

THE CHRISTIAN MYTH.

The

FREETHINKER

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Views and Opinions.

The Christian Myth.

In the *Evening News* for January 20, Canon Storr, of Westminster, deals with what he calls a challenge to the Churches. The challenge is the publication of Dr. Brandes' work on *Jesus a Myth*, a book which states the not at all new theory that the Jesus of the New Testament is a wholly fictitious character of no other, and no greater, historical reality than that of the many saviour gods the world has known. It is something to find a prominent and recognised spokesman of the Church, such as Canon Storr, dealing with the topic in the *Evening News*; and the pleasure would be wholly unalloyed if the policy of the British Press permitted any straightforward criticism of Christianity to appear in its columns. As it is, the game of allowing only one side to be heard is so well understood by our newspapers that it appears to be accepted as a matter of course, and no one seems to think it at all wrong. Where religion is concerned our newspapers are among the most cowardly in the world, and the policy of suppression is the worse because it is pursued under the cloak of concern for morality and burning desire for truth and justice. And that gives to Canon Storr a great advantage. He is writing for readers who, in the main, will hear only one side of the case. The ignorance of the average Christian concerning the nature and origin of his religious beliefs is colossal; and he remains undisturbed because no one is permitted to enlighten him. In the hey-day of its power the Christian Church found it convenient to burn the one who criticised its teaching. But the flames were as likely to serve as a beacon as they were to act as a warning. The policy of securing an avowedly open platform, and then excluding one side altogether, promised far greater safety. For perpetuating ignorance—the Mother of Devotion—no better plan could be devised. The military method of creating a desert and calling it peace is paralleled

by the Christian policy of refusing the opposition a hearing and then assuming its non-existence.

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A Miraculous Silence.

I do not observe that anything Canon Storr has written by way of a defence of Christianity—when one observes the conditions of its publication—is likely to disturb that ignorance. For example, Canon Storr says:—

There are few people who are not utterly obsessed, who will deny that Jesus was a real historical personage. . . It is just the strength of the evidence for the historical Jesus which marks the difference between Christianity and the cults of Adonis, Attis, and the like. . . Christianity is rooted in history. Unless such a man as Jesus existed you cannot explain satisfactorily the existence of the Christian Church.

What is this apparently conclusive evidence for the historical Jesus? We will give the Christian advocate all he asks for; that is, we will assume that all the testimonies to the actual existence of Jesus are quite genuine, and then see what they are worth. The average Christian reader, when he hears talk about “evidence,” thinks of it as adequate in both quantity and quality. Remember, we are not dealing with an ordinary individual, a mere teacher of morals or philosophy, whose name might well have been unknown outside his own circle, and whose fame grew up after his death as the result of a series of lucky accidents. We are dealing with one whose whole existence, from conception to death, challenged the attention of the whole world. He was miraculously conceived, he performed miracles and wonders, he made the blind see, and raised the dead from the grave, he was killed amid a series of natural convulsions, which do not occur down a back street, and, after his death, was raised from the dead, and spoke to those who knew him. Such a life and death must have challenged the widest possible notice. And yet, if all the relevant references to Jesus were admitted to be beyond question, instead of every one of them being open to suspicion, they would not fill a single page of the *Freethinker*. How does Canon Storr account for that? Will he plead that the events narrated of Jesus were such commonplace things in those days, were so familiar to the people, that no one noticed their association with Jesus more than we in this country would notice a rainy day? To admit that is to admit their mythological nature. And the only alternative hypothesis is that we are actually dealing with mythology and not with historic fact.

* * *

The Mythical Christ.

Now, I do not put it forward as a theory to be investigated that probably the Jesus Christ of the

New Testament never existed. I say definitely and categorically that I know he did not exist. The legitimacy of this is only ignored because of the confusion set up by theologians when dealing with Jesus. Canon Storr speaks of the Church as having been built upon the perfect figure of Jesus. The Christian Church is built upon nothing of the kind; and, so far as it is concerned, it will not benefit it in the least to prove that, once upon a time, there lived a very, very good man, who taught some very, very good morals, and that certain myths gathered round this figure. It is the historic actuality of the myth upon which the Church depends. It is not the good man Christianity requires, but the incarnate God. It is the miraculously conceived, miracle working, resurrected God upon which Christianity is founded. And there is no greater need to prove that this kind of being did not exist than there is to prove that Adonis, or Osiris, or Beelzebub never existed. Christians might realize this if their preachers dealt fairly with them. But they do not. They put forward the reasonableness of belief in the existence of the human Jesus, prate about the moral grandeur of Jesus (which I am certainly far from admitting), and then quietly substitute the mythological Christ. But the good man Jesus is not enough for the Church; and the mythological Christ is a scientific absurdity. Christianity falls between the useless man and the impossible God.

* * *

Concealing the Truth.

Canon Storr's way of putting the case does not disturb the placid ignorance in which the mass of the Christian world lives. I do not say that it is intentional, but his writing certainly gives the general reader no conception whatever of the strength of the case for the purely mythological character of the figure of Jesus. There is no mention of the volume of evidence for the existence of a Jesus sect before the New Testament; or for the fact that every one of the characteristics of the Gospel Christ is to be found in connection with other saviour gods, for whom no reality is claimed; nor for the worship of the mother-goddess and child, which existed round the Mediterranean long before the Christian era; nor of the general identity of Christian practices with those of pre-Christian cults. Had he indicated these things some of his readers might have realized that the real problem before scientific thinkers is, not that of determining how the New Testament story could exist in the absence of an historical character, but simply that of their determining the precise sociological and psychological conditions which brought a number of widespread myths to a focus in what became known to the world as Christianity. For, if the Christian laymen were actually acquainted with the fact that these Christian stories, right from the miraculous birth to the slain Saviour God and his resurrection, were widely-held religious doctrines long before Christianity was heard of, it would be too much to expect them to believe that, although they had figured for centuries as myths, they were suddenly re-enacted as historic fact in the person of Jesus, and that hardly anyone took notice of the remarkable occurrence. Christian credulity is capable of much, but would hardly rise to this. The early Christians got over this difficulty by asserting that the devil, in order to discredit the Christian mysteries, copied them in advance. But I do not think that Canon Storr would suggest this theory to the readers of the *Evening News*. It is true he admits that certain mythological conceptions may have crept into Christianity. But they did not

creep in; they were there from the first; and, if they are eliminated, what is there left? Nothing but the mouther of moral platitudes and homely maxims. And what kind of world religion can one build upon that?

* * *

The Real Issue.

Canon Storr does not appear to understand the Freethinker's case at all. He presents it as consisting in the belief that at a given time a certain number of people sat down, elaborated a mythology, and then fixed it upon some alleged, or real historic character. That view is quite wrong. The Freethinker's case is that the incidents which go to make up the New Testament story were already existent as part and parcel of world-wide mythologies; that a conjunction of political and other conditions brought these rival cults into competition, and finally synthesised them into the system known to the world as Christianity. The early Christians neither asked for nor received any evidence for the truth of their doctrines; evidence, that is, such as moderns would ask for. The doctrines were already believed in; and, at most, it meant the substitution of one name for another, with perhaps a slight modification of doctrine, but without the least change of mental attitude. The historical and legal enquiry arose later, and then the Church met it with its weapons of suppression, falsification, and invention. Emphatically, it is not for us to-day to discuss whether a man was born of a virgin, and was raised from the dead. We know that these things never occurred. It is an insult to civilized intelligence to ask that such an issue shall be discussed. The question is not historical but psychological, an understanding of the mental states that give such beliefs vitality. And I am not convinced that we need go back many centuries for an answer to that question. When we find Canon Storr's own Church rent in twain over the question of how far, and in what sense, the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ is present in a mixture of flour and water once it has had an incantation mumbled over it by a Christian priest, I do not think we need travel far afield to find an answer to the psychological question. Make that type of mind commoner than it is, saturate the intellectual atmosphere with credulity, and eliminate scientific knowledge, multiply superstition a thousand fold, diminish scientific criticism to almost vanishing point, picture a society in which the question is, not whether a man shall accept superstition, but only which form of it he shall embrace, and we need not wonder at the ready acceptance and rapid spread of a mythology so gross that, to-day, even its paid professors hesitate to proclaim it openly.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The City.

WE'VE passed the mighty statue—Liberty,
With towering light and looking o'er the foam,
Guiding the stranger to a New World home,
And calling to a vast posterity ;
Sceptre and crown are cash and industry,
And cast off Empires pledge their credit here ;
But berthed at last, how glorious doth appear
Neath moon and stars the offspring of the sea :
She looks a fairy city overgrown,
Seeking the heavens with her halls of light.
And is the glory but a thing o'erblown,
And dazzling splendour but the veil of night
That hides the darker day? There is a gate,
And road to ruin through a proud estate!

W. J. LAMB.

"Behold He Prayeth."

THOSE words occur in Acts ix., 11, and are employed as the text of a sermon by the Rev. Dr. Richard Roberts, published in the *Christian World Pulpit* of January 20. Dr. Roberts, though residing in Canada, is exceedingly well known in London Welsh and English Presbyterian Churches. We are not informed where the discourse before us was delivered. The text refers to the apostle Paul immediately after his sudden conversion from Judaism to Christianity on his way to Damascus on a mission of persecution. Before leaving Jerusalem he had gone to the high priest, "breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," to ask him for letters which would authorize him to seize any followers of the Way and take them bound to Jerusalem; but suddenly as he drew near Damascus, "there shone round about him a light out of heaven. And he fell upon the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Astounded, he asked who the speaker was, and the answer came, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." He was blinded by the vision, and had to be led to the famous city, where the Lord called Ananias and said to him, "Arise and go to the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus, for behold, he prayeth." How terribly startled and disappointed the Jews of Damascus must have been when they realized that their illustrious champion had, in the twinkle of an eye, turned completely round and become their enemy. It was a distressing and joy-killing discovery. Already a Christian disciple, Ananias, found him praying possibly to the very Jesus he had officially come out to curse. Such is the story of the transformation of an arch enemy of the Cross into its most loyal and fanatical friend and supporter, and whether historically true or not, it is intensely interesting.

"Behold he prayeth." To whom did he pray and what for? A few days previously any prayer of his would have been addressed to Jehovah, the Jewish Deity; but for a few hours or days he had repudiated his old faith and adopted the new, though as yet he perceived not the significance of the change. To whom did he pray? Dr. Roberts' answer is somewhat enigmatical. He says:—

Not, we may imagine, to the God of the Scribes and Pharisees, who had led him out on this false trail and landed him in this slough of despond. In such a pass most of us would be disposed to deny God or to defy him. But not this man. For behold, he prayeth—praying for an unknown good to an unknown God. Here is bare, naked prayer, prayer reduced to its elements. After all, as I heard a friend of mine once say, when a man is lost in a wood, he does not want to be sure there is someone there before he cries out; he cries out to see if there be anyone there. You may pray even before you believe in God. You may have prayed in the hope that there may be a helper. You may cry out into the dark to enquire if it be inhabited; and presently, like Saul, you hear that it is.

We neither pray nor believe in the efficacy of prayer, because after many years of sincere and continuous praying our experience certified that there was no one there who could either answer or even hear. We have heard and read much about answers to prayer, but we have never come across a single instance in which the evidence of the reality of the Divine intervention was anything like adequately convincing. In his book, *Knowing God for Certain*, the Rev. F. C. Spurr says that there is indelibly

written in his own life, not one nor two, but a hundred answers to prayer of the most surprising kind; but those "answers," in so far as he supplies details about them, bear no mark whatever of any supernatural action. We maintain from deepest conviction that no prayer whatever has ever been supernaturally answered. Dr. Roberts is not quite as dogmatic as Mr. Spurr, and yet even his belief in the importance of prayer is not justified by undoubted facts. He is persuaded that the cry of hope against hope is the most significant thing about a man. Then he adds:—

Put him out in the wilderness; strip him of love and friends; leave him unsheltered from the storm—leave him there in his unclothed elementary manhood. And behold he prayeth. Not a prayer-meeting prayer, to be sure, not a pat-like collect. None the less he prayeth, though he knows not what he should pray for or to whom. It does not, I sorrowfully grant you, always happen so. For a man may in that critical passage shut himself up with himself and perish. But that man is sick, suffering from shortness of life and of life's most precious stay, hope; hope, the last to fail of all life's supports, the last of its candles to go out. And then comes utter tragedy—the dark room of the madman, the dark deed of the suicide—pitiful folk whom we leave in troubled silence to the wide mercy of God.

Most of that passage is wholly false and perilously misleading. We know both by personal experience and observation, as well as by countless testimonies, that the end of a prayerless man in trouble is not at all the one portrayed by Dr. Roberts. There are thousands of people who, when in the valley of desolation, amid briars and thistles, and all sorts of wearisome and painful obstructions, instead of losing their hearts in despair, bravely fight their way through and out, and ultimately succeed. They have neither prayed nor felt the need of prayer. They fall back upon their own resources, convinced that these are all sufficient for all life's requirements. Their hope never goes out, but it is exclusively an earthly hope, and its objects are all confined to this world, and those who are guided by it in conjunction with all the other forces of their nature, never get seriously astray.

Dr. Roberts goes out of his way to eulogize prayer. He even claims that "he who cannot pray is, and he who will not pray becomes, by so much less, a whole man," but we denounce that sentiment as essentially contrary to and destructive of the highest interests of mankind. Dr. Roberts ignores and practically denies the value of self-reliance and self-expression. According to him man can do nothing of real worth without the help of God in answer to prayer; but, according to the true philosophy of life, trust in God tends to a weakening of human efforts for self-development and healthy growth. He quotes from one of Whitman's poems in which he praises cattle for their lack of the sense of sin:—

They do not sweat and whine about their condition . . .
They do not lie in the dark and weep for their sins.
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God.

Whitman despised people who went through life confessing their inherited depravity and their natural liability to eternal damnation. He was a consistent and thorough-going Secularist. The human wings in which our preacher believes and rejoices are purely imaginary things, on which Christians rely in vain. Dr. Roberts descends to sarcasm, and says: "No doubt we should have a quiet life, back in the meadow, eating grass with Nebuchadnezzar and the cattle. There have been men who have cut the knot in that way, have chosen the life of sense and

things, renouncing their high inheritance." But that is essentially a false conception of life without prayer. Is that the type of life so sweetly sung by Shelley, Keats, Swinburne, and Meredith? They did not regard prayer as one of man's prime necessities, nor did they advocate a low life of sense and things. They were intellectual giants, who gloried in the study of Nature and its insurgent son, man, and who saw in human life the highest and best product of evolution. Our only sphere of activity is the world in which we live, and the highest activity of which we are capable is that which makes for the elevation and nobility of the species to which we belong.

J. T. LLOYD.

Bunkum About Burns.

Granted the ship comes into harbour with shrouds and tackle damaged, the pilot is blameworthy, but to know how blameworthy, tell us first whether his voyage has been round the globe, or only to Ramsgate and the Isle of Dogs.—*Thomas Carlyle.*

MORE nonsense has been uttered concerning Robert Burns than any other poet; with the possible exceptions of Shakespeare and Shelley. Admittedly Scotland's greatest poet, he has been subjected to extreme adulation from his countrymen. Had he been a lesser genius than he was, this fulsome and indiscriminating praise would have exposed his name to derision and contempt.

Burns was a Freethinker, and the majority of his countrymen have been Christians. Oceans of Christian cant have been poured over the poet until many thousands of unsophisticated people imagine that Burns was a Presbyterian who, in his leisure moments, trod the primrose path of dalliance. Yet Burns's heresy was "four square to all the winds that blow," did men but wish to see it. Like Paine and Voltaire, he was a Deist. Of other religion, save what flowed from the mildest form of Theism, he scarcely showed a trace. In truth, one can scarcely dignify it by calling it a creed at all. It was mainly a name for a particular mood of sentimentalism; the expression of a state of indefinite aspiration. The Holy Willies of Orthodoxy have, as usual, made the basest uses of this emotionalism; but Christians cannot read Burns's poetry attentively without unloosening the shackles of their gloomy faith.

David Hume's young Freethinking contemporary did not merely express his dissent from Calvinism; he struck at the heart of the Christian superstition. Seeing quite clearly that priests traded on fear, he sounded a true note when he said, scornfully:—

The fear o' hell's a hangman's whip
To laud the wretch in order.

How he lashes the rigidly righteous:—

Sae pious and sae holy,
Y've nought to do but mark and tell
Your naeboor's faults and folly.

And again:—

Learn three-mile prayers, and half-mile graces,
Wi' weel-spread looves, and lang, wry faces,
Grunt up a solemn, lengthened groan,
And damn all parties but your own,
I'll warrant then ye'er nae deceiver,
A steady, sturdy, staunch believer.

Burns was a daring iconoclast, and he never hesitated at making a frontal attack:—

D'yrmples mild, D'yrmples mild, tho' your hearts' like a child,
And your life like the new-driven snow,
Yet that winna save ye, auld Satan must have ye
For preaching that three's aye an' twa.

He saw through the "Religion of Love"; and the "merciful God" of the Christians excites his derision and indignation:—

O Thou wha in the Heavens dost dwell,
Wha, as it pleases best Thyself
Sends aye to heaven and ten to hell,
A' for Thy glory,
And no for any guid or ill
They've done afore Thee.

The attentive reader will note the undisguised scorn in these quotations. It is characteristic of the man. The noblest quality in Burns's famous poems is the eternal quality of honest indignation. It comes always with no veil of invention; it is blunt, simple as daily speech; the man himself talking before us. It is this quality that makes his "Jolly Beggars," a poem which stands alone in literature; not only unmatched, but unmatched. The beggars are not merely rebels; for them the laws and conventions have no existence. And so with Robert Burns himself. He rises above the network of priestly authority like a skylark. Every Freethinker will say of him what warm-hearted Burns himself said in his epitaph on his friend: "With such as he, where'er he be, may I be saved or damned."

Like all pioneers, Burns was so much alone. Remember, he was a labourer; and not a scholar like David Hume, enjoying the society of other learned men. So early was Burns in the field that he could do little more than anticipate Carlyle's "exodus from Houndsditch"; or his caustic apostrophe to the figure of Christ, "Eh, man, ye've had your day." But what he did was sufficient for his generation. He fought at fearful odds; for his heresies ran counter to the Blasphemy Laws; and his ardent Republicanism might easily have caused his transportation to Botany Bay. Burns has suffered grievously at the hands of hiccoughing Highlanders, and of maudlin ministers of religion; but professed critics might well give the corpses of defunct falsehoods decent burial.

The real Burns is not the popular Burns of the Scottish manse and drawing-room. When the peasant-poet was received by the "unco-guid" aristocracy of Edinburgh, he was out of his element; and both parties knew it. The well-dressed company that professed to admire him, and drank the poet's health, belonged to a very different world to that of the poet. In spite of all the glib phrase-making of the critics, there was little in common between the rich patrons and the peasant-poet. The insuperable barriers between Burns, the rare genius, and his stupid, if well-meaning patrons, is not got rid of by pretending that they do not exist. Oliver Wendell Holmes spoke sense when he expressed surprise that puritanical Caledonia could take Robert Burns to her straight-laced bosom without breaking her stays.

Scotch critics declare that Burns depends upon dialect, and that when he tried to write English he fell into mediocrity, fettered by the difficulties of an alien tongue. This precious piece of nonsense is part only of the truth, and shows that Burns, like so many other classical writers, is more talked of than read. Burns was the poet of a nation whose capital was not Edinburgh, but London. If it were otherwise, his fame would never have been so great amongst English-speaking people, among whom Scotsmen are a minority. One or two brief quotations, taken at random from his works, will modify the dialect idea effectively. Take this from one of Burns's most admired songs:—

O my luv's like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June!
O my luv's like the melodie
That's sweetly played in tune.

Here is another from a battle-hymn, one of the best ever written:—

By Oppression's woes and pains,
By your sons in servile chains,
We will drain our dearest veins,
But they shall be free.
Lay the proud usurper low!
Tyrants fall in every blow!
Liberty's in every blow!
Let us do or die!

How much do these very striking quotations depend on dialect? Or does this?—

A fig for those by law protected,
Liberty's a glorious feast.
Courts for cowards were erected,
Churches built to please the priest.

Then turn to those lines which are admitted to be among the very finest that even Burns ever wrote:—

Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
Had we never lov'd sae blindly,
Never met—or never parted—
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

Do those superb lines derive their force from their one solitary word of dialect? The tendency of orthodox critics to follow one another like a flock of sheep should be resisted to the uttermost. However famous these same critics may be, they favour the growth of falsehood and hypocrisy in literature, the worst enemies of truth and common sense alike.

MIMNERMUS.

Drama and Dramatists.

For the delvers and divers and diggers (and what Freethinker is not one or all? for the freethought attitude is not reached with a journey to Damascus), it is interesting to search out all the shoots and off-shoots of Christianity. In Plato, in Plotinus, and in many other sources the number of three has had great prominence. Written or oral wisdom is passed on in the human race and the student may examine one hypothesis after another—and use his wits in detecting the fallacies. An interesting hypothesis put forward is, that the Trinity is now appearing in the form of three eminent men in the world of psychology—Freud, Adler and Jung, and a very good case could be put up on its behalf, and an equally good one against it. But it is the men in all ages who won't "fit" that do the real work of carrying forward the human race. Suppose, if you can, without your teeth chattering, that the business of the novel was entirely in the hands of, say, Mr. Michael Arlen and Miss Ethel M. Dell; we rule out the giants, and reading is in the limited company of fiction that hovers between "Dick Turpin and "The Green Hat." In that case, even the Freethinker would be reduced to saying, "God help us." as it would be necessary. The giants, the men who are different, those who have a genuine concern for the human race other than extracting money from its pockets, shoulder the burden of the stragglers in the world. And in doing so, is it possible that they can write soothing words, or popular books? It would be the same as asking that the doctor should be on the same mental level as his patients.

A dramatist who won't "fit" with other dramatists is Mr. Elmer L. Rice. In his play, "The Adding Machine," he has gathered together in his hand for seven scenes, all the lightning of satire; but he only uses it to destroy the fossil remains and encumbrances brought about by centuries of teaching that man is a fallen angel and dyed in original sin. He makes a brutal frontal attack on age-long prejudices; and, if there is any pity, then it is a pity that it is necessary. With imagination, with a paucity of speech, and apparently with a minimum of effort, he takes us from earth to hell, purgatory and the Elysian Fields and back again to the sorting station, where a soul at a cosmic

laundry is cleaned with kerosene and returned to earth to go over all the business of evolution again. Mr. Zero, the unfortunate man for this process, apparently could not see a hole through a ladder; the right thing to do kept bumping up against his nose, but he was blind to it. In the Elysian Fields, where the time was passed by the inhabitants in painting, sculpture, and poetry and sitting on the grass looking at the sky, he has a brief spell of happiness; but, on hearing that the place is frequented by Dean Swift and Rabelais, and other people who were not respectable, he decided to "beat it." A notable character in this place was a young moralist, a shadow of Joseph Surface from "The Rivals." He was uncomfortable, as his crime had not given him a taste of eternal hell fire. He was disconsolate, because he was not punished; and he reminded us of the two grumbling sisters who, on reaching heaven, wondered if the floors were safe, after they had complained on the way up, of catching cold on a damp cloud and having halos that wouldn't fit.

With admirable compression, the dramatist, through the mouth of Lieutenant Charles, tells Mr. Zero the story of evolution—and his fear of happiness. The Lieutenant is cast on the lines of the Button Moulder in "Peer Gynt," and is heartily sick of his job in dealing with such characters; and, in bidding good-bye to Mr. Zero on his departure to earth again, gives him, in a trifling sketch, a few words of good advice, and coaxes him away with the figure of Hope.

It is a bold play; and the author has bravely grasped the nettles of nonsense that flourish from what passes for education, the press, frenzied business, gossip, and the rubbish that, without the efforts of the few whom we have mentioned, would submerge the race. For that reason alone it is a play which, if it cannot be seen, it must be read. It challenges, in a fearless manner, many conventional ideas about death, for which our army of priests is responsible. It also challenges a maxim of Rochefoucauld's, which that cynic wrote: "One should not look death and the sun full in the face." And, now that religion is reduced to advertising on the same lines as those who have corsets and soap to sell, Mr. Rice opportunely comes along, making professional religionists a few centuries late, after the press has brought them up to the present. And we have no doubt that, as long as the money is forthcoming for advertisement, there will not be one newspaper in which it will be possible to read any intelligible criticism of a mass of metaphysics on the level of the tale of "Red Riding Hood."

The company at the Gate Theatre Salon is as excellent as ever in the production of this play. All the members work with a will, are enthusiastic, and vigorous; and, although they may not know it, they are carrying forward the work of enlightenment that must go on or recede. A new play is produced fortnightly, and although there is a certain unevenness, a poor play is an exception. And the truths that we hear from this stage may, one day, be shouted from the house-tops; but they will not surprise Freethinkers, who will be ready to say, "how d'ye do?" to the first of them—"we have been waiting for you." For civilization, which is, at present, man mixed up in a mass of wheels, with clerical battalions trying to hang round his neck, is irrepressibly comic. Having yards of print thrown at him over the Revision of the Prayer Book, having to discuss seriously the metaphysics or word-spinning associated with the Reservation of the Sacrament, make it most desirable that man should sit down in a field and look at the sky.

Mr. Rice keeps us to essentials; he gives us glorious philosophy lit up by the spoken word; and, under all the scorching and searing phrases, there is the voice of "the man who will not fit" the ready-made-boot ideas of Fleet Street, Rome, Westminster or any other place of fiction-production. How can he, if he has anything sensible to say?

WILLIAM REPTON.

Youth is to be brought into subjection by reasoning, not by force.—*Publius Syrus.*

Acid Drops.

We have often dwelt upon the gross ignorance of the average newspaper scribbler, and we are constantly noting justification for what we have said. But the high-water mark of ignorance was surely touched by the *Sunday Chronicle* in its issue for January 23, in dealing with Professor Brandes' "Christ Myth." It starts off with the remark that "anti-Christian propaganda has now broken out in a new form," and calls the book "the most powerful intellectual attempt that has been made to destroy the historical basis of Christianity." Ignorance of the literature of the subject could not be more clearly shown when one finds that although the mythical character of the New Testament Jesus has been held by scores of writers for pretty well a century, it is declared to be a new attack. And although the work of Professor Brandes is a good book, to call it the most powerful, intellectual work on the subject, must show an amazing ignorance of the literature that is available. We would suggest to the editor of the *Sunday Chronicle* that he either sends one of his staff to consult the British Museum catalogue, or sacks the office boy and employs someone who really knows something of the subject to write about it.

The article, which commences with this amazing piece of ignorance, ends with a piece of clerical impertinence. The *Chronicle* secured the opinion of Canon Peter Green, who replied that "the theory that Christ was a myth is derided by all educated people." Again, we invite the *Chronicle* editor to consult a museum catalogue, we can hardly expect him to read the works, and he will see the ignorant people who have held to the mythical theory. And if he can spare a few minutes for reflection, he might ask himself how all educated people can already have derided a theory, which he assured his readers is something quite new. We like to see consistency, even in nonsense. On the whole, the *Sunday Chronicle* would probably do better to restrict its staff to sporting subjects and sensational writings on sex and the like, for which they are clearly better fitted, and which does not require either reading or careful thinking.

There has been some discussion in a daily paper recently about the clergyman's voice. A reader says, so few clergymen know how to speak audibly and yet naturally. We suggest it is not a question of the parson knowing how, but of not wishing to do so. He has to mouth a heap of what he knows is sheer nonsense, and he has to deal with the supernatural. If he spoke audibly and naturally, people might get to understand the nature of the nonsense he has to serve them up with. Even a parson has sense enough not to wish that to happen.

Prayer is a cure-all for every kind of evil except that which visits the human body. We infer this from the fact that certain pious journals are packed with advertisements of patent pills and tonics. As the advertisers are not likely to spend money with these journals without getting some considerable patronage from readers, we conclude that prayer doesn't keep the Christian healthy, and that he must be a rather unwholesome kind of human. Well, we have certainly found him unwholesome mentally; perhaps this is an instance of mind influencing matter.

The Sabbatarians of Ealing have a special Golden Rule of their own. It is a bit tiny, and runs thus: "What you do not want to do yourself, prevent others from doing." In practising this rule they have managed to get the local Council to vote against Sunday games by 23 votes to 13. The more intelligent portion of Ealing's citizens is to be congratulated on having as councillors 13 men who do not believe in Puritan tyranny.

The Surrey County Council has rejected a proposal to open cinemas on Sunday. During the discussion a petition was received from Wimbledon asking for Sunday cinemas; it had 14,000 signatures, but some Wimbledon councillors declared that the petition did not represent public opinion in the borough. Well, it obviously represented a pretty considerable portion of public opinion. At the next Council election the petitioners, we suggest, should make sure they return broadminded men to represent them, not bigots.

The Church of England voluntary offerings for 1925 amounted to £9,808,900. What did the pious donors get for their money? So far as we can judge, things like these. An authentic account of the beginning of the world. Some explication of primitive Eastern ethics. A medley of good and bad music. Much indifferent hymn verse. A heap of slop about brotherhood and love (with a capital B and L). Plenty of denunciation of women's dress—or lack of it—and of the sinfulness of the young generation. Some unpleasant reminders about hell-fire. An earnest invitation to regard themselves as "miserable sinners." A promise of everything the heart could desire in the "Great Perhaps." No one can deny that they got value for money.

Keep out of the churches. A Hove doctor it is who gives this advice. He is anxious to help his panel patients to avoid God's 'flu germs. It must sound a wee bit blasphemous to the pious, since they believe that God cares for his faithful people as well as for sparrows. And it may prove a little unsettling to some worshippers. For the implication is that the Lord allows his germs to float around promiscuously in his very own house, that he is indifferent to the suffering they may cause to the devout, and that prayers asking for sound health are useless as an anti-germicide. Such points as these, however, few of the doctor's Christian clients will be likely to note. Their creed has never encouraged them to think.

There is nothing like getting first hand information, "straight from the horse's mouth." Thus Mgr. James Moyes, of the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Westminster, informs us the reason why we live after death. It appears that "God's life is a never-ending rapture of boundless happiness." And God, "who is infinitely happy in his own life wished to call creatures into being, so that they might in their measure partake of his happiness." Now we know all about it. Only we were always under the impression that a mental state can only exist, as such, by being opposed to some other state of a different kind. And if God's happiness is boundless, there does not seem anything that can mark it off from non-happiness, or partial happiness, and therefore cannot exist at all. Further, if God had some wish for something that did not already exist, in this case man, then until man was made he must have experienced a want, a desire, and an unsatisfied desire certainly takes away from boundless happiness. Of course, we are speaking only in accordance with the dictates of poor, weak common sense, and we quite admit that this should receive but scant attention in a perfectly sound system of theology. Otherwise we should have felt inclined to say that a boundlessly happy God reads much like boundless nonsense. But perhaps that is what the Rev.' Father in God is really trying to say.

The *Central News* reports that a bishop was riding in a tram car in Geneva when a girl got in, and when she sat down her short skirts showed an expanse of leg that led to a protest publicly against the exhibition. It perhaps never dawned upon this good bishop that there was no need for him to let his gaze dwell upon the young lady's legs. But the worst of these good Christians is, that they nearly always see more than is actually displayed. Their imagination does the rest. To the pure everything may be made impure.

The Bishop of Bradford (with photograph), in the *Daily Express*, states that he is ready to sanction certain services in connection with faith healing. He wishes that more clergy would fit themselves by prayer and study for the careful administration of these sacramental rites, in special cases where the patients desire it and where the medical practitioner has been consulted. His Lordship believes in "safety first"; and the reading of this is like trapesing back to the Middle Ages.

Like an elephant tenderly walking on eggs, the *Daily Express*, no doubt with an eye on clerical publicity, gently reproves Lord Inchcape for "blowing the gaff" on missionaries; and hopes that his donation of £7,000 towards the building of a church in Delhi will be a proper penance for a blundering and wholly unjustified speech. We may never know the real reason for Lord Inchcape's frank remarks about missionaries in China; but it is gratifying to know that the *Express*, for once in a way, cannot use its stock formula and call his Lordship a Bolshevik, or whatever term of press-abuse is popular at the moment of going to press. But it is rather a pity that his Lordship's speech came at a time when even a blind, deaf mute might realize that religion is being advertised; and, perhaps, if the funds will run to it, a religious revival will also be advertised.

The *Morning Post* articles on religion have now ended their anæmic existence. They provided room for all kinds of nonsense provided that none of the writers said anything very drastic against Christianity; even to a letter from a mother, whose testimony to the value of religion took the form of narrating how her boy at school always prayed for her at eight o'clock every morning, at which hour her ears burned regularly. Such things help us to realize how it is that Christianity lives, and how it is impossible for it to die while such forms of mentality are common. If we had published 50 per cent. of the letters published in the *Morning Post*, over the signature of one of our staff, we should have been told that we filled our columns with "scoffings" at religion and that our sole argument was ridicule. In the columns of the *Morning Post* they are taken with the utmost gravity, and as evidence of sincere interest in religion.

But the discussion (?) has ended with a row between the *Catholic Times* and the *Morning Post*, the former accusing the latter of having suppressed the Roman Catholic view. The *Post* defends itself on the ground that to have done so would not have furthered the end it had in view. That we can quite believe; which will also account for the fact that the letters and articles written by Freethinkers were also suppressed. And the end was quite clearly that of making plain to the readers of the paper that, while there might be many doubts about the relative value of certain forms of Christianity, there were no doubts at all about the value of "true religion." It was just another way to fool the people in the interests of the Christian Church. The amusing feature is to find a Roman Catholic paper protesting that a Protestant paper suppressed the other side. As though the Roman Catholic papers, church and priests have ever done anything else. The classic quarrel between the pot and the kettle becomes an exchange of friendly amiabilities at the side of it.

It is not easy to understand the mentality of some of our judges and magistrates. Here is case number one. On the recent hearing of a case in the Salford County Court, it was mentioned to Judge Spencer Hogg, that a Mother Superior of a Convent could not give evidence because her religious vows would not permit her to come to court. We are aware that judges have very considerable power in demanding the presence of witnesses, or dispensing with them, but all the same, we are inclined to believe that if this proposed witness had not belonged to one of the influential

Christian sects, the judge would have insisted upon her attendance, and would have informed the counsel that if she did not come she would be charged with contempt of court. A convent is not extra-territorial yet. As it was, the judge said that we must pay every consideration to people's faith.

Case number two is that of a boy charged with stealing 10s.; with some of the proceeds he went to a cinema. The magistrate at Wimbledon decreed that the boy, aged 14, should not go to a cinema for two years. That is starting at the wrong end. Clearly it was not the spending of the money but the taking of it that was wrong. And how on earth is preventing a boy going to a cinema likely to stop him stealing? There are ways of getting rid of the money. And we tremble to think of the orgy of cinema shows that boy will have in two years' time. Assuming that he stole the money to go to a cinema, we can quite imagine him breaking into a church, or burgling a judge's house to make up for his two years' compulsory starvation. A regular revivalist convert kept without his favourite form of intoxication for a lengthy period will be a tame animal at the side of that boy.

Jokes show their welcome faces in extraordinary quarters. In a notice with reference to better Broadcasting, it is stated that listeners are asking for information about the development of modern science, literature and philosophy. Captain Ian Fraser, M.P., thinks that Advisory Committees might be set up representative of trade, music, the Church, and other departments of life. It has yet to be proved that the Church can do anything useful in science, literature and philosophy, which cannot be treated by representatives who do not make any claim to ghostly powers. And it has also to be proved that the Church has any right to cut a slice out of Sunday night in an agreement between the listener and the Government at a cost of ten shillings and sixpence per year.

In the *Church Times* there is an advertisement which explains the method of learning French, German, Spanish or Italian in a few months. This method is hopelessly old-fashioned in comparison with that which, according to the Acts of the Apostles, happened when a gathering of illiterates took place, and by a miracle the members were able to speak with many tongues in almost less than no time. A miracle that would give one language to the world at present would be something for correspondence with our domiciliary residence. At present the only things the nations have in common are high taxes, a plentiful sprinkling of priests, and the eternal problem of how to make ends meet. Now is the accepted time for a miracle, well-spliced, copper bottomed, trim and taut, and warranted not to skid. And if we all spoke one language it would ultimately make conversation in heaven much easier.

It is not so very strange nowadays to find a newspaper editor talking Freethought. For the leaven of Freethought is beginning to penetrate even the intelligence of our enlighteners of public opinion. Hence the *Daily Mirror*, apropos of the Dean of St. Paul's plea for a revival of Puritanism, prints the following editorial opinion:—

No doubt he (the Dean) uses the word loosely, meaning by it simply an increase of virtue. Anyway, we hope so; because historically used, Puritanism means not a greater and sincerer striving after goodness, but a determination, if possible, to be sanctioned by law, to make other people better than they seem to be—to Puritans. We still have plenty of the persecuting and prohibitive type of policeman's virtue. Do not give us any more of it!

Our newspaper editors are getting very bold—now that, thanks to the efforts of Freethinkers, they need no longer be timid. The *Mirror*, in its new-found flush of "this freedom," even finds courage enough to allow a reader to say that what is needed is a revival of common-sense, not of Puritanism, which is the worst form of

tyranny. "The Puritan mind," he adds, "sees evil in everything—art, literature, and science." How the pious Victorian would have shuddered at such blunt criticism!

Our recent calamitous history has taught us, says Professor A. S. Peake, D.D., that cordiality in international relations and the regeneration of our national and social life are essential, if we are not to be precipitated into ruin. For this the religious and moral training of the young is the surest foundation. We agree with what the Professor says about cordiality in international relations being essential. But we beg leave to doubt whether the "religious and moral training of the young"—he means, of course, Christian training—will be any help towards that cordiality. In the past the peoples of Europe and their leaders have been stuffed full of Christian training. Yet the relations between the peoples have been the reverse of cordial. The history of the Christian era is an unedifying record of distrust and wars. Does this look as though Christian training were a success at producing cordiality between nations? Why, it cannot even produce friendliness between any two Christian sects!

What we want nowadays, says a Methodist writer, is adventurous religion; it is caution, probably more than anything else, that the Churches are suffering from to-day. He would have the reader interpret Christ's "Launch out into the deep," in this way: Abandon the familiar for the unfamiliar; cut your moorings and get a move on; go in for a little exploration." This seems to us rather dangerous advice to give a Christian; there is no knowing where it may land him. It might set him wondering whether all the lovely things he had heard about Jesus and God and the Bible are as true as his pastors allege them to be. He might therefore decide to go adventuring among Freethought literature to find out the other side of the tale, and might eventually land at the port of Atheism. A catastrophe like that would, of course, be most lamentable—for the Churches. For that reason, we should like to see the advice generally adopted by the more intelligent type of Christian. Most persons will not, we fancy, thank this Methodist writer for his suggestion. Adventuring after the unfamiliar by their flocks has already lost the Church too many clients.

Christ is always praying, says Dr. F. B. Meyer. All through these ages he is pleading on behalf of his Church and individual souls and the coming of the Kingdom. Poor Christ! Fancy what an existence his is—condemned to spend eternity always praying. As there is so little to show for his efforts, the Kingdom is farther away to-day than ever before, he must be getting a wee bit pessimistic. We shouldn't wonder if he decided to have a Second Advent, just to get away from the praying monotony. Anything for a change.

Clergymen of the English Church become bishops by a system of wire-pulling, intrigue, and family or political influence. This is not the statement of a blatant Atheist but a full-blown Rev, Prebendary, namely, the Vicar of St. Augustine's, Kilburn. Since a man of God is incapable of telling an untruth, we assume the statement is based on fact. That being so, the bishops, who work the aforesaid system and profit by it, strike one as being queer sorts of guides for that regeneration of our national and social life which they declare is so very essential and toward which they claim to be leading us.

Mr. John Buchan, the historical novelist, has suddenly discovered that church-going has gone out of fashion in city and village. He refuses to believe that this indicates any definite renunciation of Christianity. For, he assures the readers of a Sunday paper, "there is no serious sceptical movement afoot to-day." We can

assure Mr. Buchan that there is, and that the Churches are wellaware of it. If there is not, why the necessity for Christian Evidence lecturers? Why all the many, thousands of lectures, sermons, and Press articles that explicitly or implicitly attempt to answer Freethought arguments? Why the refusal to repeal the gagging Blasphemy Laws? Why the boycotting in the Press of Freethought lectures and of other news of sceptical activity? Why the clamour to suppress Sunday schools in which anti-religious views are taught? Mr. Buchan's statement helps one to appreciate the pretty Christian tactics. First there is the attempted suppression of all Freethought activity. Then follows the bland assertion, for the benefit of an ignorant public, that there is no serious sceptical movement operating to-day. This game of hoodwinking the public is a delightful one; and the professional Christian is an expert at it. To defeat it, the best way is to go on making Freethinkers, and show the parsons, the public, and Mr. Buchan that Scepticism is not only very much alive but intensely serious—is as active and earnest as it has ever been.

The Archbishop of Canterbury says that the dress of the bishops is retained because it goes back to antiquity. That is actually the reason for the existence of the archbishop and the bishops themselves. Many other absurdities died out in antiquity. The religious one is still with us.

Sir Oliver Lodge says that many of the miraculous occurrences narrated in the Bible, upon which doubt has been cast, have been supported by scientific theory. Now that is a serious statement coming from a teacher of science, and we challenge Sir Oliver Lodge to be good enough to give us a single one. We hope that he has been misreported, for the sake of his own reputation. We have no hesitation in saying that the statement, as reported, is glaringly untrue and absurd. If he really said that, we would advise Sir Oliver to leave that kind of thing to the bishops. They are far greater adepts at talking scientific nonsense than ever he is likely to be.

A curious commentary on Christian civilization will be found in the fact that, according to one publicity expert it would cost £250,000 to advertise peace. If there is a blue moon this year one of the followers of the Prince of Peace might leave this sum in his will.

A Word in Season.

EVERY reader of the *Freethinker* is certain to know at least one of the following:—

A professing Christian, whose mind is open to argument, who is not a reader of the *Freethinker*.

A man, or woman, who has managed to get rid of all religious belief, but has not quite realized where he or she stands; and who is not a reader of the *Freethinker*.

An avowed non-religionist, who is not a reader of the *Freethinker*.

Each one of these represents a potential and possible subscriber to this paper, and we want all who are interested to see that he or she becomes one. It is not difficult to succeed in this, if we only try. And it is worth while trying.

Apart from the good done by getting these unattached ones to take an active interest in Freethought, we want to bring back the paper to its pre-war price of twopence. And if we can only manage to get sufficient subscribers during 1927 we will do so.

This does not mean merely that we shall save the pennies of present subscribers. Frankly, we do not care very much about that. But the cheaper the paper, the better it is an instrument of propaganda. And that is our aim all the time.

The "Freethinker" Endowment Trust.

THIS special appeal on behalf of the *Freethinker* Endowment Trust will close sometime during March. But we have still a long way to go if we are to reach the goal, and annex the £1,000 promised by Mr. Peabody, and the other sums promised by other gentlemen. It will be remembered that Mr. Peabody has given a written undertaking to subscribe the sum of £1,000 to the Trust, provided the total reaches £7,000 by December 31 of this year. Mr. Jessop has promised £200 towards this, Mr. Bush £150, and Mr. Easterbrook £100, provided the balance is subscribed. The total subscriptions to date now stand as follows:—

Subscribed last year	...	£3,901	4	10
Subscribed this year	...	887	10	2
Promised by Messrs. Jessop, Bush, and Easterbrook	...	450	0	0
Total to date	...	£5,238	15	0

This means that we have still £1,761 5s. to raise. I think this ought to be done, and if all of us think the same, it can be done with ease. The result will be, for the first time in the history of the Freethought movement, an endowed organ, a paper representing the Party, which shall be made financially secure.

I continue to receive calculations from interested friends of the very little each Freethinker in the country need subscribe if each one did his or her "bit." The calculations are interesting, but are not very inspiring because, if every *Freethinker* did what he ought to do, the paper would be in an independent position from the results of sales alone. But it does look as though 1,760 of the actual readers of the *Freethinker* ought, by the end of the year, to furnish a pound each to close the Fund. And it must be borne in mind that the gathering in of the £1,450 promised depends upon the donating of the £1,760. It means that every pound given is worth almost two.

I also have another complaint from a friend that I am not a good beggar. I have no intention of becoming one. I am doing my share as I have done all my life. And I am simply offering to others the opportunity of doing theirs on behalf of a cause which they believe to be a worthy one.

The following is the list of subscriptions received since last week:—

Previously acknowledged, £874 11s. 2d. Mr. and Mrs. J. Neate, £5 5s.; W. K. H., £1; Mrs. F. Porter, £1 1s.; "Manchester," £1; Miss A. Wilson, 10s.; S. Cohen, 10s.; We Three, 3s.; J. S. Muir, 2s. 6d.; In Memory of Herbert Spencer, 5s.; V. H. Smith (6th sub.), 5s.; J. McCartney, 10s.; G. Smith, 2s. 6d.; G. Bilk 5s.; C. F. Budge 10s.; W. J. Russell (2nd sub), £1; W. Robertson, 10s. Total, £887 10s. 2d.

Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to the *Freethinker* Endowment Trust, and addressed to me at 61 Farringdon Street, E.C.4. Every contribution will be acknowledged week by week in the *Freethinker*.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

To Correspondents.

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

W. K. H.—Pleased to see your name. It brings back very pleasant recollections of the family.

W. CLARKE.—Thanks for promise of subscription to Trust Fund. We note what you say about overdue subscription. We believe that many of the cases of arrears are due to sheer carelessness, we should say the majority are due to this cause. But we clearly cannot go on supplying free copies indefinitely. And, to use an Hibernicism, if those who are very much in arrears fail to receive their copy they will have only themselves to blame.

We must take this method of acknowledging the receipt of a number of letters concerning the death of our late shop-manager, Mr. W. G. Vaughan. They all bear testimony to his unfailing courtesy, and his readiness to meet the wants of callers in every way. We cordially endorse all they have to say about him.

J. McCARTNEY.—Thanks for your very high tribute to the Editor of the *Freethinker*. Modesty prevents our reprinting it. You can repay us for any pleasure derived by introducing the paper to new or likely readers. We can do with all we can get. The "Bill of Costs" is quite well known, and has been often reprinted.

P. G. STRACHAN.—Mr. Cohen has discussed the whole case for Atheism, and the justifications urged on behalf of Agnosticism in his "Theism or Atheism." It is on sale at this office. Pleased to hear from you, and hope that you will find, on further acquaintance, that Canada is less bitten by religion than is this country.

W. J. RUSSELL.—We don't know why you should suggest we might one day go to heaven. "Call you this backing of your friends?" But we suppose it is kindly meant. Thanks for promise of further help for the Trust Fund.

H. COLLINS.—Quite understood. Glad you were so pleased with Sunday's efforts. The Branch deserves success.

C. F. RUDGE.—There are opportunities for Secular Funerals in all public cemeteries. All that is required is to give notice that no religious ceremony is required. In the case of anyone being required to officiate, headquarters should be written as soon as possible.

T. MAY.—The real sign of mental confusion, if not of downright stupidity, is that grown-up men and women should ever discuss whether such a character as the New Testament Jesus Christ had ever existed. It is about as reasonable as discussing whether the Phoenix ever had being.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Cohen had a couple of excellent meetings on Sunday last at Manchester. In the afternoon there was a good audience, and in the evening a crowded hall, extra chairs having to be brought in from other parts of the building and placed down the gangways. Mr. Mapp occupied the chair in the afternoon, and Mr. Rosetti in the evening. Both made special appeals for support for the branch, and we are pleased to know that the collection was a large one, the sale of literature good, and several new members enrolled. A pleasing feature of the meeting was the large number of young men and women present, many of whom were newcomers. Everybody appeared to be delighted with the lectures, and in this had the advantage of the speaker, who was speaking under the disadvantage of a cold.

Councillor Hall, of Manchester, appears to be determined to drive the Sabbatarian bigots of the Council either to carry their fanatical ideas to a logical conclusion, or to adopt a more civilised attitude towards Sunday entertainments. At a recent meeting of the Council, he moved the following resolution:—

That this Council, in view of the continued opposition to games in the parks and to the opening of cinemas and theatres on Sundays, instructs the various Committees responsible, in order that the policy of the Council can be logically carried into effect, to cause on Sundays the cessation of the running of trams, the stoppage of all public clocks, the abandonment of all band performances in public parks and recreation grounds, and the closing of all public parks and cemeteries.

We do not know what happened to the resolution, but it should have had the effect of making some of the bigots realize where they were.

On Saturday evening, at 7 o'clock, at Earlham Hall, Forest Gate, the West Ham Branch is holding another of its popular "Socials," with the usual accompaniments of songs, dances, and games. All Freethinkers and their friends are cordially invited.

The West Ham Branch has also arranged a course of Sunday evening lectures, at the Bromley Public Hall, Bow Road, E., for the evenings of February 6, 13 and 20. Mr. George Whitehead will open the series, and will be followed by Mr. Saphin. The concluding lecture will be given by Mr. R. H. Rosetti. The lectures will commence at 7 o'clock. Admission is free.

Our readers will be interested in seeing the indictment on which Mr. E. V. Sterry, editor of the *Christian Inquirer*, has been charged with horrible crime of blasphemy. Here it is, as printed in the *Toronto Star*:

Did, contrary to law, publish certain blasphemous, indecent and profane libel of and concerning the Holy Scriptures and Christian religion in one part of which said libel there were and contained amongst other things certain blasphemous, indecent and profane matters and things of and concerning the Holy Scriptures and the Christian religion of the tenor following, that is to say:

Read your Bible if you have not done it before, and you will find in it hundreds of passages relative to the Divine Being, which any moral and honest man would be ashamed to have appended to his character.

And in another part whereof there were and are contained amongst other things certain other blasphemous indecent and profane matters and things of and concerning the Holy Scriptures and of the Christian religion of the tenor following, that is to say:

The God of the Bible is depicted as one who walked in the Garden of Eden, talked with a woman, cursed a snake, sewed skins together for clothes, preferred the savoury smell of roast cutlets to the odours of boiled cabbage, who sat in a burning bush or popped out from behind the rocks, this irate Old Party who thunders imprecations from the mountain or mutters and gouches in the tabernacle, and whom Moses finds so

hard to tame, who in his paroxysms of rage has massacred hundreds of thousands of His own chosen people, and would often have slaughtered the whole lot if cunning Old Moses hadn't kept reminding him of "What will the Egyptians say about it?" This touchy Jehovah, whom the deluded superstitionists claim to be the Creator of the whole universe makes one feel utter contempt for the preachers and unfeigned pity for the mental state of those who can retain a serious countenance as they peruse the stories of His peculiar whims, freaks and fancies, and His frenzied megalomaniac boastings, to the high displeasure of Almighty God.

To the great scandal and reproach of the Christian religion.

We fancy we could gather as serious an indictment from many "advanced" Christian preachers, and we hardly think that in this country the authorities would be rash enough to launch a charge of blasphemy on this ground. Anyway, we are giving them a chance to do so by reprinting it.

The Crown Attorney, in an interview, appears to be in a delightful state of muddle about the history of blasphemy and blasphemy cases. He lumps Poole and Bradlaugh as having been charged together in 1883, refers to Foote as having succeeded Bradlaugh as editor of the *Freethinker*, etc. The Crown Attorney, if he is correctly reported, ought to look up both his constitutional and case law before he appears in court to make himself even more ridiculous than the prosecutors in blasphemy cases usually are. This is the first case for blasphemy in Canada, and if Freethinkers make the best of it, it should be the last.

The Descent into the Dark Ages.

In *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age*, by Sir Samuel Dill (Macmillan, 21s.), we have a continuation of that great historian's previous works, namely, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* and *Roman Society in the last Century of the Western Empire*. In the first of these volumes Sir Samuel showed us the Roman Empire at the height of its splendour; and the world lapped in the profound security of the *Pax Romana*—the Roman Peace. In this magnificent work—for which the author received the honour of knighthood—he, once for all, disposed of the malignant slanders which Christian apologists have heaped against the morals of Pagan Rome. In the same work it is shown how every Roman citizen took a pride in his native city; and delighted to add to its adornment by gifts of public baths, theatres, bridges, aqueducts, fountains and gardens, for the use and recreation of his fellow citizens. City vied with city in amicable rivalry in the race for perfection. Many wealthy citizens reduced themselves to poverty through the magnificence of their benefactions. The ruins of these stately and splendid works excite our wonder and admiration to-day, after a lapse of nearly two thousand years. Christianity has nothing to compare with them. It may be said that Christianity built the Cathedrals. Yes, but the Cathedrals were built for the glory of God; while the Romans built for the use, improvement and recreation of man; a much more important object.

In the present work which, fortunately, the author was able to finish—except for the final revision he would have given it—before his death, on May 24, 1924, Sir Samuel Dill gives a detailed account of the state of society in Gaul, from the accession of the Merovingian Clovis in 481 A.D. to the end of the sixth century; a period of only 119 years. Yet, such was the industry and knowledge of the author, the work runs to 566 closely printed pages; and there is not a superfluous page in the lot. Especially valuable are the chapters on "Morals," on "Saints and

Miracles," on "Church Life," and "The Bishops." Not that the standpoint of the author is that of the Freethinker, or rationalist; it is not. His attitude is regretful, sometimes even apologetic, for the horrors and depravities he is obliged to record; as when he observes, "truth demands the statement of some unpleasant facts. Drunken habits are found even among bishops." (pp. 462-463.) He gives instances of these happenings, even while they were celebrating the Mass.

The age was profoundly religious; it was no less profoundly wicked and cruel. Referring to the "savage cruelty," which was the normal practice of King Clovis and his descendants, Sir Samuel observes:—

The catalogue of such enormities is too long and monotonous to be told in detail; but one or two specimens may be taken to represent a ghastly series. In 575 Sigibert, one of the few estimable members of his race, when his brother Chilperic seemed to be at his mercy, was suddenly struck down at his *villa* at Vitry by two assassins armed with poisoned daggers by Fredegundis, Chilperic's queen. Chilperic, whose doom seemed almost sealed, celebrated his restoration to power by ordering one of Sigibert's adherents, a Goth named Sigila, to be exquisitely tortured with red-hot instruments, and torn limb from limb. When Merovechus, Chilperic's rebellious son, after many romantic adventures, was hard pressed by his pursuers, and at last driven to earth among the Morini, he, in order to avoid falling into his father's hands, begged his faithful squire, Gailenus, to despatch him by the dagger. Gailenus obeyed, and Chilperic, in hot haste, arrived only to see his son's dead body. He at once ordered the hands, feet and nose of Gailenus to be cut off, and the poor victim of loyalty to a Merovingian died under accumulated tortures. Under Chilperic's eyes, and presumably with his consent, Queen Fredegundis perpetrated the most revolting atrocities, unchecked either by form of law or human feeling. (pp. 133-134.)

King Chlothar rivalled Chilperic in violence and cruelty; his son, Chramnus, rebelled against him, he was captured, and, by Chlothar's orders, burnt alive along with his family! The historian comments:—

There might seem to be small space for religion in a character like Chlothar's. But S. Martin had an infinite charity. Chlothar had restored his church when it had been burnt down by Duke Willacharius. And, in his last year, the old King, and cruel sinner, visited the shrine to lament his sins, and to entreat the saint's intervention for him. It seems doubtful whether such religion, ancient or modern, is any check on sin. It certainly was a feeble restraint in the days of the Merovingians. And great churchmen like Gregory, who had witnessed the enormities of a highly placed criminal, will give him a parting benediction if he has paid conventional deference to their order, or endowed churches out of taxes wrung from the people, or in his last hours prostrated himself before the altar of a saint. Organized religion, thinking chiefly of its own power, has probably never so revealed its real spiritual impotence as in that age of loud religious claims and defiance of all moral restraints. Chlothar, dying in 561, was buried with pompous honours in the Church of S. Medard, at Soissons. (p. 170.)

Of the great Chilperic himself, Sir Samuel observes: "The threat that 'any one who disobeyed his edict should have his eyes put out' may be apocryphal; but it is true to the man. Gregory describes him in a phrase perhaps too often quoted, as 'the Nero and Herod of his time.'"

"It is strange," adds the same writer, "to see the interest Chilperic took in Theology":—

In theology, as we constantly see, the central object of interest was then the doctrine of the Trinity; and, for microscopic differences on that mysterious dogma, inaccessible to the reason, men and races were ready to hate and fight one another, and condemn one another to eternal torment. It was a bold thing, even for a French king, to venture into that cruel arena, in which the religion of Jesus in history is seen at its worst.

Yet this ferocious king, Chilperic, "wrote a treatise on the subject (of the Trinity), and debated it with Gregory with a curious subtlety and knowledge of ancient controversy." (p. 176.) The ladies of the period were in no way inferior to their lords in the arts of torture and mutilation. We have seen something of the exploits of Chilperic's Queen, Fredegundis. This Queen, when she learnt that her step-son, Clovis, had set eyes of desire on one of her maids, had the girl impaled in front of his window; and had her mother exquisitely tortured, and then burnt alive. There are other atrocities recorded of her, quite equal to those given.

Her great enemy was Queen Brunihildis, between whom and herself there was a blood-feud lasting forty years; which, says Sir Samuel, gave rise to a series of "murderous and senseless wars." (p. 174.) This Queen was equal, if not superior, to Fredegundis in atrocity. "That she was fierce and revengeful, that she could give blow for blow, that she could meet guile with guile, is only to say that she was a true daughter of her age." (p. 233.) "She had, according to Chlothar's reckoning, caused the death of ten Frank princes, enumerated by the chronicler." (p. 211.) Notwithstanding all this, says our historian, "As a pious daughter of the Church she gave endowments to churches, hospitals, and nunneries." (p. 234.) He may well remark that "the tale of the Merovingians is in the main a ghastly record." (p. 285.) And yet: "The Merovingians, however gross their personal conduct, yielded to none in religious reverence, or rather fear of the wrath of supernal powers." (p. 128.)

In the face of all this, the clergy assure us that the only foundation for morality is religion; and that, without it, we should relapse into savagery and barbarism.

W. MANN.

(To be Concluded.)

IN MEMORIAM.

CHARLES BRADLAUGH, died January 30, 1891, aged 57.

WHEN memories of the past return
And the old road again re-tread,
Slowly the passions of old days
Come back to life within the soul;
Old griefs and joys are here unchanged,
Again the once familiar thrill
Stirs echoes in the troubled heart.

OGARYOV.

An Epitah:

Think not, O visitor, this grave contains
The man, Charles Bradlaugh, or his true remains:
There is no burial for the nobler part,
Save in the seed plots of the human heart.

GERALD MASSEY.

Truth is violated either by falsehood or by silence.
Amnianus.

No one has long maintained violent government; temperate rule endures.—*Seneca.*

Take, have, and keep are words pleasing to a pope.—
Quoted by Rabelais, "Pantagruel."

The Pagan Setting of Early Christianity.

A CORRECT understanding of Christianity demands a study of the Græco-Roman civilization under which it arose, for this, as the most orthodox must admit, determined in no small measure its character as well as its fortunes. Christianity in the first stages of its history is a special development of Jewish Messianism. Its ethic is Hebraic, like its theology, which follows more particularly the tenets of the much-abused Pharisees. But as this religion spread along the shores of the Mediterranean, and encountered peoples to whom the shibboleths of Judaism meant little or nothing, it took on new features. To become the mistress of Europe, Christianity was obliged to clothe itself in the garments of Greek philosophy and Roman law.

The Church, which alone gave concreteness and relative stability to the Gospel, was an organization that followed Pagan as well as Jewish precedents very closely. The ecclesiastical was assimilated to the official hierarchy, and bishoprics and archbishoprics were established in the seats of the secular government. When the Empire fell the Papacy took up the reins of power, and the past lived again in a ghostly transformation.

The thoughts and aspirations of the world to which the Gospel was preached are still widely misunderstood. We have been led to see in Paganism a body of ideals and practices entirely hostile to those of Christianity. We think of Christ as the conqueror of Mars the god of war and Aphrodite the goddess of sexual appetite. We fancy we behold the sun of Christianity melting the snows of Pagan inhumanity. We dream of a purity to which the non-Christian heart was a stranger, and rejoice to see the vices of Rome and Alexandria skulking into obscure holes out of very shame at the presence of a thing so transcendently lovely. Like all melodramas, this one is too full of glaring contrasts to be true. By selecting our facts, and by exaggerating or minimising them, we can prove the truth of whatever we wish to believe. Every age has been thus blackened or whitened by rival partisans.

Paganism at its worst is contrasted with Christianity at its best, and Pagan practice with Christian theory, which is assumed to correspond with Christian practice. The tale of Nero's crimes is unfolded to our astonishment and horror, and we are then immediately confronted with the Sermon on the Mount. But that way lies nothing but delusion.

The truth is that Paganism at the commencement of our era was undergoing a revolution along lines that remind us of Christianity. The ideals of charity which were proclaimed in the valleys of Galilee and the streets of Jerusalem were growing daily more familiar to a world that knew nothing of Jesus or his apostles. Of the slave Seneca writes as humanely as St. Paul. Prostitution is condemned as severely by Dion the Stoic as by any of the Christian Fathers. War and the cruelties of the amphitheatre are as intolerable to Seneca and Plutarch as to Clement of Alexandria. The religious likenesses of Paganism and Christianity were important enough to impress several of the Christian apologists, and to generate that oft-quoted saying, "O human soul, naturally Christian!"

I am not arguing here that Paganism and Christianity presented no serious contrasts. I merely contend that the currents of thought and feeling which characterized both were moving in the same direction, that the mental worlds in which Christians and Pagans lived had innumerable points of contact,

and that as the battle between Christ and Antichrist developed the creeds that threatened one another's existence grew increasingly similar both in form and spirit.

We are apt to imagine that the final victory of the Church was a victory over the Classic Hellenic Paganism of the days of Pericles and Phidias, and over the Classic Roman Paganism of the reign of Augustus Cæsar. It is true that all the old gods continued to have their worshippers long after the conversion of the Empire to Christianity. The augurs inspected the entrails of the sacrificial beasts, and the Arval brotherhood performed its pre-historic rites, as late as the fourth century. But the hearts of a continually growing number of Pagans had been won by strange deities from the Orient—gods who suffered and were slain, and who rose in triumph from the dead—gods like Osiris, whom Egypt had adored from a remote antiquity, gods like Attis of Phrygia, Adonis of Syria, the Persian sun-god Mithra, Dionysus, mystically eaten and drunk in the Orphic cult, and a score of others like these. Religion tended to syncretism. Gods were readily assimilated to one another all over the Empire, and this fact fostered the idea of a single creative providence. Polytheism now sought an apology for itself, on the ground that its motley pantheon stood for the personification of diverse attributes of the Supreme, or else constituted a hierarchy of subordinate spirits, whom to worship was to pay honour to their overlord.

At the same time religion was growing more and more individualistic. Immortal bliss, communion and union with God, inward purity and renunciation of fleshly appetites—these were the aims of the Mystery Cults, which diffused themselves steadily through the Mediterranean world. National and civic patriotisms were chilled by the grip of Rome. The individual was thrown back on the yearnings of his lonely heart. Religion had become less an expression of the corporate life, a thanksgiving to providence for the continuance of ancestral blessings, than "an antidote against death" (to use the words of a Christian Father, Ignatius of Antioch). Undoubtedly, this individualism enlarged the sympathies and promoted the growth of pity. But at the same time it fostered morbidity and fanaticism. Vice and asceticism reached extravagant lengths. Both drew nourishment from the despotism of Rome, which impeded the natural flow of human energies into the channels of social and political reform. Men, despairing of this world, looked more and more to another. Philosophy consoled the few, while superstition and emotional rituals gained the same results for the multitude.

In the world that saw the birth of Christianity there was a commingling of races and beliefs, of customs and traditions, on a scale that had never been seen before. The Roman Empire extended from the Firth of Clyde to the Euphrates (under Trajan it reached the Tigris), and from the Rhine and the Danube to the desert of Sahara. In its eastern provinces Greek was generally understood, and in its western provinces Latin. Splendid roads and an efficient postal service held distant lands together, and made possible the enforcement of the most important body of law the world had yet known.

In such an environment a great religious and moral synthesis was bound to emerge. Rites and doctrines and institutions passed freely from cult to cult. Men forgot their old patriotisms and yearned for a better country—a heavenly.

The shrewd mind of Augustus Cæsar, in whose reign the New Testament places the birth of Jesus, saw the advisability of establishing a religion co-

extensive with the Empire, a religion capable of embracing and harmonising as far as possible the existing faiths. Not a credulous man himself, though probably more or less of an orthodox believer in the gods of his fathers, he knew how to turn to political account other people's credulities. He perceived that the rule of Cæsar must attract the piety of his subjects, if it were to prove effectual. In deference to Roman prejudices he refrained from applying to himself the hated title of "king" (*rex*). He pretended that the Republic still existed, and that he shared its responsibilities with the Senate, "whose decrees he dictated and obeyed" (to quote Gibbon's ironic words). But although eschewing kingship, Augustus intended to be divine. To have asked his fellow countrymen to invoke him as a god would have been to place too great a strain on their loyalty and faith. So in Italy the worship of the Emperor's "genius," or tutelary god, was alone insisted on. But in the provinces, more especially in Egypt and the East, the worship of Rome and Augustus as associated divinities was encouraged in every way. After his death the Senate decreed that Augustus should be looked on as "divine" (*divus*), in the same sense as Romulus, the fabled founder of Rome, whom a Vestal Virgin bore to the god Mars. But his intrinsic deity was a certainty in the eyes of millions of Orientals while he was still alive.

To a world long disturbed with wars and revolutions the victor of Actium, who had mastered the political maelstrom in which so many great ones had been overwhelmed, seemed to be the inaugurator of a new age. In the eyes of innumerable Pagans Augustus Cæsar was a veritable Messiah, and inscriptions still extant recall the beliefs, and even the language, of the primitive Christians about their Christ. One of these inscriptions, dating from the year 9 B.C., was discovered nearly a generation ago at Priene in Asia Minor. It is a hymn in honour of the Emperor's birthday: "This day has given a new aspect to the whole world; all things would have sunk in ruin if the sun of universal joy had not risen upon mankind in him now born.....Providence, which governs the living universe, has filled this man with such gifts for the welfare of mankind that it has sent him as a saviour to us and the coming generations; he will put an end to every feud and work in all things a glorious transformation. In his appearing the hopes of our forefathers are fulfilled; he has not only surpassed all former benefactors of mankind, but it is even possible that a greater than he should ever appear. The birthday of the god has brought into the world the good tidings (*euaggelia*) which are bound up with him. A new era must begin with his birth."

Another inscription, from Halicarnassus, declares that: "The Deity, for the joy of our life, has brought to men Cæsar Augustus, who is the father of his fatherland Rome the divine, and also the paternal Zeus and Saviour of the whole race of mankind, whose providence has fulfilled and surpassed the prayers of all men."

Horace, too, speaks of Augustus in a similar vein: "Oh scion of the gracious gods, oh best guardian of the race of Ramulus—return! Your country calls for you with vows and prayers.....for when you are here the ox plods up and down the fields in safety; Ceres and bounteous blessing cheer our farms; our sailors speed o'er seas that know no fear of pirates; credit is unimpaired; no foul adulteries stain the home; punishment follows hard on crime.....Who fears Parthian, Scythian, German, or Spaniard with Cæsar safe? Each man closes a day of peace on his native hills, trains his vines to the widowed trees,

and home returning, light of heart, quaffs his wine and ends the feast with blessings on thee as a god indeed." In reading this one cannot fail to be reminded of the picture Isaiah drew of the blessings of the reign of the Anointed Son of David, when the wolf and the lamb should feed together and a little child should lead them.

A. D. HOWELL SMITH, B.A.

(To be Continued.)

Correspondence.

FREEMASONRY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The letters which have appeared upon this subject lead me to make the following observations upon the general ethic and logic of Freemasonry, as far as an outsider can judge it.

The term *Freemason* is thoroughly contradictory, as Freemasonry is free neither economically nor intellectually. Very considerable entrance fees and subscriptions are required from members of masonic lodges, and attendance at the functions (though presumably quite optional), involves further drains upon the purse. This is not a very important matter, as the members apparently think it worth their while to incur these expenses or they would not continue to do so: but it makes the term "free" a misnomer.

What is more important is the intellectual and ethical slavery to which Freemasons subject themselves. On being initiated they declare that they are not joining from any motive of personal advantage, but I have never known a Freemason who could take that oath in sincerity. Many Freemasons are commercial travellers and agents who have joined because they considered membership would assist them in their business. When I have been advised to join, it has always been upon grounds of personal gain. This matter is again of minor importance in comparison with the next point.

It would not matter so much if Freemasons simply perverted the truth when joining, but very sinister accounts are heard of the perversion of justice arising through this fellowship with the "Great Architect of the Universe." It is absolutely opposed to freethought that there should be in existence an organization the members of which are pledged to secretly bolster each other up solely because of their joint membership. It is distinctly anti-social for underground influences to be at work in the community, pushing people into office against candidates of superior merit in every respect that bears upon the actual duties to be performed.

Freethought has established itself upon the policy of the open door, a fair field and no favour, and it must necessarily oppose all secret societies, whether they are or are not enlightened in some aspects of their work. Where there is some element of enlightenment it is to be hoped that it will leaven the whole lump, and so eliminate the mumbo-jumbo element.

HAROLD SCUDDER.

THE PARSON AND THE WHALE.

SIR,—Mr. Morse-Boycott really must not grow tired of that whale. Does he forget that the Son of God himself has testified to the truth of the anecdote by citing it as a type of his own resurrection? Both events are equally probable, and both must be regarded as indisputably authentic by all true Christians. To talk, then, of not desiring "to bolster up the Jonah story," the credibility of which is vouched for by God himself, is surely little short of blasphemy from the lips of a Christian priest.

Nor must he resent fair and open criticism. A Free-thinking audience differs greatly from the gullible public preached to from the shelter of the pulpit. Tall tales of infidel death-beds, the immoral lives of Atheists

and so forth, like the fatuous Fox story (and, for the matter of that, the Jonah and all the other Biblical fables, too), are easily swallowed by docile listeners, trained by long habit to pious and unquestioning credulity. When, however, these tales are offered to a mind accustomed to weigh and appraise evidence, they appear in their true light. Scientific criticism reveals their real nature and, most certainly, pace Mr. Morse-Boycott, has the last word concerning them.

Redolent, too, of pulpit methods is the aspersion, without a shred of proof to uphold it, that Freethinking is a dry and arid desert. Freethinkers do not find it so, but those of them who once were Christians remember only too well the ghastly times of mental stagnation which orthodox theologians actually do term "seasons of dryness and aridity," and declare to be a necessary part of every Christian's spiritual life. Aridity, then, is an acknowledged characteristic not of Freethought but of Christianity. Must a Freethinker teach a Christian his own theology?

To conclude, Mr. Morse-Boycott considers the Myth Theory of the Gospel Jesus a huge joke. Well, our forefathers laughed consumedly at the idea that the earth moves. It is jolly to laugh if you laugh last. But why is it jolly to be a fool, for Christ's—or anybody's—sake? Does Christ *want* fools? His Church's silly sheep assuredly have their uses, but are fools helpful?

Still, Mr. Morse-Boycott chooses to lay claim to that doubtful honour, and no one who has read his recent letters in the *Freethinker* will feel inclined to dispute his right to it.

F. E. M. MACAULAY.

Society News.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH.

Last Sunday evening, at our regular meeting place, St. Pancras Reform Club, Victoria Road, N.W., we had a lecture by Mr. George Bedborough on "Some Aspects of Love Culture." He covered a good deal of ground, dealing with national and international politics from the point of view of his new crusade for the cultivation of love. Mr. Bedborough drew a distinction between sexual and romantic love, and interested all by his description of marriage, as he thought it might be and ought to be conceived. Certain rights, privileges, and duties are essential to any form of marriage, but beyond that there are details of married life which may well permit variation. These agreed conditions should be understood by the bride and bridegroom, who should, in every case, aim at spreading love outside and inside the domestic circle. Properly cultivated and exercised love would help to make easier of solution problems of labour, of war, and of every other human relation. On Sunday, January 30, Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe will lecture on "Freedom," a subject of perennial interest, dealt with by a North London favourite.—K. K.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH.

A most enjoyable evening was spent at the Empire Café, Great Charles Street, on Sunday, January 23. The Tea and Social was a great success, the members contributing with good singing and musical items.

S. DOBSON.

The Non-Political Metropolitan Secular Society had a Social on Thursday, 20th inst., and the occasion was greatly enjoyed by all present. Recitations by Miss Dunger and by Mr. A. D. Howell Smith, B.A., and a Hand-bell display by Mr. and Mrs. Pollinger were greatly appreciated; while the music for the dancing was kindly performed by Messrs. Bernfield, Merrick, and Kennedy.

The entertainment was so successful that it has been decided to hold a Social on the third Thursday of every month at 101 Tottenham Court Road, where Lectures and Debates take place on Sundays and Thursdays as regularly advertised in the *Freethinker*.—B. A. L.

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.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15, Victoria Road, N.W.5): 7.30, Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe, "Freedom."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): January 30, 7 p.m., J. C. Whitebrook, B.A., "The Child, the Family, and the Law."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, John A. Hobson, M.A., "Substitutes for Morals."

THE NON-POLITICAL METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (101 Tottenham Court Road): 7.30, Mr. A. D. Howell-Smith, B.A., "The Naturalness of Christianity." Thursday, at the same Hall, at 7.30, Mr. A. L. Jackson, "Buddhism v. Christianity."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S.—A meeting at the Empire Café, 30 Smallbrook Street, at 6.30.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY, Branch of the N.S.S. (No. 2 Room, City Hall, "A" Door, Albion Street): Mr. George Whitehead, 11.30, "The Pioneers of Truth"; 6.30, "The New View of Spiritualism." Questions and discussion cordially invited. Silver Collection.

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