

THE FEAR OF DEATH.

The FREETHINKER

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Views and Opinions.

The Fear of Death.

THE familiar statement that facts cannot be denied has to be taken with serious reservations. As a matter of common experience, facts are very often denied, and denied with considerable success. And on the other hand, fictions are proclaimed and accepted with the greatest ease. This may be because to correct the denial of a fact, a certain amount of resolution and reflection is necessary, while the acceptance of a fiction requires nothing more than a lazy acquiescence to something that is "in the air," or that chimes in with one's own prejudices. For full four years, during the period of the war, the journalists and politicians of this country were engaged in spreading the wildest fictions, often such as went contrary to the commonest facts of experience, and they were accepted without the slightest question. Wandering Russian Armies, Angels fighting on behalf of the British Armies, statues of the Virgin miraculously upheld, nothing was too absurd or too extravagant. In religion we have the fiction of the "wicked Atheist," a personage who, so far as his exhibiting a greater degree of wickedness than is to be seen in his Christian neighbour, is as mythical as the monsters of old De Mandeville. And there is the dying unbeliever who passes out in unbelievable agony, because he regrets, too late, that he did not believe in the saving blood of Jesus. No one has ever met this person; it is one of the commonest facts of experience, that ninety-nine per cent. of people pass away without any thought of religion, but he still plays a lively part in revival meetings, or with prelates like the Bishop of London. And with even the more enlightened section of the Christian world, when reference is made to him, there is in their eyes a far-away look of a distant but enjoyable past, much as one looks back upon a hun-

dred million budget or a sixpenny income tax. They know he is quite dead, but they deeply regret his decease. Finally, there is the superstition that when people are on their death-beds their thoughts naturally turn to Jesus, God, and immortality.

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Pulpit Yarns.

In a recent issue of the *Sunday Chronicle*, Sir Arbuthnot Lane will scarcely have earned the thanks of the world of parsons for having put another nail in the coffin of this interested superstition. And it may be taken as yet another proof of the influence of Freethought propaganda that such articles do occasionally appear in the general press. We are at least making it easier for prominent people to speak a little more of the truth concerning religion than they could have done had we never existed. Sir Arbuthnot says that the idea that death is a very terrible ordeal is very much alive. He also says that "a whole farrago of nonsense, ignorance, and superstition has grown up about death," which, with its background of hell, is "a serious reproach to our civilization." With that we quite agree, since it is only what the *Freethinker* has been saying for nearly fifty years. As a practising doctor, Sir Arbuthnot Lane knows quite well that all the talk of death-bed terrors is pure humbug, manufactured pulpit lies, invented for the sole purpose of imposing upon ignorant or credulous people. He says:—

In the course of my life I must have seen scores of people die. Some of them were people, who in life had been horribly afraid of death. Yet I don't think I can remember a single instance where, when their time came, this fear did not leave them, to be replaced by a wonderful state of peace and calm. I have never known anybody really resent death when their last moment has come. They may have clung desperately to life so long as they could; and may have regretted bitterly the parting with their friends and all that they held dear, but not one, who was conscious to the end, ever seemed to regard death as a horrible climax to life. In all such cases it came as a perfectly natural and undisturbed happening.

That is not merely the experience of Sir Arbuthnot Lane, it is that of other medical men, and it is that of the ordinary man or woman. Hardly any of us who have reached middle age, but have had to stand by a death-bed. But how many of us have ever witnessed the agonizing scenes, or even the rapt interest in religion, that forms the staple of so many pulpit lies, and one may add, the stock-in-trade of pulpit liars. These men invent harrowing experiences of death-beds with all the carelessness for truth that is characteristic of their profession. And the curious thing is that although those who listen must know, if they reflect at all, that they are listening to a tissue of falsehoods; yet they receive these tales as though they were nothing but absolute truth. I do

not know a more drastic instance of the complete indifference of both pulpit and pew to truth where religion is concerned, than is furnished by these cases.

* * *

Doctors and the Dying.

Sir Arbuthnot Lane does not stand alone among medical men in his experience of death-beds. A very eminent surgeon, Sir William Osler, says:—

The popular belief that however careless a man may be while in health, at least on the "low dark verge of life," he is appalled at the prospect of leaving these warm precincts to go he knows not where, this popular belief is erroneous. As a rule man dies as he has lived, uninfluenced practically by the thoughts of a future life . . . I have careful records of about five hundred death-beds, studied particularly with reference to the modes of death and the sensations of the dying. The latter alone concerns us here. Ninety suffered bodily pain or distress of one kind or another; eleven showed mental apprehension; two, positive terror; one expressed spiritual exaltation; one bitter remorse. The great majority gave no sign one way or the other; like their birth, their death was a sleep and a forgetting.

Mr. Phillip Inman, Superintendent of the Charing Cross Hospital, said a few months ago, "I have seen hundreds of people die, but seldom have I seen anything like a dread of death." These are the common experiences of everyone, although when one remembers that we are dealing with a people who have been in the hands of the clergy for so long, and that these have fed them with tales of death-beds, of the horror of death, and of what was awaiting them in the next world, when we remember all these things, the surprising thing is that so few exhibit what is called a "religious death," or pay any attention to religion in their last moments.

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Inculcated Terror.

I do not agree with Sir Arbuthnot Lane, that all through the ages mankind has fostered the idea that death is something horrible and gruesome. It appears to some, as though this must be the case; but then we have all been brought up in a Christian environment, subject to Christian influences, and in many cases have been brought directly and forcibly under the brutalizing influence of Christian teaching. The fear of death that Sir Arbuthnot thinks is a disgrace to our civilization, is almost entirely a thing of Christian manufacture. It is one of the main instruments the Christian clergy have used in order to bring people under their control and keep them there. I will advance proofs of these statements later. For the moment it is well to note that the power of Christianity over people has always been greatest where the strongest fear of death have been shown. In the East, among Hindoes, Chinese, or Arabs, the fear of death is comparatively slight, and among these peoples Christianity has never exerted a great influence, and unless someone succeeds in changing their whole mental outlook, never will. It is where it has been able to take complete control of a people for generations, as in Western Europe, and could see that people were terrified with teachings about death, a teaching that began with childhood, and was continued right through life, that it has had the most power. It ruled by mental terrorism always, and just in proportion as that mental terrorism has broken down, its power has decreased.

* * *

Religion and Life.

Metchnikoff has noted as one of the most remarkable of things, that despite the fact that death is

something that everyone must face sooner or later, there has not yet been evolved what he calls "an instinct for death"—that calm and peaceful readiness to pass away of which some, at least, have left us examples. Metchnikoff attributes this to the fact that we all die deaths of disease, that death comes to most of us before our physiological vitality is completely exhausted; and thinks that as science conquers disease this "instinct" will be enabled to develop. Whether this theory be acceptable or not, it is at least certain that if the race had really believed, and faithfully visualized the Christian teachings of death and a future life, it would have been driven into insanity. Many were driven insane by it, but the mass were protected by their own insensitiveness to the full effect of Christian teaching. But on the whole, the brutalizing influence of Christian teaching had to be toned down to the point that at least permitted society to exist. The consequence is, that there has always been going on, a silent, but none the less insistent warfare, between the decent feelings of men and women and the Christian teachings of a hereafter. People could not think of *themselves* as being damned, and remain sane, although with a kindness peculiarly Christian they have nourished their piety with the reflection that damnation would be the lot of their neighbour. But on the whole, human feelings and human interests must be developed in relation to a life here, not in relation to an assumed life elsewhere. And the result of this is that while there has been a pulpit teaching and tradition—a teaching which has been taken up by no small part of our catchpenny literature—that men live in dread of death, and die with their minds full of the existence into which they are going, the overwhelming majority manage to reduce this teaching to a bearable quantity, and in a modern environment, almost get rid of it entirely. Ultimately the development of our feelings concerning death must be governed not by the need of the clergy, but by the necessities of existence.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be concluded.)

MARK TWAIN'S WAR-PRAYER.

The American *Churchman* prints a war-prayer, written by Mark Twain, in 1905. It was a part of an article in which he pictured a Church met to pray for victory to the nation's armies. A white-robed stranger enters the pulpit, taking the minister's place, and explains that he comes from God, to put into words what the unspoken part of the prayer for victory means. Thus:—

O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth to battle—be Thou near them! With them—in spirit—we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe. O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the cries of wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with their little children, to wander unbefriended through wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst, sport of the sun-flames in summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it—for our sakes, who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask of One who is the spirit of love and the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset, and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Grant our prayer, O Lord, and Thine shall be the praise and honour and glory now and ever. Amen.

What Has Christ Achieved?

THE Church's unhesitating answer to the question is—Everything, and the Freethinker's—Absolutely nothing of intrinsic value, but much of what the honest historian must characterize as positively evil. On last Easter Sunday the Church was unusually vocal, telling its tale with abundant assurance. Let us take one sample. The Rev. Dr. H. L. Goudge, preaching in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, on the text, "He saw and believed" (St. John xx. 8), said:—

So, St. John tells us, the great news of the Lord's Resurrection came to the world. Mary of Magdala went before dawn to the Holy Sepulchre, and found the stone rolled away. The tomb, she thought, had been violated and the body of the Lord stolen. She ran to tell St. Peter and St. John, and they in their turn ran to the tomb. There they saw something—we are not told clearly what it was—which led St. John to faith. It was not any prophecy of the Old Testament; it was not any word of the Lord spoken in his earthly life; it was not any appearance of the risen Lord himself; it was something seen at the tomb. God spoke, as he speaks so often, by the witness of fact.

As thus told, the story seems simple and credible enough; but it is related only by the evangelist John, while the evangelist Matthew flatly contradicts it at every point. The two narratives cannot possibly be true, nor is there any rational process by which they can be reconciled. No two accounts of the purchase of spices by the women agree, while John does not mention the incident. According to John, Joseph of Arimathæa had already embalmed the body before laying it in the tomb, and on this point again the narratives contradict one another. According to Matthew, Mark and Luke, the body was not embalmed at all, their statement being that Joseph "went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus, took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb that was hewn in stone, where never man had yet lain" (Luke xxiii. 52, 53). Again, the number of women who visited the tomb on the Sunday morning varies greatly in the different Gospels. Matthew says, that when the women reached the tomb they witnessed "a great earthquake. For an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled away the stone and sat upon it." Then this angel informed the women that the Jesus they were seeking was no longer there, but had already risen. He instructed them to go quickly and tell his disciples, he is risen from the dead, and lo, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him." As they went from the tomb, "Jesus met them, saying, All hail." After they had taken hold of his feet and worshipped him, "Jesus saith unto them, Fear not: go tell my brethren that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me." Now if Matthew's account is true, that of John is false, for Peter and John did not visit the grave at all, but hastened to Galilee to meet their Lord there.

Those already cited by no means exhaust the number of discrepancies in the Gospel narratives of the Resurrection. In fact they extend to almost every detail in the series of alleged incidents, including the appearances. Dr. Goudge is as fully aware of their existence as we are, but his faith enables him to ignore them all, and possibly he may fall back upon some false theory of harmonization. In the sermon now before us, however, he seems to accept John's narrative as literal history. On the pure assumption that Peter and John did enter the tomb and find it empty, Canon Goudge draws from his imagination thus:—

Why are the grave-cloths left behind? And that is not all. Look at those grave-clothes. The winding sheet has never been unwound. The napkin is still folded and knotted as when it enclosed the head of the Lord. And see, the space between the two is just what it was on the evening of Good Friday. Is it conceivable that if the grave had been rifled and the body stolen, the grave-clothes would have been left like this? The mind of St. John, which like his feet, is quicker than St. Peter's, sees the truth in a flash of insight. There can be but one explanation. Something most wonderful has happened with the body of the Lord. It has suffered—

a sea change

Into something rich and strange.

It has passed through, out of, away from the wrappings by which it was bound without disturbing them. Gently they have sunk down with their own weight and that of the spices contained in them. The Lord is here no longer, but it is not because his tomb has been rifled. He is not here, for he is risen.

One is highly amused by the simplicity and puerility of mind displayed in such a passage as that, for it reads exactly like a fairy tale, which perhaps it is.

But now we come to very serious business indeed. Genuine romance is unspeakably dear to our heart. Skilfully woven romances in poetry and works of fiction are fountains of overflowing and never-ending delight, and behind them there is an element of most precious truth. But poor literalists and hidebound traditionalists have neither appreciation for, nor understanding of the romantic, for they are everlastingly trying to convert inspiring poetry into depressing prose, brilliant fable into dull fact, and the result is most disastrous. Canon Goudge is doing this kind of tragic work upon religion by treating Christianity as fundamentally different from all other religions in that it has historical foundations. And yet, notwithstanding this sad fact, the reverend gentleman indulges in a bit of romancing of his own, which is a sadder fact still, for he does it in a quite another sense than the poets or the novelists. Take the following as a specimen:—

So by the witness of facts the great news came,
the news that changed the world, and changes it
still to all who believe:—

'Tis the spring of souls to-day;
Christ has burst his prison,
And from three days' sleep in death
As a sun bath risen.

How true that is! The risen Lord is like the sun—he changes everything. How gloomy was Joseph's garden when first we went there! How grey and ghastly the trees and shrubs in the morning mist! How cold and wet the grass to our sandalled feet! But while we have been pondering in the tomb the sun has risen. Outside the birds are beginning their morning song. The colour and the gloss have come back to the leaves and flowers. The dew on the grass is sparkling like diamonds. It is the sun which has made the difference. So it is with God's great garden of the world. It is a very varied garden, and not all of it is of equal beauty. We cannot call it "a show place" yet; there is very much to be done in it; here and there the weeds have altogether got the upper hand. . . . But the weediest places, where our Easter sun is shining, are brighter than the trimmest when we are without his light.

How woefully and disastrously the reverend gentleman's illustration breaks down. In Joseph's garden there were day and night, the sun rose and set; but every time it rose it never failed to transform the whole aspect of things in the garden. This has been true of the natural sun in all ages and countries. On the first Easter Day, according to

Christian teaching, the sun of righteousness rose for the first time, and it was never to experience a setting. And yet after nigh two thousand years, even Canon Goudge grudgingly admits that the garden of the world is still full of weeds, which choke the roses and other wholesome and health-giving seeds, and encourage the growth and development of deadly poisons. This is surely tantamount to a confession, by one of his official ministers, that the "risen Lord" has not conquered the world for which he is said to have died and burst open the gates of death, or that the Easter sun has always been, and is but an empty name by which the parsons swear in vain. Of course, Canon Goudge accounts for this undeniable fact by putting all the fault on man's sin, forgetting that the New Testament repeatedly assures us that Christ appeared to abolish sin, or to become a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. We now know that such a claim is completely falsified by history, and particularly by the existing conditions of life in the most Christian country under the sun.

J. T. LLOYD.

Death, and After.

The miraculous has become absurd. Gods and phantoms have been driven from the earth and sky. We are living in a natural world.—*Ingersoll.*

O fools and blind, what seek ye there,
High up in the air? —*Swinburne.*

Death and his brother, Sleep.—*Shelley*

"THE dread of death will never be removed by the promise of a future existence," writes the Bishop of Southwark, in a message to his diocese, in the latest issue of the *Southwark Diocesan Gazette*.

"What is wanted is the assurance that in the life to come, all that is best and truest in human character is preserved and heightened. . . The existence after death described by many spiritualists is to most thoughtful men, repellent rather than attractive—it is a mere lengthening of this present life. It cannot be said too often that mere survival of death is not necessarily a boon."

The Bishop of Southwark's remarks sound very odd, for they remind us that Spiritualists are not the only folks who profess to have dealing with the alleged supernatural. The clergy are as much interested in spooks as the mediums. They babble of a God who gets angry with us; of a devil who must be guarded against; of angels who fly from heaven to earth. The Christian Bible is a spook-book, and belief in spirits is an integral part of the Christian religion. In this country alone, nearly fifty thousand more or less truthful clergymen are engaged professionally in this spook business, to say nothing of their thousands of lay assistants. The "spooks" of the clergy are no more real than the "bogeys" of the Spiritualists. The clergy, however, are wiser than the mediums. They know that if a showman never lifts the curtain, it does not matter whether he has anything or nothing on the other side.

Whilst spiritualistic descriptions of an alleged future seem absurd, there is one point really worth noting. Life after death is not painted as being horrific, but as a continuation of life on earth, such as Shelley's sarcastic description of hell as a place "very like London." Apparently, even religious folks now-a-days are getting ashamed of the old, old story of heaven and hell. Unconsciously, their ideas are becoming more and more civilized and secularized. Their ideas may be childish, but it is gratifying to find that they are more humane.

There is an enormous difference between Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's farcical views of a future existence and the tragical opinions of the orthodox Christians. Charles Spurgeon, who was the greatest preacher of the nineteenth century, preached and wrote that the majority of mankind were destined to eternal torture, in full view of the Christian God:—

In fire, exactly like that which we have on earth to-day, will lie, asbestos-like, for ever unconsumed, every nerve a string on which the Devil shall for ever play his diabolical tune of hell's unutterable lament."

These unfortunate millions of people will:—

Look up there on the throne of God, and it shall be written "For Ever." When the damned jingle the burning irons of their torment they shall say; "For Ever." When they howl, echo cries, "For Ever!"

That is what the majority of Christians believed until quite recently, and similar barbaric ideas are still preached by the Roman Catholic Church, the Salvation Army, and other howling dervishes of our parks and open spaces. Yet, many centuries ago, near the time of the Norman Conquest, Omar Khayyam, the most splendid poet who swept his lyre under the Mohammedan crescent, chanted nobler ideas in splendid music.—

I sent my soul through the invisible,
Some letter of that after-life to spell,
And by and bye my soul returned to me,
And answered, "I myself am heaven and hell."

Spiritualism flies in the face of the familiar clerical argument that the surgeon's knife cannot find the "soul" of a man. For, in a sense, Spiritualism does try hard to find the "soul" with the knife, that is with material means. It wants to get as good evidence for the existence of John Smith after death, as it did for John Smith before death. The alleged spirit of Mr. Smith is required to prove his existence and presence by making himself audible, by showing that he remembers his aunt or his grandmother, or by having his photograph taken, or by playing the saxophone, not wisely but too well.

And what are we to make of the revelations of the alleged hereafter, with its projections of present-day existence? Are we to suppose that all life is indestructible? In that case, we have still to ask where life begins; and wherever the line may be drawn, it is manifest that the jellyfish, the oyster, and the bug and flea are on the hither side of it, and have "souls." In that case, it is to be hoped, as Voltaire suggests, that bugs and fleas will be self-supporting in the "next world." All these, and a thousand other difficulties encounter us when we try to consider the spiritualistic account of the "beyond."

Behind all the verbiage of telepathy, clairvoyance, automatic hand-writing, precognition, and the like, there is always the furtive figure of Sludge, the medium, with a tambourine between his toes. The cases of detection run from the time of the Davenport Brothers, the Fox Sisters, down to the day of Mme. Blavatsky, Eusapia Palladino, and other smaller fry. Though the spiritualists contend that their concern is the question of man's immortality, their books are full of tales of telepathy, chatter of clairvoyance, and samples of automatic handwriting. In the last analysis, the spiritualists base their case for the immortality of mankind on these things.

It must be confessed, that the newest and most up-to-date spiritism is very like the old. Behind the educated vocabulary of Messrs. Lodge and Doyle, there is always the uneducated imbecilities of the professional mediums. The new spiritism gives no better answer than the old, and the later messages from the "other side" are as unconvincing as the

earlier. The savage dreams of his happy hunting-grounds; the Mohammedan peoples his Paradise with houris; the Bishop of London imagines the jewelled lamp-posts and golden streets of the New Jerusalem, and Sir Oliver Lodge is satisfied with his "cigar-smoking" bogeys. The religious world is no nearer a solution than it was four thousand years ago, or in the far earlier times when primitive man sobbed over his dead in an agony of fear and wonder.

After all, death is not so much our concern as life itself. The men of our generation have shown the greatest courage and the highest disdain of death ever shown. It is our present fate, smoky with clouds that hide splendour or doom, to be living at the very apex of the world's history, and in the zenith of man's challenge of fate. Nor is there any one of us, however weak, afraid, or unready, who can disdain the quiet words of the wise old philosopher, Epictetus: "Why should we fear death? For where death is, there are we not; and where we are, there death is not." The Secular solution is the best after all is said. All sprang from Nature, and have their little day, and all return to Nature's breast for their last sleep. Fear should have no place, "Into the breast that gives the rose, shall we with shuddering fall?"

MIMNERMUS.

Elijah in Opera.

It is two or three years ago since I last described a performance of "Elijah" at "The Old Vic," in these columns. It was then described as an "Oratorio in Action"; it is still so described, but it has been rearranged and developed somewhat since then, and the production, I witnessed a few weeks ago, now as nearly approaches operatic form as possible.

The story or plot follows very closely that given in the Book of Kings. Elijah the Tishbite appears before Ahab the King, and informs him that the Lord hath declared "that there shall not be dew nor rain in the land these years," and the people are sore distressed. The Lord also commandeth Elijah to hide himself by the brook of Cherith, and there he shall be fed by ravens. He is also to go to Zarapath, where the Lord has commanded a widow-woman to sustain him. When, however, he arrives there the poor woman is famished with hunger and is gathering sticks, for she has only a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse, but Elijah says unto her, "Fear not; go and do as thou hast said; and make me thereof a little cake first and bring it unto me and after make for thee and for thy son." For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, "The barrel of meal shall not waste, nor shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth." Shortly after this, the widow's son becomes sick, and according to the narrative, the sickness becomes so sore that there is no breath left in him. The widow remonstrates with Elijah, and says, "What have I to do with thee thou man of God, art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance and to slay my son?" But Elijah answers by taking the boy into a loft, stretching himself upon the child *three times* and calling upon the Lord to let the child's soul come into him again, and the prayer is immediately answered, so that Elijah restored the child to the widow and she exclaimed, "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth." After this we are taken to a scene "outside the Temple of Baal, on Mount Carmel." Here Elijah confronts the wicked

King Ahab. The King asks: "Art thou Elijah? Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" And Elijah replies: "I never troubled Israel's peace; it is thou Ahab and all thy father's house. Ye have forsaken God's commands and thou hast followed Baalim!" And then Elijah makes bold to challenge Ahab, in the following terms. "Rise then ye priests of Baal, select and slay a bullock, but put no fire under it; uplift your voices and call the god ye worship, and I will call on the Lord Jehovah; and the God who by fire shall answer, let him be God!" Well, no prophet could say fairer than that. And then the contest opens. The Baalites cry to their God Baal, "Hear us, O mighty God," but their god is deaf to their entreaties; and then like a reputed "wicked Infidel," Elijah commences to jeer at them; tells them to call louder; and suggests that perhaps their god "talketh, or is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or worse still—peradventure he sleepeth, so awaken him, call him louder." But let the Baalites call never so loud there is no response.

Then comes Elijah's turn. He calls upon his God; and lo and behold the fire descends from the wings with startling rapidity, and the flames consume the offering, and thus Elijah is triumphant. The people cry, "The Lord is God; Our God is one Lord; and we will have no other gods before the Lord." But this is not all. Elijah directs that all the prophets of Baal shall be taken; let not one of them escape us—he says, "bring all and slay them," which after all, when one comes to think of it, is only the religious way of dealing with opponents.

Soon after this, however, the people turn upon Elijah, and ask: "Doth Ahab govern the kingdom of Israel, while Elijah's power is greater than the Kings?" And the people sing in chorus: "He shall perish. Hath he not destroyed Baal's prophets?" And then poor Elijah, driven to despair, exclaims: "It is enough; O Lord now take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." But an angel appeareth and says: "Arise, Elijah for thou hast a long journey before thee. Forty days and forty nights shalt thou go to Horeb, the Mount of God." And Elijah exclaims, "O Lord I have laboured in vain; yea I have spent my strength for naught." At length gaining a little strength Elijah slowly ascendeth the mount, and when the Lord would take him away to heaven, lo! there came a fiery chariot and fiery horses, and he went by a whirlwind to heaven." Of course, as Freethinkers, while we are listening to the opera we overlook the improbabilities and absurdities of the story. As an opera, or, as an "Oratorio in Action," it is not only impressive, but is dramatic in the highest degree.

The music is Mendelssohn at his best. The melodies are beautiful, and the choruses stupendous. To hear Mr. Henry Wendon, as Obadiah, sing "If with all your hearts ye truly seek me, ye shall ever surely find me, thus saith the Lord," is to hear something not soon to be forgotten. Mr. Wendon possesses a pure tenor voice of splendid quality and sings with wonderful beauty of expression. Also, to hear Miss May Busby sing, "Hear ye Israel; Hear what the Lord speaketh"; or Miss Gladys Palmer sing, "O rest in the Lord," is to hear operatic singing of the highest order.

Miss Frances Geraldine has only a small part as the Queen, but she sings her lines with a fine sense of their beauty and force. And to crown it all, to see the majestic figure of Mr. Joseph Farrington, the famous bass-baritone, as Elijah, and hear him sing all his recitatives and airs, especially to hear him deliver the lines: "Is not his word like a fire; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces," is to experience at "The Old Vic" a taste of the

wonderful work that is being done at this theatre, to give the people the best music in opera that is to be heard anywhere in London. A word of great praise is due to Mr. Charles Corri, for the thoroughly efficient manner in which he conducted the orchestra.

Freethinkers appreciate good music as much as any other section of the community, and I was very glad to see among the audience several old Freethinkers, whom I have known for years, and who take every opportunity of hearing good music whenever they can, even if it be associated with primitive religious beliefs; for on such occasions they realize how much Christianity owes to the works of such great composers as Handel, Haydn, Mendelssohn and others, who have given of their best to a faith that is now on the wane, and that is destined with the growth of intelligence among the masses, to gradually undergo a radical change or die out altogether.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Acid Drops.

The Archbishop of Canterbury may thank his stars he lives in times when there is considerable unbelief in the air, and when even the belief of most Christians is of an attenuated character. At a meeting of the Religious Tract Society, the Archbishop in the chair, there were wild scenes, people shouting, making it impossible for the Archbishop to be heard, etc., etc. This was all on account of the revised prayer book. In the days of a genuine Christianity, good Christians would not have contented themselves with shouting. At more than one Church council there was bloodshed over such things, and many a disputant has been left dead upon the field, before the participants of the Council retired to prayer. We have in later centuries managed to tame the savagery of Christian disputants very considerably.

The *Weekly Dispatch* is giving folly and credulity another run by inaugurating a series of articles on "Ghosts I have Met." Quite appropriately the high priest of the cult, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, leads off. But also with fitness, a leading article at the side of Sir Arthur's yarn, bears the title, "Tomfoolery." We think the favourite of ghostland has legitimate cause for complaint. But we haven't the ghost of a doubt but that any number of people will claim close acquaintance with ghosts of some kind or another. But why should we be so neglected? With so many ghosts about, one might be spared for the *Freethinker* office.

What we always have liked about these ghosts is their unapproachable imbecility. A man is stabbed, or a woman is hanged, or a child is poisoned, and they all seem to enjoy their experience so much that at every opportunity they come back and re-enact the stabbing, the hanging, or the poisoning. It never struck us that these experiences were so delightful as to make those who have gone through them repeat them whenever possible. Or a man has buried some treasure, and he comes back and moons round where the treasure is buried in order to show some one, who doesn't get the treasure, and has no right to it, where it is. One of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's experiences was that of watching in a church with some others. They saw some ghostly forms round the altar, which he believes to have been priests connected with the burial of a treasure in the time of Henry the Eighth. But when one of the party said, "Friends, is there anything we can do for you?" the ghosts disappeared at once. That is just like these idiotic ghosts. They come back to tell us "all about it," and when we ask what the deuce they want, they promptly disappear. Of course, Sir Arthur, as self-styled psychic expert, should have known better. He should have known that orthodox ghosts like to come silently and slowly fade away before the awe-stricken gaze of the observers. To ask a ghost, in the manner of

a draper's assistant, "Is there anything we can do for you to-day, Sir," is too crude. One can imagine the enquirer adding, if he had been given time, "We have a fine stock of shrouds in stock, or we are doing some flickering lights and special halo's at remarkably low prices." Sir Arthur is too, too crude.

According to a Methodist reviewer, "Woodbine Willie's" sermon-novel, *I Pronounce Them*, is a brave book. Its main problem is whether a Christian, whose first marriage has proved disastrous and has been dissolved, can marry again. The answer is that it is impossible. The vow taken at the altar is binding. The innocent party to the divorce must suffer because the other has sinned, must bear the other's sin, make it his own, and suffer for in body and soul; and thus keep the flag of love flying in a selfish, animal, grasping, greedy world; the flag being the Cross of Sacrifice, the voluntary suffering of the innocent for the guilty, the apparently purposeless, but really redemptive agony of the loyal lovers of the world. This is the reviewer's summary, and his language. The Rev. Mr. Woodbine, we are told, leaves his two chief characters renouncing marriage for Christ's sake and the world's. There can be no doubt that the novel is a "brave book." A most heroic brand of bravery is needed to pen a novel which merely reiterates Mother Church's silly dogmas about marriage and divorce, and her unwholesome notions about sacrifice. "Woodbine Willie's" bravery should not go unrewarded. Surely the Church could find him a vacant bishopric.

Urban Councils appear to have a fair proportion of Sunday School teachers and local preachers among their members. We are not surprised. A young man with a desire to "get on" knows that if he stands as a shining light in the chapel, he is going to get the support of a certain type of Christian believer, and the chapels know that if they elect this type of man they will have someone at court who will look after their interests. Many a small tradesman in a small town joins a chapel for no other reason than a purely business one, and the same is true of many who go in for local civic honours. It is one of the many ways in which religion tends to undermine the honesty of public life.

The people of New York, we learn, are eagerly patronizing the new shilling-in-the-slot machine that takes your own portrait. English Christians can get a portrait of themselves much cheaper than that. They need only pay threepence for a copy of the *Freethinker*.

The Lord Mayor of London has turned iconoclast. Dick Whittington, says he, never had a cat. This smashing of cherished illusions is very unsettling. We hope it won't start Christians wondering whether they ever had a Christ.

A newspaper heading asks for "Justice for Gas Consumers." This has no connexion with a plea for shorter sermons.

A pious contemporary prints as a thought for the week, the following, by Principal I. P. Jacks: "So live that in affirming your own self, you may help others to affirm theirs." A piece of good advice to which, of course, all godly men agree, after adding the proviso: "but not if the others be Freethinkers."

The Bible, says Dr. Maldyn Hughes, lies at the basis of all that is best in Western civilization. It has welded the peoples together. It has given the Western world the great spiritual ideals which are in process of unifying it. The Doctor may be right, but we suggest he needs to re-write history before he can furnish evidence of his Christianly modest assertions.

Sir William Joynson-Hicks: "I am no believer in the go-as-you-please religion of the twentieth century." Judging by the Christian company he keeps, we should say Sir William favours that brand of religion which gave this country kill-joy prohibitions and Blasphemy Laws, and turned intolerance and bigotry into virtues. But in intellectual matters there is surely no one who bothers what "Jix" believes in.

There was recently an enquiry into the whole question of the treatment of delinquent and neglected children. A comment made by the Committee, says Mr. Sidney W. Harris, of the Home Office, was that there is very little to choose between the two; the child who is neglected almost inevitably becomes a delinquent. The Committee's statement must be rather disconcerting to the pious, who fervently believe that all "Sinners" are tempted by a devil, and are to be cured by injecting into them the fear of God. The Committee, too, appear to have no use for the wonderful Christian theory of Original Sin. Mr. Harris added that the care of the child is not only an elementary Christian duty, but a measure of self-interest. He could more accurately have said that the care of the child is a measure of social self-interest and therefore an elementary social duty.

The Rev. T. Gray Atkinson, of Redhill, recently addressed some London local preachers, his theme being "the place of preaching in the present day." Present-day preaching, he said, had not the power it had thirty years ago. Naturally; preachers are now acutely aware that present-day congregations are not to be scared into feeling "love of God" by the older preaching methods, which strove to inculcate fear of hell-fire. That being the case, the "fire"—literally and metaphorically—has gone out of present-day preaching.

The President of the Baptist Union, in referring to his Church's methods, says he thinks it a false reading of the psychology of youth to imagine that Baptist young people can be held permanently by methods that coddle and amuse them. Baptist pastors would seem to be faced with an awkward problem. If they coddle and amuse, their young clients cannot be held permanently. If they don't coddle and amuse, they cannot get the young to stay at all. The pastors appear to be between the devil and the deep sea. Perhaps after a little prayer and fasting, light will be vouchsafed unto them, and some new means of manipulating the psychology of youth to the advantage of the pastors will be forthcoming. Anyway, we hope so, for the sake of stipends.

Gipsy Smith is never tired of telling people how great is the power of prayer and of the wonders it works. He, however, evidently believes that this wonderful power has its limits. It is no good as a fat reducer. Working hard for the Lord has caused the Gipsy to become rather more "tubby" than a follower of the ascetic, Jesus, ought to be. So the Gipsy anchors for three weeks at a sanatorium in Michigan, and adopts a meagre diet of fruit and vegetables, in order to "reduce." Our stout friend has evidently missed an excellent opportunity for testing the efficacy of prayer. He should have asked his God to make him slim again in a couple of days, and then see what happened. It seems a wicked waste of money to pay doctors for doing what God can do for nothing. We hope he reads *Elmer Gantry* during his retirement.

The Rev. Arthur Pringle has been asked for guidance by two different correspondents. The first has been muddled a bit by some astrology expert, and asks whether the stars rule people or not. Mr. Pringle replies that all talk about lucky or unlucky stars, favourable or unfavourable planets, is pure superstition. All people, says he, who value sanity and common-sense should have nothing to do with it. The second correspondent wanted to know: How does God guide us? The rev.

gentleman replies that God leads and guides and helps: but because we are human beings and not machines, God cannot compel. We must train ourselves to recognize this guidance when it comes. We must not expect voices or anything sensational. The Divine leading comes through ordinary everyday events and circumstances. For instance, you are sadly perplexed as to what you ought to do. Prayer brings no apparent answer of a direct sort. But you come upon a certain verse of Scripture, and it happens to fit your need and throws light on your difficulty. You can regard it as merely a coincidence, or as God's way of answering your prayer: why not? ask Mr. Pringle. We should say that all Mr. Pringle's talk about Divine guidance is pure superstition. All people who value sanity and common-sense should have nothing to do with it. The medicine-men of Central Africa give their clients advice, with variations to suit race and culture, similar to that given by their Christian prototype, Mr. Pringle.

An article in the *Church Times* points out that since the war, in all countries where full political freedom has been given the Jews, there has been a wholesale drift from Judaism in the direction of religious apathy and Agnosticism. The "danger" appears to be due to the fact that the Jew has an inclination towards the intellectual life. In America, says the article, with the Jews forming three per cent. (?) of the population, they form ten per cent. of the universities. So, it seems, if the world is to be made a safe place, these Jews must be brought over to Christianity. There is about as much chance of that being done as there is of converting the staff of the *Freethinker*.

We do not, of course, expect the *Church Times* to read history from the point of view of commonsense, or it might conclude that just so soon as social equality follows political equality, the Jews, as a distinctly religious people, are doomed. It is Christianity that has kept the Jew alive. The savage persecution of the people who, according to the Christian story, made the salvation of Christians possible, drove the Jews together, stereotyped their peculiarities and preserved their religion. That is always the effect of persecution where it fails to exterminate. Persecution either kills completely the thing persecuted, or it preserves it by drawing a ring fence round it. But in every case where the social and political equality exists, the consequence is a marked drift away from Judaism, and a merging in the surrounding population. Half a dozen generations of absolute equality would make a Jew about as great a curiosity as a devotee of ancient Druidism.

The Bishop of London has been varying the very hard labour of his life by taking a world tour; and has been giving New Zealanders a taste of his quality. Of course the gallant way in which he slaughtered the Atheists years ago in Victoria Park, figured in his speeches, and we have no doubt that the number grows as the years pass. The splendid way in which he did it may be gauged from the Bishop's own account as reported in the *New Zealand Herald*: "When he talked about the love of God, some wicked Atheist said 'Prove it.' 'Well,' replied the bishop, 'you can't prove it from nature, because there is a great deal of cruelty in nature. You can't prove it from human nature, because there is a lot that is ugly there. You can only prove it by accepting the Cross.'" And that the Bishop thinks is a proof! No wonder the Atheists died—probably they killed themselves laughing.

"If a man does not believe in God," he went on, "let him kneel at the foot of the Cross and say 'He died for me because he loved me.'" Of course, to the uninitiated it would appear that one would have to believe in God before he could do it. And he would certainly have to have a good conceit of himself to believe it. It is only the humility of the Christian which leads him to think himself of such tremendous value as to justify the

sacrifice. And with all due respect to the bishop, one feels that it was really fortunate for him that Christ died for him before he had a chance of seeing him. Otherwise the sacrifice might never have been consummated.

And here is the bishop's crowning gem. "No man who says openly, 'I am an Atheist,' is to be trusted." It is not wise to take Bishop Ingram seriously, otherwise it might be pointed out that it is precisely the man who does say this openly that may be trusted. Not because he is right when he says it, but because in saying it in a Christian environment he is giving evidence of his sincerity. That evidence is certainly not forthcoming in the case of a Christian bishop. He may or may not be honest. We do not know. But he has every inducement to pretend to believe even when he does not. It is the man who avows an opinion that is unpopular, which exposes him to risk and loss, who gives evidence of his honesty in his avowal. The Bishop gets sillier as he gets older; and we thought he had reached the limit, even as a young man.

We find a note bearing upon this topic in a recent issue of the *New York Medical Critic and Guide*. Dr. Robinson, the editor, says that he has yet to meet an American professor who would dare to speak the whole truth about regarding religious beliefs. We are not surprised at this being the case in America; we know it is the case here. There are plenty of professors in schools and universities, who will venture on some mild criticisms on religious doctrines, but how many of them are there who will tell the whole truth about religion? Even men in the position of Sir James Frazer, whose investigations knock the bottom out of all religion, refrain from applying what they teach to Christianity. And with others, although they have really given up all belief in a genuine deity, they ward off attack by applying the word "God" to some abstraction, that bears about the same likeness to the genuine article as a horse-chestnut does to a chestnut horse. If these men venture on a course of absolute honesty in relation to religion, Christians soon find means of driving them from their posts, or making their lives a misery. The consequence is that there is more dishonesty in connexion with religion than there is in connexion with anything else in the country. Christians have made mental honesty one of the most expensive luxuries that any man may have. Think what chance of holding public office any man would stand who was not a religious believer, if men like the Bishop of London had full power, and one will realize the premium on dishonesty Christianity has placed and still places.

Pastor Jeffries is still busy at Leeds, and produces the usual crop of cured cases. It seems almost useless to argue against this kind of thing, because those to whom the argument is addressed never read it. What we should like each one of his hearers to do is to read *Elmer Gantry*. American methods may be more blatant than ours, but the methods of the religious fakir are much the same all the world over.

We see from the April issue of the *Rotary Wheel*, that Mr. George Bernard Shaw recently excused himself proposing the toast of St. Patrick, "in view of the result of St. Patrick's introduction of Christianity to my unfortunate countrymen." That was a hit. Much of the troubles of Ireland can be traced to that disaster having occurred; whether St. Patrick or someone else was responsible for it, is a matter of detail.

Southend Wesleyan Methodists have been conducting revivalist meetings. One night the revivalists surrounded a certain public house and sang, "Since Jesus came into my heart." As soon as the hymn was finished the patrons of the pub all came tumbling out and sang—the Frothblowers Anthem. That must have cheered the revivalists immensely.

A labour paper, the *Worker's Life*, give an account of the way in which the Salvation Army helps the poor man. When a man arrives at Whitecross Street (London), he is told that he must attend meetings or nothing can be done. He is then put to work sorting paper, for which he gets food and shelter, and for the first three weeks, sixpence a week. If he is not capable at the end of that time he is discharged. If he is capable he is employed regularly, and must pick 6 cwt. per day for five days, and 3 cwt. on Saturday. For this he receives food and lodging, which works out at Salvation Army prices, at 19s. 6d. per week. The paper, when picked, sells at about £5 per ton—a clear profit of £4 on each man. Above the quantity named the man is allowed 4d. per cwt. And this is the organization that caddges all over the country to help the poor and down-trodden. Of course, there is nothing new in all this, it was thoroughly exposed years ago by Mr. Manson. But it is done in the name of Jesus Christ, and few public men care to face what might come to them if they ventured to make the facts public.

The Mexican Government is, as is to be expected, encountering the bitter opposition of the Church in its nationalizing of Church property. It seems that for about fifty years this has been considered by law to be national property, and the Government is therefore only acting on the law as it stands. But the Church has declared war against the Government, and the latter declares that the episcopate is everywhere stirring the people up to rebellion. Further, the recent train outrage, in which a train was held up, soaked in oil, and set alight with the passengers inside the carriages, is said to be the work of the religious party. A number of bishops have left Mexico, by deportation, says one report; to escape having to stand their trial on serious charges, says another report. Some light is thrown on the situation by the statement of the Archbishop of Mexico, as published in the *Times*, of April 25, that he had upheld the right of Roman Catholics to fight for their rights, peacefully, if possible, but with arms in an extremity. When an Archbishop goes so far as this, some colour is given to the Government charges. And we know that the Roman Catholic Church does not stop at much where the interests of the Church are concerned.

A statistician declares that figures speak for themselves. So they may; in the case of Christianity they speak *through* the mouths of preachers, and that makes a devil of a difference.

Preaching at Wesley's Chapel, the Rev. Dr. Lofthouse said that life to-day has become something that is very ordered and respectable and intelligible. Science has cleared away mystery after mystery that used to cloud the minds of men. Vastly different, he continued, was the case with primitive man. Every wood and jungle was alive with voices that might mean destruction; the witch and wizard were everywhere. At the present time people had a better appreciation as to the sequence of cause and effect. We hope the primitive-minded congregation fully appreciated the Rev. Doctor's statements. It is science that has cleared away the mysteries that clouded men's minds, not the Christian religion. All that religion has ever done is to add mystery to mystery, and stand in the way of their being dispelled.

At a conference of representatives of the National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches and of the Trade Associations, it was agreed that the soliciting of goods from shop-keepers or manufacturers for sale at Church bazaars, especially where a suggestion of boycott was used in support of the demand, and the undercutting of prices at such bazaars, were to be deprecated. We are glad to note that the Trading Associations are summoning up courage to protest against the mean tricks of Church and Chapel bazaar-holders.

National Secular Society.

THE FUNDS of the National Secular Society are now legally controlled by Trust Deed, and those who wish to benefit the Society by gift or bequest may do so with complete confidence that any money so received will be properly administered and expended.

The following form of bequest is sufficient for anyone who desires to benefit the Society by will:—

I hereby give and bequeath (*Here insert particulars of legacy*), free of all death duties, to the Trustees of the National Secular Society for all or any of the purposes of the Trust Deed of the said Society, and I direct that a receipt signed by two of the trustees of the said Society shall be a good discharge to my executors for the said legacy.

Any information concerning the Trust Deed and its administration may be had on application.

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.

We have to thank Mr. T. W. Haughton and others for their letters of appreciation concerning our last week's "Views and Opinions." We do this because the fact of so many writing to express their appreciation of such an article is itself a tribute to the mental calibre of *Freethinker* readers. We are certain that most other papers would have thought such an article too much of a strain on the mental ability of their readers to insert it. But we know our readers, and are proud of them. Professor Julian Huxley is not alone in these lapses where religion is concerned; it is quite common with most public men in this country.

FREETHINKER ENDOWMENT TRUST.—Libra, 5s.; J. G. Burdon, 3d. 6d.

"LIBRA."—Sorry to hear you have been unwell; we missed you from our last meetings. Shall be glad to hear from you again on the matter of which you write.

H. BARBER.—Article not set up yet. Proof shall be sent as early as possible.

J. G. BURDON.—Sorry for delay.

J. H. ROOSE.—Sorry, but your letter is rather too late for that particular controversy. This is one of the disadvantages of living so far away as Rhodesia.

CINE SERE.—We should much like to see an active Branch of the N.S.S. at both Darwin and Blackburn. There are plenty of Freethinkers there if they would only get to work.

J. R. ELPHSON.—Thanks for MSS., but regret we are unable to use it.

W. A. EASTER.—You are right in thinking that we should not be able to find space for your letter. The only advice we can give you is to read the *Freethinker* for a season, and a few Freethought pamphlets. You evidently know nothing whatever of what Freethought means, or what it is that Freethinkers are after.

J. G. BARTRAM.—Your lecture notice was not delivered here till Wednesday. We see by the postmark that it was not posted—or cleared—till 9.45 on Tuesday. All notices must reach here by first post on Tuesday to be of use.

W. J. MILES.—Sorry we shall not have the pleasure of seeing you in London this year.

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 connexion 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 62 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.

The arrangements for the National Secular Society's Conference, at Glasgow, on Whit-Sunday are proceeding, and full particulars will be announced shortly. The evening meeting will be held in the large City Hall, and as this has a seating capacity of 2,000, there will be a good opportunity for Freethinkers to bring Christian friends. The morning and afternoon meetings will be business meetings, and open to members only. The evening meeting will be a public demonstration.

We have some enquiries about the Conference from intending visitors, but not nearly as many as we should like to have heard from. It is still several weeks off, and that may account for more not having written, but it is well for those who intend being present to write as soon as they can. They should address their letters to the Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, and state exactly what are their requirements—length of stay, etc.

There will be a luncheon arranged between the morning and afternoon meetings, and on the Monday an excursion is being arranged to Lochgoilhead, which is counted among the most impressive pieces of scenery in the Western Highlands. Provided Whit Monday is fine, this should be something to be remembered by those who are visiting the Highlands for the first time. We shall be able to give the cost of the trip in a later issue.

To-day (May 8), Mr. Cohen will speak (afternoon at 2.45, and evening at 6.30), in the Secular School, Pole Lane, Failsforth. In the afternoon he will speak on "Why We Need Freethought," and in the evening, "Did Jesus Christ Ever Live?"

Now that the finer weather is approaching, and Freethinkers along with others, will be wandering over the country, we suggest that some useful propaganda work might be done in distributing a few specimen copies of this paper. One never knows where or when new readers may be picked up. We are always ready to send parcels of specimen copies to anyone who will undertake their distribution. All that is necessary is to send name and address with directions as to how many copies are to be sent. We will see to the rest at this end.

The following from the *Daily Chronicle*, April 28, is interesting:—

It is fairly safe to prophesy that any man who is abused for his opinions in one age will be regarded with respect, and even with admiration, by the next. Bradlaugh is one illustration of this, and now I see a new life of Colonel Ingersoll is just out in America. As a "free-thinker" he excited in the United States the same horror which Bradlaugh aroused here. To-day he is a national figure, of whom all are proud. Shakespeare's cheap cynicism about the good which men do being "oft interred with their bones" was far from the truth.

We are glad to see that the name of Bradlaugh is not quite forgotten by the outside world. Respectability—heretical and orthodox—do their best to bury him by seldom mentioning his existence, just as they have managed to bury many another fearless Freethinker. And that makes the above notice the more welcome.

The Causes of Religious Decay.

IN the ranks of the professional religion-peddlers, no less than in the increasingly attenuated ranks of their staunch satellites, is plainly to be observed something perilously approaching panic. There is, of course, no public admission of any such panic, but to those members of the intelligentsia, who are interested students of the rise and fall of ghost worship, and who rely for their information, not on such learned news-sheets as the *Daily Mail* and the *News of the World*, nor on the horological columns of the *Church Times* but are accustomed to base their diagnoses on that which is unsaid, rather than the spoken utterance or printed word, there are observable, whenever a learned theologian opens his lips on the matter of Christian progress, vast dissatisfaction, much ill-concealed uneasiness, and, on occasion, every symptom of carefully suppressed alarm. And little wonder.

For fifty years the Christian religion has been slowly but steadily rotting. Cumulative in its effects, to-day, the rotting process is so well under way, that the whole edifice of Christianity is in positive danger of collapse. It has taken the easy-going, greedy, complacent parsons and priests a long time to realize the dangers facing their supposedly steel-built Christian structure—a religion that had safely weathered the storms of nineteen hundred years seemed a pretty secure affair. But at last into the cerebrums of these sweating pontifical ecclesiastics is penetrating the grim, dismaying and devastating fact that Christianity is losing its hold. In consequence, pious frauds the whole country over, who have been accustomed to getting their buttered bread in the easiest way ever invented by man, at the prospect of having to sacrifice the butter and possibly the bread as well, are shivering in apprehension.

For years they have steadfastly denied the decline. At last, however, faced with hard facts which have obtruded themselves so often and so repeatedly, as to render their continual ignoring an exhibition of mere stupidity, an admission partial, at any rate, of the reality of this decay, has become not only essential but politic. Thus the standpoint now taken is that the present ineffectiveness of theologic teaching is but a passing shadow on Christianity's glorious escutcheon. The message is rung out with concerted thoroughness from a thousand pulpits, that we are on the verge of a tremendous revival, that the present indifference is but the precursor of a vaster and more widespread recognition of Christian concepts and the omnipotence of the Lord God Jahwé, than has been known since the days when Jesus trod the earth.

For this present wave of indifference, reasons many and varied are given. The late war, as usual, has received its share of blame. But in the main, the competition of the several varieties of modern amusement together bear the brand of guilt. The civilized world, say the parsons, is passing through a phase of excitement following on the tragedy of war, and this excitement is seeking its outlet in a cult of dancing, theatre-going, and pleasure-seeking generally.

To lure the youngsters back to the protecting fold, attempts of various kinds have been made, all more or less strikingly ineffective. Y.M.C.A.'s with attached movie-shows or concert halls have done little; the emasculated theatricals presented in the Sunday-schools have done less. The day has gone when sops of this brand are of the slightest effect, for when all is done the amusements which are superintended by clergymen, are to those gaudily supplied in every town of any size, what the itinerant barn-storming theatricals of twenty years ago were to the

regular drama of London and provincial cities. In despair the clergy can only subdue their inmost quakings with half-hearted prayers to God for the speedy coming of the reformation.

Now the fault with all the reasons given, or at any rate, every reason that has caught my watchful eye, is that they are one and all abysmally wrong. They overlook the fundamental cause of the decline in the Christian religion, and in consequence theologians are altogether unable to realize that any remedy for this decline would involve a complete negation of the very principles upon which the edifice of present-day civilization has itself been carefully built.

Every form of religion that has ever become in the faintest degree popular is anthropomorphic. Christianity, Judaism, Mohammedism, are alike anthropomorphic. In each case the basis is a personal God as in Judaism and Islamism, or a trinitarian Godhead as in Christianity. The primitive mind, and none but the primitive can swallow the crudities of thought on which religion in its ultimate analysis rests, cannot in any wholesale sense accept a system of morality imposed upon it by anything which has not for its figurehead a personal God. Savage man the world over, as anthropological research has clearly demonstrated, starts out with a polytheism which, with the development of civilization becomes restricted, ultimately fructifying into a monotheism as in Judaism and Islamism. Christianity, with the sole exception of the Unitarian cult, despite the assertions of not a few ornaments of the clergy, is not a monotheism: the three-horned Godhead of orthodox Protestantism, the Mariology and Saint-worship connected with the Catholic Church, brand it as distinctly polytheistic.

But whether the God sits in solitary state, or is married and has children, matters little. Nor apparently do his moral and physical attributes matter a great deal more. The fierce, angry, revengeful, jealous, cruel Jahwé of Israel secures the same adoration as does the loving, kindly, forgiving Jesus. Together, they form an ideal combination, raking in the worship of all; hence the supremacy of Christianity. There is the roaring Jahwé for those who can only be impressed through fear; there is the forgiving Christ for those who subscribe to the gospel of charity and goodwill.

All very well and good was this until the smashing blows of science caused the one time adamantine rampart of anthropomorphism to shiver and tremble under a formidable recurrent bombardment. The history of Christianity during the last century is one continuous story of a bitterly contested retreat. The army of theologians, black-coated and thousands strong, has contested every inch of the ground. Every trick that the mind could conceive, every subterfuge, every thinkable appeal to imagination, have been brought frantically to bear against science's remorseless advance.

Admittedly the parsons have been severely handicapped in the struggle. The Bible has been a millstone, if ever there was one, round their devoted necks. It is this Bible, with its monstrous stories of God's cruelty and selfishness; with its absurd miracles, its comic evolutionary statements, that has caused the clergy of two continents, collectively and individually, for the best part of a hundred years, to rack their brains in vast efforts to reconcile these Biblical fictions with the crude realities of scientific knowledge.

I can well imagine that there are professional soul-savers not a few who would give considerable sums in hard cash (subscribed by their parishioners!) for any feasible scheme whereby the story of the Ark, the Creation legend, the Adam and Eve fable, the Jonah confection, the Witch of Endor seance, the

Gadarene swine buffoonery, and many another grotesque fiction, could be erased from the Testaments. In particular does this apply to the exponents of what is known as higher religion. These would gladly obliterate the Jahwé of the Old Testament: they would in fact hurl aside with gusto, any idea of a purely personal God, envisaging a spiritual entity which by its all pervadent power is omnipotent and omnipresent.

But here again the priests reckon without their public. The readers of the *Daily Mail*, of the *News of the World*, of *John Bull*; the professors of the crossword puzzle; the devotees of the radio, the hurrahing worshippers of football stars and cricket heroes can grasp little of the idealistic concepts that appealed to the philosophic schools of ancient Greece. To all such, esoteric religion is so much Chinese. It is precisely for this reason that no abstract conception of God has ever blossomed into a popular religion. Humanity, deprived of any theophanic manifestation, as in Positivism, failed lamentably. It was bound to fail. The morons that go in for community singing at the behest of a newspaper, cannot understand a religion that attempts to set up an abstract quality for public worship. The idea of an anger-spitting God such as Jahwé is readily understandable, and in times of dire stress may be calculated to send the clodhopper to his knees sweating fear: the idea of goodness or pureness ruling and creating the world would merely cause him to spit in ridicule.

Thus present-day theologians are between two stools. On the one hand there is Christ with his thundering father, and with a preposterous historical record which day by day becomes increasingly unswallowable by the public; on the other hand there is a mystical conception of an abstract quality or force which is plainly incomprehensible to all but an esoteric priesthood. Try as they will, the bishops and the deans inevitably run against a stone wall, on which the one thesis or the other is shattered to bits.

It is useless to attempt to educate the public to an acceptance of mysticism with its correlation of an ineffable and unthinkable God. Nothing less than the biologically impossible breeding of a race of super-men such as Bernard Shaw advocates would suffice. Likewise, every attempt to reconcile science and religion is doomed to utter failure; there can be no such reconciliation. Nor can the diligent efforts of the press to bolster up a decaying theology do more than put off for a few years the inevitable end. Every step forward in the pursuit of knowledge constitutes a big clinching nail in religion's coffin. Knowledge and religion are not peaceful bedmates: they are rivals fighting tooth and nail for supremacy.

Thus the prediction of a coming religious renaissance is a vain hope. Its accomplishments would be possible only by a rigid curtailment of any further excursions into new realms of knowledge, and the coincident destruction of the Scriptural books. Have the perspiring theologians the wisdom to realize that in the adoption of this plan alone lies their smallest chance of salvation? Granted this prescience, have they the courage to openly advocate such a solution?

GEORGE R. SCOTT.

The Bible means black cloth. It comes with a certain official claim against which the mind revolts. The book has its own nobilities—might well be charming, if it was left simply on its own merits, as the others; but this "you must," "it is your duty," repels. 'Tis like the introduction of martial law into Concord. If you should detour our farms with picket lines, and I should not go or come across lots without a pass, I should resist, or else emigrate. If Concord were as beautiful as Paradise, it would be detestable at once.—Emerson (*The Heart of Emerson's Journals.*)

A Rationalist's Reverie.

WHY?

A broken shoe; a hungry shivering boy;
Five guineas given for some new nursery toy.
A coughing woman toiling 'mid the stream;
A boudoir perfect as a poet's dream.
A pheasant shoot, a lavish luncheon, spread;
A workman cringing for his children's bread.
While evermore ascend the bitter cry,
O Lord of bounteous earth we ask thee—Why?

E. G. (*Daily Paper*).

WHAT thoughts surge the brain—as in unison with the rush and speed of the express in which I sat, when these lines caught my eye—simple lines, in a daily paper, to pass and, maybe, be forgotten with its issue, but I sit and think, and all the consolations of all the creeds are but sophistry and ashes—and I too think, why?

Why? when the consciousness of man no longer slumbers, as in the reptile and the animal, the rend of heart and nerve should but supplant the rend of the grosser muscle and flesh—way back in the Miocene—in that age long brutal war for life and survival—the horrors of which only the geologist knows—but no geologist of the future will find embedded in the rocks, records of the tears and sorrows, the broken hearts, the crushed efforts, the hopeless longings, the unfulfilled ideals and aspirations, which cover as with a mantle of anguish, this latter battlefield—those things will but leave their record in the brain and soul of the race, steps for the future physiologist to sadly retrace. Far, far too reverent, are some of us to even postulate—aquiescent omnipotence, a responsibility, other than our own. Is it that all through the ages man has placed his responsibility on the unseen, making his personalities out of good and evil, and has shifted his guilt like a coward to the shoulders of the evil one, and given to the gods services which should have rendered easier the path of his fellows? Do such things survive because man awaits direction from above, and waiting, profits not from the lessons and experience at his feet—that he presses forward to a heaven hereafter, while his paradise may be here and now?

Man with his muscle and brain, has altered the environment of his globe. He has severed its continents, argosied its oceans; invaded the air; winged his thoughts through its ether, and delved into his own grave to yield him fire and power, while the gods looked on. Why does he wait? Why does he appeal to:—

"That inverted bowl we call the sky
... for it rolls impotently on as 'Thou or I'?"

When will he awake to realize it is not supplication, but application, that will just as surely alter the ethical environment, changing the fettered mind; the degradation of want; to the rich sweetness of life; the soulless dull tread of the millions, to the confident Sunward march of humanity, but only through man's effort; man's sympathy and love—while still the gods look on?

J. W. WOOD.

Books are apt to turn reason out of doors. You find men everywhere talking from their memories, instead of from their understanding.—Emerson (*The Heart of Emerson's Journals.*)

In Roxbury, in 1825, I read Cotton's translation of Montaigne. It seemed to me as if I had written the book myself in some former life, so sincerely it spoke my thought and experience. No book before or since was ever so much to me as that.—Emerson (*The Heart of Emerson's Journals.*)

Drama and Dramatists.

"THE BLUE COMET," produced at the Court Theatre, had a poor run, and besides missing the earth at the end of each performance, it has also missed delivering a sensible message to many who are not satisfied with the indifferent plays now appearing on the stage. Its withdrawal from the Court, however, does not by any means signify its total disappearance. The vicissitudes in connexion with the "Farmer's Wife" will doubtless be repeated with this play, in spite of conscious or unconscious efforts to reduce the drama to the mental level of a tame cat, and it would almost appear that producers on the stage accept as their standard the maudlin and irresponsible chatter of penny papers. Mr. Eden Phillpotts, in the "Blue Comet," has permitted himself the privilege of thinking aloud, and to paraphrase Gogol, who, if not a dramatist, is to speak aloud the truth? The play is a delicious blend of satire and the invigorating wine of wisdom. It tilts at snobocracy with a gentle insistence on human values and a nice disregard for the moribund ideas personified by Colonel Lucas Bedall, V.C., C.B. It was Leigh Hunt who wrote that Truth sits upon the lips of dying men, and, in the gathering in the garden to await the comet there is a vigorous and generous clearing up of misunderstandings. The old book-worm is found clasping a volume, *The Consolation of Boethius*; the butler gets over the trouble by being dead drunk. The young folk are reconciled, and, to the sound of the church organ playing, "O God our help in ages past," and the intermittent waves of the drunken people's singing, "We all go the same way home," the comet just misses the earth. About a year ago Mr. St. John Ervine stated in the *Observer*, that:—

Convincing evidence was given to the committee that the "play of ideas," which generally leaves a West-End audience dazed and nearly stunned, is popular in the country.

We trust that the truth of the contention will enable "The Blue Comet" to be produced again; it contains ideas on the bedrock of commonsense, and Sir Barry Jackson will be well advised to find another house for this play, which in reality is a reminder of how near we are to losing our civilization, imperfect as it is, but to be improved if we only have the will.

An opportunity for seeing "Anna Christie" is now presented to those readers who do not mind crude realism. The caveman, or strong silent man in this play, is—and the atmosphere is infectious—a loquacious Irish Sailor, who marries Anna, after a plentiful display of action—that quality which makes a play. It was a pleasure to meet Miss Connie Ediss, as "Marty Owen," a one-time flame of the heroine's father, Chris Christopherson. She has the agreeable art of making a contact with the audience, in the same subtle manner as that possessed by Mrs. Patrick Campbell, and the late Marie Lloyd. Byon, in *Don Juan*, wanted a hero; the people want an idol, and Miss Connie Ediss knows how to supply the want. Here again it appears to be the happy knack of being a human being, and Mr. Eugene O'Neill's play gives her scope for the exercise of her undoubted talent in this direction. Her meeting, in the bar, with Anna Christie was a joy to behold, and the display of feminine devices towards her own sex and towards the opposite sex, partly explains the mystery associated with the trouble in the Garden of Eden. Mr. Keith Kenneth as the hero Mat Burke was very effective in his use of physical force, and a happy ending pleases everybody. The play is a little gem of excitement, and does not depart from the basic facts of life; there is confession and forgiveness of aberrations, and it is a short essay in determinatism.

Mr. Arthur Roberts, the celebrated actor, described the "pictures" as being like mustard without the beef. Cyrano de Bergnac, on the wireless, was to us, a first step towards its re-appearance on the stage. Sir Josiah Wedgwood had an article in the *Evening News*, and although one sympathized with his view, the term "he-man" seems to belong to our American cousins, who are quite welcome to have and to hold it for ever

and ever. Whitman, in his best mood, rejoiced in the gospel of "manliness," and, in our admiration of this quality, we confess that to be the reason for our admiration of Cyrano, and a desire to see this play produced on the stage by Mr. Robert Lorraine. The sound of his voice re-made pictures in our mind of his scenes at the Savoy Theatre, where the spendthrift, quixotic, exuberant and MANLY Gascon was a living example of Blake's aphorism that "the wide mouth laughs at a generous gift." Rostand has touched, in this romance, all those delicate chords of emotion to a noble purpose; no ruffian hands in the play have exploited man's hopes and fears in the manner so beloved by those who wish to enslave their victims. Cyrano is a Man. There may be some of our readers who heard this play by wireless, who will be interested to learn that it can be had for two shillings from William Heinemann, 21, Bedford Street, W.C. With the stuffed dolls, and turnip-headed heroes of the plays now being produced for the benefit of theatre owners and hirers, is it too much to expect a revival of this play from Mr. Lorraine? If he produced it in Birmingham, Liverpool or Manchester, there would be a prayer from him for elastic walls to the theatres, and it could then be brought to London, when that wonderful city had recovered from the effects of the Cup-tie, and the popularity of the press as shown by photographs of the commons after a bank holiday.

WILLIAM REPTON.

Correspondence.

A QUESTION OF BIAS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In conversation once with our friend, V. J. Hands, he suggested that the introduction of a more personal note in the *Freethinker* might be acceptable to its readers. And so, in an evil moment, I sat down to pen some reminiscences and things, and unwittingly mentioned the name of Karl Marx. Ever since that unfortunate day, my pockets have been bulging out with long epistles from irate communists anxious for my scalp. I am beginning to have a good deal of sympathy with Jesus Christ. For telling the Scribes and Pharisees and other self-opinionated people, a few home truths, they made his life a perfect hell, and, if tradition be correct, they ultimately "did him in." I fear there is a grave responsibility resting on the shoulders of our friend Hands.

But the most unkindest cut of all is the letter of Mr. J. G. Bartram, in the issue of May 1. only, in his nervous hurry to slate my innocent and inoffensive article, "Life's Little Incidents," he is guilty of a serious exaggeration, which spoils the effect of his criticisms. The miner's pay, in the newspaper report, and also in my article, is given as twenty-six shillings per day. Mr. Bartram generously increases this to "thirty-six," and then treats us to a long tirade of his own manufactured figures. Such a method of controversy is a little surprising, coming from a forty years' reader of the *Freethinker*. In accusing this miner of "boasting," Mr. Bartram is simply drawing upon his imagination. The man was only answering a civil question put to him by the magistrate, who had probably heard a good deal of the starvation wages paid to miners, and was naturally surprised to learn that one of them could make as much as twenty-six shillings a day. I am advised to consult some of the intellectual aristocracy among the miners; but a consultation with the whole of the miners of Great Britain would not affect the matter one way or the other. The only relevant reference would be to the colliery pay-sheets. Now this incident was broadcast in the newspapers, and must have been read by thousands of miners; but, so far as I know, it passed unchallenged. So, why a thing which is admitted to be true in the public press should become a "lie" and "flapdoodle" only when reproduced in the *Freethinker*, is beyond my understanding.

It appears that the sort of "stuff" I write (Mr. Hands, of course, being to blame) is responsible for checking the credit and lowering the dignity of the *Freethinker*. I suppose the circulation must have dropped

down considerably in consequence. Personally, I am of opinion that the credit and dignity of the *Freethinker* may safely be left in the hands of its able editor. It is not for small fry like us to dictate to the Supreme Court.

I am afraid I will have to write to Mr. Hands for some other suggestion, which will not lead to such an irksome and voluminous correspondence.

JOSEPH BRYCE.

SIR,—After a few months' absence abroad, I was extremely glad to get back to "Blighty" and the *Freethinker*. I noticed in your last issue a letter from your correspondent, Mr. J. G. Bartram, in reply to Mr. Bryce. Of course this prompted me to hunt high and low for the back number. Fortunately I was able to procure this in our wonderful London, and sure enough, Mr. Bryce has been "at it again."

Without any desire to provoke any political discussion, I think I described Mr. Bryce's underlying inspiration correctly in my first letter, when I suggested an ill-suppressed bias, with regard to the Karl Marx and Jesus Christ assertions.

May I register my hearty endorsement of Mr. Bartram's remarks. As he says this flapdoodle won't do, Mr. Bryce; and I am not a little disappointed that such reflections come from so able a pen. J. GARRICKSON.

SIR,—In your issue of May 1, Mr. J. G. Bartram belabours Mr. Bryce for daring to attack his religion (Socialism), and in giving Mr. Bryce a good doing he hits out against the *Freethinker*; and I, as a reader, get some of it, because I must own I enjoyed Mr. Bryce's contribution. At the same time I take Mr. Bartram's warning seriously. There is a prospect of a Labour Government coming into power, and what if they pass a short Act, so as to make the Blasphemy Laws retrospective and to cover these things? There is nothing to laugh at. Mr. Bartram is quite as much hurt at the frivolous way Mr. Bryce dares to joke about Socialism, and the *Freethinker*, and some of its readers making merry over it, as any good Christite or other religionist does over his obsession.

I am sorry to say Mr. Bartram's reading the *Freethinker* for 40 years has not improved his sense of humour. I have nothing to say against his Socialism, except this, that if I want to follow the lead of a Sunday School teacher, I prefer the good old tory or the Lloyd George type to the Hendersons and such like. Sunday School teachers are not burdened with worldly problems, seem more level-headed, or at least more reasonable. Now all I ask Mr. J. G. Bartram is not to hang me just because my wits will not function his way.

M. STEINBERGER.

FRANCISCO FERRER AND THE CHURCH.

SIR,—Mr. H. Cutner, who contributes an article in last week's *Freethinker*, on "The Execution of Francisco Ferrer," need not be discouraged by the absence of other writers on the same subject.

To write successfully on such a subject requires precise knowledge of facts and literary ability, such as few possess.

Mr. Mara's letter, published in your journal, did not pass unnoticed, but it was realized that this correspondent was a worthy representative of the "Great Lying Church," and that therefore his statements and assertions emanated from the "Father of Lies," and were therefore useless.

The fact that this "Great Lying Church" possesses an "Index Expurgatoria," is conclusive evidence of its falsity, and its insolent and arrogant pretensions.

SINE CERE.

SIR,—In your issue of May 1, there appeared an article on "The Execution of Francisco Ferrer," by H. Cutner. Amongst other things, the writer speaks about the intolerance of the Religionists in refusing to publish adverse criticism in their papers; while they are only too willing to expatiate in the columns of their opponents. I should like to endorse this point of view heartily. I have had several instances of it myself.

On one occasion, I sent a letter to the *Universe*, couched in the most courteous tones possible, asking whether they could inform me as to where I could obtain an official reply to such works as *Maria Monk*, and *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, by Pastor Chiniquy. To this I received no reply whatsoever, either personally or in the *Universe*.

I have, of course, the satisfaction of knowing that their silence is more damning than any attempt at an answer could have been, but unfortunately this knowledge is confined to myself.

My object in writing to you is to ask your readers whether they will not co-operate with me as far as possible, in endeavouring to penetrate their defences. Perhaps, if enough of us bombard the Brazen Gates, someone will eventually find a way through. There are several papers, both Catholic and Protestant, which are read by a large section of the public, and there are abundant topics to choose from in any daily newspaper.

For the average man or woman this is the only means of obtaining a hearing amongst the Religionists; for the daily papers are loath to publish controversial matter, and, effective though such publications as the *Freethinker* are, one is largely speaking only to one's own partisans when seeking the hospitality of their columns.

B. S. WILCOX.

Society News.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY.

THE Annual Business Meeting of the Glasgow Branch was held on Sunday, April 24, in No. 2 Room, City Hall, the President, Mr. E. Hale, in the chair.

The President outlined the work done since the last Annual Business Meeting. Twenty-five lectures and two debates were held by the Branch, and two debates jointly with other Societies. Twenty-three lectures were given by Secularists to Societies such as the Glasgow Ethical Society, Socialist Sunday Schools, Glasgow Psychic Investigation Centre, I.L.P. Guilds of Youth, and last, but not least, to Church Societies. Nine Rambles were held during 1926, and during 1926-27, three Social Evenings and one Musical Evening.

Mr. Cohen had been induced to undertake a "Mission" week in Glasgow and district. This had been most successful, and much new ground had been broken. Mr. Whitehead had visited the Branch twice, drawing large audiences. Mr. Whitehead's debate on "Was Jesus a Socialist?" was still a topic of conversation. The Secre had failed to induce any local clergyman of standing to meet Mr. Cohen in debate, but this might be arranged in the coming session.

A new Branch of the N.S.S. had been started in the Shotts, as a result of Mr. Cohen's lecture in Motherwell, in 1926. The Shotts Secularists had made great progress. Mr. Cohen had lectured in the Shotts during his "Mission" week, and his visit had been followed up by five lectures by members of the Glasgow Branch.

The following were elected as Office-Bearers and Committee for the ensuing year:—Hon. President, Mr. R. Parker; President, Mr. E. Hale; Vice-Presidents, Mr. D. S. Currie and Mr. H. Lancaster; Secretary, Mr. Fred Mann, 34 Trefoil Avenue, Glasgow, S.1; Assistant Secretary, Mr. J. Christie; Treasurer, Mr. R. Muir; Assistant Treasurer, Mr. J. Barr; Librarian, Mr. J. Casey; Committee, Messrs. Ewing, Lonsdale, MacEwan, Mrs. Galbraith and Miss Hale; Auditors, Messrs. Gough and MacInnes. Messrs Hale and MacEwan were elected Conference Delegates.

MAY-DAY IN VICTORIA PARK.

A VERY successful Freethought demonstration was held on the first of May, in Victoria Park. Miss Vance, in spite of her infirmities, very courageously agreed to act as chairman. The presence of a lady in that capacity, using a motor van as a platform, attracted quite a respectably-sized audience, notwithstanding a score of other claimants for attention, provided by as many meetings. In a voice of rather surprising strength and vigour, Miss Vance performed her duties. Mr. Hart made what would have been an effective speech, had it

not been subject to incessant interruptions from a very rough-looking gentleman, whose voice, in spite of previous very evident alcoholic lubrication, was more harsh than melodious. He, fortunately, departed before the next speaker, Mr. G. Whitehead, held forth and the meeting terminated with an address from Mr. Rosetti. With the exception referred to, a good audience listened with interest to the various remarks, and altogether an encouraging start was made for the season's propaganda in Victoria Park.—G. W.

WEST LONDON BRANCH.

THE gorgeous weather on Sunday last helped to make the meeting in Hyde Park unusually large, and the questions put to the speakers were of an intelligent character. Among these, however, were the usual questions about big hosts, Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, etc., which may be taken as indicative of the amount of ground work that has yet to be done. The most astonishing feature of the meeting was an ex-military gentleman, who asserted that he had actually seen the angels at Mons. There are evidently some uncured shell shock cases still wandering about. There is evidently plenty of room for the work of the West London Branch, which intends to shortly carry its work to other parts of the West of London. It can do that the more speedily and the more effectively by receiving the co-operation financial, moral, and oratorical, of Free-thinkers in this area.

A debate has been arranged between Mr. LeMaine and a well known speaker on political platforms, on the "Efficacy of Prayer," and one with a clergyman on "The Historicity of Jesus," is also under arrangement.—W. L. M.

CHESTER-LE-STREET BRANCH.

A Supper and Concert was held in the Assembly Rooms, on April 30, in honour of one of our members, Mr. F. Forth, who is leaving the country for Western Canada. In the course of the evening an eight-day watch, suitably inscribed, was presented to Mr. Forth, and a serviceable purse to Mrs. Forth. The Chairman, Mr. T. Brown, making the presentations, dwelt upon the services of Mr. Forth to the cause of Freethought, to which a suitable reply was made. Mrs. Forth also replied on her own behalf, thanking the members for their kindness and good wishes. The meeting concluded with the singing of Auld Lang Sync.—J. T. B.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON APRIL 28.

The President, Mr. C. Cohen, in the chair. Also present:—Messrs. Clifton, Coles, Gorniot, Moss, Quinton, Rosetti, Samuels, Silvester, Miss Kough and the Secretary.

The Auditor's Draft of the Annual Balance Sheet was read, discussed and ordered to be printed.

New members were received for Liverpool, Nelson and Shotts Branches, and the Parent Society.

The reorganization of the Liverpool propaganda was discussed, and at the request of some of the older members, application for a new Branch was granted. Various items of correspondence were dealt with.

The preliminary notice of an International Congress, to be held in Antwerp, in September, was received, and discussion deferred to the next meeting.

Attention being called to the refusal of the L.C.C. of permission to take up collections, which would involve a certain financial loss to some London Branches, Mr. Moss moved a resolution asking the Editor of the *Freethinker* to open a special fund for the London Open-Air Propaganda.

An intimation from the Birmingham Branch that the local Education Committee had at last removed the ban on the letting of the Schools to the N.S.S. was reported. The Executive expressed their pleasure at the successful issue of the agitation so well maintained in Birmingham.

A formal report to date, re the Canadian Blasphemy

Prosecution, which had already appeared in the *Freethinker*, was made, no further details beyond the sentence being to hand.

Re the Conference on Whit Sunday, June 5. Notices of motion from the Agenda were read, together with those drawn up by the Executive, and remitted to the Agenda Committee, upon which Messrs. Coles, Quinton and Rosetti were elected.

The Secretary was requested to remind the Branches of the importance of appointing their delegates to the Conference without further delay.

E. M. VANCE,
General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by the 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, 1, Little George Street, Westminster, S.W.1): 3.30, Lecture in French, by Monsieur Deshumbert, on "Un Roman Pré-historique." All invited.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): 7.0, Arthur Linecar, "John Galsworthy's 'Tatterdemalion.'" "

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, (E.C.2): 11.0, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., D.Lit., "Are the Poor Blessed?"

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 3.30, Mr. G. Whitehead.—A Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Regent's Park, near the Fountain): 6.0, G. Miller.—"The Conflict Between Science and Religion."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Clapham Common, 11.30, Brockwell Park, 6.0): Lectures by L. Ebury and Mr. S. Hanson.

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Outside Technical Institute, Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7.0, Mr. G. Whitehead. Monday until Thursday, 7.45—Lectures.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 3.30, Messrs. Campbell-Everden and Jackson. 6.30, Messrs. Hyatt and Le Maine—Freethought Lectures. Every Wednesday and Friday at 7.30, by various Lecturers.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

CHESTER-LE-STREET BRANCH (Assembly Rooms, Front Street): Open daily for reading, etc., from 10 a.m. All Freethinkers and enquirers welcome.

FAILSWORTH SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular School, Pole Lane, Failsworth): Lectures by Mr. Chapman Cohen, 2.45, "Why We Need Freethought"; 6.30, "Did Jesus Christ Ever Live?"

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Royal Buildings, 18 Colquitt Street, off Bold Street): 7.30, Dr. Carmichael, "Determination and Morals."

OUTDOOR.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY, Branch of the N.S.S.—Ramble to Corkindale Law. Leader, Miss M. Hale, Meet at Glassford Street, at 12 noon.

CLOTHES MAKE—a lot of difference. Who makes them makes most of the difference. If you know Freethinkers make clothes, and good clothes, and they don't make yours, how is it? You must write at once 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.; or Ladies' Fashion and Pattern Sets, costumes from 60s.; frocks from 47s.—MACCONNELL & MAHE, New Street, Bakewell, Derbyshire.

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