman was made for man and not man for woman.

The Bishop of Oxford gave his opinion of the enquiry to an interviewer, but it hardly needs a public enquiry to find out what they profess to believe. What some of them do believe no man will know, unless they leave a confession when they die, and their relatives are candid enough to publish it. But to find a bishop declaring publicly that he believes in Christianity invites Heine's comment when he was asked about God forgiving him. "Oh," he replied, "he will forgive, that's his trade."

The Bishop assured the interviewer that he believes in personal immortality, but unless this means "the getting into touch with those I have known on earth, I do not want personal immortality." Well, so far as we are concerned we should like to make a selection even among those we have known. Spending eternity with those we have known, irrespective of who they are, holds out anything but pleasing prospects. But one is most amused at the ingenious manner in which these people lay down the conditions on which they will tolerate the universe behaving in this or that manner. It is the egotism of a child, and the philosophising that goes with it is that of a child also.

Even Christians are beginning to feel ashamed of the history of Christianity. What has brought this about needs no defining in this paper, but, as the result of no fierce controversy over Bishop Gore's book, a correspondent in the *Daily Express* pays an oblique compliment to those, dead and alive, who have whittled away the crudity of a savage superstition. He asks: "Would your correspondent like to return to the Christianity of the last century, which built churches and allowed the poor, the widows, and the fatherless, to starve in the back streets out of sight?" And when Christianity is humanized there will be nothing left of it.

Down this slippery slope of trimming another correspondent comes along with the assertion that all good Christians are agnostic in the best sense of the term. This must make the hell-fire dogmatists uneasy, and wonder where it will all end.

Britain has about four hundred museums, declared a speaker at the Museums Association Conference. The statement, of course, referred only to buildings that store ancient objects. But there are thousands of other buildings which can also be termed museums, where may be found other kinds of antiquities—worn-out notions. People call them "Houses of God."

At a service held by the "Old Contemptibles" in memory of fallen comrades the Deputy-Chaplain-General, the Rev. Owen S. Watkins, after recounting some past deeds of the First Expeditionary Force, declared:—

Pride, however, is not our chief sentiment as we gather here. Rather is it thanksgiving to Almighty God. First there is personal thanksgiving that out of that hell of agony and bloodshed we have returned again to home and friends and life.....Above all, however, we thank God for those good comrades of ours who so gladly gave their lives.....It is a great thing to have lived among such men, to have called them friends.

According to Mr. Watkins, then, God was very busy during the war. He carefully selected so many men to survive and watched over them until the finish. He provided them with good comrades, whom, however, he for some inscrutable reason thought fit to allow to be wiped out. Of course if God was so busily engaged in selecting men to survive and men to be killed, that would explain why he found no time to stop the war. But what we should much like Mr. Watkins to tell us is, where do the widows and orphans and bereaved parents come in in this thanksgiving business? Hasn't the Lord provided them with a something to give personal thanks for?

A set of commandments, which, it is suggested, should govern the Church in its relations with present-day youth, has been drawn up by a Methodist pastor of Kansas City. Summarised they run thus: Thou shalt not condemn and criticise, nor stife and shackle, nor denounce and deny, nor scold. Thou shalt not crush the spirit of youth by ridiculing its ambitions, by quenching its enthusiasm, by suppressing its energies, by sneering at its dreams. Thou shalt not attempt to bluff and bluster youth, nor assume it is ignorant, nor charge it with being more wicked than former generations, nor speak to it in negatives and negations. This pastor's suggestions, we fear, will not be welcomed very heartily by the Church. They imply that the old and trusted methods employed to teach youths (and adults, too) the way they should go are all wrong; and that the warnings, denunciations, and prohibitions, which have obviously been based on Bible teaching, are a stupid mistake. And churches, as we know, object to admitting that they have gone wrong, lest their authority should be undermined. The reverend gentleman's suggestions are, of course, merely a sign of the times. He has noted youth's desertion of the churches, and he realizes that clients cannot be secured by denunciations and prohibitions. Modern youth is too deeply inoculated with the new notions of freedom to stand the Churches' traditional bullying. Hence he suggests that youth should be pandered to. But we doubt whether the "soft sawder" business will be of any use. The modern generation quite plainly has no use for a discredited creed. It is saying with old Omar: "The Revelations of Devout and Learned.....are all but Stories"; and it is too busy facing the real problems of this world to spare time for Christian fairy-tales.

The old guff about Continental wickedness and the awful Continental Sunday, employed to frighten the ignorant and untravelled pious to get them to support all kinds of prohibitions on other people's liberty of action, is getting played out. Too many persons nowadays have travelled abroad for the pious libel to have the effect it once had. Some of the more intelligent Christian writers are evidently realizing this. Hence we find a good Methodist assuring his readers that the talk about Continental wickedness is so much rubbish, and that Paris is no worse than London. The writer says he has had as quite and refreshing Sundays in Bruges or on the Riviera as he has had at places like Brighton. Our European neighbours are much like ourselves—kindly, sympathetic, and glad to be helpful—he declares. Well, those of us whose eyes are not blinkered with sectarian religious prejudice asserted all this long ago. Perhaps now it is regarded as safe to

point out that the tale about Continental Sunday depravity is all myth, we shall hear a little less of it. We suspect, though, the old yarn will still be made to do useful service at Lord's Day Observance Society meetings, because it serves to bolster up that quaint pious fiction that Britain's greatness is the result of keeping the Sabbath Day holy.

A Methodist writer, after mentioning the suggestion that postal defacing marks should be used to incite, by means of a slogan, Americans to visit England, declared that slogans are mere parrot phrases. He adds, so the parrot is to become an international agent for good-will. Parrot methods, says he, are brainless methods. Parrots get something off by heart and say it over with so much iteration and reiteration that it takes hold with power beyond its importance. This good Methodist is, we think, doing the Church ill-service in condemning parrot-phrases. They have been a tremendous asset to all the churches in keeping the masses within the Christian fold. People have been so well drilled in such phrases as: "Back to Jesus," "Salvation through the blood of Christ," "God's love for man," "Christianity has never been tried," "Jesus was the ideal man," and so forth, that the phrases have become part of their mental make-up, and often persist after church-going has been done with. Why, we even find a good Rationalist, Mr. Arnold Bennett, assuring some newspaper readers that he had a tremendous admiration for the character of Jesus. Ecclesiastical parrot-phrases are blinkers that keep the unfortunate wearer looking only in one direction and blind him to all that the church does not wish him to see. And when the church is unable to fix its blinkers on the masses it will soon have to prepare for the Official Receiver. The church knows that well enough, and it never loses an opportunity of trotting out its tried and trusty slogans to gather in a little business for the old firm.

The same Methodist writer mentions the Revival scenes of his youth. We were set, he says, to sing one verse over and over again, to sing even one line over and over again; we were bid to hypnotise ourselves by rhythmic repetition. From this the reader can see how greatly Christian methods transcend those of the ignorant dancing dervish of Africa and of benighted Hindu fanatics. He will also get an inkling of how Gipsy Smith and other highly civilized gentlemen working the revival stunt get to business.

Dr. Cyril Burt has an article in *The Child* embodying the chief points of his address on the delinquent child to the British Association. His investigations convince him that crime in the young has no single universal cause, but results from a number of converging factors. He believes there is no such thing as a born criminal or a moral imbecile; morality is acquired, not inherited, and is the complete resultant of tradition, education, training, and development. The chief cause of crime among the young is defective home conditions and the lack of provisions for recreation. Most of the offences are committed during leisure hours, and the largest number are found where there are no parks or playing fields. Moral health, he declares, is closely associated with physical health poor health means poor control. The proper treatment therefore of the delinquent child is to provide wholesome outlets for his instinctive energies. Many childish acts now regarded as crimes are simply inherited modes of reaction that once had a biological value in the uncivilized world, but that now require suppression or education by parents and teachers. We notice Dr. Burt makes no mention of "original sin" and "temptation by the devil" which are the stock Christian explanations of the cause of evil-doing. This may be an oversight on his part. Or is it that the Church's explanation is a wrong one? Noting what the Doctor says about providing wholesome outlets for the child's instinctive energies, we are almost inclined to fancy that our Sabbatarian friends are doing a deal

of harm by closing the public parks on Sunday and prohibiting Sunday games and other wholesome amusement. But possibly we are mistaken; for we feel sure the Sabbatarian would never do what was harmful in order that good might result from it.

The *Weekly Dispatch* is publishing a series of articles on "The Great Secret—Immortality"—with the Bishop of Oxford leading off. The next article is announced to be by the Bishop of Chelmsford, so that it is apparently intended to keep the articles in safe hands. The Bishop of Oxford says something really sensible to begin with, as follows:—

When we look back over the history of the main speculations in these regions, certain very important features are noticeable in them all. The other world is always conceived as in an externally special relation to this; it is like a country abroad to which we go by travelling. Moreover, the details of the life there are always conceived in terms of this life, and vary in different times and places according to the various experiences of those who devise the mental pictures.

That is quite true, and is enough to set the Bishop on the road to discover how the belief in future life has been built up. But instead of seeing in this much a ground for dismissing the existence of a future life, he concludes that the beauty of Christianity is that it leaves the next world very vague as to its nature, we have to be content that we shall live in Christ.

But as a matter of fact the Christian religion is not so vague about the future life as the Bishop would have us believe. We are to have the same passions there that we have here. We shall experience pleasure and pain, love and hatred, etc., all of which argues the persistence of the same qualities that make up the individual here. And the difficulties in the way of believing a next world exactly like this one, are just as numerous and just as great as believing in the existence of exactly the same character there as here. Moreover, character has no meaning apart from an environment different from that to which character is at present related is an unthinkable possibility. The Bishop, after all, is not nearly so logical as the more primitive believers. He is simply less courageous and less logical in following his ideas to their logical conclusion.

How to Help.

There are thousands of men and women who have left the Churches and who do not know of the existence of this journal. Most of them would become subscribers if only its existence were brought to their notice.

We are unable to reach them through the ordinary channels of commercial advertising, and so must rely upon the willingness of our friends to help. This may be given in many ways:

By taking an extra copy and sending it to a likely acquaintance.

By getting your newsagent to take an extra copy and display it.

By lending your own copy to a friend after you have read it.

By leaving a copy in a train, tram or 'bus.

It is monstrous that after forty years of existence, and in spite of the labour of love given it by those responsible for its existence, the *Freethinker* should not yet be in a sound financial position. It can be done if all will help. The Paper and the Cause are worthy of all that each can do for them.

To Correspondents.

Those subscribers who receive their copy of the "Freethinker" in a GREEN WRAPPER will please take it that the renewal of their subscription is due. They will also oblige, if they do not want us to continue sending the paper, by notifying us to that effect.

"FREETHINKER" ENDOWMENT TRUST.—John Lauder, £1; C. Groom, £1 5s.; J. Wearing, 1s.

W. E. JARMAINE.—The British Israel absurdity, with its super-nonsense about the Pyramids, is a form of idiocy that defies common-sense. People who can believe that kind of nonsense are not likely to be affected by anything that could be said by us.

T. MORETON.—It is simply a begging of the question. The claim of the Church, as a Church, is that it possesses an authority over and above that of a mere Secular institution. If it has no supernatural warranty for its existence, it is of no greater importance, as an institution, than an ordinary club.

J. RAE.—Christian liars are the most reckless of all liars. Perhaps this is because there is so little to hold them in check. "Saladin," W. Stewart Ross, edited the *Agnostic Journal* till his death, and the story of his conversion is only another form of one of the hardest worked and the most popular lie in Christendom.

R. BELL.—Thanks for cutting. One cannot look to any of the political parties thinking of much else than votes. Politics is proving itself almost as good as religion in serving as a popular "dope."

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

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

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

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—

One year, 15s.; half year, 7s. 6d.; three months, 3s. 9d.

Sugar Plums.

Referring to our "Views" of last week we have been asked whether we are of opinion that Freethinkers ought to make a special effort to reply to the questions. Well, if every Freethinker in the country were to reply to the Questionnaire and the results were published, the number of people who have definitely rejected the Christian religion would give many something to think about. So, on the whole, we think it advisable that as many as can be should make their opinions known and their presence felt.

Judging from the selection of letters published by the *Daily News*, it looks, however, as though the usual game will be played, and everything done to foster the delusion that if not belonging to orthodox Christian Churches, the number of those who have definitely rejected Christianity are a negligible quantity. We wonder how long we shall have to wait before one of

our big dailies has the courage and the honesty to give its Freethinking correspondents the same publicity as it does to its Christian ones. And when it will publish in special articles reasoned views against Christianity as well as specious apologies for it? At present there is not a paper in the country that does not seriously mislead the people on this issue.

For this, as we have so often said, Freethinkers have themselves partly to blame. When they are more insistent in their claim to fair play, they will get a little more of it. And when they are less hesitant in expressing their opinions publicly there will be the greater likelihood of their being taken as a matter of course.

The following will doubtless interest many of our readers. It is from the notes of "Robin Goodfellow" in the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*:—

On June 19 last an article from the pen of Mr. John Rowell Waller appeared in our columns with the title "I Wonder Why." In that article the writer told of his association with the late G. W. Foote and his paper, the *Freethinker*, which our contributor understood to be defunct. Last week a newspaper arrived at the *Chronicle* office for Mr. Waller and was at once despatched to his private address. On opening the paper he was amazed to find it was the *Freethinker* of date February 21, 1926, with passages marked in red, and along the top of the front page was written, "I wonder why you said this paper was dead?" The present editor is Mr. Chapman Cohen, from whom the copy presumably came. The publication naturally stirred some strange thoughts in Mr. Waller's mind, and recalled the time when G. W. Foote was incarcerated in Holloway Gaol for conscience sake. Two of the articles quoted against Mr. Foote at the Mansion House were written by Mr. Waller. After twelve months, a vast concourse of sympathisers met Foote at the prison gates on his release and some time later, when on a lecturing tour of the provinces, a stirring scene took place in a northern theatre one Sunday afternoon when the curtain rose to a packed audience and disclosed G. W. Foote and John Rowell Waller with gripped hands before the footlights.

"Robin Goodfellow" is quite mistaken in thinking the copy of the *Freethinker* was sent by us. It probably came from one of our local readers, who wishes to correct the misstatement made by Mr. Waller. We hope that the statement about the spectacular raising of the curtain with Mr. Waller and Mr. Foote posed clasping hands is more accurate. But the *Freethinker* has a great many readers on Tyneside, and Mr. Waller might have exercised a little more care before dooming the *Freethinker* to extinction. It may be that Mr. Waller has not read the paper for some years, but it borders on egotism for Mr. Waller to assume that because he had ceased to read the paper it had, therefore, come to an end. None of us are quite so necessary to the existence of things as we are sometimes apt to think.

We hope that our Tyneside friends will see in this episode a reason for doing something to make the *Freethinker* better known than it is. The *Freethinker* is not dead, and there is no probability of its dying. It has far too many good friends for that to occur, and we do not hesitate to say that no greater disaster to the Freethought movement in this country could happen than the death of this journal. There is simply no other to take its place. The paper is not even dying. There is simply a constant struggle to keep things going, a struggle that might be quickly ended if all did what little it is well within their power to do.

Mr. George Whitehead concludes his Manchester campaign with two meetings to-day (September 5) at 3 and 7.30, in Stevenson Square. On Saturday (September 4) he will hold a meeting at the corner of Longworthy Road, Salford. Local friends will please note.

Leopardi.

AN APPRECIATION.

THERE is no need, in the case of Leopardi, to invoke that august tribunal, "the consensus of civilized opinion," which, indeed, he himself saw might return an adverse opinion, being composed largely of "those poor stupid philosophers who find comfort in the boundless growth of reason, and think that human happiness consists in the cognition of truth, when there is no other truth than nothingness—which would be madness according to nature (or common usage), and absolute and perfect wisdom according to reason." He agrees also that, "if we regulated our life in accordance with this nullity the world would come to an end, and we should justly be called mad....." Yet was this Leopardi so sane, so keenly and profoundly observant, so full of sweet reasonableness, so clear and convincing, so accurate and pure in his diction, so free from metaphysical mystifying; subtle yet logical, as easily comprehended by the plainest man as by the most learned philosopher, but more daringly admitting to himself the desolating ultimate truth; in his own words: "Tearing the veil from the masked and mysterious cruelty of human destiny." After reading him, the truth of his observations comes home to us in a thousand instances, with abundant corroboration of all our previous experience; not colouring that or this, general not particular, confident, satisfying even, in his utter and undiluted pessimism. He, himself, is the focus, if not the consensus, of all human experience. Understanding, not grudging, rejoicing in, envying, the illusions that make others happy. Not embittered either by his life-long physical suffering—over which the aristocracy of his genius towered supreme, that "great cerebral sponge" absorbing, assimilating, classifying all, rejecting only the baser elements of body and mind. To those who attributed his pessimism to his physical suffering he returned the answer: "Before dying I am about to protest against this invention of feebleness and vulgarity, and to beg my readers to employ themselves in attacking my observations and reasonings instead of accusing my maladies." That is the language and the spirit of the true aristocrat of letters. Shakespeare wrote to please himself, and others, and even so "touched all the shores of thought"; Leopardi more directly touched profounder depths; but even in his utter and incurable sadness, in his exposure of the nothingness of all things, some fierce joy would stir his gentle nature as in Poe's lines:—

Still this ebony bird beguiling
My sad fancy into smiling;

even that "vain curiosity" of the scholar surviving the *ne plus ultra* and certitude of life's despair. And yet the poet-pessimist, detesting his native Recanati, kept seeking more favoured climes and company in his beloved Italy.

Pisa pleased him with its airs and prospects; Florence welcomed and befriended him; he was feted in Bologna; Rome repelled him. According to the Romans, he says, "The crown of human knowledge.....the sole true science of man is Antiquarianism"; no one "applies the name of literature to anything but archæology." Describing Rome, he says:—

All the population of Rome would not fill the square of St. Peter.....these immense buildings, and these streets consequently interminable are so many spaces thrown between men, instead of being spaces that contain men. I do not see what beauty there can be in putting chess-men of the common size upon a chess-board as large as your square of the Madonna.....if men needed to live so at large

as they dwell in these palaces, and as they walk in these streets, squares, and churches, the globe would not suffice for the human race.

Of politics he speaks but once with the same gentle sarcasm:—

Considering all the efforts from Solon's time until now, to obtain the perfection of political systems and the happiness of peoples, I am somewhat inclined to laugh at this fury of calculations and of political and legislative fantasies; and I humbly ask whether the felicity of nations is possible without the felicity of individuals—these are condemned to unhappiness by nature—it seems to me that studies of the beautiful, affections, imaginations, illusions, avail more than aught else to comfort this unhappiness—certainly more useful than are all these most arid studies—but when will they attain their object? I should be very glad to be informed by one of our professors of the *Science of History*.

In his superb allegory, *The Story of the Human Race*, the gentle sage gives utterance to this illuminating thought—Mortals feeling themselves abandoned by Jove grew wicked, perhaps because "it is the nature of misery to harden and corrupt." "For they are altogether wrong," says Leopardi, "who think that human infelicity was first born from the iniquities of men and their offences against the gods. On the contrary, the ill-conduct of men first arose from nothing else but their calamities."

There is concentrated pessimism, a criterion of our civilization, and, withal, a touch of Pyrrhonism, in this single "Thought": "Nothing indicates more clearly that one has little wisdom and little philosophy than to desire that all things shall be wise and philosophical."

In a similar vein he complains: "Everything impassioned and eloquent wearies me, has in it a taint of mockery and ridiculous childishness." Religion Leopardi ignores—perhaps he cannot descend so far—or despises by implication with here and there an expressed contempt for priests; of theologians, he says: "It were easier to drag all the teeth out of their jaws than an opinion out of their heads."

His malady increases and his melancholy. "I have been much better," he writes, "in such a manner, however, that anyone falling into this, my better, would think himself dead." His translator finely says:—

We are tempted to accuse great Nature. She grudges the wood of the casket in bestowing a priceless jewel. She forges a blade of finest temper, then leaves it to rust in a broken sheath, while the world's battle must be fought out with flails and pitchforks. "Even Piety herself at so shameful a sight, cannot refrain from all upbraidings against the permitting stars."

Visiting the tomb of Tasso in Rome (where he wept) a meagre monument, Leopardi writes:—

One feels a sad and angry consolation in reflecting that this poverty is yet sufficient to interest and excite posterity, while the most superb mausoleums which Rome contains are regarded with complete indifference for the persons to whom they were erected—one does not even ask the name, or if one asks, it is not of the person but the monument.

Of the street leading to this spot he says:—

It is all bordered with buildings employed for manufactures and resounds with the noise of looms and other such machines, and with songs of women and other operatives at work. In a city idle, dissipated, irregular, as is a capital, it is pleasant to study the expression of reserved and orderly life occupied in useful trades.....simple and human..... express the characters and habits of persons whose life is based upon truth and not upon falsehood.....who

live by work, and not by intrigue, imposture, and deceit, like the greater part of this population.

What generous compatibility of great poet and common people!¹ In his *Story of the Human Race*, after all the efforts of the gods, men were still unhappy. Incensed at last by their ingratitude, Jove determined to punish them utterly, and to that end sent Truth among them, "whence followed all these lamentable effects which he had foreseen." But less relentless than the later Jehovah, this benevolent god allowed Love to come among men. Thereafter Love and Truth held divided empire among mortals. This Love, "like in name to the phantasm, so called, but in nature, virtue, and actions most unlike. The son of the Celestial Venus, while he stays,

takes up his abode in the amiable and tender hearts of generous and magnanimous persons, and diffuses therein, for the short period he remains, a strange and wonderful serenity, and fills them with affections so noble, and of such virtue and force, that they experience a sensation hitherto unknown to them, namely, a feeling of real beatitude, and not a mere semblance of it.

To make an end for the present, it is quite hopeless to quote adequately the story and the sayings of Count Giacomo Leopardi—a man of vast learning and immense suffering, whose smile (if he ever smiled) was sweet and ineffable—whose last words, like those of Goethe, was a complaint about the light: "I see here still less—open that window—let me see the light!"

It is a thousand pities this admirable translation by James Thomson, edited by Bertram Dobell, lovingly and intimately by both, is out of print. As said, it is a book to suit the simplest alike with the greatest. Some London publisher may come to the rescue of so precious a legacy of sense and taste and truth. *The Story of the Human Race* and *Parini's Discourse on Glory*, or the *Thoughts*, failing the complete volume, would each form an excellent and readable fragment of this perfect thinker and writer.

As to "this pessimism" one fears it is little understood by Emerson's little Statesmen philosophers and divines. It is not misanthropy; but sympathy with all that moves and breathes and feels; with a quick sense of the mockery of the skies, and the ultimate "nullity of all things." Pessimism is the "dominant thought," the persistent, insistent note with all the greatest writers of all times. Bertram Dobell suggests it might be necessary to "cherish belief in happiness even if never attained"; and that is but to base our lives upon an illusion—which, indeed, most people manage to do. But be it remarked, also, that those in whom all illusion is at an end can still contrive to live, and not only that, but produce the world's masterpieces, as witness the case of Leopardi.

In a review in the *Freethinker*, dated December 3 and 10, 1905, G. W. Foote refers to the above as "A book written by a great Italian poet who was also an Atheist, and translated by a great English poet who was also an Atheist, and edited by a most loyal friend who was also an Atheist." And it may be added, lovingly, if fragmentarily, referred to here by another who is also an Atheist.

ANDREW MILLAR.

A fool with a good memory is full of ideas and facts, but he cannot draw sound conclusions from them; everything turns upon that.—*Vauvenargues*.

¹ Compare the humble bust of Burns in Westminster Abbey.

The Entrusted Money.

(Matthew xxv. 11-30; Luke xix. 12-27).

THE TWO ACCOUNTS COMPARED.

I.

1. *The Common Details*.—1. Departure of a man for abroad. 2. Entrustment of money by the man to his servants for usury during his absence. 3. The proportionate increase of the entrusted money by the first two servants. 4. The neglect of the third servant to increase what he had received. 5. The reckoning of the master with his servants upon his return. 6. The ample reward of the first two servants. 7. The excuse of the third servant as thus reported by the respective evangelists:—

I know that thou art a hard man, reaping when thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter: and I was afraid.	I feared thee because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layest not down and reapest that thou didst not sow.
---	--

8. The reply of the master that, knowing this, the man should have put the money into banking transactions for him to have received it with interest on coming back. 9. The order of the master to take the money from the unprofitable servant and to give it unto the one who had gained the most with the sum entrusted to his management. 10. The observation of the master that he who hath something shall have more; whilst he who hath nothing shall loose even this.

2. *The Principal Differences*.—1. One master is a private man; the other, a nobleman. 2. The first has three servants; the second, ten servants. The three have: five talents, two talents, and one talent respectively; the ten have one pound each. 4.¹ The first account describes the conduct of the servants before describing the reckoning, and makes them relate it at the reckoning; the second account takes the last course only. 5. The first two servants with the talents double them; the first two with the pounds increase them severally by ten pounds and five pounds. 6. The unprofitable servant with the talent hides it "in the earth"; the one with the pound keeps it "laid up in a napkin." 7. The reward of the talent holders is to enter into "the joy" of their lord; but that of the pound holders is to rule respectively over ten and five cities. 8. The punishment of the unprofitable servant is, in the first account, to lose his talent and to be cast into "the outer darkness"; but in the second account only to lose his pound.

Besides these differences, which are relative, there is one that is absolute, for the whole episode of the nobleman's departure "to receive a kingdom," the refusal of "his citizens" to accept his authority, and his order to slay these "enemies," exist only in the second version of the parable.

II.

THE STORY AND ITS MEANING.

1. *The Matthaean Version*.—This is remarkable for its neatness and smoothness; and its almost tedious

¹ According to the Revisers, a talent was worth £187 10s.; a pound (or mina) £3 2s. 6d. Thus he with the talents had £1,500 increased to £2,812 10s.; whilst he with the pounds had £31 5s., increased to £56 5s. Talent = £187 10s.; one servant receives 5, another 2, and another 1 = 8. £187 10s. by 8 = £1,500. One servant renders 10, another 4, and another 1 = 15. £187 10s. by 15 = £2,812 10s. Pound = £3 2s. 6d. Each of the ten servants receives 1 = 10. £3 2s. 6d. by 10 = £31 5s. One servant renders 11, another 6, and another 1 (the rest nothing) = 18. £3 2s. 6d. by 18 = £56 5s. The low return of the pounds arises from the fact that 7 of the 10 servants render no account, which involves a deficit of £21 17s. 8d. on the sum entrusted.

completeness. The terrible doom of the unprofitable servant is in harmony with the sinister character that Matthew's work displays in various parts, such as the oft repeated reference to "the outer darkness" and "the weeping and gnashing of teeth." The lesson taught is the importance of using capabilities to their fullest extent during the absence of Jesus Christ in order to get a proportionate reward from Him when He comes to hold His reckoning at the end of time.

2. *The Lucan Version.*—At the beginning the servants are called "ten servants"; but later on, when their master holds the reckoning, "the first" comes and then "the second," and last of all "the other."² This shows that three and not ten was the real number of the servants, for by "the other" is plainly intended "the remaining one." The supposition that the word "ten" entered the text through the mistake of a copyist, must be discarded, because the "ten servants" receive "ten pounds," *i.e.* every man a pound; and the first one having with his pound gained "ten pounds more," receives authority over "ten cities." Nevertheless, the presence of only three persons at the reckoning, and the nature of the conversation between the last servant and the master, are so clearly in agreement with Matthew's version that it is impossible to doubt that the parable was known to Luke under the form in which Matthew knew it. The only question is, did Luke take it from Matthew? Now, Luke's version seems to indicate his acquaintance not only with Matthew's version, but with other parts of Matthew's work. For, whilst Matthew calls the entruster of the money "a man," Luke calls him "a certain nobleman," about "to receive a kingdom," and in the parable of the *Rejected Invitations*, whilst Matthew lets "a certain King" give the feast, Luke makes "a certain man" give it.

Again, as Matthew, in the *Rejected Invitations*, lets "the King" slay those who refuse to come to his feast, Luke, in the *Entrusted Money*, makes "the King" slay those who refuse to become his subjects. Thus, what Matthew has in excess of Luke as regards the *Invitations*, Luke has in excess of Matthew as regards the *Money*. Finally, the word "ten" which in the present parable Luke applies only to persons, is thus used by Matthew in the parable which he puts immediately before this one. There is no difficulty in seeing why Luke altered the parable of the *Entrusted Money*. He presents it with the observation that it was intended to disillusion those who were expecting the speedy appearance of the Messianic Kingdom. This is certainly not the case with Matthew's version, for there the sole lesson is that of zeal and fidelity in the use of capabilities, and the delay of the second advent is referred to only by the casual remark that the lord of the servants came back "after a long time." But Luke, retaining the principal elements of the old story and all the old moral, adapted the parable to his design by incorporating therewith a new moral. This is the episode of the nobleman departing to receive a kingdom, and being rejected by those whom he had left behind in the hope of their becoming his future subjects. The exigencies of the new story necessitated changes in the old. Thus the servants were increased from three to ten to make them look more like a royal staff; and their gains were made larger to give them the opportunity of ruling over a respectable number of cities. But the further alterations which these rendered necessary were not made, and there was a speedy return to the details

of the original parable. Then, at the very end a connection was forged with the added incident by letting "the king" command the slaughter of those who had rejected his authority. Luke, who frequently shows acquaintance with Josephus, evidently borrowed from him the episode of the king. For Josephus relates that Archelaus, having inherited the kingdom of his father, went to Rome to have this inheritance confirmed by the emperor, and that he obtained his wish in spite of an embassy sent to oppose it by his rebellious subjects.³

III.

AUTHENTICITY.

In both versions of the parable, Jesus is the person who entrusts the money to His servants and then goes abroad. Now, according to various references in the Gospels, Jesus, after taking Himself for the Messiah, came to believe that He would die, and go to heaven, and be sent back to earth with an army of angels to establish the heavenly kingdom. But He evidently did not think that much time would elapse between His departure and return, for when telling His apostles to flee from city to city before the persecution, destined to be their lot, He added: "Verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come" (Matthew x. 23).

This is certainly not the view expressed in the parable of the *Entrusted Money*, for the Matthaean version by incidental touches, and the Lucan version by essential features, plainly teach that Jesus departed to stay away for a good while; whereas He Himself foretold His return as an event of the near future. The anxiety caused by the protracted delay of the second advent, would inevitably occasion attempts to show that Jesus had foreseen and predicted His long absence. The fact that the present parable in both its forms evinces such an attempt is a strong argument against its authenticity. In the case of the Lucan version there is a no less striking anachronism. For there the king, having received the kingdom, exterminates those who had refused his sovereignty. Here the kingdom is the heavenly one designed to include both Jews and Gentiles; whilst those who refused and were exterminated are the Jews, who, as a nation, declined to acknowledge Jesus for their lord, and were, in consequence, destroyed by the Romans under divine instigation. Again, it is a very remarkable thing, that the talents and the pounds, which both represent capabilities, are bestowed by the person who represents the Messiah. For this dignitary is never credited with the power to do anything of that kind. Paul, however, who believed that Jesus through His resurrection attained special powers, says: "But unto each of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore He saith, when He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (Ephesians iv. 7-8).

Here the apostle quotes the eighteenth verse of the sixty-eighth Psalm; but he quotes it falsely to suit his purpose, the Hebrew and the Septuagint reading as follows:—

Thou hast ascended on high,	Having ascended on high,
thou hast led thy captivity captive;	thou has led captivity captive;
and thou hast received gifts among men.	and received gifts in human fashion among men.

Moreover, the context on both sides proves that the personage thus referred to is the Lord God, and not the Messiah.

² Both our versions have "another" in the text, but the Revised adds "the other" in the margin, as being the true rendering of the Greek, which, according to Dr. Nestle's text is *Ho heteros*, "the other."

³ *Ant.* xvii. 11.

The truth is that as an excuse for the failure of Jesus to appear in the flesh it came to be alleged that He had arrived in the spirit; and that He was communicating spiritual gifts to his elect. Afterwards a distinction was made between Jesus and the Spirit; and it was said that Jesus sent the Spirit to comfort the elect during His own absence. Therefore, when the parable of the *Entrusted Money* teaches that one who is Jesus gives capabilities to his servants, it affords further evidence in proof of his unauthenticity.

Finally the parable in both its forms is quite out of harmony with the moral discernment, and the religious insight which Jesus is said to have possessed; and which he certainly displays in many of his alleged utterances. The profitable servants are commended and rewarded by their master for increasing his wealth, although they did this by extorting interest which, according to the first authority, was double; and, according to the second, ten times the amount of the capital. The unprofitable servant excuses himself to his master on the plea that he was afraid, knowing him to be severe and unjust. The master, instead of indignantly repudiating this character, fully admits it, and even makes it the reason why the man should have acted as the others did. The chief term of reproach offered by the servant and accepted by his master varies in the two reports. Matthew has *skeleros* and Luke *austeros*. Neither word occurs again in the New Testament with respect to persons; but the first sometimes with respect to things. Both have much the same meaning. Matthew's term is used in the Septuagint to describe the character of Nabal;⁴ and Luke's to describe the conduct of Nicanor.⁵

On each of these occasions our versions have "churlish" as the equivalent. In both forms of the parable Jesus is evidently intended to be represented by the master. If he spoke either of them, it is passing strange that he should have attributed to himself such repulsive qualities. Still, if anyone thinks it worth while to claim Jesus as the author of the parable, he may contend that it existed in a form more primitive than that of Matthew, which itself is more primitive than that of Luke. There no reference would be made to the departure of the master, but he might be represented as an absentee landlord, who finally appeared to make a reckoning with his stewards. In that case he would be the Almighty Himself, the natural giver of all good gifts. But this explanation succumbs to the fact that Jesus, according to all accounts, believed that the Messiah, and not the Almighty, would execute the final judgment. Moreover, the bad character so cynically attributed to the Messiah in the existing versions would be even more shocking if attributed to the Almighty in the original version. I think we may acquit Jesus of this atrocity.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

PHILOSOPHY.

Here's to Solomon and David
And their merry, merry lives,
With their many, many lady friends
And many, many wives.
But when old age came creeping,
With its many, many qualms,
Solomon wrote the proverbs
And David wrote the Psalms.

Religion is the expansive lie of temporary warmth.—
T. E. Hulme.

⁴ 1 Sam. xxv. 3.

⁵ 2 Maccabees xiv. 30.

Correspondence.

THE "FREETHINKER."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—As a regular reader of the *Freethinker* for over forty years it should be time I offered my congratulations on the able, efficient, and convincing articles which appear, week by week and year by year, in its columns. One always feels, when cutting the leaves, they are opening out the treasures of deep thought, the honest research of men and women, for truth. The *Freethinker*, since its inception, has had an arduous struggle, but it has weathered all the difficulties and organized opposition of its enemies, which have been legion.

The *Freethinker* has been most fortunate in connection with "Editorship." The late G. W. Foote and the present one, Mr. Chapman Cohen, have, by sheer ability and unremitting energy, carried aloft the flag which stands for liberty of thought. One cannot know to the full extent what these weekly messages mean to the people. How many tens of thousands (like myself) have had their minds cleared of superstition and become the happier, brighter, and better members of society.

There are no fortunes or "Higher Calls" in the movement. The love of the work and knowledge of its advancement is its own reward. Many of the old writers one knew have passed, but an article by our old friend, Mr. A. B. Moss, in a recent issue, entitled "Sunday by the Seaside," had special interest for me. His account of his own Sunday was almost the same as mine, and it brought recollections of a happy day at Ramsgate. Like him, I looked for no "evangelist." I heard the band, saw Mr. Moss at John Henry's concert on West Cliff, took something on "St. Paul's" advice, and then, like your correspondent, went home to watch the storm. It was the pleasant feeling engendered by reading his article that induced me to pen these few lines.

With best wishes for the future of Freethought.

F. GOODWIN.

AN APPEAL.

SIR,—May I be permitted, through the medium of your journal, to appeal to Freethinkers, as Rationalists, to abstain from unnecessary interruptions at various religious meetings in the London parks? From my own observations it is owing to these questions that our opponents are able to obtain any audience at all, and it would be to our advantage if they would refrain from doing so.

I have also noticed that when our own lecturers are answering the questions of our opponents that Freethinkers will take up the position of the speaker by starting discussions in the audience which makes it very hard for the man on the platform to deal with them, and therefore likely to create a disturbance at the meeting.

As Freethinkers, we must show more toleration. I therefore suggest that it is up to us to look at the subject from our point of view.

I am quite aware how hard it is to persuade some folk to listen, one having already been prejudiced in favour of some dogma or other, but seeing the progress Freethought has made during the last decade, I have no hesitation in stating that we may look forward in the near future to a complete change in the mentality of the public in the idea of belief in God.

B. A. LE MAINE,
Hon. Secretary,

The Non-Political Metropolitan Secular Society,
Bryanston Street, Marble Arch, W.

THE FIRST SUNDAY.

"And is my child smart?" said the proud mother.
"He knows all about the Bible. Tell the man, Junior, how many days the earth was made in."

"God made the heaven and earth in six days," was the child's reply.

"And what happened on the seventh?" enquired the mother.

"He was arrested," came the answer.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON AUGUST 26, 1926.

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

Minutes of last meeting were read and confirmed. Pass Book produced and examined.

New members were received for Leeds, South London, and the Parent Society.

Mr. Whitehead's activities were reported and a suggestion as to a deviation from the route mapped out was considered. It was finally resolved that the present arrangements be adhered to.

Mr. Coles reported that the efforts to find a hall for lectures in South London had, so far, been unsuccessful, and a great regret was expressed that the difficulty of obtaining halls should so hamper the work of the Society both in London and the provinces.

The serious illness of the Secretary was formally reported, and pleasure expressed that she was now well advanced towards convalescence.

The meeting then closed.

K. B. KOUGH,
Asst. Secretary.

Mr. G. Whitehead's Mission.

Mr. Whitehead writes: "During the second week's mission at Bolton determined efforts were made by various religious bigots to prevent our meetings on the Saturday and Sunday. The pitches, accordingly, were monopolised for many hours before the time of the meetings by fanatics, some of whom read the Bible aloud for hours to the empty square to the amazement of the passers-by. So, on the Saturday evening I had to be satisfied with a quarter of an hour's vigorous denunciation of such tactics, while on the Sunday, we had a capital meeting at Blackburn. The other five meetings were held in Bolton, and were highly successful. We had won considerable support and sympathy and the bigotry displayed by our opponents has evoked much adverse comment, even from nominal Christians. I cannot praise too highly the valuable assistance rendered by Messrs. Sisson and Partington during the whole fortnight, on occasions which were often very trying." On September 2, 3 and 4, Mr. Whitehead will lecture at Langworthy Road, Salford, Manchester; September 5, afternoon and evening, Stevenson Square. During the week commencing September 6, Mr. Whitehead will lecture in the Market Square, Ashton-under-Lyne.

E. M. V.

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SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, S. K. Ratcliffe, "The Religion of Bernard Shaw."

OUTDOOR.

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

Bandstand): 6.15, Mr. F. P. Corrigan, a Lecture.

NON-POLITICAL METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Hyde Park): Every Tuesday and Thursday at 7.30; Sunday at 11, 3.30, and 6.30; Lecturers—Messrs. Hart, Howell Smith, B.A., Hyatt, Le Maine, and Saphin.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Regent's Park, near the Fountain): 6, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, a Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Brockwell Park): 3 and 6, Mr. F. P. Corrigan will lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (outside the Technical Institute, Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. H. C. White, a Lecture.

COUNTRY.

OUTDOOR.

LEEDS BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Square): 7.30, Mr. L. Davis, "Religion and Slavery."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S.—Mr. G. Whitehead's Mission, August 30 to September 5. Meetings commence at 7.30.

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