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FREETHINKER

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Views and Opinions.

Religion and the Press.

It is one of our boasts that we are not a priest-ridden people. In one sense that may be true. It is not often that the priest interferes, openly, in political affairs; although it is not at all difficult to detect his hand in much of the legislation that is attempted; and in the prevention of the wiping off the statute book of Acts which should long since have disappeared. We are not compelled to go to church; and it is possible for a man openly to deny Christianity, provided he maintains a certain moderation of language. A Freethinking paper cannot be, legally, suppressed; and Freethinkers may not, as such, be imprisoned. So far, we are not priest-ridden; but that is just about as far as it goes. The power of the priest still exists; and it is strong enough to drive thousands into hypocrisy, and to exclude from public life many men who are brave enough to let their opinions be known. Moreover, the same influence acts as a gag upon the public press, and places a padlock on the mouths of thousands. There is not an editor of any newspaper in this country who does not, when a particular course of action is proposed to him, seriously consider whether he will thus offend the priests of the various Christian sects, and who does not usually decide that it is not politic to offend the churches. We are certainly not priest-ridden, if we mean, by that, public and openly-applied pressure by the priest, but if we count underhand and cowardly pressure, a pressure that operates, and thoroughly degrades in its operation, then we suffer from a form of priestly rule far more demoralising than that which once lit fires round the stake, or filled the dungeons of the Inquisition.

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Questions for Infants.

A Swansea correspondent sends me an account of some recent happenings in South Wales, which well

illustrate the truth of what I have just said. Some time ago, the *South Wales News* published a questionnaire, on the lines of those recently issued by the *Nation* and the *Daily News*. The questions asked of its readers were as follow: (1) Is the Bible, as a whole, inspired in a way that no other literature is inspired? (2) Are we at liberty to apply every possible human test to discover or to determine the truth of scripture? (3) Is the religious authority in the Bible independent of the miraculous element in it? (4) Are the Biblical doctrines of God, or of the person and mission of Jesus Christ, or of the conditions of salvation absolutely authoritative and final, so that we cannot alter them in any way? (5) Does the Bible contain definite prophecies of future events which will surely come to pass? (6) Is the Bible infallible in every way? These six questions are in themselves illuminating. They are far below the intellectual level of those put forth by the *Nation*; and their crudity is eloquent testimony of the primitive quality of Welsh religious intelligence. It is something to find a daily newspaper seriously putting forward such questions; questions which any decently educated, or fairly intelligent man or woman ought, at this time of day, to be ashamed to ask; and it is interesting to know that, according to the editor of the paper, the majority of those who answered the questions gave a decided "yes" to number six. Those, who think we have got very far from the Stone Age, or, who think that Christianity is quite dead, would do well to consider that statement. At a venture, one feels inclined to say that only in Wales, or in parts of Cornwall, would it be possible for an editor to risk asking questions which are an insult to educated men and women. When Caradoc Evans drew his picture of certain groups of Christians in Wales, with their brutality, ignorance, lechery, greed, and profound religious belief, he was accused by "patriotic" Welshmen of slandering his countrymen. No slander could be a worse attack on Welsh intelligence than the putting of such questions in the year 1927.

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An Abject Surrender.

But the cream of the story is to come. There is a peculiarly hideous form of Christian belief known as Calvinistic Methodism. The name is ugly enough, but the thing itself is uglier still. A mixture of the hyena and the tiger met in solemn conclave in Aberdare. The matter of the questionnaire came before it. The genuineness of the editor in putting these questions was acknowledged; but it was felt that he really ought not to do it. What underground work followed the discussion we do not know; but it is quite evident that the editor was afraid; and, as an act of penance, he publicly announced that the questions would be withdrawn, and that no summary of the answers would be given other than one stating that

the majority of those who replied believed the Bible to be infallible in every way. With all due respect to the editor, we do not feel justified in placing the slightest reliance upon the assurance. A man, who would publicly withdraw from his columns a series of questions because a Church meeting had objected to them, must not be surprised if we require other evidence before admitting that his statement commands our belief. He says that he still thinks the questionnaire would perform a useful service; but because a number of readers, probably urged thereto by clergymen, objected to the questions being asked, and because the meeting at Aberdare also objected, he decides, promptly, to draw the curtain on the whole affair. The promise which he made to publish the results, and the fact that he thinks a public service would be done by the enquiry, count for nothing. Priestly influence is at work; and the editor, like a good Christian newspaper man, thinks it better to break his promise to his readers, and to refrain from performing this public service, than to offend those Calvinistic Methodist priests. I dare to say that, if this editor were asked, he would laugh to scorn the idea that, anywhere, in this "free" country, are we priest-ridden!

* * *

The Power of the Priest.

The *South Wales News* is one of the smaller papers; that may account for its complete, almost abject, public surrender to the Calvinistic Methodists; but, in its degree, it is typical of larger newspapers all over the country. In the provinces, the churches and chapels sometimes bulk largely in the supply of advertisements, and small local papers are greatly affected by that. With the larger papers, big advertisers may be influenced by the Churches; and other forms of pressure may be tried. Some years ago, I was told by the editor of a well-known provincial paper, that, although he had commenced his editorial career in the resolve to give all sides a hearing so far as the religious question was concerned, the pressure brought to bear soon shewed him that either he would have to vacate his position, or to alter his policy. In another case, the editor of an old-established daily paper declined to publish an exposure of one of the Industrial Missions in Africa; and when pressed by a friend, confessed that it did not pay to run counter to the Churches. The only reason why so many of the candidates for Parliamentary and municipal honours hide their anti-religious opinion, and even profess some sentimental attachment to a purely fictitious Jesus, is that honesty in such matters is incompatible with public advancement. In business there is the same story, and every now and again we receive the statement from newsagents that the only objection they have to displaying the *Freethinker* is that they are at once threatened with an organised boycott. Owners of halls frequently decline to let their buildings for freethought meetings on Sundays; and explain, over and over again, that they personally would like to do so, but that it would arouse the opposition of the local clergy, who, working through the police, would hamper them in the course of their business; and if they are working under a licence, would find opposition to their licence being renewed. Our priests are still strong enough, in the majority of cases, to prevent Sunday entertainments; and nearly sixty years of struggle have not managed to clear the priest out of the schools. When we add to these things the place demanded by, and allotted to, the priest in public affairs, it sounds like a stroke of satire to speak of the country as not being priest-ridden.

Christianity's Crowning Offence.

It is not often that we have, as in the case of the editor of the *South Wales News*, the frank confession that something he is doing in connection with religion will be discontinued because it does not please a congress of parsons. Usually editors are awake to the risks they run, and do not invite them. This helps us to understand the peculiar evil of the rule of the priest in this country. Where this dominance is open and avowed, a public man, who is not sufficiently courageous to oppose it, may yield without very great personal harm. His surrender is so far public that he does not deceive himself, neither does he deceive others; but where the priest secures his end by cunning and by underhand pressure, the victim disguises from himself and from others the fact of his surrender; he invents a justification for conduct of which he should be heartily ashamed. He deceives himself as well as others. He is without the sense of dignity that comes from doing what is right, or the strength derived from open opposition to an iniquitous rule. He helps to lower the whole tone of public life; and, when the indictment against Christianity is fully and completely set out, not the least of the counts will be that it is responsible for the introduction of a great deal of the insincerity, humbug, and hypocrisy which disfigure so much of our intellectual life.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

"The All-Conquering Christ."

SUCH is the title of a sermon, by the Rev. W. C. Poole, D.D., which was published in the *Christian World Pulpit* of February 24. Dr. Poole is an American divine, who is now minister of Christ Church, Westminster Bridge Road, London, a Church rendered famous, in both this country and America, by the long ministry of the well-known Newman Hall. Dr. Poole, also, has the reputation of being a great preacher.

The sermon before us is based on John xi, 21, 22, where Martha is represented as saying to Jesus:

Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died; and, even now, I know that whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give thee.

Curiously enough, in the article on Lazarus in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, we read that the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead "is non-historical, like the History of Creation in Genesis"; and yet the minister of Christ Church employs a non-historical incident as his great argument for the omnipotence of the Gospel Jesus. He says

that the impact—mark it—that Jesus made upon these two women left them with the belief that Jesus was undefeatable. And I ask you, is your understanding of Christ a Person who is undefeatable? Have you risen to that?

How characteristic of the pulpit it is, to treat fiction as fact; and then to found its greatest doctrines upon the fiction without making the least enquiry as to its genuineness or as to its falsity. Dr. Poole cannot be ignorant of the fact that the Synoptists do not even mention Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus; an inexplicable omission, if John's narrative be true. If the raising of Lazarus actually happened, is it likely that Matthew, Mark, and Luke had not heard of it, or deliberately made no reference to it? Of all this uncertainty Dr. Poole takes no notice; but accepts the words attributed to Martha as the very words which the bereaved sister really used, with the comment:

quite frankly my faith, compared with this woman's faith, is just like a little foot-hill compared with a mighty Alp. What a grip she had on the ultimate realities.

Dr. Poole's estimate of Mary and Martha is wonderfully high:—

I think it is quite likely that someone came to Martha and Mary, and said, "After all, Lazarus would have had to die some day. You are only having your grief and sorrow a little earlier than you might have had it." Perhaps someone else said: "After all, it is probably all for the best . . ." I think the current attempts to console Martha and Mary were like the current attempts we make, and I think Martha's answer to all those beautiful attempts to console her was this: "Yes, that is all right; if I had never seen Him, if I had never seen the light flashing in his eyes, and felt the power quivering in his touch."

Poor Martha! Dr. Poole evidently imagines that he knows better than the Evangelist what she felt and said. Dr. Poole's faith knows no bounds. To him nothing is in itself unbelievable. Listen to this:—

I believe that all the miracles recorded of Jesus Christ were performed; and I believe that many other miracles were performed than those recorded; but I think that the ability Jesus had of implanting, in the souls of these two women, this deathless confidence is a greater miracle than the physical raising of Lazarus from the dead. It is the supremest thing in life to convey to someone else a deathless faith.

We do not envy Dr. Poole his amazing ability to believe; and we feel sure that the number of clergymen who possess it is extremely small. It is now regarded as the duty of a preacher to be a bit of a critic, as well as a believer. As a matter of fact, however, multitudes of intelligent people have left the Churches because the faith proclaimed in the pulpit they cannot hold. It contradicts their reason and insults their intelligence. The Christ of the Church has lost his popularity. He is of no practical account in any department of life. As Dr. Poole says:

Kings have slighted him; scholars have scorned him; the rich have flouted him; and the poor have mistrusted him.

In practice he is despised and rejected of men. Even in the Church, the reverend gentleman admits, his sway is largely a thing of the past. The Church is called his Body, and yet

Not infrequently does our Lord find it hard to move in and through his body. The spiritual circulation of the Church is, oft-times, so poor that Christ's body seems to be paralysed; and the present at least is no time for religious paralysis.

Does it not, then, inevitably follow that, if the world and the Church are in the states just described, "the all-conquering Christ" is conspicuous only by his absence?

Dr. Poole is in no sense a humanitarian. In humanity, as such, he has no confidence whatever. Of those who endeavour to elevate it by natural means, he has no good and encouraging word to utter. He says:—

Has not the preventive Christ something to say to men and women engaged in all forms of social uplift? Is it not pitiable to watch the light fade from the faces of those who are sincerely yearning to help others? Sooner or later, there always comes to those who go forth to elevate mankind without a personal faith in Christ, the hour of disillusionment. They find that human nature, whether dressed in rags or silks, is not so easily rejuvenated, or so quickly transformed, as they supposed it to be. And when they discover that, many turn back, and walk no more with God or man. No man can be a true humanist whose heart is not primarily and perennially the shrine of the living Christ.

The whole of that passage is wholly untrue and dangerously misleading. In the first place, is it not a most shameful and derogatory admission for a Christian minister to make, that mankind still need to be elevated after "the all-conquering Christ" has been reigning for two thousand years? And yet, that

is the disheartening confession which Dr. Poole inferentially makes. The Church, with its all-conquering Christ, has always been, and still is, a stupendous failure; and the world has to fall back upon its own resources in order to make the least progress.

Of Dr. Poole's sincerity, we entertain no doubt, but that he is hopelessly prejudiced in his estimation of human nature it is equally certain. So passionately concerned he is that he employs the following language:

I want to write these words in fire this morning. We live in a time when anything is likely to happen. I plead this morning that you should give Jesus Christ a place that no one has ever been willing to give him before. For if we do not, they will rob our cradles in twenty years hence. When we have dried the eyes of one generation, the next generation will be weeping tears more copious than have yet been seen; and we shall carve our tombstones afresh and write our epitaphs afresh, and stagger down our darkening way, crying, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died."

The reverend gentleman is fundamentally mistaken. Humanity is not on the downward path, though the Church, undoubtedly, is. Man is moving on an ascending scale. By "man" we mean, not an individual, but, the race to which all individuals belong. The Garden of Eden story of its fall and expulsion from Paradise is completely false. We began our careers in a wilderness, bristling with nettles and thistles, and briars and thorn-trees; and to this day the world has not altered much. Life continues to be a struggle against countless difficulties over which conquest comes but slowly.

Our only comfort lies in the fact that man is essentially good-hearted, disposed to take his brother by the hand, and help him to climb the upward road. Every religion has proved a stumbling-block. The oldest religions are dead and buried; and the latest of them all is at last passing away. The supernatural no longer grips our imagination and heart. All that counts now is the present as creator of the future. What we need most of all is knowledge; and, with this, science is already flooding the world.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Bishop's Kiss.

The Book of Good News, under your interpretation, tells people, not only, that they may go and be damned; but that, unless they are lucky, they must inevitably.—*W. S. Landor.*

Stuffing the ears of men with false reports.—*Lucretius.*

IN controversy, the clergy are very prone to admonish Freethinkers; and to insist, with extremeunction, that sceptics are wasting their time in criticising dogmatic Christianity. Freethinkers, the clergy insist, are merely "flogging a dead horse." Unfortunately, the animal, notwithstanding his alleged decease, has a distressing habit of coming to life again, to the discomfiture of believers and critics alike.

A case in point is the admission, by Bishop Well-ton, Dean of Durham, that part of the work of the Salvation Army is identical with that of the Church of England. This statement was made, in most startling fashion, by the Bishop, at a Salvation Army gathering at Durham Cathedral, where the Bishop said he had confirmed a murderer in a local gaol, and kissed him. Then the Bishop added:—

That incident will show you that we in the Church of England have work like yours."

Apart altogether from the similarity between the Bishop's ideas and those prevalent among the flat-chested warriors of the Salvation Army, this matter

of kissing murderers is a serious one. The hazards of a bishop's life are great. He has to follow his Saviour, on a meagre income, ranging from £2,000 to £10,000 yearly, and he has to risk his life in aristocratic drawing-rooms; and to face untold dangers in Riviera health resorts. One might get used to the episcopal simple life; but most men would rather face a firing party than kiss murderers.

In the first place, kissing amongst men is decidedly out of fashion in old England. It has been out of fashion for over two centuries amongst sober men. The other kind sometimes attempt to kiss policemen; and get fined by hard-headed magistrates for their vain effort. But however drunk a man might be, I rather fancy he would draw the line at murderers.

I know quite a lot of murderers by sight; for they were a popular feature at Mdme. Tussaud's Exhibition; and, speaking plainly, they were not worth kissing. Most men would prefer to kiss an orang-outang than one of these blue-eyed monsters. Why they are blue-eyed is a question. Perhaps blue was the only colour, in eyes, that was in stock at the waxworks. The fact remains that the eyes were as cerulean as the heaven in which the Bishop dreams that some day he will meet his confirmed murderer.

In the second place, this singling out of murderers savours of the vice of snobbery. Why kiss murderers only, when burglars can also be enfolded in a Christian embrace? And, if burglars, why not pick-pockets and area-sneaks? A bishop should love his flock impartially, and not be guilty of gross favouritism. A pork-butcher might, out of business hours, lead a blameless life. Why should he be denied the episcopal kiss? Such a refusal would rouse, in him, those disturbing thoughts of hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, which are so detrimental to the Christian life.

Bishop Welldon was addressing a Salvation Army gathering. It is to be hoped that his audience will not follow his example too slavishly. There is considerable discipline in the ranks of the Salvation Army; but if the officers' duties include the kissing of murderers, there might be a strike, and some talk of increasing their pay. A bishop's salary is so very much larger than that of a Salvation Army officer.

Of course, there is a real danger of the kissing being taken as a precedent; and it might even happen that a new convert, fresh from the public-house, might wish to embrace the General of the Salvation Army. If he is at all like the generals in the Regular Army, there is a danger that the kissed might die of apoplexy, or that the kisser might be shot at dawn.

This kissing business is best dispensed with. It is too reactionary; but it is not so reactionary and retrograde as the Bishop's theological ideas, which savour not only of the Dark Ages, but also of the dark-skinned Christians of Carolina, U.S.A.

At a time when Dean Inge, and some other Christian apologists, are trying to persuade us that modern religion is something other than the grossest form of anthropomorphism, Bishop Welldon shows that Church of England divines can be as literal, stupid, and uncultured as Billy Sunday, or any of the other howling dervishes of Orthodoxy.

Talk of meeting murderers in heaven may be acceptable sob-stuff to the flotsam and jetsam, drunks and disorderlies, at a revival meeting, but it induces nausea in a clean-minded citizen. If heaven is to be filled with all the repentant murderers since the dawn of the Christian era, and all the bishops are to be there to welcome them, sane Christians should pray to be allowed to go to that other place so often mentioned in sermons.

Sympathy is good in its place; but a sloppy senti-

mentalism is open to severe criticism. Why should the murderer wear the halo, and the victim be damned? In the Christian scheme this inevitably follows if the victim is caught unawares, "unannounced, unhousted," as Shakespeare puts it. The victim is hurried to hell, but the murderer has plenty of time to make his peace with his saviour. "Bah! I had rather be a dog and bay the moon" than preach such uncivilised horrors.

Bishop Welldon in his time, has been a school-master; and he has had many hundreds of boys under his care. If he believes such nonsense he is not fit to be a pastor and master to his fellows. If he does not, and merely talks down to the level of his audience, the less said the better.

The plain, blunt truth is that the Salvation Army is the most reactionary religious body in England, save the Great Lying Roman Catholic Church. Bishop Welldon wishes people to believe that the British State Church shares the same sorry views as the others, thus making a wretched trinity of tergiversation.

General Booth's trade-mark is "Blood and Fire." In a country pretending to some culture and some civilisation the motto should be sufficient to make the bronze lions in Trafalgar Square roar in indignation, and to make Nelson descend from his lofty column. It means that all must wash in the blood of Christ, or fall into the fire of everlasting hell. This may be Christian teaching; it may, even, be the quintessence of the Gospel message; but, most certainly, it is most strange talk in the mouth of a citizen of a great country.

The clergy are past masters of the gentle art of making excuses; and some will doubtless, explain that the Bishop meant the exact opposite to what he actually said. They will be in the same delicate position as the San Francisco stonemason who was asked to arrange the wording on the tomb of an American who had been lynched by his fellow-citizens. "I guess," he drawled, "we can get over the difficulty by stating that the deceased was "jerked to Jesus." If murderers are to be petted, and fussed over, in England, by high ecclesiastics, the suggestion may be a useful one.

MINNERMUS.

"The Man With the Hoe."

Bowed by the weight of centuries, he leans
Upon his hoe, and gazes at the ground;
The emptiness of ages in his face,
And, on his back, the burden of the world.

ON either side of the Border, the work on the farms, especially among root crops and harvesting, is, or was—for rural England has changed, greatly, during the last fifty years—done by women, the wives and daughters of the ploughman; whose ability to provide two or three cheap units of labour, in times of stress, bettered his chance of employment.

They are called "bondagers"; an appropriate name; for, spreading dung and picking spuds on a wintry day is of the very essence of bondage; "the ceaseless toil of the galley slave," as Burns put it. They are the only workers, as far as I know, whose occupation is described by a term which, in days gone by, designated their status in human society.

In spite of that, they and theirs are, far and away, the most independent and virile class, among farm workers; with great self-respect, and reliance. Yet, provision of food and shelter is still included in the conditions of their contract of labour; and they are generally bound for a certain length of time.

The discipline, which was used to keep them docile, was provided by the State;—less than fifty

years ago the farm servant, who broke his contract of labour and absconded, could be hunted down like a runaway slave—and by the Church; which (by its antagonism to any fresh thinking, and its doctrine of a future life, in which the lowly here is elevated to a front seat there), sought to keep the peasant in the position its God had mapped out for him.

Edwin Markham's query as to "Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw? Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow?" cannot be answered, with any degree of accuracy, unless the action of the Church is kept constantly in mind.

When the king, in William Morris' story, *A King's Lesson*, was jogging homeward, with his courtiers, after they had all sweated at the task of spreading dung, under the supervision of the serf, he was in a thoughtful mood; and, when one of his captains questioned him, they fell to discussing the means whereby they lived. Said the captain, "As the potter lives by making pots, so we live by robbing the poor." "Bear that in mind," said the king, "and then shall I tell thee my thought while yonder carle spoke. "Carle," I thought, "were I thou, or such as thou, then would I take in my hand a sword, or a spear, or were it only a hedge stake, and forth would we go; and, since we would be so many, and with nought to lose save a miserable life, we would do battle, and prevail, and make an end of the craft of kings and of lords, and of usurers; and there should be but one craft in the world; to wit, to work merrily for ourselves, and to live merrily thereby." There may be some virtue in a hedge stake.

A. W. Benn, a well-accredited historian of England, has put it on record that the governing class of this country "habitually yields to violence what it will not yield to reason"; but the craft of kings, and of lords, is a question time has solved. Kings are kings no longer; it isn't worth the time, or trouble, to crack the skull of any of them; and, as for the price of them, the nation could pay treble what it does for foundation-stone laying and never miss it.

But the craft of usurers is a different proposition. They have a survival value that has enabled them to endure and thrive, during the last six or eight hundred years of national life. The Church condemned them, in a phrase that expresses a fine humane sentiment—and nothing more. For Christian precept and practice, on any matter, or even Christian precept and precept, were often profoundly different; although the most suitable are, invariably, brought forward to justify the claim that Christianity is the fount of all justice.

A writer, in the *New Leader* of January 14, was contending that Christianity abolished slavery, in virtue of the doctrine that all men were equal in the sight of God; and he, piously, assumed that the objectors to his contention were, in their own minds, convinced of the truth of it.

As a matter of historical fact Christian precept and practice, in all the important phases of human relationship, have always been at variance. The Church denounced usury, and practised it. One of the things, insisted on by the German peasants in their rising of 1524, was that usury should be abolished; and, that clerics both practised it, and abetted laymen in so doing, is evident—I am quoting from G. G. Coulton's book, *The Mediæval Village*—from the fact that it, frequently, attracted the notice of the Church councils; and, just as the Churchmen's sexual irregularity is manifest from the great number of enactments passed by the councils against it (the two volumes of Lea's *Sacerdotal Celibacy* are packed with them), so, in the matter of usury.

The Franciscans, the devotees of poverty, were addicted to it; the abbots, of many of the monas-

teries, added it to their way of skinning the serfs; and some very Jesuitical learning was expended to justify the taking of offerings from usurers.

Coulton says that many of the prelates kept tame usurers; however that may be, there is plenty of evidence that they encouraged a practice, which, as it was conducted then, and is now, will sap the vitality of a nation as nothing else on earth can. They preached poverty, and avoided it.

The order of Franciscans is, perhaps, the most glaring example of this gap between precept and practice. St. Francis, when he devoted himself to God, had nothing but the rags of a beggar. On one occasion, a spasm of decent feeling prevented him from abandoning even those. He had all the characteristics of the mediæval saint, the chief of which was the getting of himself into heaven; a proceeding which involved every anti-social human trait.

Yet, with such an example, strong enough to endure to the present day, his adherents began to lust after the good things of the world, as soon as he was dead. They went further; and argued in the mediæval way—the way of the stake and dungeon—against those of their order who objected to the perpetual manœuvring for legacies and other plunder indulged in by the Friars.

The author of *Piers Plowman* represents them, in their greed, as a menace to the community. They extolled justice; but the record of their iniquity, regarding the treatment meted out to the serf, is vile. The Mediæval Church is often held up as the centre around which "Merric England" revolved. There was, really, no "Merric England"; that is a myth brought into being to hide the real thing, which was anything but "merric."

In the 13th and 14th centuries, the Church had an undisputed sway over the souls of men. There was a certain amount of Free thought, for there are sceptics even in the most benighted periods; but insufficient to give the Church cause for alarm; although its keen nose for heresy had detected that disintegrating quality, as far as the Church, itself, was concerned, in the work of Roger Bacon; and some of the utterances of Chaucer had a blasphemous flavour.

Alongside of this, which probably never reached the common people, there was an immense amount of anti-clerical feeling among the peasants. They had some of the quality of more primitive peoples, who are sometimes provoked to chastise their gods; but there was, comparatively, little reasoned objection to the principles of Christianity.

Now and again, a stark Atheist flitted across the scene; but he was soon squashed. It was the harness of the Church that galled; and, the prevalent feeling was that of rebellion, which erupted in a sort of guerrilla warfare, along the whole line of contact between Church and people. The fighting, at times, almost reached the point of a general engagement; and in most of them the existence of the monasteries was the chief point of attack. The lord in his castle also came in for knocks; for his treatment of the serfs was pure, unadulterated commercialism; but, although Coulton says they were slightly less humane than the monks, as landlords, they led the way, when the time came, in manumitting the serfs.

Father Thurston, in the course of a review of *The Mediæval Village*, argues that that was due to the fact that abbots were but trustees for the Church; and, therefore, they were unable, however willing, to free any of their tenants. That, however, did not prevent them, either, from purchasing additional serfs, or, from seeking to extend the bondage of the countryman.

Mr. Chesterman is more plausible in recording that the freeing of the serfs was anonymous. "It is

admitted," he says, "everywhere, that the conscious and active emancipators were the parish priests and the religious brotherhoods; but no name among them has survived."

It may be well, at this point, to give the facts concerning manumission, as ascertained by the author. With hardly an exception, the monastic freeing of serfs was done on a cash basis. Laymen, occasionally, gave liberty to their serfs, by way of ensuring the future welfare of their own souls; but the clergy had that matter off their minds, and so insisted on their full pound of flesh. The Abbey chronicler might put it down that it was done for the greater glory of God, and for the honour of their patron saint; but the full market price was paid.

It is true that in doing so, in manumitting serfs at all, they were going against canon law. The monks had no papal authority to sell liberty; the Church upheld serfdom, and fought, to the bitter end, every attempt of the peasants to obtain a better life; but the monk of the 14th century would sell anything, short of his immortal soul, for the means of satisfying his anything but ascetic needs.

H. B. DODDS.

(To be Concluded.)

Religion and Spiritualism.

THAT highly discerning, unprejudiced, logical, apostle of occultism, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, champion of the rights of fairies, spooks, broom-riders, and hobgoblins generally, has once again been indulging in his favourite pastime of banging the big drum of Spiritualism.

With his propagandist crow-bar—if I may change the metaphor—and with the columns of the favourite daily paper* of the Bishops as a *point d'appui*, he has made a frantic effort to prise open the doors of the Church, and to gain entrance for *his* cult.

That his efforts to force its presence on the Church signally failed may have been a matter of surprise to the zealous advocate himself; but were certainly so to the Freethinker who sees, in the far back Witch-of-Endor days, a common origin of the two sets of beliefs; and lines of descent therefrom, which, if not actually parallel, have a divergence, scarcely appreciable, if we ignore such trivial differences of detail as that the spirits of the one kind are furnished with bird-like wings and play harps, while those of the other possess dragon-fly-like wings, drink whisky, and smoke cigars.

But this confident pilot to "Summerland" is going to stand no nonsense. He warns all and sundry that, if the Church will not admit his Spiritualism it will be so much the worse for the Church; or, rather, Churches; for Spiritualism, in that case, will "supercede or modify" every existing belief. In his familiarly characteristic vein, he boasts that his little "philosophy," as he terms it, a "philosophy" that expounds the "relation between life and death," constitutes "the most sane, helpful and cheering view of the intentions of God towards man which has ever yet been vouchsafed to the human race."

With regard to its "saneness," the present writer, who has had a fairly long experience in the treatment and care of mental cases, has seen more than one case of insanity that was directly attributable to spiritualistic obsessions.

The neurologist, Dr. Haydn Brown, has described how several of his patients received their first mental shock at spiritualistic *seances*, a shock initiating a

* *Morning Post*, Dec. 31, 1926. *The Place of Spiritualism in Religion*. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

progressive disorder of illusions, delusions, and, finally, of fixed hallucinations. One spiritualistic enthusiast, under his care, ended up "by hearing voices coming from every manhole in the street until he was terrified to leave his house."

This specialist, though he has "searched the minds" of thousands of persons in health and disease, has found not the least evidence of any communication with a spirit world. Like Sir Arthur, he, too, is prophetic:—"Spiritualism is going to be explained and smashed to atoms in a very few years."

Sir Bryan Donkin† is one of our most distinguished alienists, and an authority whose opinions in such matters carry immense weight, as they are based upon a long career of expert work in lunacy and feeble-mindedness and upon a careful and discriminating study of what may be described as the spiritualistic mentality. He had, time and again, called attention to the dangers of Spiritualism; more especially as the very type of individual, who is most readily enfolded in its snares, is one possessing the uncritical, weak, and unbalanced, mind.

Spiritualists, no doubt, would argue:—"All this but proves the existence of a spirit world, and the effect of its occupants on those of our world who are not sufficiently in tune with them."

To which it may be replied that the superstitious servant girl, crossing the churchyard in the dark, screams and swoons away because she *believes* the screech-owl that she sees and hears is a spook. Saul "fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid" because his mentality was favourable to his being bamboozled by the wily old lady of Endor into *believing* that the dead Samuel, and not she herself, was talking to him; indeed, we are expressly told that Saul had "no strength in him; for he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night."

As the observations of those differing from them are of small account among spiritualists, those of a confirmed believer in the existence of the supernatural element in mediumistic phenomena may—for them—carry more weight.

Dr. A. T. Schofield differs from the orthodox type of spiritualist only as to the character of the participants in these quick-and-dead conversations. Phenomena, which Sir Arthur claims as "vouchsafed" by God and his angels, Dr. Schofield regards as machinations of the Devil and those in league with him.

Now, what has Dr. Schofield to say, concerning Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's vaunted health-giving properties of Spiritualism? He, first, endorses the estimate of a famous mental specialist that "thousands of persons . . . have been driven to the asylum through Spiritualism," and then he adds:—"A truly pitiful record!" When spiritists fall out wise men come into their own.

The claim of Sir Conan Doyle, that Spiritualism is "helpful and cheering," does not appear to be the view on the Continent, where it is recognised that so much harm has been done that in certain parts the practice has been forbidden by law.

Perhaps Sir Conan Doyle used the expression in the same sense that Huxley did when, in denouncing, as a "gross imposture," a case of Spiritualism he had personally investigated, he remarked that the only good he could see in the demonstration of the truth of the cult was that it furnished an additional argument against suicide, in that it were better to "live a crossing-sweeper than die to be made to talk twaddle by a medium hired at a guinea a *seance*."

Sir A. C. Doyle has great faith in the experiments and findings of W. J. Crawford, D.Sc., who spent

† It was Dr. Bryan Donkin and Professor Ray Lankester who exposed the charlatana of the notorious Slade in 1876.

years of his life in investigating the "levitations" and "ectoplasmic outpourings" at the *seances* of the Belfast medium, Miss Goligher; and who was so cleverly duped by that astute and unscrupulous young lady. Had Dr. Crawford followed Huxley's sound advice he would, almost certainly, not have met his tragic end by suicide.

Sir A. C. Doyle, no doubt, would sweep away all objections to the "helpful" and "cheering" effects of the practice of Spiritualism by pointing to the spectacle of the "several thousand people" who leaped to their feet, at the Albert Hall, as testimony to their having enjoyed the privilege of "getting into touch" with "outside intelligences."

But, as Herbert Spencer said, "to the mass of people nothing is so costly as thought." The intellectually honest will resolutely decline to make a fools' paradise their bourne, and will bodily nail their standard of faith, not to the mast of what is *comforting*, but to that of what is *true*.

Perhaps the best evidence of the "plane" of intelligence at spiritualistic conversaciones is forthcoming from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself, if one may judge by what he is reported to have said in a lecture at the Gateshead Town Hall:—

There are people who object to the quality of these (spirit) messages; indeed, they say they are all twaddle. Well, friends, I'll tell you how that is. One of our philosophers has said that these islands are inhabited by some forty million people—mostly fools. *It is the same on the other side.*

Now one would have expected so surprising a statement would have caused considerable amusement among the huge audience assembled, but their faces are described as remaining as "solemn and glum" as that of "a Presbyterian elder dispensing the Sacrament." Only one person in the packed building appreciated the significance of the explanation, and he, our friend Mr. Joseph Bryce, laughed consumedly.

JAVALI.

THE MEANING OF HUMANIST.

Humanist. The word is apt to puzzle or mislead, first, because it is applied to different things and a doubt of which is in question is often possible, and secondly because in two of these senses its relation to its parent word *human* is clear only to those who are acquainted with a long-past chapter of history. The newspaper reader sometimes gets the impression that *humanist* means a great classical scholar; Why? he wonders, and passes on. Another time he gathers that a humanist is a sceptic or an agnostic or a freethinker or something of that sort, you know; again he wonders why, and passes on. Another time he feels sure that a humanist is a Positivist or Comtist, and here at last, since he knows that Comte founded the Religion of Humanity, there seems to be some reason in the name. And lastly he occasionally realizes that his writer is using the word in the sense in which he might have invented it for himself—one for whom the proper study of mankind is man, the student, and especially the kindly or humane student, of human nature.

The original humanists were those who, in the Dark Ages, when all learning was theology, and all the learned were priests or monks, re-discovered pre-Christian literature, turned their attention to the merely human achievements of Greek and Roman poets and philosophers and historians and orators, and so were named *humanists* as opposed to the divines; hence the meaning classical scholar. But this new-old learning had, or was credited with, a tendency to loosen the hold of the Church upon men's beliefs: hence the meaning freethinker. The third meaning—Comtist—was a new departure, unconnected in origin with the first two, though accidentally near one of them in effect, but intelligible enough on the face of it. As to the fourth, it requires no comment.—H. W. Fowler, *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*.

Acid Drops.

The Bible, and New Testament Protestantism, have been the secret of Britain's greatness. *The Christian Herald* says this; so, we know it must be true. Another paper informs us that Britain's Naval Estimates for last year amounted to £58,000,000; and that this year's Estimates are likely to be not less. We infer from all this that Protestant greatness, nurtured by Christly pacifism, appreciates the usefulness of a strong navy.

"There is no such thing as a vicious child," declares Dr. L. J. Bendit, of Leeds. We feel sure the Doctor is wrong. The Christian Church most positively declares the viciousness of human nature. Every child is born into the world with the label, "Original Sin—handle with care," tied around its neck; that is why the good offices of the Church are so essential to mankind. The Church must be right in this matter—she has her information direct from God. If the Doctor is permitted to run about giving the direct lie to a fundamental Christian doctrine, morality is likely to be seriously endangered. We suggest that the clergy of Leeds should wait upon this heretical medical man, to get him to retract his ungodly statement.

The British-Israel World Federation (a Christian organisation) is to hold a mass meeting, on March 1, at the Albert Hall. It calls this, "A Trumpet Call to the Nation." The Federation appears not to realise that the larger portion of the nation has grown up, and no longer enjoys listening to blasts on a Christian tin trumpet. Still, no doubt the British-Israelites will get a good "gate." The undeveloped mind is still keen on toy trumpet calls.

"A day of prayer for China" has been arranged for March 3, by the World's Evangelical Alliance. The curious thing is that our Christian friends always start their concerted efforts to influence the Most High after trouble has begun, after blood has been shed. Three things never seem to occur to them; (1), that prevention is better than cure, and therefore the Lord should be asked to prevent; (2), that a really humane God wouldn't wait to be asked to prevent bloodshed or strife of any kind; (3) that, if God interferes in the affairs of a certain section of mankind, at the request of another section, he is infringing the first section's right to exercise that wonderful Free Will our Christian friends are always shouting about.

A Fundamentalist, Mr. R. L. Lacey, objects to Modernism. It is, he says, not "playing the game." It is untrue to the Scriptures. It is not Christianity; and to live in Modernism, while living on Christianity, is not even moral. Our Fundamentalist friend sees clearly. When a priest deliberately teaches doctrines different from those which the Church has believed in and taught from its earliest days, and interprets the Scriptures in a manner utterly opposed to that of the Christian Fathers, he is guilty of gross intellectual dishonesty; which is especially despicable, considering the fact that he is paid by his Church to teach something quite other than that which he does teach. In the secular affairs of life, this kind of dishonesty is unknown. In the Church, seemingly, another code of honesty obtains; and the tricksters can even be exalted to the rank of Bishop.

The Willesden magistrates refused encouragement to a husband who wished to lock up his wife's clothes in order to keep her at home. He thought he was "within his legal rights" in doing so; but the magistrates disillusioned him on that point. This good man has evidently been reading St. Paul, "not wisely but too well." He has now discovered that the Christian way of treating wives has gone out of fashion in these deplorably Pagan times. We suggest that his wife should take him to Church again to get married once more, with the aid of the Bishops' nice new Permissive Prayer Book, which, owing to pressure of civilised opinion, has dropped out "obey" from the marriage service.

A vast scheme "to revive the glories of Ancient Rome" is to be put in hand shortly, involving the razing of hundreds of houses and the widening of narrow streets around the ancient monuments. This strikes us as an attempt to start at the wrong end of the revival business. What the Italians appear to be concerned with is reviving the external signs of Rome's greatness. Whereas, what they could more usefully revive are the internal virtues that made Rome renowned before the ancient civilised world—tolerance, and love of free speech and justice. These ancient Roman glories, seemingly, do not appeal overmuch to modern Italians; for they have the misfortune to be dominated by a creed with an appalling record of intolerance, and persecution, and hatred of free speech. Under such a domination the real glories of Ancient Rome stand little chance of being revived.

There are some gallant lads in the Free Churches, and one instance of bravery and high enterprise deserves to be recorded for posterity. Mr. Leonard M. Shepherd, speaking at the annual meeting of the Metropolitan Free Church Federation, unburdened himself as follows:

I was severely criticised because I stopped the Frothblowers' Anthem being sung at a dinner to the blind in our hall. I protested because it is a sinister move to encourage treating which many of us hoped the war had killed.

Let us hope that it will be recorded in the archives of the British Museum; the conglomeration of bodies standing for the propagation of black magic in 1927 could not stop the march of commonsense which is measured by the tempering of dogma; but one of its official representatives stopped—the Frothblowers' Anthem.

Miss Maude Royden says the fashion to-day is to say that we must think of God as wholly impersonal.

This is a natural reaction against the ideas of an older generation—ideas of God so suffocatingly narrow and "personal" as to give one a feeling that He is a sort of huge clergyman; or super-policeman.

According to the Rev. Miss, "it would be wrong to say God is a person. He is something infinitely more than that; but he includes personality. Miss Royden rambles on in this wise, and proves to her own satisfaction that her God is a super-person. So we get back again to the "suffocatingly narrow," and come to the conclusion that all's well with the world; the "super-policeman still reigns; and the huge clergyman still has ears big enough to listen-in to the petitions of his millions of faithful worshippers.

The National Laboratory of Psychological Research, S.W., have been using a ten-ton steam hammer to crack a nut. Mr. Harry Price states, in the papers, that the briefly famous Poltergeist Girl, at the Laboratory, would cheat if they would let her. This form of research appears to be as useful as the efforts of a society to straighten out all the corrugated iron in the United Kingdom.

Apropos of the Bishops' twenty years weighty deliberations, culminating in the new Prayer Book, a reader of a weekly paper remarks:

The layman would wish the Church to concentrate more on social reform than on the settlement of purely academic questions.

This reader seems curiously lacking in a sense of proportion. What he styles academic questions are, in truth, highly important. He may take it from us that these highly intelligent men, university trained, and with salaries ranging from £6,000 to £15,000 a year, are not likely to have been devoting their valuable time to matters unconcerned with the welfare of the nation. If he doubts this, let him examine the fruit of their labour—the Permissive Prayer Book; it redeems the Bishops from the charge of indifference.

A contemporary informs us that the Chinese are the most reasonable race on earth. This explains, perhaps, why, despite the circulation of hundreds of thousands of Bibles in the native tongue, and despite many years of missionary effort, the Chinese have no use for that which stultifies reason—the Christian religion.

The Vicar of Nuneaton has banned the Charleston from his parish school dance programme. He fears that to include it would bring "all the riff-raff from the cheap dance-halls." The reverend gent seems rather particular. Has he left off teaching little children that David pleased God by dancing "in the altogether" before the Ark? We cannot, too, understand the vicar's objection to "riff-raff," since his Church is always trumpeting forth its anxiety to "save" sinners. He appears to be missing an excellent opportunity of "gathering them in."

The Sabbatarian fanatics don't get things all their own way. The Town Council of Banff wrote to Duff House Golf Club protesting against Sunday play on the Club course. The Club ignored the latter. When a motion was put forward to prohibit Sunday play, the Club members voted against the motion, by 68 votes to 16. The busybody Town Council thus gets a double slap in the face. What we suggest is that the Club members should carry the war into the enemy's camp. They should get up a public petition in Banff requesting the Council to open the public recreation grounds on Sunday for games, in order that the less well-to-do citizens may enjoy the same opportunity for wholesome recreation as is now enjoyed by the golfers.

O, my brethren, do be careful. There is a universal danger that the world might wake up and give a tremendous guffaw of laughter at the heaped-up imbecility of fools. We read that four naughty girls of society, whose eyes were bigger than their pockets, were arrested at Gateshead for shop lifting. Their relatives said they were "dancing mad." A detective stated that, an hour after their arrest, they were dancing the Charleston in their cell. A week's remand in separate cells was ordered. Now, judging by the fact that the revised version of the Prayer Book is, at present, the best seller, it appears strange that this book was not asked for by these young ladies to pass away their time.

The Rev. R. J. Campbell agrees with a well-known publicist, that people of very moderate attainments often come to occupy exalted positions in the public eye; and, says he, one cannot help wondering why that should be so. Mr. Campbell, we fancy, must have been cocking his eye at some of the Deans and Bishops of his own church, when he wrote the latter statement. What he might have added is, that in no other profession or calling in the wide, wide world is it so easy for the man with mediocre abilities to rise to exalted, and well-paid, positions as it is in the Church. We may add that it is not exactly a testimony to public intelligence that the masses accept these exalted mediocrities at their own valuation.

In Milan, where priests appear to have been revelling in their element—the crooked and ugly territory in the history of mankind—an accident has happened that, once again, proves the absurdity of the hypothesis of faith. The steamer *Lecco*, with nearly 1,000 pilgrims and priests on board, sank in Lake Como. The relics of St. Aloysius of Gonzaga were on board, but these bones failed to save the lives of four people, and could not prevent injuries to thirty in the panic that ensued. We are told that men and women fought with desperation, several being crushed and hurled into the water. What a comfort true religion is! and how splendidly it works out in practice! The moral of the story is, that there are enough troubles in the world of fact, without adding to them the superfluous troubles of faith.

Forty people have been killed and some hundred injured in the tornado that swept over Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. This seems a very poor return for the pure and unadulterated piety that characterises America. We have no doubt that the Fundamentalists will reconcile this mismanagement of the universe with the ethics of Adam and the theory of a flat earth.

Following events in China, the Y.M.C.A. has sprung into activity on lines similar to those adopted in France. An appeal is also made to the public for £5,000.

The "Freethinker" Endowment Trust.

As previously announced, the special appeal on behalf of this Fund will close on March 20. We should like to close this with no more than a level thousand to raise next season; thus making sure of the £1,450 promised conditionally; but, as there is a sum exceeding £1,600 yet to raise to accomplish this, we are afraid our wish will not be realised. Of course, one never knows, and some of the wealthier Freethinkers of the country may yet come forward at the eleventh hour and furnish what is required. We shall see.

The complete list of subscriptions this year to date is as follows:—Previously acknowledged £992 4s. 2d. "An Ardent Admirer of the Journal," £1; "We Three" (2nd sub.), 3s.; C. J. Knox, £1; J. Lauder (Cape Colony), £1; T. Faulkner (Auckland), £1; O. Underwood, 5s.; W. Pratt, 5s.; G. F. L. (Bella Coola), £1; L. W. Wallis, £1; J. M. Hill, 10s.; W. Clowes (2nd sub.), 10s.; S. Clowes (2nd sub.), 10s.; Miss Barker, 2s. 6d.; Mr. Scabrook, 5s.; H. H. Hurrell, 2s.; "Juvenal," £1; S. H. Ade, 2s. 6d.; E. L. Bishop, 4s.; H. Scudder, 10s.; W. Milroy, £1; A. Wilcox, 10s.; J. Fergusson (2nd sub.), 2s. 6d.; R. Stevenson, 5s.; A. Millar, 2s. 6d.; T. C. Kirkman (2nd sub.), £3; A. L. Dover, 10s.; W. R. Angell, 10s.; C. B. Little (New Jersey), £1; W. J. Lamb, £1 9s. Total, £1,011 2s. 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. PRATT.—It was evidently a good night's work, and you appear to have enjoyed yourself. It will, doubtless, bear good results. Pity there is not organised work going on in the town.

J. LAUDER.—Will hold up papers as requested until we hear from you.

Mr. F. J. GOULD writes pointing out that a sentence in his last week's article should read "Moses pondered and prepared," not "plagiarised and prepared," as printed.

S. CLOWES.—We can always depend upon you doing your share. We should like to see all others equally zealous.

C. B. LITTLE.—We are glad to hear that there is some prospect of your returning home, and that you intend, if you do so, to take up your Freethought work again. You are not forgotten in Glasgow, and your return would be welcome.

E. L. BISHOP.—We have placed both subscriptions together. We hope that is satisfactory.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

To-day (March 6) is the anniversary of the opening of the Secular Hall, Leicester, and Mr. Cohen has been invited to attend as one of the speakers on the occasion. It is always an interesting function, and we foresee a crowded hall. The Leicester Society has a record of which it may well be proud.

Mr. Cohen brought his ten days' campaign to a close on Sunday last with a crowded meeting in the City Hall, Glasgow. Every seat was taken and many were standing. The meeting in the Co-operative Hall, on the Monday evening, was an excellent one, and the first Freethought meeting ever held at Shotts, about 18 miles from Glasgow, held every promise of good work in the future. The interest of those present was marked, and the new branch there should make many new members in the near future. Altogether, it is quite clear that there is a very strong movement in favour of Freethought in the West of Scotland, and we doubt not in other parts of the country as well. And when the Scot moves he does not easily go back.

The success of the Hamilton meeting was largely due to the efforts of Mr. Higgins, of Motherwell, but the scheme of the week's arrangements was under the care of Mr. Mann, the Secretary of the Glasgow Branch. Mr. Mann attended every meeting, saw to the literature at most, and acted as chairman at several. His heart is wholly in the work, and we hear excellent accounts of him also as a speaker. He is keen mentally, well read, and we congratulate the Branch on having so efficient and painstaking an official. As he is a young man, we hope that he has very many years of work in the Freethought cause before him. We venture to say that no other work will yield so enduring a sense of satisfaction.

To-day (March 6) Mr. R. H. Rosetti will lecture in the Town Hall, Broad Street, Pendleton, at 3 p.m. and 6.30 p.m. In the afternoon his subject is "What We Pay for the Religion we Get," and in the evening "Popular Fallacies about Christianity." A frequent service of cars from Deansgate, Manchester, passes the Town Hall, and we hope that our Manchester friends will be there in force, and that each will bring a Christian friend with him. Mr. Rosetti fully deserves a crowded hall.

We are glad to hear from the secretary of the New Chester-le-Street Branch that its weekly meetings are going on well, and that it is looking forward to making many new members. The secretary is Mr. J. T. Brighton, Prospect Cottage, Chester-le-Street, and he will be glad to hear from anyone interested.

We hope that our London friends will busy themselves about the two lectures by Mr. Cohen in the Portman Rooms, Baker Street, on Sundays, March 13 and 20. Baker Street can be reached quite easily from all parts of London, and the Portman Rooms are very well known. Small slips advertising the meetings have been prepared, and we shall be glad if those who can do so will assist in their distribution. They can be obtained at the office of either the N.S.S. or the *Freethinker*.

We see from a report in a local paper that Mr. A. C. Musgrave, Secretary of the Northampton Secular Society, gave an address on "Materialism" at the Northampton Y.M.C.A. Debating Society. The lecture was certain to do good, and the N.S.S. would send speakers to other Christian Associations if these bodies would really like to hear "the other side of the case."

We are asked to announce that a meeting of the members of the Plymouth Branch will be held on Monday, March 7, for the purpose of discussing details in connection with Mr. Cohen's visit on the 27th, and making all arrangements necessary. We hope there will be a good attendance.

There will be a meeting of the Swansea Branch at No. 3 Carmarthen Road, Swansea, to-day (March) at 7, to consider general propaganda. We should like to see Swansea more active than it is, and trust that all interested will make it a point to be present.

From Protoplasm to Man.

FROM Protoplasm to Homo Sapiens, or modern man, there extends a period of at least 1,000,000,000 years, according to the most reliable consensus of modern scientific opinion; while a previous period of lifeless and molten matter, probably preceded by a state of unstable nebulosity, must have extended backwards for such a length of time as to cause the mind to boggle in trying to realise the infinity of its extent.

The dividing line between these two periods is fairly well defined, because the end of the remoter age is indicated by the ending of the Azoic, or lifeless rocks. These basic rocks are molten, or crystalline, and contain no indication of life.

Science indicates that the Azoic Age, which may have endured for a 1,000,000,000 years, began in a state of white heat, or fiery nebulosity, and, gradually cooling and solidifying, ended in clouds of steam, torrents of hot rain, pools of boiling water, and a quivering landscape—dotted over thickly with lurid volcanoes, belching fire and smoke, and innumerable geysers spouting columns of hot water that would fall with a continual hissing on to the red or incandescent streams of volcanic lava.

Then we enter on the Proterozoic Age, which may have extended over a period of no less than 500,000,000 years, or half of the time that life may have existed on this globe.

At some period at the beginning of that almost inconceivable extent of time, life evolved. Those warm but cooling seas gave birth to Protoplasm probably at the very first moment in which the temperature of the Polar waters fell sufficiently to permit of certain natural chemical actions and processes, a degree of heat that may be scientifically ascertained in the future.

From Protoplasm, which was conceived in the womb of Mother Nature, and born by perfectly natural processes in those ancient pools of tepid water, has descended all that has life to-day, both in the animal and the vegetable kingdom; including man, who is poised at the apex, who is the epitome of evolutionary creation.

Bishop Barnes, for whom we are thankful because he serves as a signpost to indicate to what extent Freethought has permeated the church, accepts the theory of evolution practically in its entirety. But this theory, he declares, fits in perfectly with the true conception of religion. He contends apparently that God created the first atoms of life, and also the laws of nature governing them, and then left man to evolve through all his stages, for some 1,000,000,000 years, without any arbitrary interference from himself as man's designer and creator.

We say to Bishop Barnes that such a theory is not good enough for intelligent and enlightened people; while those who prefer to be continually doped and duped would swallow, with just as much, or more, avidity, the Garden of Eden story, including Adam's rib; and they would be logical; because a God, who could create life and the laws of nature, could surely create a perfected man just as easily to begin with.

In the rocks of the Proterozoic Age only microscopical remains of the simplest life-forms are to be found; the minute algae, representing plant life on the one hand; and, on the other, the skeletons of tiny creatures, called radiolaria; while certain mineral deposits are believed to have been formed by the corrosive action of masses of decaying jelly-fish.

The true scientist, discarding any belief in the supernatural, cannot doubt that life began with that long-drawn-out Age. And he is not merely guessing, because, having found visible and indisputable evidence of the origin and gradual variation of plant and animal life through vast ages, he knows that it must have required equally extended periods of similar growth and change for the original living organisms to have developed to that stage where they would leave shell, or bone, or even print, behind them.

The scientist, glancing backwards across the vast dead and silent ages of the past, immediately visualizes in his "mind's-eye" the process, stage by stage, by which Protoplasm slowly evolved to jelly-fish and various *animaculæ*, without sufficient substance to leave their imprint in those rocks. He clearly visualizes, between the frail jelly-fish and the first vertebrate animal, an enormous extent of time in which there were creatures with soft cartilage; and, then, with harder cartilage in the place of spine; and he is satisfied that this evidence is quite incontrovertible.

A fully developed jelly-fish, or a human being, without ancestors, is equally impossible. There is no stopping place where any creature or organism could originate after the protoplasmic atom from which all life germinated.

The Early Palaeozoic Age, which may have lasted 250,000,000 years, has left us the first plainly visible traces of life in the guise of the sea scorpions and the trilobites. But these were, already, distant variations from the lineal ancestors of man; who, at this stage, were probably developing cartilage; but were, as yet, quite incapable of creeping entirely out of those shallow and tepid pools which were their homes and only possible abodes.

The later Palaeozoic Age, which may have endured, approximately, 150,000,000 years, was an age of fishes and amphibia. The sea-weed, from which all plant life primarily originated, was steadily climbing out of the sea, and colossal swamp forests had already developed. Throughout this Age those swamps were of enormous extent. The earth's surface was still comparatively flat; no great mountain ranges existed, because, although there might be frequent volcanic action and upheavals, the earth's crust had not solidified sufficiently to support any great irregularities of surface.

It was in these great swamps that the dense forests of the Carboniferous Age flourished, and left their record in the coal measures that abound throughout the world.

Fish and amphibia resembling large newts or salamanders, and also some primitive reptiles, left their records along with that of the forests.

But, undoubtedly, many amphibian creatures, that were struggling up the slopes from the shallow waters to seek refuge from their more powerful but less agile enemies, were too frail and small to leave any trace behind. Nevertheless, their ability to climb and run was steadily increasing; and they were gradually be-

coming more adapted to land, and less to water. The determining factor in their survival was their agility—their ability to scramble up the land elevations in precipitate flight from their enemies. When caught they were completely devoured; when they died by a natural death, it would be on the borders of the bare lands; where they would completely decay, in the scorching heat, without leaving any trace.

There is no good reason for doubting that man has descended from some line of these small amphibia.

Next we come to a very interesting Age, the Mesozoic; which may have continued for 100,000,000 years, and is known as the Age of Reptiles; because, during that Age, the Earth teemed with gigantic reptilian monsters. Many of these Saurians grew to a length of 50 or 100 feet. The remains of one has recently been discovered in East Africa that is 160 feet in length. They could reach to a height of from 20 to 40 feet. Such creatures, if alive to-day, could easily thrust their snake-like heads into our second floor bedroom windows and pluck us out of our beds; or even peer over the top of an ordinary two-storey house.

Although many were herbivorous, others, like the Tyrannosaurus, were carnivorous, and were fighting monsters of a most terrifying aspect.

The rocks of this tropical Age are sown with the remains of these monsters; and here we find the first remains of true birds, which had, evidently, evolved from semi-reptilian amphibious creatures, which had been literally forced to fly in the air to escape the teeming enemies that preyed on them.

The Archæopteryx had a long reptilian tail, studded with feathers; showing, clearly, its transitional nature.

The Pterodactyls grew to half the size of a man, and hopped, flopped, or glided from tree to tree, or from rock to rock. They had the body of a serpent and the head of a bird, but the bill was filled with sharp teeth. The wings were like a bat's, stretching from fore to hind legs. But these weird creatures had no feathers, which indicated a purely reptilian origin. True, birds must have evolved from scaly fish-like creatures, as feathers are only elongated and highly developed scales or fins.

Where were the progenitors of man, in this age of monsters and monstrosities? As yet, all the higher land was barren and parched; and only the low and moist regions were covered with vegetation. A creature that must have lived on this border line of vegetable and animal life, a creature that crawled, hopped, and climbed, a creature that could subsist where all the larger reptilian animals would have perished from starvation, was undoubtedly our ancestor.

Although there are not remains which can be picked out as having belonged definitely to that creature, we know that he must have existed in that age, and that he had already, in all probability, developed a covering of hair that was becoming pronounced about the head and other parts of the body.

If we rule out the supernatural, as true scientists and Freethinkers must, this must have been true, because, at this point, we would be about half-way in the process of evolution from Protoplasm to the first and remotest remains which have been discovered, and which we can reasonably surmise were the remains of man.

Hair, scales, and feathers, all made of the same material, point, undeviatingly, back to the sea as the cradle of life.

The close of the Mesozoic Age is wrapt in mystery; although certain outstanding facts are plainly written in the record of the rocks. Some sudden change of temperature, or cataclysmal convulsion of nature,

brought death and destruction in its train.

The Saurians, great reptilian monsters of many types, perished, became completely extinct. On land only a few diminutive creatures of the hardiest types survived. So violent was this catastrophical change, or occurrence, that a great variety of amphibious creatures perished completely.

The Ammonites, creatures with coiled shells that grew to a width of a foot or more, of which there were upwards of a hundred varieties, filling those ancient seas, became entirely extinct. Only varieties of small shell fish persisted into the next age.

On the land, almost all of the vegetation prevalent at that time disappeared and was gradually replaced by entirely new varieties, very similar to those of the present day.

ONA MELTON.

(To be concluded.)

Suggested Further Revisions.

CHRISTIANS are constantly tinkering about with their old creed. After the masterly criticism of the Pentateuch, by Bishop Colenso, and the new view of the evolution of man from an ape-like ancestry, by Darwin, it became necessary to revise the Old Testament; for, not only were the books ascribed to Moses shown to be unscientific and unhistoric, but also many of their teachings utterly immoral.

In 1881 a revised version of the Old Testament appeared, and though there were many verbal alterations, it was seen that the old stories of the alleged Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden, the story of the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and the Plagues in Egypt remained unchanged.

Shortly after this the New Testament was revised, and the same thing occurred; the alterations being merely re-translations of certain passages, while the miraculous stories and the main teachings remained unaltered.

Some of the critics in those days said, quite bluntly, that if the Bible was really the inspired word of God it was a gratuitous piece of meddling on the part of man to try and improve upon it. However, notwithstanding these and other revisions, certain Christians still remain unsatisfied, and call for further alterations and improvements.

For instance, Dr. Barnes, Bishop of Birmingham, as a man of science, knows perfectly well that the story of the alleged Fall of Man in Genesis is not true; he is, however, content to say that it is merely an allegory; quite overlooking the fact that if the first man did not fall, there was no reason why God should send his only-begotten Son down on earth four thousand years later to die, in order to blot out the sins of mankind.

In other words, if there was no fall, there was no need of an Atonement. Thus, the whole scheme of Christianity falls to the ground.

Recently, I noticed that Miss Maude Royden, the famous woman preacher, had been writing some articles, in *Reynolds's Illustrated Paper*, on the doctrine of eternal torment in hell fire, in which she suggested that the passages, in the Old and New Testaments, dealing with this subject, had been wrongly interpreted by the famous divines of the past. She enumerated Bede, Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventura, Sir Thomas More, Calvin, and others, all of whom believed in a literal hell fire.

Thomas Boston said:

God will hold sinners with one hand over the pit of hell, while he torments them with the other.

Jonathan Edwards, in 1758, "not so very long ago," she says, declared:

Here (that is on earth) all judges have a mixture of mercy; but the wrath of God will be poured out upon the wicked without mixture. Imagine yourself to be cast into a fiery oven and that your body were to lie there for a quarter of an hour, full of fire, as full within and without as a bright coal fire, all the while full of quick sense; what horror would you feel at the entrance of such a furnace? Oh, then, how would your heart sink if you knew that, after millions of ages, your torment would be no nearer to an end than ever it was! But your torment in hell will be immensely greater than this illustration represents.

In the goodness of her heart, Miss Royden revolts against such a terrible doctrine as this. Her humanity is evidently immeasurably better than the old Christian creed; and so she proclaims:

If such a creed is intolerable with human beings, how is it possible to suppose that God, who sees all, and knows all, and who is not merely loving, but Love itself, could find it tolerable? Surely, we must either abandon the belief that God is love, or say boldly that there is no such hell as our forefathers have believed. The two things cannot be believed together.

Quite so; but I am old enough to remember the late Charles Haddon Spurgeon, in a sermon, trying to show that our punishment in hell for sin and unbelief was but a manifestation of the justice of God; and I have heard clergymen of the Church of England argue to the same effect.

What I should like to ask Miss Royden is, would she in her new interpretation of hell, do away with the "Day of Judgment" altogether?

What about the recording angel, who is alleged to be making a note of all our sins, great and small? A record of all the lies told in business? of the millions and billions of other sins committed by mankind day by day? Is the office of recording angel abolished?

And what has become of all the records of the past? Have they been flung into the "everlasting bonfire" of the hell of the old Christian divines?

In Miss Royden's revision of the Edwards' version of hell she seems to have forgotten that, according to her creed, we have all got to come up for judgment on the last day—whenever that may be. And, how can we be fairly judged if no record is kept of our misdeeds?

Besides, if God is the maker of us all, did he not know, from the beginning, that we were bound to commit sins? And, if he is almighty, could he not have prevented us from committing them?

Moreover, if God is the maker of the human machine, is he not responsible for the right working of its mechanism?

Does Miss Royden know anything about the doctrine of evolution? Does she realise that man has come up from the lower animals, and that he carries, within his body, the "scaffolding of his early ancestry," as the late Professor Drummond, in his *Ascent of Man*, so finely put it?

When did man first become responsible to God for his actions? When he was an ape-like creature, and lived up in the trees? or when he was a savage and probably a cannibal? or when he lived in holes in the earth and was the prey to all kinds of wild beasts?

It is nonsense for the theologian to talk, at this time of day, about man having a free will. As a matter of fact the will is never free. Man is impelled by motives over which he has no control, and the strongest motive, in his mind at the moment of volition, determines his action. Moreover, man can never be responsible to God for his actions; because he cannot injure an All-powerful Being; but he is

responsible to his fellow-man, because he can injure him and destroy his happiness in many ways.

Further, if Miss Royden, in her new translation of hell, proposes to do away with eternal torment, does she also propose to abolish all future rewards and punishments? If there is no hell for the wicked, is there no heaven for the just and the righteous?

With our knowledge of astronomy to-day, where does she think heaven is located? Or, does she think, with the Persian poet, Omar Khayyam, that heaven and hell are within us? And, if so, will she tell her faithful followers so in clear and unmistakable language?

Does she think there is a local heaven somewhere up above—if there is an "up above"—which the choicest spirits of the earth will inhabit on the last day—whenever that may be; and, if so, what greater evidence is there for a belief in a local heaven than a local hell? Or does she think that all mankind will find their way to heaven whatever their colour or their creed?

Lastly, does she hold with the old Jewish writer who said:

That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts, even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so doeth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that man has no pre-eminence above a beast. All go into one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.—*Ecclesiastes, Ch. III, 19, 20.*

When the Christians again revise their creed, will Miss Royden help them to throw some light upon these questions?

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Freethought on the Farm.

WE arrived, after a two hundred miles journey, at the farm in the moorland heart of Lancashire, in the evening of the first day of 1927, as ever was. The "we," in this case quite accurately plural, comprised a father and two sons; three hungry Scotsmen, with strange tongues, in a place and parlorage quite as strange to the younger men as to the old man of the party, the writer of these presents.

We felt a little diffident at first; doubtful, exiled, quixotically audacious. Oh, tender-hearted Scot! Oh, tough-minded Englishman! Yet, is it really so?

Over the heart of the elder hung some vague, yet palpable, complex of sadness, dullness, unease; a shadow that increases with the years in one, ever-more sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought:

And the raven still is sitting,
Still is sitting, never flitting,
Perched above my chamber door.

Ah! more, much more, comes for our disquiet than the memory of a "lost Lenore"; however fondly-treasured and adored that radiant angel of "Love's young dream."

The pen stops a moment; the winter sun is declining, in a summer-like scene of grey-purple-amber-luminous cloud; the light of other days; again the glory passes, and the night will surely come. Yet it is of the past we dream, not the future that we dread; why dread inevitable, determined things?

But here, at the farm, were kind hearts more than coronets; and, more than these, enlightened, emancipated, understanding minds. With all their faults most Freethinkers are like that; and, but for their lack of the one thing needful, the Lord Jesus Christ, would be the envy of Christians everywhere.

Now, the only Lord we know, that giveth light to all the world, has dipped below the rim; and a richer glow the dusky clouds incarnadine. The light is gone, the leisured pen laid down; but, in pleasant reverie, the composition proceeds. It is morning, and, to vary Coleridge, again:

. . . the glorious sun uprist,
Nor dim, but red, nor God's own head—
The Pagan Sun, I wist.

Vapours chill it in mid-sky; later, it shines bright and clear, and even warm, higher and higher every day towards the summer's noon. How the poet mind beats with the rhythm of Nature! What unsectarian benediction is this! Even that withheld, he sees no curse in Her, but just the process of the suns; he lives in this; knows he must, and learns how to die; though hard the lesson for the happy heart, he passes; and the suns shine on, lighting generations to come; shining, in his last, fond, magnanimous, unquenchable hope, on a brighter and better world.

The magic tables, referred to by Mr. Bryce in a recent "reminiscence," were loaded, and lightened, in the same silent mysterious way, some four or five times daily; and not, be it suggested, by the hands of leisured ladies; or from stores of wealth and plenty; but yet, from the miraculous, inexhaustible, inextinguishable wealth of kindness in the hearts of a family of Freethinkers, wresting a living from shaggy heath, and not too kindly soil.

Often the farm steading, summer or winter, is wreathed in white mist which, lifting, reveals, rising abruptly from the doorstep, the shaggy and sodden hill; below, the deep, wide, populous valley; and farther, more wide, encircling, hills. The kitchen lamp is a far-seen beacon for the countryside; the kitchen-folk well qualified to guide and enlighten it to the sweet paths of reason, philosophy, humanity, and love; and yet they are not Christians!

The wind, here, is seldom still; and sighs, all night long, in a few writhing trees; moans and whispers in the eaves and crannies of the outer walls. Northward, the Plough and the Pole Star twinkle, amid the wind-swept boughs. In barn and byre the cattle are warm and contented; the fowls lit and warmed in the hen-runs; many are pets not to be parted with or sacrificed without regret; but here, as elsewhere, animals must perish that the paragon of animals may live; but who, if he be an Ingersoll, can look an ox in the face? Not thus thinks the Christian butcher, whose care is all for human souls! but who regards animals as the gift of God—to him. To one Freethinker, at least, this is the chilling aspect of farming; such as he feels would Hamletise his husbandry. He would rather think of the milk float, and of those three lonely miles down the hillside to the town; that road where at times the snow has lain, fluted, heaped and piled, in virgin purity, requiring much shovelling in the heavier drifts to let the milk cart through.

Work done, the wild shut out, with the melancholies of the earth, we gather round the ample hearth; we have reading, radio, reminiscence, secrets sweet and precious, sad things, glad things told, and sometimes—just as in the "huppah succeeds"—sit a little bored, but, always bravely eager to make each other happy. We are mostly "grown-ups," but we recall some lines from childhood:

Around the fire, one winter's night,
The farmer's rosy children sat;
And jokes went round; and careless chat . . .

Then of the "tap" at the door, and so on. Neither could we forget the two town lads who perished in a snowstorm just outside these very doors—with no Providence to guide them here.

It was growing late, and a lissome lass unbound her hair—just previous to her soft "good-night"—unbobbed and beautiful, luxurious and long; surely the glory of a woman is her hair! and the fair face framed in that soft cataract was awesome in its beauty. We might have "glowered like ane bewitched," but dared not even look our admiration—what hypocrites are we all! Yet still we saw—

The gowden locks o' Anna!

duski'er but not less lovely than Anna's of the song.

The mother's hair, if tinged with autumnal grey, was yet piled thickly round her brow. The son and brother seemed Bobbie Burns in his habit as he lived, and not without that ae spark o' Nature's fire. The honoured father and his honoured guest,
were unco thick and fain o' ither,
A brither soul had met a brither.

The two youngsters busied themselves with putting melodious discs in a large polyphone, their dad enjoying

the sweet, tinkling sound. While here, a young townsman and his wife honoured us with a visit. He was a Freethinker. The earlier sermons of R. J. Campbell had set him on the downward (!) path. In a long Sunday walk, Mr. Marsden told us of his revolt in, and subsequent ejection from, the Bible class of which he had been the teacher. It was an amazing and amusing story, just as it must have happened, and would be good matter for the *Freethinker*. Happily married, in a good business, clever with his head and hands, a delightful companion, his plunge into "blank atheism" has not been so calamitous after all. Ah! but his old friends may say: "Wait till you come to die!" One hopes that is a distant event; and it is comforting to think he may yet have time to repent.

But we must switch off. Again the sun is going down. Good night, everybody! Good night!

ANDREW MILLAR.

Correspondence.

FREETHOUGHT AND FREEMASONRY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Freemasonry being as we have defined it, last week, let us answer the question, what is a Freemason?

A Freemason is one who, upon being initiated, has sworn, in the most serious and solemn fashion, inter alia, "to keep inviolate the . . . mysteries of the Order"; he has declared his reliance on God, in all cases of difficulty and danger.

When, therefore, an honourable gentleman (and no other need concern us in this discussion) finds that greater knowledge brings him to the honest conviction that no longer can he adhere to the fundamental formula to which he once subscribed, in all good faith, what is his obvious duty?

He must recognise that it is he who has changed, not the Order; and *he must come out* from among them, and be separate. He cannot, any longer, join in inducting others when he himself has ceased to believe in the fundamental formula.

He has no right to say to his brethren, "I have changed my mind, and, therefore, you must change yours."

Nor has he the right to say, "I and those thinking with me now outnumber you; so, we will just alter a few things in your fundamentals, and then you can stop in or get out. We will carry on the old firm."

If a Roman Catholic becomes a Protestant does he still call himself a Roman Catholic?

If a member of a Trinitarian Church becomes Unitarian in thought, does he continue to call himself a Trinitarian? If he goes further and becomes a Freethinker does he still call himself a Trinitarian?

If he and his fellows could outnumber the Trinitarians, and pass a resolution declaring that Trinitarianism

is a progressive institution; so, considering metaphysical conceptions as belonging exclusively to the individual appreciations of its members it abstains from any dogmatical affirmation,

would they be entitled, in virtue of their numerical ability to pass such a resolution, to take possession of the church and its revenues, and still call themselves Trinitarians?

But, above all, would Trinitarianism cease to be Trinitarianism because a local majority of Freethinkers united in declaring that it had so ceased to be?

The English Grand Lodges proclaim the liberty of human conscience to be or not to be a Freemason or anything else; and do not contradict themselves when they proclaim that if you wish to be a Freemason your conscience must agree with theirs; and that if your conscience ceases to agree with theirs, you may go and be anything else you like but you cannot become or remain a Freemason.

The Grand Orient proclaims the liberty of human conscience to believe what it likes; or to disbelieve what it likes, or doesn't like; to say what it likes, and do what it likes; and still to call itself a Freemason!

Then it says that "the acceptance of a prescribed dogma would compel Freethinkers to painful acts of hypocrisy."

What confusion of thought is here!

Nothing could compel Freethinkers to accept a prescribed dogma; and nothing should permit them to *pretend* to do so.

I must, in passing, say a few words in protest against the unthinking habit of putting a national adjective in front of the word Freemasonry. There is no such thing as English Freemasonry or French Freemasonry. It is Freemasonry, or nothing at all.

There is some Freemasonry in France, but not much.

One thing is certain, Grand Orientism is not Freemasonry.

I think it is better. It is free from dogma; and, as a Freethinker, I hate dogma.

That is why I will not march under the banner of Freemasonry. That is why I object to Freethinkers in France masquerading as Freemasons.

I think "Freethinker" is a better title; it constitutes a better claim to the gratitude of our fellow man for the assistance we are rendering to him in helping him to free himself from the shackles of fantastic superstition; a task in which some of the Freethinkers of France have played a great and leading part; and for which we, in England, are admirably grateful.

The Grand Orient of France "is an essentially progressive institution, etc.

Freemasonry is not (except in numbers)!

Freemasonry is—just Freemasonry.

Let the Grand Orient come away from the shadow of the banner to which it has no right, historical or otherwise! It will find, if it does so, that its own banner of Grand Orientism will be sufficient for it; and it will obtain an added lustre by being simply Grand Orientism, and so freeing itself from the dishonesty which will always be associated with it so long as it maintains its desire to pretend to be Freemasonry.

So mote it be!

OMEGA.

Society News.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH.

Dr. Arthur Lynch's lecture last Sunday more than exceeded our expectations, and those who were fortunate enough to be present were delighted with the talk on music which held the listeners enthralled. Mr. Cutner's address to-night on the "Claptrap of Spiritualism" should bring a good audience. K. B. K.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH.

Mr. Clifford Williams gave a fine lecture on Sunday evening last dealing with the manner in which Christianity has successively modified its teachings under pressure of advancing opinion. Nothing had been more powerful than Freethought in breaking down the superstition of the ages. The pity was that the policy of both Church and Press kept this important fact away from the public. There was a good audience, and Mr. Williams' humorous remarks anent the revision of the Prayer Book were greatly appreciated.

Obituary.

On Thursday, February 24th, at Kingston Cemetery, Mrs. Challis, aged 62, was interred. She had been an ardent Freethinker for the last ten years, and her husband and three sons are also keen secularists. There was a remarkable display of floral tributes testifying to the respect felt towards the deceased lady. A gratifying feature of the funeral ceremony was the fact that many orthodox friends and relatives expressed appreciation of the Secularist Funeral Service, which was listened to with deep interest in spite of the heavy rain. We extend to Mr. Challis, who has been a Freethinker for 25 years, the deepest possible sympathy for the loss of an affectionate wife, and to his sons for the loss of a loving mother. G. W.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

ETHICS BASED ON THE LAWS OF NATURE (Emerson Club, Little George Street, Westminster, S.W.): 3.30, Lecture in French by Monsieur Lemaître, de l'Institut Français, on "Florence Sous les Médicis." All invited.

THE NON-POLITICAL METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (101 Tottenham Court Road): 7.30, Mr. C. E. Ratchiff, a Lecture; Thursday, at 7.30, Mr. L. Botting, a Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W.5): 7.30, Mr. H. Cutner, "The Claptrap of Spiritualism."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): 7.0, R. Dimsdale Stocker, "Conscience and the New Psychology."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Battersea Town Hall): 7.30, Hon. Bertrand Russell, M.A., F.R.S., a Lecture, "Why I am not a Christian." Doors open at 7.

OUTDOOR.

THE NON-POLITICAL METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Hyde Park): 11.30 and 3.0; Speakers, Messrs. Botting and Hart.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Clapham Common): 11.30, a Lecture by Mr. J. Hart.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH: 7.0, a meeting at the Empire Cafe, 30 Smallbrook Street; subject, "The Church—What is it?" Discussion.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY, Branch of the N.S.S. (No. 2 Room, City Hall, "A" Door, Albion Street): 6.30, Mr. W. G. Cameron, "The A B C of Esperanto." Questions and discussion cordially invited. Silver collection.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Pendleton Town Hall, Broad Street, Pendleton): 3.0, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, "What We Pay for the Religion We Get"; 6.30, "Popular Fallacies about Christianity."

The Manchester Branch will be holding a Whist Drive, Social and Dance at the Co-operative Hall, Downing Street, Manchester, on Saturday, March 12th, at 6.0 p.m., and in the afternoon at 3.0 p.m. there will be an American Tea. A cordial invitation is extended to all members and friends. It is hoped that as many as possible will attend in order to make the event a success.

SWANSEA AND DISTRICT BRANCH N.S.S. (3 Carmarthen Road, back entrance): 7.0, a Meeting. All members please make an effort to be present.

WE MAKE A LOT of fuss about advertising in the *Freethinker*. We do—we think there is only one thing more important. This is giving absolutely perfect satisfaction to every responder to a *Freethinker* advertisement. If you know of a better guarantee of service, you will not require to write to us for any of the following:—Gents' A to D Patterns, suits from 55s.; Gents' E Patterns, suits all at 67s. 6d.; Gents' F to H Patterns, suits from 75s.; Gents' I to M Patterns, suits from 98s.; Gents' Overcoat Patterns, prices from 48s. 6d.; or Ladies' Fashion and Pattern Sets, costumes from 57s., coats from 53s.—MACCONNELL & MADE, New Street, Bakewell, Derbyshire

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Secretary: Miss E. M. VANCE.

THIS Society was formed in 1898 to afford legal security to the acquisition and application of funds for Secular purposes.

The Memorandum of Association sets forth that the Society's Objects are:—To promote the principle that human conduct should be based upon natural knowledge, and not upon supernatural belief, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end of all thought and action. To promote freedom of inquiry. To promote universal Secular Education. To promote the complete secularization of the State, etc. And to do all such lawful things as are conducive to such objects. Also to have, hold, receive, and retain any sums of money paid, given, devised, or bequeathed by any person, and to employ the same for any of the purposes of the Society.

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