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Views and Opinions.

Is there a Religious Revival?

THE Bishop of London recently travelled round the world and—marvellous man!—discovered there was a revival of religion everywhere taking place. But every time he went to cheer up believers in any part of England, he made exactly the same discovery. Every time a travelling evangelist holds a meeting, he and his managers have the same experience. If a clerical congress is held, the parsons present—each one drunk with his own eloquence and bored with that of his fellow-preachers—say the same thing. There is a great revival of religion, either going on or approaching. Like a petrol engine, Christianity seems to-day to be wholly dependent upon a series of explosions, although it differs from the machine in not getting any "forrader." There is an explosion, but no propulsion. There may be a sense of movement in such cries, but there is no movement of sense. They may express hope, they certainly register, at least, some measure of defeat. For a revival must mean at least a recovery. It implies that Christianity has lost some amount of ground, but there is now some prospect of recovering it. If the cry is warranted, it can only mean that Christianity will regain some of its lost territory; if it is not warranted, the slogan vendors will be worse off than before—in the eyes of sensible people, that is. Fortunately for parsons there are always enough fools around to provide them with a fair-sized congregation.

* * *

A Hopeless Fight.

Putting on one side the yarns told by such professional evangelists as Billy Sunday or Gipsy Smith, and which deceive none who understand the machinery of this side of the soul-saving business, the alleged revival is worth noting. Little more than a hundred years ago, the Christian religion, despite the breach between the Protestant Churches and the Church of Rome, presented an almost unbroken front to the world. Its historic teachings concerning the structure of the world was still held by all save a few

professed unbelievers. It had almost got rid of the belief in witchcraft, but it still held on to miracles, literal inspiration, special creation, and the direct interposition of God in human affairs. The doctrine of eternal damnation was almost untouched, the law practically ostracised from public office all who were not believers in the Christian religion. A revival of Christianity should mean that belief in these directions has been re-created. Is that so? It is true that the vogue of Spiritualism promises a revival of something approaching demonology, but that is about all. Leading Christians are falling over each other to announce that they do not believe in the literal inspiration of the Bible, that the belief in Hell is barbarous and brutal, that what are called miracles is merely a name given by ignorance to misunderstood natural occurrences, which have been exaggerated by religious fervour. That is certainly not a revival; it is a surrender to the enemy. Christianity is permitted to survive only on condition that it gives up all to which it once stood pledged.

* * *

Deism and Atheism.

It is easy enough to talk of Christianity having lived through a lengthy series of attacks. How far is this true? In the eighteenth century the Christian religion stood face to face with Deism. From the point of view of a scientific Atheism the issue was trivial enough. It was a conflict between two forms of supernaturalism. The Deist repudiated the Christian God in the name of the God of nature. Against the Deists entered Bishop Butler—to whom Atheism in this country owes much. To the Deist Butler said, "Why reject the God of revelation on account of certain characteristics which revelation gives him, while accepting a God of nature who bears precisely the same marks? The retort was decisive, and Deism wriggled ineffectively to escape. One God was just as absurd as the other, and there was no economy in foolishness in giving up one absurdity in the name of another. One might just as well rest content with the absurdity that one had, instead of flying to another, the character of which was quite apparent. Even so late as the time of Thomas Paine, Deists were still trying to escape the logic of Butler's attack. But suppose the current Christianity of Paine's day had been that of present-day Christians, would Paine's *Age of Reason* ever have been written? It is hardly likely. Assuming Paine to be alive to-day with his opinions unchanged, he might, had he been inclined to verbal dishonesty, have comfortably filled one of the English Bishops. But this would not have meant that Paine was converted to Christianity. It would have meant only that Christianity had become converted to Paine. For the best Christianity of to-day is little more than the eighteenth century Deism it so bitterly

opposed, with a liberal use of the question begging name of Christ. The Christianity that was then alive is now well on the road to complete extinction. The name has been carried on, just as an old firm, with a changed business, often perpetuates the name of its founder. Without the spoils of office it is doubtless if even this would have survived. But the "good-will" of a business is often an important asset.

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An Accommodating Religion.

There is no revival of Christianity in any genuine sense of the term. There is only a continuous endeavour to state a number of beliefs in such a way that they will not too openly offend educated people. The use of such a phrase as the revival of "religious faith" is evidence of this. What is really implied is a revival of *Christian* faith. But this would be too precise, too definite, and might cause certain hesitations in the minds of those who listen. So when prominent men are questioned as to their belief it is not "Do you believe in Christianity?" but "What is your religious belief? Do you believe in God? or in a future life?" And all the time it is not mere religious belief that is at stake, but so far as men like Dean Inge, or Bishop Barnes are concerned, it is belief in the Christian faith that is required. Once upon a time the important question was "Do you belong to *the* Church?" Then it became, "Do you belong to *any* Church?" Later, "Are you a Christian, even though of no Church at all?" And now it is a timid, "Well, are you religious; do you believe in anything?" and behind this there is a beseeching "For God's sake say you believe in a kind-of-a-sort-of-a-something somewhere or other." Anything will do, so long as you will continue to use the blessed word "Religion." One could respect a Church that stood to its teaching in the face of all attacks. Even though destruction were certain there would be no dishonour. But a Church that experiences defeat after defeat, a Church that denounces teaching after teaching, and then accepts them in the name of the defeated beliefs, is a pitiable spectacle. Men like Barnes and Inge imagine they are proving the resiliency of the Church, when all they are doing is exhibiting the excellence of its mental digestion in assimilating unpalatable foods. It is determined to save itself from being slaughtered, even though it commits suicide in the course of its endeavours.

* * *

Civilization and Religion.

One of the most curious of the defences set up on behalf of Christianity—genuine Christianity—is that no one believes in it. If the Freethinker argues that the affairs of the world do not exhibit the care of a benevolent deity, he is told that Christians do not nowadays believe in a particular Providence. If he asks for proof of answers to prayer, he is told that these are not objective, but subjective, the benefit of prayer is the effect it has on the mind of the one who prays. He denounces the doctrine of hell, and Christians say he is old-fashioned. He criticizes the orthodox conception of God, and is told he is caricaturing deity. The Bible is the same book, the creeds are the same, but they must be taken to mean something entirely different from what they were always thought to mean. And if a certain number of people can be brought to the point of reading into Christianity something that was never thought to be there, it is called a revival of Christianity! Of course, I am not dealing with the genuinely backward portion of the community. There are plenty of people whose mental equipment

will never bring them beyond the crudest form of Christian belief. This is the type of mind that would be quite at home in a gathering of the early Christian apostles, and would not be greatly out of place in an assembly of central Africans, provided Christian terms were used. But there are numbers of people who cannot wholly escape the influence of genuinely progressive ideas. A civilization may remain in the mental condition of the Stone Age, but it does not advance to a knowledge of the use of metals and then go back again. The Churches may engineer a revival amongst sections of the population, but the recapture of the more progressive minds is impossible. They are definitely beyond its grasp. Genuine Christianity is, after all, orthodox Christianity, and if that cannot be brought back into power, then whatever takes its place is not Christianity at all. Really I do not think that the most optimistic of apologists hopes to do this. What they are hoping to effect is, by the use of meaningless or misleading phrases, to lull the more alert into a state of quietude, and the more superstitions into co-operation, so that some form of superstition may be placed in power. It is from this direction that the threat to civilization comes.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

"The Experience of Immortality."

SUCH is the title of a sermon by Dean Inge, preached in St. Paul's Cathedral on Easter Sunday morning, and published in the *Christian World Pulpit*, of April 28. The text is 1 John iii. 14: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." The Dean begins his brief address by quoting "a well-known saying of Spinoza, that there is no subject on which the free man or the wise man will think so seldom as on death." So far as Non-conformists are concerned, that saying is false. Well does the present writer remember that during his youthful years in North Wales, there was no subject so constantly thought and spoken on as death. Children were frequently and funereally asked, "Are you ready to die? Have you found peace with God? If he were to call you to-night, would you go to heaven?" The supreme appeal of the pulpit was and is to people doomed to die. As the Dean puts it: "Death has even been said to be the preacher's commonplace. 'Remember that thou must die,' has been held to be the most potent maxim with which to terrify the worldling." Despite all this, the preacher thinks that, on the whole, Spinoza was right. "It is more important," he says, "that we should remember that we have to live than that we have to die. I have not a great respect for the man who turns pale at the thought of death." And yet in Christian thought death occupies a large place. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh the judgment." It is alleged that in the next world there are two territories, the one called heaven and the other hell, into either of which people pass at death, according to their attitude to God in Christ, and it is, therefore, considered a sin to think of death lightly or not at all. It is perfectly true that death is a law of Nature, and in no sense whatever a punishment; but if the Bible is true, death comes to all, either as a grand reward or as a terrible curse. If the Bible is not true, death puts an end to individual existence. It is as natural as sleep, and no more to be feared.

Dean Inge is of opinion that a short life is more desirable than a long one. He says:—

The claims of succeeding generations make it necessary that we should pass away and make room for them. Nor should we be happy if our lives were even trebled in length. For the longer we live the

more we become creatures of habit. Habit diminishes our freedom, and at last destroys it, together with our powers of enjoyment. Our psychological development, under present conditions, has its natural limit, no less than our physical growth; and to live longer than is required to achieve this goal is loss rather than gain.

That is a highly sensible passage, which any Freethinker might have penned; but in the very next sentence he makes a sudden and wholly unexpected leap into the supernatural, saying, "Eternity has nothing to do with death; it is rather a quality of the higher life, a timeless sphere into which we can pass in a measure here and now." Of the actual existence of such a realm, there is absolutely no positive evidence; nor does Dean Inge pretend to offer any. To say that "love is the master-key to the problem," is to evade the real question at issue. Love is a most valuable human emotion, which concerns itself with social relationships in this world, and has nothing at all to do with "the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns." The Dean speaks of eternity as if it were as well-known to him as time, whereas, in reality, he does not possess nor can acquire the slightest knowledge of it. We do not know of "a higher world above the limitations which belong to the world of ordinary experience." No doubt the Dean sincerely believes in the existence of a supernatural sphere, but knowledge of it he certainly has not, nor can obtain. It is a purely imaginary realm; and it was his imagination that made it possible for Wordsworth to compose his wonderful *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, of which the Dean makes such generous use in this discourse. The calm, cold, severe critic so prominent in the *Outspoken Essays* is here seen transformed into a perfervid sentimentalist, who lets his fancy run away with him:—

We have all had our moments with Christ, on the Mount of Transfiguration, times when heaven seems not far away, no dreamland, but very near and very real, all about us and within us; times when:—

Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal silence; truths that wake to perish never.
They never perish, though we may forget them.
Things cannot be with us quite as if we had never
seen, never felt, those high and blessed realities.

There are people, no doubt, who enjoy such strange visions, and who believe that the things which they see are objectively real; but as a matter of fact, their reality is exclusively subjective. Shakespeare is in perfect agreement with us on this point. In *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act V., Scene I., Theseus is represented as saying:—

I never may believe
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact:
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;
That is the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends, some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear?

The nature and origin of the belief in fairies are exactly the same as the nature and origin of the belief in God, and the unseen universe; and that Shakespeare himself held that conviction is evident

from the immortal soliloquy in *Hamlet*, in which we read:—

Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,—
The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns—puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.

Tennyson was much nearer the truth than is Dean Inge, when he exclaimed, "We have but faith; we cannot know," and to keep faith alive was the hardest struggle in the great poet's life. Browning opens his *Easter-Day* with these significant words:—

How very hard it is to be
A Christian! Hard for you and me.

Browning himself was a Freethinker, as Mrs. Sutherland Orr assures us in her interesting *Life* of him. It is an undeniable fact that in proportion as secular knowledge spreads, supernatural beliefs perish. To many of us who have carefully read Dean Inge's articles and essays, the mystery is how on earth he can preach the sermons, of which the one before us is a fair specimen. He seems to be two entirely contradictory beings mysteriously rolled into one. But the tide of unbelief is flowing so rapidly and powerfully, that no preaching, however skilful and eloquent, will ever succeed in turning it back. Knowledge has come to stay and rule, and all superstition must vanish for ever. J. T. LLOYD.

The Tyranny of Tithes.

There is nothing on earth divine beside "humanity."
—Landor.

Understand it, you at least
Who toil all day and write and groan all night
With roots of luxury, a cancer struck
In every muscle; out of you it is
Cathedrals rise and Heaven blossoms fair.

—John Davidson.

FIFTY years ago stalwart Radicals were keen concerning the disestablishment and disendowment of the English State Church, which they recognized as one of the foremost bulwarks of Toryism and Reaction. Since then the political kaleidoscope has changed enormously, and present-day Labour Members of Parliament are familiar figures on Christian platforms, and anti-Clericalism is as dead as a door-nail in official Labour circles. Yet nothing has been changed in the position of the Anglican Church, which still draws huge sums of money from English pockets, and which continues to obstruct all progressive legislation in Parliament.

A report issued quite recently by the Tithe Committee of the Governors of Queen Anne's Bounty, upon whom important duties were laid in connexion with ecclesiastical tithe-rent charges under the Tithe Act, 1925, states that inquiries were made during the past year, of every incumbent of every benefice in England, to find out whether tithe-rent charge was attached.

The result has been ascertained that there are 7,518 tithe-owning benefices to which an aggregate sum of £2,091,000 tithe-rent-charge is attached. Over and above there are 29 ecclesiastical corporations to which is attached an aggregate sum of £95,000 tithe-rent charge. Further, claims of incumbents to be appointed agents of Queen Anne's Bounty have been considered, and the committee recommend appointments in 1,818 cases. The total charges collectable by these incumbents is £488,000 yearly.

The committee have divided the whole country into fifteen collection areas, and have constituted a committee for each area. Think of it! The entire

country is parcelled out in the interests of Priestcraft to the tune of £2,674,000 yearly. This is done in the twentieth century in the interests of a Church, which is only attended by a small percentage of the nation, and whose dogmas are repugnant to hundreds of thousands of citizens. Tithe, be it remembered, is an annual tax on the proceeds of land and personal industry taken for the support of clergy and church. First fruits and tithes were originated in this country by the Roman Catholic Church, and these Papal imposts were afterwards transferred to the Reformed Church at the Reformation.

The modern State consists of persons who profess all sorts of religious opinions, and none. If the State compels its citizens to pay tithes for a Church in which they do not believe, it commits a real and palpable injustice. This is not merely a question between one sect and a rival sect. It is indeed, unjust to make a Quaker pay tithes for teaching the doctrine of the Sacraments, or an Unitarian for teaching the three-fold nature of the Christian deity, but it is equally unjust to make an Atheist pay for the religious propaganda of a Church which he despises on intellectual grounds. Statesmen would not require to be reminded of such elementary truisms, but timid and time-serving politicians seem utterly incapable of looking at any question with the eyes of statesmanship. The burden of clericalism is as real to-day as it has been for centuries past, and the Anglican Church, with its 20,000 priests, is as much a menace to Democracy as it was in the far-off days when a former Bishop of Shaftesbury said that a horse-pond was the proper place for a political agitator.

This tyranny of the tithe, a relic of the Middle Ages, is only part of the great price paid by the English people for the very doubtful privileges of Priestcraft. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners control property worth many millions of money. For instance, Church property in the heart of the City of London, excluding the suburbs, has been valued at over £2,000,000. In addition, the Anglican Church derives huge sums from mining royalties in the County of Durham, and elsewhere, although contemporary Labour leaders are loath to admit the impeachment, and direct their diatribes at dukes rather than deans. Last, and certainly not least, the Bishops of the Established Church have a controlling voice in the Upper Chamber of Parliament. Forty in number, they can always be relied upon to oppose democratic measures, and the pages of *Hansard* show, beyond all cavil and dispute, that the bishops have ever stood with the purse-proud peers against the poor people. Many a man in the House of Lords voted against some of the changes desired by reformers, but the Anglican Bishops voted against all the proposed changes, and even when the firmness of the House of Commons convinced the Lords the time had come to yield, still the Bishops would be found among the "last-ditchers," who witnessed in their unbending hostility a lack of political perception. The records of Parliament show that the Bench of Bishops was commonly behind and against the best spirit of the age, blindly suspicious of aspirations and desires which posterity has approved. In its weakness the Labour Movement found the Bishops of the Established Church always among its most determined enemies. To-day, when the Labour Movement is a force in politics and a power in the country, the Bishops speak smooth words of it. The workman without a vote and without organization was treated with high-sniffing contempt by my lords, the bishops. With Labour as an organized party, it is out of the question to try and keep the workman in humble obedience to his "pastors and masters." So

the wily priests patronize him—and vote against him in the House of Lords, and pocket the tithes, ground-rents, mining royalties, and church-rates.

There is one grain of comfort in this record of the exploitation of an entire nation. The Anglican Church is a creature of Parliament, and can be unmade by Parliament. Priests are not of any particular value to the English people, though, according to their assertions, they draw their comfortable salaries to save us all from eternal distress and damnation. The thousands of priests in this country will think it odd, of course, but that simply shows (as the countrywoman proudly said of her soldier son on the route march) they are all out of step but John.

MIMNERMUS.

Jesus in Faith and in History.

Was Jesus a Person?

ON this question of the actual historicity of Jesus, Rationalists are divided into two camps. There are some who claim Jesus was a myth pure and simple. There are others who say that Christianity is more easily explained by insisting that there *was* a real Jesus of Nazareth, but we know nothing whatever about him. They readily admit that the Virgin Birth, the Miracles, the Parables, the Resurrection—in fact, almost the whole of the Gospels—are myths or legends, but it is impossible to explain certain sayings without a real Jesus. Most of them complain that the myth thesis is quite inadequate—whether Jesus is considered partly as representing the universal solar God idea, or merely some of the secondary vegetation or phallic gods, or even if the explanation be a transcription of a Greek drama containing such incidents as the trial, crucifixion and resurrection of a Saviour God. Their contention is that Rationalism is better served and Christianity more easily overthrown by rejecting fantastic explanations of its rise in world history.

Still, it is amusing to see how much of the Gospel Jesus is left, when such believers in his historicity as Mr. Joseph McCabe and Mr. Robert Arch, for example, have done with him. After hearing or reading their expositions, I feel they are practically in the same boat with Mr. J. M. Robertson. Their Jesus is merely a supposition based on certain unexplained texts (which they would be the first to admit are not even authentic) and when all is said and done a Jesus about whom we really know nothing at all does not seem much better than a myth.

For my part I cannot read the Bible without seeing how *esoteric* it really is. I am convinced its meaning does not lie on the surface. I feel certain that (as I have once before intimated) its real explanation was, for the most part, lost during that horror known as the Dark Ages. Thus it has been only within the last 100 years or so that the Sun Myth, the more or less universal basis of religion, is gradually interpreting Jewish and Christian beliefs.

It is, of course, fashionable to throw cold water on the theory. It has been examined by "eminent" scientists and has been found "wanting." There are a few coincidences they admit, but they are very minor and insignificant. No, say the great ones (even including Sir James Frazer), we must give up the Sun Myth and admit a real Jesus. Besides, Jesus is not merely a fact, he's an ideal, by far the greatest ideal that ever trod this earth, and so we get back to our starting point.

Whether Jesus was a person or a myth really matters little to Freethinkers. After all, one man may be better or worse than another, but there is no man in *history* who is so much greater in *everything*

than another. And if we know so little of Jesus that the only biographies extant are admittedly compilations without a scrap of authenticity, he might just as well be a myth, and therefore the whole discussion is, for all practical purposes, fruitless. My own examination in these desultory papers is to show that the Sun Myth theory is not quite so worthless as we are so often told, and that the reasons given for insisting on the actuality of Jesus are far more unconvincing. Let me begin with the Mother of God.

Now if Jesus was a person, he had a mother, and that mother was, according to all accounts, Mary. Very well. But what proof is given for the existence of Mary? The one clear answer is, *none at all*. There is no proof of a real Mary, who either married or did not, at first, a real Joseph. Why, in the first place, was she called Mary? It seems rather extraordinary that the mother of Jesus, that is, the Saviour, should be called Mary. Did her parents quite by accident stumble on this name, just as she in turn called her son Jesus? Jesus and Mary in Greek stand for Joshua and Miriam in Hebrew, and Joshua (the "Saviour") was supposed to be the son of Miriam. Now what is the meaning of the word Miriam? Cruden (who was not exactly a Rationalist) says one of the meanings is "bitterness of the sea." Another, "myrrh of the sea," or—"lady or mistress of the sea." Now, can these meanings be applied to other names in antiquity. Well (as Robert Taylor has pointed out and confirmed by Lemprière), Myrrha is actually the name of the mother of Adonis—and Adonai is the name *spoken* by Jews when they wish to talk about Jehovah. Is this merely a coincidence?

Venus, says Lemprière, was the name of "one of the most celebrated deities of the ancients." She "sprung from the froth of the sea," and Mary, says Robert Taylor, "is the same as the Latin word *Mare*, the sea; and in its plural form *Maria*, signifies the seas . . . and was from the days of an infinitely remote antiquity, one of the names of the Goddess Venus . . . Venus rising out of the sea, is precisely the character of Miriam."

Astarte was another name for Venus—in fact, she had quite a large number of names and titles duly enumerated by Lemprière, and she fully deserved being called the Queen of the Heavens—a title also, I think, borne by Mary.

If one turns to a picture of Virgo, in the Signs of the Zodiac, there will be found the lady with her arm outstretched "and this victory of the Lord over Pharaoh," says Robert Taylor, "is expressly declared to have been achieved with a *stretched-out-arm*. And look ye here, Sirs; by heaven, if here is not the *stretched-out-arm*, the peculiar characteristic of the Virgin of the Zodiac, the hand-maid of the Lord!" Prof. Arthur Drews says, "I would ask the reader not to pass judgment on this (the Solar Myth) until he has studied the constellations. There are too many who shrug their shoulders at astral mythology and never glance at the heavens or have the least idea of the corresponding speculations of the ancients." (*Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus*, page 313, note.)

Taylor also points out that Joseph "was rather a *husbandman* than a husband," for even the Catholic Church connects him with "the bread of life and the wheat of the elect," and the pictures of the sign of Virgo show her holding a bundle of *wheat* or corn in her hand!

But the reader, if he wishes further to study the question of Mary, can do so very profitably, by carefully reading the chapter on the *Mythic Marias* in Mr. J. M. Robertson's *Christianity and Mythology*. For my own part, I am quite convinced she is as mythical as Venus, and it would be interesting to hear from those who insist that Jesus was a person, why they

think that Mary must have been his mother's name?

Of course, other reasons are urged why Jesus was undoubtedly a person—one of them advanced by Mr. Robert Arch in these pages some years ago, in a criticism of Mr. W. Mann.

He claimed that unless there had been a real Jesus, it was impossible for this particular saying to have been *attributed* to him (even though it is quite possibly not in any way authentic):—"This generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled." The reason given is, that obviously there could be no point in making Jesus say a thing which would be disproved so easily, and therefore could not have been invented for a myth. In other words only a real person *may* have said it, but to put such a saying in the mouth of a myth is quite absurd. (I think this truly represents Mr. Arch's contention.) Well, I could give quite a lot of similar sayings if I took the trouble to go through the gospels. For example, what good was it attributing to Herod the Massacre of the Innocents, when everybody knew the Massacre never took place? But in any case, there are several replies to Mr. Arch. In the first place, who is it that says that the writer of the particular text relied upon was actually writing a real biography? Does Mr. Arch and those who think like him, seriously contend that the four gospels were intended by their writers to be genuine biographies? That there is nothing esoteric in them, no symbolism, no inner or mystic meaning? If they do, it seems to me hopeless to discuss the point with them.

Take the book written by "John Mysticus" (who is, I think, Mr. G. A. Gaskell), called *The Gospel Drama*. The introduction is an eloquent plea for a symbolical interpretation of the Gospels. The author shows how perplexed is the modern educated Christian when asked to defend the "inspiration" of the Bible—its "historicity." He knows it can't be done. "A mystical view of the scriptures," says John Mysticus, "is plainly the only consistent view . . . It seems almost needless to explain that if scripture language is symbolical, and the undermeaning is the real meaning, the discrepancies, etc., in the outer form are of no consequence whatever, and are unworthy of any attention being given to them by serious minds . . . The story in the Canonical Gospels is, from the symbolical point of view, a dramatization of the evolution of the human soul . . . The Virgin, the miraculous Birth, the Baptism and the Baptist are conditions of the soul and spiritual experiences."

John Mysticus believes (of course) that Jesus really existed, but after his analysis of Gospel texts, one can say (I think with Carlyle), "exit Jesus."

This generation shall not pass away till all these things be accomplished, is the wonderful text, and here is the explanation:—"Christ here asseverates that every existing grade in the evolution of the qualities of the soul, shall continue to progress, and not one be dissolved until the complete process of soul development has been carried out." Now I leave it to others to defend the symbolical or estoric interpretation of the Gospels, so ably put forward by John Mysticus, Mrs. Besant and a number of Christian divines. But I venture to assert that it is more reasonable to believe they can be understood a little better this way than by claiming we have four attempts at a genuine biography of a real person—the attempts admittedly containing nothing authentic.

The discussion can be and probably will be endless. One must decide the issue for one's own mind. But if Jesus was a person, I for one, would like to know exactly what we know of him. Is it merely that his name contains (in English) five letters?

H. CUTNER.

Debates and Debaters.

I AM fond of recalling an incident that happened in the Mechanics' Hall, Nottingham, when I scored off the fat and fatuous Mr. G. K. Chesterton. The crowded meeting, presided over by Mr. Hilaire Belloc, was held to rally support for Mr. Chesterton's then newly-projected journal *G. K.'s Weekly*. Mr. Chesterton posed as the champion of intellectual freedom; he dwelt on the iniquities of the Trust Press, which by "a process of distortion and suppression," misled the public on all the vital problems of the day; and he proposed, in his own journal, to counteract all that and give us the pure milk of the word. At the conclusion of his address G.K.C. dealt with serious questions with characteristic levity, and seeing that serious treatment of the subject was futile I arose and spake as follows:—"Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chesterton has been dealing with the way of the Press, which by a process of distortion and suppression, continually leads us astray. Well; seeing that the Press has for years been acclaiming Mr. Chesterton as a great intellectual, and a master of paradox, doesn't he think that a prime illustration of distortion and suppression?" Mr. Chesterton rose slowly to his feet, made me a profound bow, and resumed his seat amidst general laughter!

I was reminded of the foregoing incident by the broadcasting, some time ago, of a debate between Mr. Chesterton and Lady Rhondda, under the chairmanship of Mr. George Bernard Shaw. The debate itself was rather poor, the noble lady being particularly feeble. There was, however, one incident worth recording, which the Press generally appears to have missed. In his opening remarks Mr. Shaw referred to the fact that the modern leisured woman, who was the subject of the debate, had "got rid of the children by birth control." "Got rid of the children!" retorted G.K.C. bitingly, "doubtless a phrase used by King Herod in his official report!" He proceeded to describe birth control as a "filthy expedient."

Sincerity is not a quality one readily associates with Mr. Chesterton, yet I am persuaded that he is passionately sincere in his protests against those aspects of modern civilization that tend to destroy romance and minimise the importance of human individuality, and in this I largely sympathize with him. Mr. Chesterton's opposition to the hustle and bustle of modern life is quite understandable: to a man of his gargantuan proportions it must be extremely disconcerting. Just imagine G.K.C. clinging to a policeman at Ludgate Circus, or dodging the one-way traffic in Trafalgar Square! No wonder he sighs for the comparative tranquillity of the Middle Ages—"those darling bygone times, Mr. Carker, with their delicious fortresses, and their dear old dungeons, and their delightful places of torture, and their romantic vengeance, and their picturesque assaults and sieges, and everything that makes life truly charming."

It is in many ways a pity that interest in public debates should be on the wane. Gone are the days—or, rather, the nights—when the leading gladiators of Free-thought encountered and slew the champions of Christendom for the delectation of the faithful. I fear we are becoming intellectually invertebrate. Such an organization as the Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society, which, during the winter, attracts an audience of five or six hundred every Sunday afternoon, is extremely rare. The cynic may point out that debating societies are productive of little else but hot air, and their disappearance is not therefore wholly to be regretted. There may be some truth in this, but the strong silent man is as mythical in political reform as in other directions, and the "gift of the gab" is not incompatible with deeds of great pith and moment.

My first and only debate of any importance was in the Art Gallery at Worcester; the venerable and grey-haired librarian of that city furnishing the opposition. The subject of the debate, as proposed by my opponent, was: *That heredity is a greater factor than environment in human life*, the case for the environment being entrusted to me. I was quite young at the time, and the audience, as well as my opponent, were inclined to treat me with good-humoured disdain. The opening speeches

were something of a personal triumph for yours truly: my opponent had a very hesitating delivery, and it soon became apparent that his knowledge of the subject under discussion was infinitesimal; on the other hand, I had unbounded confidence, a passable fluency of speech, and had devoted considerable study to the question. It is curious, but I recall, as though it were yesterday, the opening sentence of my first speech; it ran: "*It is an axiom of scientific thought that man is a product of heredity and environment, and to-night, for the purpose of debate, we are separating in thought what really are inseparable in fact.*" I think, after this, the audience began to sit up and take notice. In my final speech, I committed an appalling *faux pas*; I was guilty of one of those indiscretions one only commits when one is very young; I blush now whenever I think of it. I went entirely out of my way to make a violent and wholly gratuitous attack on the Christian religion, and all those moral sentiments that a respectable audience might be expected to cherish. The result was to completely alienate the sympathies of my listeners; the atmosphere which had been warm and friendly suddenly became cold and hostile, and the chairman put an end to my infamy by sounding his bell five minutes before time. The experience was indeed salutary. I have no doubt they wrote me down a blatant atheist.

There have been occasions when a "gift of the gab" has proved useful. I recall one during the war, when I was hauled before my superior officer—who was none other than Mr. A. A. Milne, the eminent playwright and novelist and late sub-editor of *Punch*—for a minor breach of King's Rules and Regulations. Instead of making the usual army plea of "guilty," I entered on an eloquent and elaborate defence. I admitted—as, indeed, I had to—the main charge, but pleaded that I was more sinned against than sinning. If I was convicted I urged that there would be a grave miscarriage of justice; I think I even went so far as to imply that the reputation of the British Army for just dealing was at stake, and that if I were convicted it would receive a blow from which it would never recover. The genial author of *Mr. Pim Passes By*, was amused but not, I fear, impressed. There was a twinkle in his eye as he passed sentence upon me. The sentence, I gratefully record, was exceedingly light.

There is, I think, one gratifying feature about public speaking at the present day: audiences are more critical and are impressed, if at all, by the matter of the speech rather than the manner of its delivery. Speeches, consequently, tend to become more reasoned and reasonable—the appeal is made to the intellect instead of the emotions. The day of the eloquent peroration is passing. Oh! those perorations! I recollect that when I first took to the Secularist platform I was hot stuff on perorations. "I would roar so that it would do your hearts good to hear me." Having pictured the dark damned ages of faith and consigned them to the limbo of forgotten things, I would metaphorically usher in the dawn of an age of reason, and picture a world at peace; a world freed for ever from the tyranny of the gods; a world in which we should all be joy-smiths, and in which our task should be to beat out laughter on the ringing anvil of life. I am older now!

VINCENT J. HANDS.

The Fallen Idol.

BEHOLD! A face that speaks immensity
Of thought and passion:—Soul is written there;
A virtuous glance that pierceth everywhere;
A voice that rings Conviction,—bold and free:
He flings the gauntlet for Humanity;
He hath the Spirit in him that would dare
The foes to Liberty,—and lay them bare:
Ye Gods! He's bound for Immortality!
Alas!—A nation's freedom all but won,
With gratitude to hail him as divine,—
The God falls to a wench,—his work undone,—
A fallen idol with deserted shrine:
Thus strongest Souls display their weakest spots,—
And garters tie their principles in knots!

WM. J. LAMB.

Acid Drops.

The Home Secretary, Sir William Joynson Hicks, has fallen out with the Bishop of London. It is a pity, for two such intellects should run well together. What has happened is that a particular kind of idiocy favoured by the Bishop, runs counter to a pet idiocy of the Home Secretary. It is all over the revised prayer book. "Jix" explained to an audience at the Church House, Westminster, that he had been bred in a Church that had had its doctrines "settled for us at the time of the Reformation"; and being what he is, he is content to take what divines settled as the truth nearly four hundred years ago as being binding for all time. So he gives the Bishop solemn warning that he is betraying those who look up to him for guidance, and if the Bishop persists, he solemnly warns him, "I will go out into the wilderness." So Sir William Joynson Hicks, thus avows that he intends to take as binding, what was settled four hundred years ago, because it was settled. Sir William has, not merely as a vote, but he is one of His Majesty's Secretaries of State! And we call ourselves a civilized people!

The *Church Times* says that it does not take Sir William Joynson Hicks seriously as a religious leader. That, we take it, means that it does not agree with him, since it can hardly be on the ground of want of intelligence—seeing that it is a matter of Christian belief. Foolish as he is, he is not less so than very many Christian leaders. It is true that many of them have more learning, but learning and ability are two quite distinct things, although they are very often confused.

The Bishop of Chelmsford has been granted a rise of salary, from £2,500 to £3,000 per year. We have no doubt he will explain that he is worth it.

It is too bad of so eminent a scientist as Dr. Chalmers Mitchell to tell his audience in the course of the Huxley Memorial Lecture, established by the Imperial College of Science, that "every possible addition to knowledge in biology had been in the direction of materialistic explanations." And that is just when the scribblers in the Press have been assuring us that Materialism is quite dead! But we suppose the difference between Dr. Chalmers Mitchell and these others is that he knows what Materialism means and the others do not.

The other Sunday, the King paid a private visit to the Royal Academy, for the purpose of viewing the pictures. We wonder what some of our very loyal Sabbatarians will make of this? The *Church Times* very properly asks why one of the chief exhibitions of pictures should be closed to the public when so many have a chance of visiting it, and hopes that the example of the King will have its influence on the authorities. We hope so too.

The *Methodist Recorder* prints a column and a quarter article by Dr. H. B. Workman, full of indignation against Sinclair Lewis' *Elmer Gantry*. The Rev. Dr. says the Jewish Chief Rabbi declared Gantry to be a gross caricature, and that the Christian ministers of all denominations he has known are a fine and sincere body of men. The Cardinal-Archbishop of Boston, we are told, assures Catholics that the book is "an insult to the members of every religious body in the land." Dr. Workman says he has evidence that *Elmer Gantry* is an extremely vulgar part of a general attack on the Methodist Church, political in character, and, of course, "wet" (anti-Prohibition) in origin.

The vast majority of the 5,500,000 children in elementary schools are denied participation in games, because there are no playing-fields for them. A Norfolk school-teacher declares that if the children and youths had

playing-fields, half the police force could be dismissed. The statement may be an exaggeration, but there is considerable truth in it. When youthful energy is denied a wholesome outlet, delinquency is encouraged. Sabbatarian fanatics who shut the public parks against games on Sunday have a lot to answer for.

The Vicar of Otley objects to the suggestion that there should be a refreshment stall in the local park on Sundays. He is anxious that no burden should fall on the ratepayers, as it would do if the stall proved not profitable. He also objects to Sunday trading. These parsons are adepts at concealing their true reasons. The vicar's real objections to the refreshment stall are, that it will enable the people to enjoy themselves away from the churches on Sunday, and that it will interfere with clerical business.

Prof. S. R. Laycock, of Canada, addressing a Sunday School Conference, asked: What are we as Sunday School people trying to do? What is our aim? You might, he said, make such answers as, "to teach the Bible"; "to save the child's soul"; "to prepare the child for Church membership." But these definitions seemed to him only half truths. They strike us in that way, too. The most accurate definition would be: "to dope little brains with the crude superstitious of primitive Palestine."

A pious American writer contends that Science needs imagination and faith as much as does religion. No doubt. But the imagination and faith of Science have a rather different basis. Science employs reason to guide its imagination; religion uses exuberant fancy. Science grounds its faith on ascertained facts and proved theory; religion beds it on the crude guesses of ancient nomads.

Principal A. E. Garvie has been to Czecho-Slovakia discussing Sunday School problems with parents there. He urged that the lesson material must be of the very simplest character, for the children are very ignorant. That the children are ignorant should, of course, be no matter for regret by a parson. It makes them not only better able to be turned into good Christians, but also much more easily led by the nose, both now and in the future.

The coming transformation of East Kent as a result of the new coal-fields is interesting the Churches. As new garden cities are being planned to accommodate 300,000 people, the Churches are eagerly purchasing sites (on very favourable terms, we learn) on which to erect doping depots for adults and adolescents. Who was it said the clergy were poor business men?

Dr. T. R. Glover has published a selection of his *Saturday News* articles under the title of *Saturday Papers*. A reviewer suggests that a happier title would have been "Sunday Papers," the articles being eminently suited for Sunday reading. We suggest (cribbing the title from the *News* humorous column) "The Merry-go-round" would be more appropriate. For the Doctor's articles, like a fair roundabout, are fully guaranteed to induce that dizzy feeling in the upper storey, so essential to the right Christian atmosphere for the Sabbath and the proper appreciation of Holy Writ.

Christians still love one another, especially in Rumania. The Baptist World Alliance have found it necessary to address a protest to the Rumanian Government for its failure "to concede religious freedom, including liberty of conviction, of worship, of preaching, and of organization," and for repressive acts against Baptists. If the Rumanian Christians in power treat fellow-Christians thus, one wonders what is the treatment they serve out to Freethinkers.

Concerning the Mississippi floods, the *Sunday School Chronicle* says that maybe the problem presented by the river is insoluble, and all that can be done is by constant vigilance to strengthen the embankments. There are, it adds, definite limits to human power when confronting the forces of Nature. Why not say "forces of God"? It is just as well that the many thousands of sufferers should appreciate who is responsible for their suffering, and who puts definite limits to human power, well knowing that suffering will be the result.

According to a contemporary, the Saturday half-holiday was a British invention, which has spread to many parts of the world. Now America is following us with a five-day week. Those reduced hours of labour have been made possible through the invention and use of machinery, and not, be it noted, through any efforts of the Churches or parsons or Sabbatarian bigots. Yet, by the way in which the bigots stress this increased opportunity for recreation when attempting to prohibit Sunday games, one might fancy that they alone are the benefactors. Any argument, one presumes, will serve if it helps to hide the intolerant nature of Sabbatarian prohibitions.

A notice in all Italian barracks states: "Mussolini is always right." The world now has a trinity of infallibles—Mussolini, the Pope and Jesus Christ. The Millennium would appear to be well started. And, perhaps not, for some "Rules of Conduct" for Fascist soldiers assert:—

Remember that the Fascist, especially the militiaman, must not believe in perpetual peace. Your musket and your uniform have been given you not to spoil in idleness, but to preserve for war.

Gipsy Smith is quite certain that the people generally are hungering for God as never before. He appears to have come to this conclusion after being thrilled by the singing of "Abide with me" at a Cup Final. We hope he will not hear a crowd chanting the Frothblowers' Anthem, or he will be inevitably led to the conclusion that people are hungering for beer.

Dr. S. W. Hughes, after declaring there are nearly six million scholars in the Sunday Schools, asks: What would England be like if one-seventh of the nation were not in the Sunday School? We are not told the answer, but all godly men and women are supposed to shudder at the thought of so terrible a state of things. Perhaps we, in our turn, may be permitted a question: What would the English people be like if the parents of the six million scholars had never been to Sunday School? The answer is: Less narrow-minded and intolerant, less given to malicious gossip, a little more appreciative of the right of free speech, considerably less antagonistic to new thought, more given to thinking for themselves or to be guided by reputable thinkers, less interested in the clap-trap of parsons, less dominated by silly conventions, slightly more humane, more sensitive to justice, and more open to be guided by reason rather than by emotion.

A *Methodist Recorder* reviewer has been reading Rafael Sabatini's *Torquemada and the Spanish Inquisition*. The author, he says, has written with complete impartiality, and his book is already well-known as probably the most fair-minded work in existence on the subject. Torquemada himself, says the reviewer, still remains a great problem. No doubt is possible of his piety, his utter honesty of purpose, his integrity, his utter devotion to what he believed to be the will of God. Mr. Sabatini, we learn, quotes with approval, Prescott's remark that "Torquemada's zeal was of so extraordinary a character that it may almost shelter itself under the name of insanity." So, it may be, Torquemada himself is explained, says the reviewer. We may as well add that it was the Holy Christian Bible which

incited the pious fanatic to commit his fiendish crimes, and which furnished complete justification for them and for a Christian priesthood to shelter, encourage, and aid him in his appalling misdeeds. Meanwhile, God did nothing.

There is far too little community thinking, regretfully sighs the Rev. J. B. Middlebrook. The dear man appears to believe that the "herd mind" is a desirable thing. No doubt it is—for clerics anxious to do the shepherding and eager to suppress all independent thinking.

The last century has been one of unparalleled intellectual activity, says the *Methodist Recorder*. The foundations of the Faith have been assailed, and there has had to be a re-orientation of Christian thinking. This is hardly an accurate statement of what has happened. Science, the villain of the piece, found Christian thinking standing with its feet plumb upon the Bible. Science knocked the feet from under Christian thinking and stood it on its head; so that to-day it is not quite certain which way up it is. And the more it tries to discover the truth of the matter the more fuddled it gets. The only thing it knows for certain is that it has lost two-thirds of its one-time cherished possessions. What it appears to be engaged in now looks more like stock-taking than re-orientation.

The Bible is a very daring book; it represents man just as he is, without apology or compliment, declares the *Baptist Times*. Our contemporary might have added that the Bible also represents God just as he was, without apology, but with much compliment. We say "just as he was," for he is not quite the same to-day as when the daring book depicted him, without apology. The Modernists have felt it necessary to reinterpret him. His old deeds are seen to be no longer deserving of compliment, but to demand apology. And the ecclesiastical way is to camouflage apology with re-interpretation. Pity the poor Gods! They all have, sooner or later, to be drastically purged of their savagery.

A very serious-minded gentleman is Mr. A. W. Lyon, of the Halifax Town Council. A proposal had been made that the Council should supply refreshment on Sunday to those who visit Shibden Park, and Mr. Lyon rose in all his strength and declared he would rather forfeit his seat than agree to such a suggestion. He also said that if this were done we should be having in Halifax that frightful institution, the Continental Sunday. We do not know what Mr. Lyon thinks the Continental Sunday is, but we can assure him that there is far less drunkenness all over the Continent on Sunday than there is in this country. But Mr. Lyon dreads the effects of men and women, and even children being supplied with tea and coffee and ginger beer on the Lord's Day, so he is willing to sacrifice himself rather than take a hand in the degradation of the nation. On the whole, we do not think the country would lose much if Mr. Lyon were to surrender his seat on the Council to one who is not quite so infatuated with these ancient taboos. In the end the Council referred the matter for further consideration. There is quite a lot for Free-thought to do, evidently.

We notice that Miss Maude Royden, in *Reynolds's Illustrated News*, on Sunday last, suggests that women would probably make as good theologians as men. No doubt. Theology, she says, means "the knowledge or Science of God." But the God of modern theology is merely an idea, of an idea, of which nobody has the slightest idea; and how anybody could make a Science out of that, whether men or women, "the Lord only knows," as the pious say. But we dare say that women will make as good God-makers as men, if they try. What is to prevent them?

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.

FREETHINKER ENDOWMENT TRUST.—D. Querido, £1; S. Benton, 5s.; T. A. Sharpe, 5s.

F. MANN.—Glad to get your letter. We are looking forward to the Glasgow visit, and to spending some time with our Scotch friends.

J. BROWN.—Pleased to see you so busily engaged in Press correspondence with letters that are so very much to the point. You cannot expect to get the same show that is given to religious people, not always because editors would not like to give it you, but because in most cases they dare not do so. In saying that we are speaking of what we know. They cannot afford to offend religious bigotry. Still, every time someone does, it is so much to the good.

W. REPTON.—Received too late to be of use this week.

LONDON OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA FUND.—Miss Vance asks us to acknowledge the following:—W. J. W. Easterbrook, £2 2s.; George Wood, £1; Robert Brown, £1.

R. BROWN.—Thanks. Shall appear as soon as we have space.

B. S. WILCOX.—Next week.

REASON.—There is a life of Richard Carlile (not Carlyle), by Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner. The articles on Carlile, which appeared in these columns, by Mr. Guy Aldred, were reprinted in book form by him. Carlile spent over nine years for his temerity in publishing Freethought works.

A. MILLAR.—Your Scotch Calendars must be behind the time. Whit-Sunday is June 4. Other matters attended to.

D. P. STICKELLS.—It takes all sorts to make a world. Generally we are in agreement with what you say; but while one must write with a particular audience in view, one cannot write to please every individual in that audience.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

There are only two or three weeks, between us and the National Secular Society's Conference at Glasgow, and we hope it will see a good muster of Freethinkers from all over the country. The opportunities of Freethinkers meeting in this way are not numerous, and full advantage of them when they arise should be taken. There will be a long day together on the Monday following the Conference, in addition to the opportunities that are offered at the Conference itself. For the benefit of those interested, we repeat the information given last week:—On Monday there will be an excursion to Lochgoilhead, one of the beauty spots of the Western Highlands. This will leave Glasgow at 9.30, returning at 8.15 in the evening. The cost, including dinner and tea, will be 10s. It is necessary to know as early as possible how many will join the party, and information should be sent at once to either Mr. Mann, or to Miss Vance. Visitors from London will have choice of two ways of getting to Glasgow. The longer way by sea, the shorter way by train. For the latter there will be both the usual week-end tickets issued and special cheap excursions. For the former, a boat leaves the Jetty, London Docks, every Tuesday, the time of departure will be 10 p.m. It calls at Belfast and arrives in Glasgow on the Saturday. The fare, 3rd class, is 25s. single, and 50s. return. The great thing is for headquarters to know as soon as possible how many are going, and what accommodation is required.

In the *Historical Reality of Jesus* (Watts & Co., 7d.), Mr. Edward Greenly has produced a very useful pamphlet. The essay lays no claim to originality, but avows itself a summary of the arguments of Messrs. Robertson, Drews, Whittaker & Couchod, against the historical existence of the New Testament character. One of these days, people will be as amused at the fact that Jesus Christ was once accepted as a genuinely historical personage as they would be now if someone avowed their belief in the historical existence of Adonis or Bacchus. However, that time is not yet, but we are certain that the works of the authors named will bring that day a step nearer. Mr. Greenly gives but a bare skeleton of the case, but it is interesting and enlightening, and if it sends students to a closer study of the works named, we imagine the author will feel that he has done what he intended to do.

We are asked to announce that a debate has been arranged between Mr. McEwan, Vice-President of the Glasgow Branch, and Mr. Norman C. Baird of the Glasgow Ethical Society, on Monday, May 23, at the Hall, 4a, Carlton. We do not know the title of the debate, but presume it is on some subject of interest to Freethinkers. The discussion commences at 6.30, and admission is free.

With reference to paragraph in last week's issue concerning Cycling Clubs among Freethinkers, Mr. D. P. Stickells writes that he is willing to give information concerning their formation, with a model set of rules to anyone interested. Letters may be sent c/o. this office.

To those who are in grief and misery, death comes as a relief, not as suffering. Death annuls all the ills that flesh is heir to. Beyond it there is no place either for trouble or for joy.—*Julius Cæsar (Sallust Catiline, Chap. II.)*.

"The Shadow on the Earth."

I am fully aware of the sensational nature of much that I have related here. I make no apology for the same. It is unavoidable. I am dealing with a terrific thing; I am dealing with life as it is.

—Author's Note.

BUT, rather, one might say on reading the book: Life as it is not. Such the adumbrous title, such the solemn warning of a book by an ex-Protestant, now Roman Catholic priest (Longmans, Green & Co., paper covers, 2s.), the Rev. Owen Francis Dudley, who has lately been conducting a mission in Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester. This is the second of two books on "problems of human happiness," the first, *Shall Men be like Gods?* was reviewed at length by Mr. W. Mann in the *Freethinker*, February-March, 1925. The earlier volume had an introduction by G. K. Chesterton, whose spiritual avoirdupoise would be a decided make-weight. But, to our tale:—

It was a monastery on the lower slopes of the Alps. It was night. And it was a knocking on the outer door, loud enough for the great awakening that roused the monks from their slumbers. One of them went and opened it. Outside were three men bearing a roughly-made stretcher on which a dark form lay. . .

And so the terror proceeds in the best style of the late Marie Corelli.

The three bearers at the door are the Pessimist, the Optimist, and the Atheist. The Cripple is the "dark form" on the stretcher—but the real "dark horse" is the Atheist—his is the unforgiveable sin. The Pessimist has no resemblance to Leopardi, the Optimist none to Mark Tapley, the Atheist is not a Bradlaugh; including the Cripple they are all four lay figures stuffed with straw; Brother Anselm of the Monastery is hardly more alive, and no more like Sterne's "poor Franciscan" than I to Hercules. Yet this Brother Anselm, like his creator, is "sublime" in one thing—his simple "Submission to the religion of Rome as the one and only avenue from God the Father, down through the Pope, and the higher and lower priesthood, to the Catholic world of mankind. But what of the remaining four-fifths of the human race, will they be saved without "Submission," without having even heard of "this great salvation? And what a claim, what a shutting out, what a chosen few—and not the best, what credulity, what conceit! This is the Rock of St. Peter, whereon the Church is built. The shadow of a great rock in a weary land! Or, rather, is it not the yet uncharted rock in the sea of Superstition, whereon has been wrecked many a good ship of many a good cause, and has been especially fatal to the cause of Truth. Providentially, Catholic truth never runs upon this rock, for it itself has made the rock and made the truth—this not the least of the miracles of the Catholic Church. Outside this great Church there is a truth absolute, common truth, truth not made with hands, or creeds, or gods, the simple facts of life; but no true son of the Church must accept these undiluted, uninterpreted, without danger to his immortal soul.

I am an Atheist, and as near a child and the kingdom of heaven as may be, with the still undiluted truth of childhood; truth now that nothing can shake, least of all, remotest reverberation, the thunders of the Vatican. I have learned humility, also, not before gods, but compared with better men—or those whom, in the magnanimity of spirit, I consider better men, and women—I love the natural, unsoiled simplicity of little children, before their minds are corrupted and debased by priest and

parent: I am the champion of these—this the last, battered token of my nobility, the sheet anchor of my perishing soul. I am long-suffering, too, not as your One mythical Man of Sorrows, but as all the millions of my fellow mortals. There is no problem of pain—till you introduce God—no moral need for it; but as you, my brother, in the one sane thought in your book, say, "pain is inseparable from sentient life": it is necessitated; not the discipline of God for the refinement and salvation of souls; as often as not pain degrades; while pain that has attacked, or threatens, another often excites to noblest action Christian and Pagan alike; were it not for death, love would be a poorer thing; and without his "little brief authority," priest and king would become intolerable.

Alas! again I must descend. The story proceeds, and I must mercifully shorten it: The Cripple is converted, and smiles and loves where he cursed and hated. His "friend," the Atheist, will persist in trying to wile him from his new-found faith and happiness, till finally driven away discomfited by the searching words of the good Brother Anselm. The Cripple now meets a little sainted Innocente of the Alps. There are love and flowers, prattle, and the inevitable tragedy, and "death of little Nell"; the little coffin in the Church; visions, beatitudes; never the human, the natural touch, always the sublime—and the ridiculous. It is death that gives the true sublime to such a scene, not the scene that exalts death—but what an opportunity for the Church: and what an argument for the Atheist!

I read the book through, with an open mind, and hoped for better things; but promise and performance, premise and conclusion, were on a like low level, fit only for the crudest taste of a common ignorance. To one quite unprejudiced, fairly well read, and very familiar with the rational and religious points of view, the first few pages suffice to reveal the calibre of the book as art, as science, philosophy, faith, religion. Sorrowfully, sympathetically, we ask, is this the best our colleges can do for us, is this the culture and the inspiration of the Catholic Church? Our author-preacher has behind him all this sheltered forcing-house environment of school, college, social and religious status—impediments, not helps, we fear, fatal handicaps—he has, in addition, "the one thing needful," this Catholic faith, and yet can write only—as he does!

The Shadow on the Earth is crudely artificial, the very sawdust of art: no doubt the aim was high, the urge sincere, the result is only fitted to tickle and terrify the great uneducated masses of the Catholic Church.

There will be shadows on the earth just so long as there is substance on it. The good Catholic dreams of a country where there will be no shadow, and no substance:—

A blessed never, never land
That only faith can understand.

The place that so many fear, the condition that is all shadow, is just as much a never, never land and is being as little regarded. The shadow of God is failing from the open face of nature, and is growing more and more indefinite, even in the house of God. Human extremity created all the Churches, human progress is dispensing with them. The Logician is to-day opposing the Magician, even commonsense is catching, even among the vulgar, even the fetters of "the one true faith" are failing to bind the human spirit. For there is one thing constant, changing, growing, but in essence immutable, Evolution. It has created morality, necessitated it; it has created and crushed religions. The Christian God of to-day is but a few thousand years

old. We know exactly where he originated—not in Bethelhem; yet under those lone Assyrian stars that have looked down on so many graves of so many gods. But Yaveh, we know, was one of several tribal gods of a few thousand years, B.C.; his followers conquered the neighbouring gods, all as divine as he, so he survived to be the God of the Holy Roman Church.

ANDREW MILLAR.

Religion During the French Revolution.

KNOWING that a translation into English was being made of Professor Aulard's book, *Christianity and the French Revolution*; we looked forward to seeing much fresh light thrown on the subject by this distinguished historian. It is a subject that has probably been more distorted and lied about than any other period of history.

The book has now been published (Benn, 10s. 6d.), but we cannot say that it comes up to our expectation. There is nothing at all in it we did not know. He himself says that he has dealt with different parts of the subject in his *Political History of the French Revolution*; in his *Etud et Leçons*; and *Le Culte de la Raison et le Culte de l'Etre Suprême*; which he treats as a whole in the present volume; and we may say that there is very little added to what he has previously written. It must be understood that we are not complaining of what the book contains; it is a good book, so far as it goes, well worth possessing by any one who can afford it. We complain of what it does not contain; it consists of only 164 pages, whereas a book of 500 pages would be none too long to treat the subject adequately, and dispose of the malignant falsehoods which righteous and truth-loving (!) Christians have heaped upon the subject.

For instance, we expected to have an exposition of the religious, or irreligious, views of all the leading characters of the Revolution—and who is more competent to give it than Prof. Aulard?—but we get nothing of the kind. There is no mention of the real Atheists of the Revolution, as such, like Condorcet, Clootz, Andre Chenier, Isnard, Vergniaud, Salaville—who strenuously opposed the culte of the "Goddesses of Reason"—or of Brissot, the leader of the Girondists, who numbered so many Freethinkers among them, that Danton, who brought them to the guillotine, denounced Brissot as the "leader of an impious sect." These all perished in trying to stem the torrent of blood shed by the Deist Danton, and the fanatically religious Robespierre. And ever since, Christians have held up the crimes of the French Revolution as the result of Atheist rule. Such is Christian history!

However, Prof. Aulard does, once for all, dispose of this "old, old story," although doubtless, it will long continue to garnish Christian sermons as an awful example of Atheism. He shows that it was not Atheism, but Natural Religion, that the revolutionaries wished to be substituted for Christianity. Chaumette and Hebert, the main organizers of the Feasts of Reason, were neither of them Atheists, and, in fact, Hebert was loud in his praises of the "sansculotte Jesus." As Prof. Aulard observes:—

That which they wanted to set upon the ruins of Christianity was what the philosophers had called natural religion. But which religion? The philosophic sort, according to Voltaire? Or the kind favoured by Rousseau, with Christian formularies? They made no distinction. Rousseau and Voltaire were both honoured alike. Chaumette, a violent anti-Catholic, posed rather as a disciple of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, while the Voltairian Hebert took

pleasure in extolling that "fine sansculotte Jesus." So-called primitive Christianity and natural religion were jumbled up together in the imagination of the Sansculottes, who, in 1793, became iconclasts as much out of patriotism as out of Freethought, and were more concerned at Paris with pulling down than with building up.

The Worship of Reason was nearly everywhere deistic (and not materialistic or Atheistic). The popular gatherings for worship in Paris were joyful, full of childish playfulness, in spite of the pedantry of a few learned people. In the provinces the Worship of Reason was taken with more gravity. In the towns, at all events, serious and sincere attempts were made to abolish the old religion, and to establish a Worship of Reason. The goddesses of Reason were not actresses, such as they were at Paris, or giddy working girls, but nearly everywhere—and the fact is not denied by the most hostile witnesses—they were lovely young girls, virtuous and serious, the flower of the middle classes.—(A. Aulard, *Christianity and the French Revolution*, pp. 110-111.)

The government does not seem to have taken any active part in the movement, they held aloof. Many of the leaders were opposed to it. Prof. Aulard continues:—

Robespierre, who at first had kept silence, protested at the Jacobin Club, on the 1st Frimaire of the Year II., against the violence of those who would overthrow Christianity. He who was regarded as the head of the Government declared that the Convention, while accepting civic offerings, had not proscribed the Catholic religion and never would take so rash a step; that the intention was to "maintain liberty of worship," and to punish the persecutors of priests. "The man," he said, "who wishes to prevent the saying of Mass is a greater fanatic than he who says it." He denounced those who wished to abolish Christianity as Atheists (which was false); he said: "Atheism is aristocratic . . . the idea of a great Being who watches over oppressed innocence and punishes triumphant crime is entirely democratic"; he also denounced the foes of Christianity as traitors and foreign agents. (p. 113.)

Robespierre agreed with Danton, who, speaking in the Convention a few days later, declared:—"I desire that there be no more anti-religious masquerades before the Convention." A week later still, the Convention decreed that "all violence and measures against liberty of worship are forbidden," but the laws against refractory or turbulent priests remain unaltered." (p. 114). It is true that a movement for the abolition of Christianity began in the provinces, but, as Aulard points out, the leaders of it: "had no sort of authority for their doings" from the government; and later, when Robespierre saw his chance, he struck at the Feasts of Reason, sent Hebert and Chaumette to the guillotine—one of the charges against them being that of Atheism, which was quite untrue—and established the worship of the Supreme Being, at the inauguration ceremony of which, he officiated, and caused an emblematical figure of Atheism to be burnt.

Upon one Point Prof. Aulard's opinion has changed. He says that previously it had seemed to him that Christianity was indestructibly rooted in the soul of the French, but a deeper study of the subject, and a clearer insight into the facts, leaves him "startled at the ease with which the people of France, in 1794, began to drop their customary worship." And he is of opinion that had the Revolution continued much longer, Christianity would have been wiped out in France altogether.

For, although there was much scepticism among the nobility, before the Revolution, it had not affected the masses, the gulf was too great between, and the masses were too ignorant

and illiterate to be instructed in philosophy. At the opening of the Revolution, says Aulard, Christianity seemed to be flourishing in France: "It was the religion of a king styled the *very Christian King*. It was the religion of a nation, which the popes called the *Elder Daughter of the Church*." And yet the astonishing fact remains that: "there was no general uprising to demand the restoration of Catholicism, nor even any very large partial rising, such as had been aroused by the question of feudal rights in 1791 and 1792." The masses would fight for their rights, but not for their religion; and Prof. Aulard comes to the conclusion that:—"The reason why there was no general rising was that the French peasant is at bottom indifferent to religion. To judge by the *laissez-faire* attitude he has adopted, one would say that his Christianity was superficial and, as it were, a new thing superimposed on his old customs. If he was not stirred to the depths of his soul by the insults to Christianity, it must be that Christianity had not gone very deep with him." (p. 121).

We should hesitate twice before challenging, or disputing with Prof. Aulard upon any matter of fact connected with the French Revolution, but we do not think that he has supplied the correct solution to the problem in this case.

Take the case of Russia, for instance, before the war. "Holy Russia," as it was termed. Every traveller who returned from Russia, every book describing Russia, dwelt upon the most striking characteristic of the masses in that country, namely, their devotion to religion. The sacred emblems of religion were everywhere conspicuous, and even the cabmen—not a class noted for their humility—never passed one without crossing themselves. Yet when the Revolution came, and the priests were dispossessed and religion disestablished, there was no popular uprising. But when the government attempted to force Communism upon the peasants, they found themselves up against a very different proposition. The peasants who had parted so easily with their religion, declined absolutely to have Communism in any shape or form, and were ready to fight to the death for the old system of individualism; and the government were forced to give way.

Take again the case of Mexico, considered to be one of the strongholds of Roman Catholicism. The Government there have just turned out the priests and disestablished the Church without any popular uprising. Can it be said of these two countries that Christianity had not penetrated very deeply? If so, then Christianity has never penetrated very deeply anywhere. The fact is that we are so used to hearing that religion is the deepest need of our nature, an ineradicable "Divine spark," that most people believe it to be true. But the facts are all against it. Nations will fight for liberty, or nationality, but not for their religion, and it seems to us that, in the mass, they are not at all sorry to part with it.

W. MANN.

After all, youth is but striving towards freedom, struggling from the stage of obedience and acceptance to the stage of initiative and effort. The best gift that parents can give their children is the ability to think independently and to face life with courage. It is more important for the young person to start with something approaching mental freedom and a mind trained to thing and to judge values than with material advantages. . . . It is infinitely more important that children should be helped to self-dependence and self-confidence, and that they should be encouraged to have independent views, social, political, and religious; for this means that the adolescent is developing reason and the power to think.—Dr. Elizabeth Sloan Chesser (in "Good House-keeping.")

National Secular Society.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

THE KENILWORTH HOTEL, QUEEN STREET, GLASGOW.
WHIT-SUNDAY, JUNE 5, 1927.

AGENDA.

1. Minutes of last Conference.
2. Executive's Annual Report.
3. Financial Report.
4. Election of President.
Motion by Bethnal Green, Manchester, West Ham, South London, and North London Branches:—
"That Mr. C. Cohen be re-elected President of the N.S.S."
5. Election of Secretary.
Motion by the Executive, West Ham, South London, and Manchester Branches:—
"That Miss E. M. Vance be re-elected General Secretary."
6. Election of Treasurer.
Motion by the Bethnal Green and West Ham Branches:—
"That Mr. C. G. Quinton be re-elected Treasurer."
7. Election of Auditor.
Motion by the Executive:—
"That Messrs. H. Theobald and Co. (Incorporated Accountants) be reappointed Auditors."
8. Nominations for Executive.
SCOTLAND.—Mr. James Neate, nominated by Glasgow Branch.
WALES.—Mr. Gorniot, nominated by Swansea Branch.
N.E. GROUP.—Miss K. B. Kough, nominated by Newcastle Branch.
Mr. A. B. Moss, nominated by South Shields Branch.
N.W. GROUP.—Mr. H. R. Clifton and Mr. R. H. Rosetti, nominated by Liverpool and Manchester Branches.
S.W. GROUP.—Mr. G. Wood, nominated by Plymouth Branch.
MIDLAND GROUP.—Mrs. C. Quinton (Jnr.) and Mr. J. G. Dobson, nominated by Birmingham Branch.
SOUTH LONDON.—Mr. E. Coles, nominated by South London Branch.
NORTH LONDON.—Mr. S. Samuels, nominated by North London Branch.
EAST LONDON.—Mr. H. Silvester, nominated by Bethnal Green and West Ham Branches.
9. Motion by West Ham Branch:—
"That bearing in mind the number of Freethinkers filling public offices or engaged in public work, this Conference is strongly of opinion that the time has arrived when united and persistent protests should be made against the preferential position given to ministers of religion, and the use of religious ceremonies in public institutions and in purely civic ceremonies."
10. Motion by North London Branch:—
"That all Branches be requested to send, for the information of the Executive, a copy of the rules under which the work of the Branch is conducted."
11. Motion by Mr. W. J. W. Easterbrook:—
"That this Conference urges upon the National Secular Society's Executive, the need for a well organized literature distribution, postal and otherwise, which shall have the effect of bringing the objects of the Society before those who are at present unacquainted with them."
12. Motion by West London Branch:—
"That this Conference requests the Executive to arrange a series of Freethought Demonstrations in the London area."

13. Motion by Executive :—

"That this Conference protests against the repeated endeavours of the London County Council to make the conduct of public meetings in the Parks and Open Spaces under its control increasingly difficult, and regards recent regulations prohibiting the sale of literature and the taking up of collections as a deliberate attack upon the right of public meeting, and authorizes the Executive to take whatever steps it may find advisable to defeat this attempt to deprive the citizens of London of one of the oldest and one of the most important of their rights."

14. Motion by Bethnal Green Branch :—

"That this Conference desires to enter the strongest possible protest against the abuse of the machinery of Broadcasting in the interests of sectarian religion, in spite of the very numerous complaints by members of the public, and in spite of the B.B.C. being supported by public money, levied by the Government, and protected by Government regulations; it protests against the issuing of sermons, religious services, etc., by the B.B.C., that are an affront to a civilized intelligence, and asks Free-thinkers everywhere to register their protest against this new form of religious endowment."

15. Motion by West Ham Branch :—

"That this Conference is of opinion that the time has arrived when every form of State endowment of religion should be abolished; it demands that Churches and Chapels shall no longer be relieved from the payment of rates and taxes, thus placing an additional burden upon the rest of the community, but shall be subject to the same taxation as other property; it further protests against the exaction of tithes, royalties, and other charges upon the public purse that are levied for the upkeep of religious establishments, and urges upon speakers the importance of keeping this aspect of the matter before the general public."

16. Motion by Executive :—

"That in view of the encouragement given to religious intolerance in this country, and as recent events have shown in our Colonies and Dependencies, and in the United States of America, by the continuance of the laws against Blasphemy, this Conference deplors the fact that no opportunity has presented itself for bringing the Bill for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, introduced to the House of Commons by Mr. George Lansbury, to the test of a Parliamentary discussion, and urges upon Free-thinkers of all shades of political opinion to impress upon their representatives, and upon all Parliamentary candidates, the urgency and importance of this measure."

17. Motion by Mr. George Whitehead :—

"This Conference desires to call the attention of Educationalists to the grave danger fronting the country, of a concordat being established between the Nonconformists and the Established Church, with a view to the strengthening of religious education in State-supported schools, and in the avowed readiness of the Government to support such an agreement if it can be reached; it reaffirms its conviction that the only just and wise policy is that of the complete neutrality of the State in all matters of religious opinion, and the complete exclusion of religious teaching from all State-aided educational establishments."

18. Motion by Mr. R. H. Rosetti :—

"That this Conference regrets that in the Army, Navy, and Air Forces, compulsory attendance at religious worship is still the rule, despite repeated protests by many members of these Forces, against attending a religious service in which they do not believe, and calls upon the Government to give to those serving in His Majesty's Forces the same liberty of abstinence that is enjoyed by all civilians."

The Conference will sit in the Kenilworth Hotel, Queen Street, Glasgow: Morning Session, 10.30 to 12.30; Afternoon Session, 2.30 to 4.30. Delegates will be required to produce their credentials at the door; Members, the current card of membership. Only members of the Society are entitled to be present. A public demonstration will be held at 7 p.m. in the City Grand Hall. Luncheon for delegates and visitors at 1 p.m., at the Kenilworth Hotel, price 4s. During the Afternoon Session, papers will be read on items of Free-thought interest, followed by discussion.

By order of the Executive,

C. COHEN, *President*.

E. M. VANCE, *Secretary*.

Correspondence.

WITCHCRAFT.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—My attention having been drawn to a reference in your issue of May 1, to my recent *History of Witchcraft*, I ask leave to state that I did not give as one of the reasons for my "defence" of the wholesale burnings of witches, "that they actually flew to their meeting-places on broom-sticks!"

Indeed, when discussing this popular belief, I expressly pointed out that upon investigation the statements made to this effect are remarkably few, and that actually no aerial flight on a broom was seriously implied, but that a certain ritual figure in a dance has been exaggerated.

I fear that facts and accuracy, especially the verification of references, are not among Mr. Cutner's strong points.

MONTAGUE SUMMERS.

THE CHURCH AND THE PRESS.

SIR,—In an article on the "Real Scandal of the Churches," in the *Sunday Chronicle*, of the 8th inst., the Rev. Frederick C. Spurr states: "The Churches are considered fair game for anyone who wishes to exercise his penmanship in a letter to the Press."

As a frequent newspaper correspondent, I should like to inform the reverend gentleman that my own contributions are always made under a feeling of serious responsibility in the interests of truth; and if the said mere exercise of penmanship is desired, it can be done in a twopenny exercise book, or on any suitable scrap of paper.

Perhaps the gentleman will not be offended if I suggest that even as he asserts, there would be as much justification as in those who use the pulpit for the exercise of their oratory for the dissemination of untruth and falsity, which they know to be untrue and false.

SINE CERE.

THE EXECUTION OF FRANCISCO FERRER.

SIR,—Mr. H. O. Boger might have taken the trouble of investigating the terrible crime before rushing into print with a display of lamentable ignorance on the whole matter. He wants to know where he can obtain the late William Archer's book on Ferrer. Obviously, either at his free library or a good bookseller—or he could get Mr. Mara to lend him his copy.

Of course, I was very interested to learn that "one may claim proudly to be R.C." without agreeing with Mr. Mara—though this gentleman showed his sturdy independence of thought by completely disagreeing with the Pope about Ferrer. I was also interested to learn that "we have no Englishmen to represent us Catholics in a really English way"—which will, no doubt, be taken quite philosophically by Mr. Chesterton, who certainly thinks he fills the bill. But I am left wondering, even if the Englishmen did come along in his English way, what he would do about Ferrer?

Mr. Boger wishes I hadn't dragged in Mr. Montague Summers and his witches (full references will be found in his book) but why shouldn't I write how and what I like? I am not a Roman Catholic forced to write to

order—or get out of the Church. Finally, I hope Mr. Boger will do us the honour of reading the *Freethinker* for a year at least. He will find many interesting things about religion in general, and Roman Catholicism in particular, and he will certainly find its columns open for a complete refutation—if he can do it.

H. CUTNER.

MR. W. J. LAMB'S SONNETS.

SIR,—I appreciate the letter of Mr. Lamb's brother for the heartiness of its counter-attack. I have enjoyed it as heartily. Still more, I value the good feeling towards his brother that the letter exhibits. I have hurt this feeling (in these cases one cannot know who else will be touched), and am sorry that I wrote the sonnet in question. To his brother, Mr. W. J. Lamb, too, I offer my apology for the absence of personal consideration in my sonnet. At the same time, I may point out to Mr. Wilkinson, who also stands up for Mr. Lamb, that it is not quite accurate to say that I likened Mr. Lamb to a yapping poodle. It was the irritation set up in the one case that I likened to the irritation set up in the other.

Mr. Wilkinson says that Wordsworth has no proprietary right in the sonnet. No; but when one's attempt in any form of verse follows too apparently the work of any known writer, one invites the charge of imitation; and Mr. Lamb, particularly in "The Tower of Silence," was patching the thought to piece out the sonnet as does Wordsworth at times; generally, when he has nothing special to say.

Even had Mr. Lamb successfully imitated the great sonnets of Wordsworth, the result, in my opinion, would have justified him. Such work blurs the reader's sense of the original. About twenty-five years since, I was reading to my sister Wordsworth's sonnet to Lady Fitzgerald in her seventieth year. "Why don't you write something like that?" she asked. I answered: "Because I can't." I might have added, as truthfully: "and would not if I could." In this spirit I would say to Mr. Lamb (parodying the apostle): Avoid even the appearance of imitation.

My sonnet, says Mr. Wilkinson, was a snarl. I assent. To be frank, there is no way out. But if Mr. Wilkinson had read as much verse as it has been my lot to read, he might have developed as irritable a stomach.

Mr. Lamb's sonnets, Mr. Wilkinson thinks, are better than most of the verse published now-a-days. Better than ninety-nine hundredths of it, I should say. It was the desire to keep the originals in our literature high, apart, in clear atmosphere—nothing else—that led me to be unjust to Mr. Lamb.

H. BARBER.

A QUESTION OF BIAS.

SIR,—I am very loath to continue a correspondence that must be of little interest to the general reader; but, as Mr. Bartram still persists in attributing statements to me that I have never made, I feel that I must protest. I did not say, nor did I insinuate, that the miners' wages generally were twenty-six shillings a day. Any person who would venture to make such a statement would obviously be a fool. And my friend, Mr. A. J. Cook, keeps me too well posted up on the miners' earnings for me to commit any such blunder. I was referring to one miner, and one miner only.

If Mr. Bartram expects any writer in the *Freethinker* to please all the Shakers and Quakers, and Roman Catholics and Presbyterians, and the people with bees in their bonnet, who disturb out-door meetings—well, I'm afraid the editor himself would not be equal to such a feat.

JOSEPH BRYCE.

IN KEEPING with your views isn't there something not altogether exact? Giving special regard to FREETHINKER appeals is surely the correct thing. This one only asks you to write to-day 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 & MABE, New Street, Bakewell, Derbyshire.

Society News

MR. G. WHITEHEAD'S MISSION AT WEST HAM.
SPEAKING under the auspices of the West Ham Branch is always pleasant, as a result of their excellent organization and the number of willing helpers provided. On the Sunday afternoon a good meeting was held in Victoria Park, followed in the evening by another at Water Lane, West Ham. Four more were held during the week, and all were attended by audiences which appeared to be both interested and amused by the lectures. Several people, who attended the whole series, expressed appreciation, and even the two policemen, who seemed to be taking a course of Freethought propaganda, kept awake. Mr. Rosetti and others ably presided over these meetings, where even the opponents were good-humoured and mirth-provoking (one of them unconsciously so).—G. W.

CHESTER-LE-STREET BRANCH.

LAST week-end the new rooms of the Chester-le-Street Branch of the National Secular Society were visited by a representative group from Tyneside, including members from Northumberland and Durham. Messrs. J. G. Bartram, R. Chapman and others. A careful examination of the Public Reading-room Library, and a right hearty welcome from a crowded gathering of the local supporters—the eldest approaching the 80's. After a most pleasant evening the guests departed North, with the warmest recollections of young Chester, and more than a little surprised at the enthusiasm of the whole of the members and friends. Various enterprises are under consideration, and Chester will be heard again.—R. C.

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.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): 7.0, R. Dimsdale Stocker, "Our Dreams and their Meaning."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11.0, Rev. A. A. Green, "The Jew of To-day."

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 3.15, J. Hart, A Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Regent's Park, near the Fountain): 6.0, R. H. Rosetti, A Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Clapham Common, 11.30, Brockwell Park, 6.0): Lectures by G. Whitehead. Each evening, May 23 and 27, at 8 p.m., Mr. Whitehead will lecture at Clapham Old Town.

THE NON-POLITICAL METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Hyde Park), 11.0, 3.0 and 6.30, Speakers—Messrs. Saphin, Ratcliffe, Hart, Botting and Baker. Thursday, 7.0, Speakers—Mr. Saphin and Mr. Botting.

WEST HAM BRANCH, N.S.S. (Outside Municipal College, Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7.0, Lecture by Mr. A. C. High.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 3.30, Messrs. Campbell-Everden, Darby and Jackson; 6.0, Messrs. Hyatt and Le Maine. Freethought Lectures every Wednesday and Friday, at 7.30 p.m. 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.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Royal Buildings, 18 Colquhoun Street, off Bold Street): 7.30, Discussion.

OUTDOOR.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY BRANCH of the N.S.S.—Ramble to Ballageich. Meet Clarkston Terminus, 12 noon prompt.

THE "FREETHINKER" ENDOWMENT TRUST.

A Great Scheme for a Great Purpose.

THE *Freethinker* Endowment Trust was registered on the 25th of August, 1925, its object being to raise a sum of not less than £8,000, which, by investment, would yield sufficient to cover the estimated annual loss incurred in the maintenance of the *Freethinker*. The Trust is controlled and administered by five trustees, of which number the Editor of the *Freethinker* is one in virtue of his office. By the terms of the Trust Deed the trustees are prohibited from deriving anything from the Trust in the shape of profit, emoluments, or payment, and in the event of the position of the *Freethinker* at any time, in the opinion of the Trustees, rendering the Fund unnecessary, it may be brought to an end, and the capital sum handed over to the National Secular Society.

The Trust has been before the public since October, 1925, and up to date over £5,000 has been subscribed. A sum of £1,000 has been promised conditional on the amount being made up to £7,000 by December 31, 1927, £450 by other friends to make up the £7,000. There is thus left about £1,500 yet to be raised. That should be well within the compass of the friends of the *Freethinker* at home and abroad.

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