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Views and Opinions.

Profiteering in Grief.

THE other day, a writer in the *New Republic* (New York) raised a protest against what he called profiteering in grief. He was concerned with the extravagant charges made by those who carry out funeral arrangements, and the lavish expenditure on the part of the mourners. Both appear to vary with the social importance of the dead person. The protest is, I think, needed, although something has been done in recent years to limit extravagance in this direction. Still, in many cases, the expenditure is out of all proportion to the grief of the mourners—if one can measure grief in that way—the goodness of the deceased, or the financial resources of the family concerned. Like the Lancashire woman who boasted that although she had buried three husbands she had buried them all “on ham”—the reference being to the fact that the “funeral baked meats” had been on a lavish scale—there is a wide-spread tendency to go the limit in the case of a funeral, even though the same expenditure might have postponed the funeral for some years, or the dead man was one who would have benefited the world by dying much earlier. Much of this is, of course, sheer fashion. Most people follow the fashion in expressing their grief just as they do in dressing their hair. A silver-mounted coffin is counted as an expression of affection, whereas it often does no more than record the fact that the family can bury their dead “on ham.” Fashion calls the tune, and the undertaker profits from the occasion by piling up the costs.

* * *

Pious Impudence.

On October 17, there was buried at Tottenham and Wood Green Cemetery, the body of the late Mr. Ernest Sims, of Thorpe Road, Tottenham. Mr. Thorpe had requested that no religious ceremonies should take place at his funeral, and the family had honourably respected his wishes. The coffin was lowered into the grave, the eldest son said a few words of farewell, and the ceremony was over. At

least it ought to have been over, and would have been over, but the cemetery chaplain, a Rev. W. H. Saturley, had to be reckoned with. He had been told by the Superintendent of the cemetery that there would be no religious ceremony, but, he explained to a representative of the *Daily Express*, “I thought it my duty to be there.” Apparently he felt it his duty to be very much there, for he was “respectfully requested by one of the sons to stand aside.” So, “I was turned away, and sorrowfully left the graveside.” But the good man was not to be denied, and “when they had gone I felt constrained to approach the grave, and then I prayed just a simple prayer.” Mr. Saturley was, he confesses, impressed by the two sons of the dead man, and, “I want to meet them again and have a heart to heart talk . . . I felt the sons were good men, and told them before they turned me away, that I had no desire to force my religion on them, and that I admired their sincerity and intellectual honesty.” Perhaps, if he had told these two sons that the moment they were out of the way he would return and offer his “simple prayer” over the grave, the story might have had a different ending.

* * *

A Religion that Demoralizes.

Now it is quite possible that Mr. Saturley regarded his conduct as that of a good Christian, and it is quite as likely that those Christians who read the story in the newspapers will take it as evidence of the goodness of the cemetery chaplain. Yet I do not hesitate to say that a better proof of the demoralizing quality of Christian training it would be almost impossible to find. It may be urged as an excuse, or even as a justification, that to the chaplain it was important what was done at the funeral of the man. That may be true, but it only makes the demoralization the greater. For in this case the dead man had left clear instructions that no religious ceremony was to be performed over his grave; the family were determined that no ceremony should be performed; but this man of God steps in, and creeping to the grave, after the family had departed, desecrates it by performing *his* incantations in spite of the desires and the protests of the family. Such conduct shows an absence of the very rudiments of a healthy sense of what is right and decent. His action was an insult to the memory of the dead man; it was an outrage on the feelings of his living relatives. The parson is not conscious of having done wrong; on the contrary, he feels that he has acted in a spirit of Christian nobility. And that may be true, for nobility of the Christian order is a very queer thing.

But in the fact that Christians can see no wrong in this kind of thing lies the plainest condemnation of Christian influence on character. Such men are like those who, having been brought up in a peculiar manner, see nothing wrong in highway robbery or

wife-beating. Nothing can excuse or justify such intolerable conduct; Christianity alone can explain it. To do without a Christian prayer over a grave, if one desires it, is a thing that ordinary decency would grant, and which the law specifically allows. But this cemetery chaplain—cemetery chaplains are not usually men of high intelligence, even reckoning by the standard of intelligence that rules in the pulpit—says, "It shall not be. It is my job to pray over the corpse" (I believe chaplains are paid so much per body) "and a prayer there shall be, no matter what the desires of the dead man were, or what the wishes of his family are." And I question whether there is a parson in the whole of England who will condemn what he did. Given the power, Christians as a body have never yet done justice to the living who did not believe in their creed; we can hardly expect they will be capable of acting with decency towards them when they are dead.

* * *

Body Snatchers.

Unfortunately this incident does not stand alone. In some form or another it is of constant occurrence. It happens in relation to those of distinction and to ordinary men and women. Men like Swinburne and Meredith, who repudiated Christianity while alive, have a Christian service mumbled over them when dead. Charles Darwin had a religious service performed over his body in Westminster Abbey. In scores of cases men who were intensely opposed to Christianity in all its forms are buried in a *Christian* manner. It is almost waste of time pointing out to Christians the indecency of the whole proceeding. They simply do not realize it, and cannot be made to see it. Christian arrogance, Christian bigotry, and Christian impertinence have combined to make anything justifiable that panders to Christian prejudice. Just as he considers it a personal affront to see anyone spending Sunday in a way that runs counter to his religious opinions, just as for long ages the Christian would not allow an opinion antagonistic to his religion to find expression, so a funeral without a Christian service is something that should be prevented at all costs. In the ages when Christianity had a little more self-respect than it has at present, it declined to permit a Christian service over the bodies of such as had been untrue to their faith. But to-day, when it is glad to grasp at anyone, it strives with what is sheer misrepresentation to gain whatever advertisement may be forthcoming from a misleading service over a corpse. It is pure body-snatching for the greater glory of God.

* * *

The Profits of Death.

The writer whose article I cited at the outset of these notes, found particular fault with the high charges of undertakers because they took advantage of the mental distress experienced by those immediately concerned with a death. He pointed out that "grief lessens resistance," and the undertaker turns the occasion to financial profit. But in making a market out of grief, weakness, and distress, the undertakers are only amateurs at the side of the Christian clergy. Consider the manner in which the clergy, during the war, harped upon the value of religious consolation to those who had lost sons or husbands in the struggle. We remember publishing a circular from a firm of monument-makers offering to provide memorials, at cut rates, to mourners. And side by side with that we published some special tracts which impressed upon mourners the value of the Christian religion in helping them to bear their loss with equanimity. The advertising undertaker and the advertising parson were working

the same game; they were counting upon the fact that grief lessens resistance. Of the two I fancy I would count the parson the lower. The business side of the undertaker's advertisement is patent to all. No one is likely to count him as stricken with grief because he wears a long face, or to count him a hypocrite because he chisels in stone or wood praises of those who might profitably have died years before. But the parson scorns the imputation of professional interest. He protests that his advertisement is issued in the interests of the dead and the living. He is exploiting grief and distress in the name of charity and righteousness, and so adds hypocrisy to his professionalism.

* * *

Blessed be the Weak!

The exploitation of grief, weakness, and distress has been one of the strongest, the most pronounced, and the most permanent of the features of historic Christianity. No other religion has quite so well understood that resistance is weakened during sorrow and distress, and none has pushed its knowledge to greater extremities. We may easily be philosophical about sorrow, we are seldom philosophical *in* sorrow. Intense grief is not unreasonable, but it is unreasonable. In the grief that overtakes us at the loss of one dear to us we do not reason, we can only feel; there is a deep sense of loss, and for the moment that sense of loss is supreme. Reason is off its guard, and in weak natures anything that promises relief in an intolerable situation is eagerly grasped. It is at this moment that a religion such as Christianity makes its most determined assault. There is also the significant fact that it has never appealed to man at his strongest, always at his weakest. The Greeks conceived man as fighting with all his strength against fate and the gods, and used that conception as an inspiration to increase man's confidence in his own power and capacity. The Christian pictured man as a weak, helpless creature, convinced of his utter inability to help himself, but deriving whatever strength he had from a crawling approach to the cross. It denounced "this world" because it might fill man with a consciousness of his own strength and so lead away from Christian teaching. It dwelt upon the terrors of the next world because the more terrified man became the less became his capacity of resistance to Christian teaching. Profiteering in grief may be true of a great deal of the undertaking business. The undertaker might reply that his work is essential, and the profiteering in grief is, in his case, largely accidental. But the profiteering in terror and grief set up by the Christian Church was largely deliberate. It was planned and perpetuated in the interests of the Christian Church. It deliberately weakened man's power of resistance in order to profit from his loss of strength.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Beyond Good and Evil.

HE has not eaten of Forbidden Fruit,
He, therefore, has no Consciousness of Sin;
Nor does he heed the moralists' loud din,
But acts by instinct, simple as a brute;
He does just what he wants and feels no shame:
Let Christians whine; he knows a better game.

No act is sinful till men think it Sin,
For evil is a figment of Man's brain;
That Consciousness of Sin which gives us pain,
That Sense of Guilt, comes solely from within:
The man is free who knows no good and evil,
And does not live in fear of God or Devil.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

The Latest Christian Evidence.

"Mr. Squeers had but one eye, and popular prejudice runs in favour of two. Moreover, the one he possessed resembled nothing so much as the fanlight of a street door."—*Dickens*.

"Truly, the moon shines with a good grace."
Shakespeare.

WHEN a young reporter first started his duties it used to be the fashion to get him to attend the police courts and to report the proceedings at inquests. It seems as if this sound procedure is being altered, and that the innocent youngster is kept in the office to write leading articles on the Population question, and alleged defences of the Christian Religion. How otherwise can be explained the publication of such delirious dialectics as have appeared recently in the newspaper press. The curious thing is that these articles do not appear in *The Slossville Sentinel*, or *Mudfarm Monitor*, but in big newspapers with huge circulations. The more highly-placed the publication, the less well-informed the article, appears to be the rule. So insistent, indeed, in this campaigning for Christianity, that it looks as if our dear old friends, the lecturers of the Christian Evidence Society may find that their services are no longer required, and that they are doomed to unemployment and the hard seats of the Thames Embankment.

Mind you, Freethinkers are not thin-skinned in this matter. Any person so sensitive as to die of a rose in aromatic pain is not equipped by Nature to be a sceptic. There are limits, however. We have listened to the criticisms of men who have dropped their aitches with a bang like a rifle-shot. We have been reminded of the error of our wicked ways by black men from the southern states of America. Other uncivilized persons, hailing from other states in the Union, have sought our salvation and their own glory. Irish priests, with accents like the kick of a mule, have told us with undue emphasis where we shall spend eternity. Belgian ecclesiastics have cooed at us in broken English, and implored us to seek the narrow path. Young curates have hurled their prize sermons at us: older parsons have memorized passages of the *Encyclopædia Biblica*; blondes and brunettes of all ages have pressed tracts into our unwilling hands. But all these things pale into insignificance beside the circumstance of a boy of sixteen, fresh from a secondary school, with a mind untrammelled with any knowledge of his subject, setting down to "wipe us off the slate," and having his juvenile efforts published in leaded type in the middle page of a great newspaper.

Of course, it is not the boy's own fault. He has to do what he is told, or get "the sack." Personally, he would much rather report the "drunks and disorderlies," or hang around the mortuary. A butterfly on the wheel, he is sacrificed in the cause of Mammon. And veteran Freethinkers, who were old before the boy was born, watch the proceedings with tolerant amusement. If only the boy would sign his articles. "Charlie Brown defends the Trinity," or "Johnnie Smith thinks Jesus was a man," or "Jack Robinson blames Darwin," would be ideal headlines in a controversy usually as dull as ditchwater, and as illuminative as mud.

Mother's own boy got a rare chance, recently, in the *London Evening News*. Doubtless, he bought a dozen copies at cost price to give to his girl friends. It is so good that we hope it gains him a five-bob rise. It is headed "The Master Knot," which perhaps explains its wooden treatment of a great subject. This is how it opens:—

If the proverbial Martian, returning to-day from a brief sojourn in our midst, were asked what it was

that the terrestrials chiefly concerned themselves with, he would undoubtedly answer, "Christianity."

Only an innocent boy, fresh from mamma's apron strings, could have penned it. What humans are chiefly concerned with is "gold-digging," merely that and nothing more. To put a theological answer into the mouth of the unfortunate Martian is to suggest that he was untruthful or intoxicated. And that is a most insulting way to treat a foreigner. It is a good thing that Mars is further off than Margate, or there might be further trouble, and the five-bob rise imperilled.

You notice the delightful suggestion in the opening sentence? Human beings, the wide world over, are chiefly concerned in worrying about the Christian Religion. If it were true, every clergyman would be bursting with money like a bookmaker; places of worship would have to introduce three shows daily like the cinemas; and Freethinkers would be hanged in Trafalgar Square. That naughty editor ought to have told the poor boy of *Whittaker's Almanac*, and other reference works. From their pages he could have learned that, even on paper, Christians only represent one quarter of the world's inhabitants, and this total is only reached by counting the *Freethinker* staff, and other wicked worldlings, as earnest believers. There are other great religions, but we do not wish to be unkind. Perhaps the boy left them out of the paragraph because he couldn't spell their names, or had never been introduced.

This is not all. How could it be so, for the young, unconscious humourist, who penned the opening paragraph, has further outbursts that would try the hilarity of an Egyptian mummy. For instance, he says that the concern of the late Anglican Church Congress was rather "with Einstein and Darwin, not with the Personal Devil," and that Christianity is "a strong tower of assurance to the countless millions who look forward to a life beyond the grave." Further, he adds that Aimee McPherson, the blonde crusader from California, U.S.A., and the parsons at the Church Congress "have substantially the same end in view." Ho! Ho! Ho! If this campaign continues, the Freethinkers will be exterminated because they break bloodvessels from laughing overmuch, which is better, after all, than being choked at Charing Cross to the music of a Salvation Army band.

It would be too cruel to criticize these statements, but we greet a young humourist at the commencement of a great career. He is not, we are glad to see, confining himself to one paper only, for we seem to recognize his artless pen in the columns of the *Daily Mail*. In an article, headed: "Are We Less Religious?" there is the same innocent form of humour, as in the following passage:—

It is also a fact that there is a tendency for men and women to-day to fit their religion to their lives, instead of fitting their lives to their religion. They do not go to church as their ancestors did, but prefer the open air.

You see our young friend's mind is broadening with each article he writes. Contact with Fleet Street has widened his outlook. He may have noticed someone with a piece of blue ribbon in his coat emerge from the "Cheshire Cheese," wiping his mouth. He may even have spotted a Sunday school teacher winking at a tea-shop waitress. Trifles light as air help to change a boy's views, and the air of Fleet Street is as sultry as the Strand in the "wee sma' hours."

Well! Well! The human race is obsessed with the old, old story of damnation, but prefers the open air on Sundays instead of going to church. That is the best that the most influential organs in Fleet

Street can do in the way of Christian apologetics. Of course, the junior reporter can be superseded by the cricketing correspondent, now out of work. Being a sportsman, he may not altogether relish the job of defending Orthodoxy. It is a consummation devoutly to be wished, for this journalistic competition means driving our old friends, the real Christian Evidence lecturers, into the ranks of the Suicide Club, which would debar these spiritual swash-bucklers from ever reaching heaven. On second thoughts, the professional defenders of Omnipotence might prefer to play the ukulele on the kerb-side, and so escape the hobs of Hades.

MIMNERMUS.

Religion and Labour.

THE difference between the attitude of the organized workers on the Continent towards religion, compared with the attitude of the organized workers in this country, has often been remarked.

A profession of Socialism on the Continent is equivalent to a profession of Freethought, or irreligion. In fact, so well is this understood, that the Romish Church has banned, and the Popes anathematized, the Movement as being opposed to religion.

In this country, on the contrary, the leaders of the organized workers are nearly all professing religionists. Mr. Ramsay Macdonald is as fond of interlarding his speeches with pious platitudes as the ex-Kaiser, and is quite as certain that God is on his side. Mr. Henderson is a well known performer in Wesleyan pulpits. Mr. Philip Snowden was at one time a weekly contributor to the *Christian World*. Not that these represent the attitude of the average trade unionist towards religion; they do not. His attitude toward religion is one of profound indifference. As a general rule he is vastly more interested in the week-end football matches—for which there is a sweepstake in which all the shop takes part—or in race-horse form, than in any question of religion.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that while the attitude of the Continental worker is largely anti-religious, the attitude of the English worker is merely indifference to religion, while many of his leaders carry on a definite religious propaganda.

One cause for this divergence between our workers and those on the Continent was, of course, due to the Evangelical Movement, organized by Wesley and Whitefield, which swept a large proportion of the working classes into the gospel net. The Continent never experienced that.

But another cause operated much nearer our own time. This arose through the division caused by the individualistic politics advocated by Charles Bradlaugh clashing with the Socialistic politics of the most advanced, or most influential, leaders of the working classes. It was a great pity. Bradlaugh debated with Hyndman, advocating individualism against Socialism. The debate was very heated and a great deal of ill-feeling was aroused. Now Hyndman was a militant Atheist, but he declined to advocate it for fear of playing into the hands of Bradlaugh, in which policy he was followed by many other Freethinking Socialists; in fact Bradlaugh was quite as much abused by the Socialists as by the Christians. If this did not throw the workers into the arms of the Evangelicals, it at least acted as a brake in preventing them from joining the Secular Party. Those, on the other hand, who had decided religious opinions, found the path made easy for their advocacy.

If General Booth had been a really able man, and

as great a strategist as he was a fanatic, he would have exploited the situation as a man of real ability would have done. Instead of that he took up an attitude of bitter hostility to the Trades Unions because they objected to his labour homes where skilled unemployed workers were employed for their keep, plus a shilling or two at the week-end, which the Trades Unions quite rightly denounced as sweated labour.

As for the division caused through the political situation, I can speak from personal experience. I am not blaming one side or the other, I am only dealing with its effects. I have already narrated how I renounced Fundamentalism for Freethought, and no captive ever escaped from a fetid dungeon to the fresh air with more joy than I did from the dungeon of superstition to the fresh air of Freethought. I was prepared, like Ulysses:—

“To follow knowledge like a sinking star;
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.”

Under the burning and illuminating rays of the sun of knowledge, superstition would melt like an iceberg in the Tropics. Then came the dismaying recognition that the most advanced workers declined to listen to, or have anything to do with, the gospel of Freethought, because of politics. I was inclined to say with Tennyson, “raving politics, never at rest,” and to regard them as “a trouble of ants in the gleam of a million million suns.” In my opinion, the more quickly the workers attained to mental emancipation, the more quickly would they achieve industrial emancipation, or amelioration.

Another minor matter that acted adversely to the interests of Freethought was the loss of the Hall of Science to the Secular Party.

After the death of Charles Bradlaugh, a fund was raised for a memorial to perpetuate his memory. Then a dispute arose to to whether the Hall of Science should be bought, or a new building erected in another locality. The money collected was invested in the names of several Trustees, and could not be withdrawn without the signature of all the Trustees. The Trustees disagreed and declined to sign each others' scheme, the money was locked up, and in the meanwhile the Hall of Science was sold and we lost it altogether and never received sufficient funds to build a hall of our own.

The old Hall of Science, the scene of many of Bradlaugh's triumphs, was a rallying place for Freethinkers all over London, where they met together to hear lectures and debates, and afterwards adjourn to a club, held in the same building, for social intercourse and to make acquaintances. The acquisition of a new Headquarters would undoubtedly be of great assistance to our Movement, and it is hoped that one day this desirable ideal may be realized. A great number of Freethinkers from all over the world visit London every year, and a building suitable to the dignity of the Cause would be a source of perpetual strength. That, however, remains something for the future to achieve.

W. MANN.

COMING OF AGE.

At fifty, though the mental faculties of man are in full vigour, and his judgment better than at any preceding date, the bodily powers for laborious life are on the decline. He cannot bear the same quantity of fatigue as at an earlier period. He begins to earn less, and is less capable of enduring wind and weather; and in those more retired employments where much sight is required, he fails apace, and sees himself, like an old horse, beginning to be turned adrift.—*Rights of Man*.

Before we can bring happiness to others, we first must be happy ourselves; nor will happiness abide with us unless we confer it on others.—*Maeterlinck*.

On Ridicule.

GOLDSMITH said there are two classes of people who dread ridicule—priests and fools. They cry out that it is no argument, but they know it is. It has been found the most potent form of argument. Euclid used it in his immortal Geometry; for what else is the *reductio ad absurdum* which he sometimes employs? Elijah used it against the priests of Baal. The Christian fathers found it effective against the Pagan superstitions, and in turn it was adopted as the best weapon of attack on *them* by Lucian and Celsus. Ridicule has been used by Bruno, Erasmus, Luther, Rabelais, Swift, and Voltaire, by nearly all the great emancipators of the human mind.

All these men used it for a serious purpose. They were not comedians who amused the public for pence. They wielded ridicule as a keen rapier, more swift and fatal than the heaviest battle-axe. Terrible as was the levin-brand of their denunciation, it was less dreaded than the Greek fire of their sarcasm. I repeat that they were men of serious aims, and indeed how could they have been otherwise? All true and lasting wit is founded on a basis of seriousness; or else, as Heine said, it is nothing but a sneeze of the reason. Hood felt the same thing when he proposed for his epitaph: "Here lies one who made more puns, and spat more blood, than any other man of his time."

Buckle well says, in his fine vindication of Voltaire, that he "used ridicule, not as the test of truth, but as the scourge of folly." And he adds:—

His irony, his wit, his pungent and telling sarcasms, produced more effect than the gravest arguments could have done; and there can be no doubt that he was fully justified in using those great resources with which nature had endowed him, since by their aid he advanced the interests of truth, and relieved men from some of their most inveterate prejudices.

Victor Hugo puts it much better in his grandiose way, when he says of Voltaire that "he was irony incarnate for the salvation of mankind."

Voltaire's opponents, as Buckle points out, had a foolish reverence for antiquity, and they were impervious to reason. To compare great things with small, our opponents are of the same character. Grave argument is lost upon them; it runs off them like water from a duck. When we approach the mysteries of their faith in a spirit of reverence, we yield them half the battle. We must concede them nothing. What they call reverence is only conventional prejudice. It must be stripped away from the subject, and if argument will not remove the veil, ridicule will. Away with the insane notion that absurdity is reverend because it is ancient! If it is thousands of years old, treat it exactly as if it were told the first time to-day. Science recognizes nothing in space and time to invalidate the laws of nature. They prevailed in the past as well as in the present, in Jerusalem as well as in London. That is how Science regards everything; and at bottom Science and common sense are one and the same.

Professor Huxley, in his admirable little book on Hume, after pointing out the improbability of centaurs, says that judged by the canons of science all "miracles" are centaurs. He also considers what would happen if he were told by the greatest anatomist of the age that he had seen a centaur. He admits that the weight of such authority would stagger him, but it would scarcely make him believe. "I could get no further," says Huxley, "than a suspension of judgment."

Now I venture to say that if Johannes Müller had told Huxley any such thing, he would have at once concluded that the great anatomist was joking or suffering from hallucination. As a matter of fact trained investigators do not see these incredible monstrosities, and Huxley's hypothetical case goes far beyond every attested miracle. But I do say that if Johannes Müller, or anyone else, alleged that he had seen a centaur, Huxley would never think of investigating the absurdity.

Yet the allegation of a great anatomist on such a matter is infinitely more plausible than any miraculous story of the Christian religion. The "centaurs" of

faith were seen centuries ago by superstitious people; and what is more, the relation of them was never made by the witnesses, but always by other people, who generally lived a few generations at least after the time.

What on earth are we to do with people who believe in "centaurs" on such evidence, who make laws to protect their superstition, and appoint priests at the public cost to teach the "centaur" science? The way to answer this question is to ask another. How should we treat people who believed that centaurs could be seen now? Why, of course, we should laugh at them. And that is how we should treat people who believe that men-horses ever existed at all.

Does anybody ask that I shall seriously discuss whether an old woman with a divining-rod can detect hidden treasures; whether Mr. Holme floated in the air or Mrs. Guppy sailed from house to house; whether cripples are cured at Lourdes or all manner of diseases at St. Winifred's Well? Must I patiently reason with a man who tells me that he saw water turned into wine, or a few loaves and fishes turned into a feast for multitudes, or dead men rise up from their graves? Surely not. I do what every sensible man does. I recognize no obligation to reason with such hallucinate mortals; I simply treat them with ridicule.

So with the past. Its delusions are no more entitled to respect than those of to-day. Jesus Christ as a miracle-worker is just as absurd as any modern pretender. Whether in the Bible, the Koran, the Arabian Nights, Monte Christo, or Baron Munchausen, a tremendous "walker" is the fit subject of a good laugh. And Freethinkers mean to enjoy their laugh, as some consolation for the wickedness of superstition. The Christian faith is such that it makes us laugh or cry. Are we wrong in preferring to laugh?

There is an old story of a man who was plagued by the Devil. The fiend was always dropping in at inconvenient times, and making the poor fellow's life a hell on earth. He sprinkled holy water on the floor, but by-and-bye the "old 'un" hopped about successfully on dry spots. He flung things at him, but all in vain. At last he resolved on desperate measures. He plucked up his courage, looked the Devil straight in the face, and laughed at him. That ended the battle. The Devil could not stand laughter. He fled that moment and never returned.

Superstition is the Devil. Treat him to a hearty wholesome laugh. It is the surest exorcism, and you will find laughter medicinal for mind and body too. Ridicule, and again ridicule, and ever ridicule!

G. W. FOOTE.

Heaven and Hell.

FOR Immortality, I do not care a Fig;
The ceaseless twanging of the Sacred Lyre
Midst broody Angels, and Sankey-Moody Saints
Would leave me cold, yearning for Hell Fire;
No, let me dream of Music, Books and Paints,
In Hell; my harp and halo'll suit some Holy Prig.

I'd swap some sinner out of Hell with glee,
Deck him out in full Celestial Gauds,
Hand him my slice of Heaven with a Grin,
Drive to the Devil with his singeing Bauds,
Pealing a Prean to the Prince of Sin
And Purr in warmth through all Eternity.

To Hell with Heaven and its senseless Choir
Of Angels, knitting what-nots for the Lord.
I'd rather fry in Hell, ten thousand times,
Than drivel, parasitically to "Gawd,"
And rhythmically nod to Chants and Chimes.
No: Hell for me, with Toasting Fork and Pyre.

Let all the Pie-faced, Goody-goody Cants
Pursue their Mealy-Mamby-Pamby fight.
With dull eye, oily voice, and slabby hand,
Stare blindly at their "Artificial Light."
If they like it, let 'em have their Happy Land,
And leave me stripped to burn in Vest and Pants.

ALOYSIUS PYM.

Acid Drops.

We are glad to see that there is some probability of the case of the book *The Well of Loneliness*—which we have not read, and have no desire to read—coming before the courts. If and when the case does come before the courts, we hope that the matter will be fought on proper lines. If it is, it will help to put that monument of stupid religious pomposity, Sir William Joynson Hicks, in his place. And a judge should make it clear that no one, not even our pious Home Secretary, has the right to seize any book, or to prevent its sale, in the absence of an order from a court. England is not ruled by a policeman or a Home Secretary, yet—although it may be one day, the way things are going. And if books are stopped at the Customs, there should be at once an appeal to the courts for the purpose of seeing whether the Customs authorities have the power to seize, and whether they were justified in seizing in this particular case. But Englishmen appear to be forgetting that individuals have any rights whatever against the order of an official.

We do not know anything more contemptibly stupid than the speech which the Home Secretary delivered before the London Diocesan Council for Youth. Sir William is a stupid man, and his speech exhibited his particular form of religious silliness to the full. He announced that he may have to deal with indecent books—as though there are not laws already existing that do so. There must, he explained, be limits to freedom of publication, the limit is determined by whether what is spoken or written is offensive to “one of the least of these little ones.” We are not quite sure what this means, but apparently the mental taste of a Sunday school is to determine what adults may read. For Sir William goes on to lament that the home is not what it was, the Sabbath is not what it was, therefore he wants the power of the Christian Church behind him to so order things that boys and girls may have “the old-fashioned religion that we learned at our mother’s knee.” It really looks as though he wants taking across someone’s knee. But a man of that stamp tends to make whatever office he fills supremely ridiculous.

Of one thing we are quite certain. This is that fifty years ago no Minister of State would have dared to have talked in this way. First, because he would have known that there is no power under English law which would enable him to act in the way “Jix” thinks he can act, and secondly, because at that date English life was not so overshadowed by a glorified Bumbledom. But we have grown so accustomed to censorships of this and censorships of that, police orders here and police orders there, that very few people seem to realize that these have for the most part no standing at law. What is sadly needed is some public committee that would watch the actions of officials and police, and take action when they exceeded their powers. If such a Committee were formed we would do all we could to help.

From the hotch-potch of a report from the *Daily Mail’s* own correspondent at Shanghai, those who think religion is dead may gather that it is very much alive. And in using the term “religion,” the word may be accepted to connote any form of humbug that is used to rule, subdue, to domineer a race. There were 200,000 people massacred in China, so the report states. Ma Ting-hsing promised heaven for every Moslem killing ten Chinese. This resulted in a punitive campaign by a General Feng Yu-hsiang, whom the *Daily Mail* correspondent describes as a so-called Christian General. It is now left to students of religion to ask what might happen if the world once and for all washed its hands of religion, and what is the gain to the human race in compelling mankind to live in the atmosphere of the past.

Canon Donaldson brings a new note to the yearly Harvest Festival. He said, “This year our starving miners

are ghosts at the feast.” According to the Bible it ought to be an easy matter for the Canon’s God to remedy this state of affairs. Or is it that the reverend gentleman dares not dip into the pages of the past and put faith to a practical test? Some consolation may be found, however, in the dramatic note sounded by Sir Joynson Hicks, who thanked God that the country was still Protestant.

Father Woodcock, preaching at a Roman Catholic Church, denounced the rival firm in the following language:—

“A double-faced Church—a Church that has two or three minds.”

And this is quite all right until one asks how many faces has the biggest imposture of them all.

The “Saturday Pulpit” in the *Daily News* is occupied this week by the Rev. W. H. Elliott. This gentleman, like Alexandra, sighing for more worlds to conquer, is not content with his own pulpit six feet above contradiction. He takes as his subject (or is it sermon?), “The Week-End Habit.” Having noticed that a motor show has been held, he topically works in a good word for motors and also points the moral. The impregnable rock of religion is threatened by a conglomeration of glass, indiarubber, stink and noise, and, somewhat pathetically, readers are asked the following question:—

Is the small car going to take us away from all those ideas of Sunday which formed so large a part of the piety of our fathers?

The rollicking freedom of the Irish Free State may be correctly gauged by a report appearing in the *Morning Post*. In the Free State Censorship Bill there is a clause to the effect that:—

No newspaper containing advertisements referring to birth-control would be allowed to circulate in the Free State.

One gets a crick in the neck by looking up the height of these high politics; one also understands why famous Irishmen honour their country of birth by never returning.

A little of the truth goes a long way, and therefore it must be released in microscopical quantities by the Christian battalions who contest every inch of the ground of progress. An illustration of this can be found in a review of Charles E. Ravens book, *A Religious Experience*. The notice appears in the *Times Literary Supplement*, October 18. The reviewer states, in taking Dr. Raven gently to task, “But that a barrier exists between the clergy and the educated lay public is indubitable.” The trouble is more fundamental than the reviewer cares to admit, but we are grateful to notice that education assists the lay public in marking off an anachronism in modern life; there will be less reason to accuse the masses of being ignorant when a greater part of the supply ceases to be given out from the top by those who should know better.

It is pleasant to observe that many people in England are becoming interested in the beauty of their own country. This is an agreeable change from the senseless yawping about heaven being our home, and Freethinkers will give their good wishes to the organizers of the “Chamber of Horrors” at Leicester. They deserve the thanks of all people content with one world at a time, for showing by photographs the havoc made of the countryside by the thoughtless, or what may be described as Barbary apes.

Apropos of the Middlesex County Council vote against Sunday cinemas, the spokemen for the Church bodies opposing Sunday opening, says a pious weekly, have been dubbed “Kill-joys,” but the advocate of Sunday cinemas “have not found it possible to dispose of the other form of opposition in the same way.” This other opposition came from the Musician’s Union, which has

5,000 members in London, and 22,000 members in the country, whose spokesman stated that Sunday opening had increased the musicians' work and that they hoped the Council would refuse the application. Our opinion of the musicians is that they were foolish in allowing the parsons to use them as tools for Sabbatarian ends. We can appreciate the musicians' objection to having their labour increased. But they could have stated that they had no objection to Sunday opening of cinemas, provided the Council stipulated that the musicians and other persons employed should be free one day in seven. That proviso would be an easy one for the Council, or any Council, to enforce when permitting Sunday opening. And the result of the permission and the proviso would have meant a lot of extra jobs for members of the Musicians' Union and for other musicians. When next the question of Sunday cinemas comes before the Union's leaders, we suggest they would best serve the members by taking a far-sighted view of it instead of a short-range one.

A Methodist missionary from Nigeria, Mr. Dodds, recently quoted some rules of a West African secret society. Some of these are:—

Avoid offending the feelings of propriety your parents hold sacred.

When you are married, do not ill-treat your wife, and never meddle in her or other people's quarrels.

Be just to your enemy. Rescue him when he is in danger, and never go out of your way to get him into trouble.

Watch to take the weakest side. Always side with the one fighting against the several.

Stealing is undignified. If you covet a thing, ask for it; if it is refused, go without.

There are no rules between man and wife, but there are understandings.

Gambling is exciting, but it is precarious. What you lose might give comfort to your family.

To tell lies to another member of the Society is to pronounce yourself outside the membership.

Herein are the beginnings of an ethical code. The rules are clearly the outcome of social experience and observation. Ethical precepts in all religions—not excluding the Christian—originated in the same way. To account for them is required no tales of "divine inspiration" or of God-given tablets of stone. And to conform to such precepts, the intelligent man or woman needs not to be scared by fear of a God or promised everlasting bliss.

Is youth indifferent to Jesus or to the Church? The youthful members of the Congregational Union recently got together to discuss this question. According to a pious weekly, the most applauded statement was: If only the officers and members were afire with love of Christ, young people would long to go to Church. This appears to imply that the youthful Congregationalists are rather luke-warm as regards the Church and Christ, and they defend their lack of love by saying the older members and officers are no better! This is a sad revelation that is not likely to please the pastors. It, however, only relates to Congregationalist youth. To the larger question: "Is youth outside the Churches indifferent to Jesus or the Church?" the answer is that it is indifferent to both. For it stays away from church because it cares nothing about Jesus. And—doleful thought—all the nice newspaper sermonettes, and all the uplifting broadcast addresses, seem not to have altered things one jot. "If you have tears, prepare to shed them now!"

A great problem in West Africa, says the Rev. F. W. Dodds, is not the bush native but the African brought up in a town, educated up to a point, and yet undisciplined by old tribal sanctions. In him, education does not seem to have built up character. Assuming what Mr. Dodds says is true, one need not be surprised at it. The "education" doled out to coloured men in the towns has a Christian bias. Mainly, it consists of a little reading, writing and arithmetic, plus a dose of

Christian teaching—which is a hotch-potch of weird ethics and wonderful superstition. Decent character cannot be built up out of that.

The Editor of *Public Opinion*, Mr. A. Birnage, is reported as saying at a Congregational Union meeting:—

Newspapers nowadays, to an increasing degree, record the statements of experts instead of setting forth at great length the private views of editors and proprietors. And the reader can readily obtain any journal he desires, however powerful the interests opposed to it, so that the public is in no way forced to read certain newspapers whether it wants to or not. What is of greatest importance is that people should not be content to know only one side of any case. "You can do a great deal to impress upon youth that it is an excellent training to hear the views of the other side, and persuade them not to be certain until they really know *both* sides."

It may be true that the modern tendency is to print the opinions of experts. But it is equally true that the experts are carefully selected according to whether their views are likely, either to agree with, or to be not too antagonistic to, the private views of editor and proprietors. On matters of religion in particular it is obvious that this method of selection is the general practice of almost every newspaper in Britain. It was certainly the method used by the *Daily News* in the recent *Where are the Dead?* "discussion." That being the general rule, is this printing of expert opinions of any considerable value to the inquiring reader? In general matters it may be useful to some small extent, if the reader will trouble to search various journals. But, it should be remembered, papers are increasingly coming under the control of a few big proprietors or syndicates; and that means a correspondingly limited number of proprietorial "private views."

As regards religious matters, however, the inquirer may search the whole British general and religious press, and find nothing criticizing the Christian religion. Only if he stumbles on the *Freethinker* can he get the other view of religion; and powerful religious interests, by aid of boycott and back-stair influence, see that this getting shall be as difficult as possible. Still we are glad to hear the Editor of *Public Opinion* exhorting Christians to seek the other side's views, though we suspect he meant to encourage merely the search for other sectarian opinions, and not unbelievers' views. Nevertheless, Mr. Birnage will have done a good turn to freedom of thought if the more intelligent of his hearers put the widest construction on his advice.

The Church is a failure, thinks a reader of a daily paper. He declares it is astonishing that, after 2,000 years of attempted interpretation of Christianity by the Roman Catholic and other sections of the Christian Church, these organized systems of religion have failed to produce *Christians*. They have produced "Christians" as distinct from Mohammedans or Buddhists, etc., he says; but not after the pattern of Christ as revealed in his sayings called the "Sermon on the Mount." Well, charitably assuming that the good people called Christians have tried hard to be the right thing, we must conclude that it was the Founder of the Church who is principally to blame. He evidently failed to make absolutely clear to all men exactly what was to be the pattern. Obviously he ought to have stayed a little longer expatiating and expounding, so that there could not possibly have been any mistaking what he wanted. If he had done that, there would not have been millions of believers of whom hardly any two could or can agree as to what exactly his teachings mean. At his one and only job of exposition Jesus seems to have been the world's greatest failure.

Says Miss Rebecca West: "A scientist cannot be a materialist." That settles the matter, once and for all. Miss West has qualifications for judging the issue—she is a popular novelist, and it is not necessary for a popular novelist to know anything about the philosophy of

materialism in order to make ex-cathedra pronouncements.

Dr. N. P. Jacks says there are two ways in which a man can use his leisure—by playing the fool or playing the man. We are wondering under which heading one ought to classify the way of using leisure which takes the form of howling in a church, and grovelling on the knees before a big bogey in the skies.

Mr. Stanley Hoare suggests that a strike of clergy headed by the Bishops might be rather a good thing; they should insist on being paid decently. This be a fearsome proposal. Mr. Hoare apparently fails to realize the awful consequences if it were adopted. Why, the nation might realize that no one was a penny the worse for the suspension of spiritual activity. The clergy have too much acumen to risk putting the chance of so dangerous a discovery before their dupes.

The "most beautiful cathedral built for 200 years," St. Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, has just been completed. We don't know whether there is a shortage of ordinary dwelling-houses in Australia. If there is, the houseless must be highly elated at the thought of millions of pounds having been spent on a glorified praying-shed, while working-men huddle in a room or two. But the same thing is happening in Britain. Still, truly Christian people always put the needs of God before the necessities of their fellow-creatures. That is the kind of sense of proportion that is engendered by the Christian religion.

At the autumn assembly of the Congregational Union, the Rev. Bertram Smith strongly urged that the teaching of Jesus about getting rich should be made very clear. For our part, we thought it was clear and uncompromising enough for every Bible reader to understand. What the rev. gent probably meant to stress was, that all who owned much of this world's goods should be made to realize the hopelessness of their reaching heaven and the certainty of their sojourning in hell. He might also have pointed out that rich Congregationalists cannot buy a seat in Paradise by bequeathing money to the Church, a Missionary Society, and a Charity. What Jesus taught was that Christian people must not acquire riches. If they wilfully do so, there will be for them no perpetual Pleasant Sunday Afternoons with Jesus.

Says the Hon. John Collier, the artist, "Honesty, truthfulness, and courage are the greatest qualities a woman can possess." In the past, he adds, these three qualities were more rare among women than is the case to-day. He appears to attribute the improvement to the feminine interest in sports. If this is the fact, one may infer that the more girls are interested in games and the less their interest in religion—and the modern girl is not much interested in religion—the more they acquire the qualities of honesty, truthfulness, and courage.

Lister, says a famous surgeon, made the body safe for surgery. Indeed? Some people, who should know, say the credit for this is due, not to the discoverer of antiseptics, but to him who discovered *aseptic* surgery.

Sir Henry Hadlow says: "Work is all that part of our occupation which directly or indirectly contributes to the public good." This may be true of labour done by the community's productive members, but it is deuced hard to see how the "work" of priests, consisting chiefly of conducting massed prayers to an imaginary God and performing funny antics called ritual, can contribute anything to the public good.

The Archbishop of York believes in adult education. He is interested in it because he is anxious to ensure that it shall not impart knowledge likely to be dangerous

to the Christian religion. The kind of adult education he gives his blessing to takes the form of wireless sermons, and the comic lectures on religion now being broadcast by the Rev. Professor Waterhouse.

The Rev. Dr. Selbie says "the younger generation has absolutely no use for our old religious methods." He might have added that the same young persons haven't much use for old or new religious notions.

Sir Henry Lunn writes to the *Methodist Times* :—

We are exceedingly in danger in the country of having Evangelists making money by these so-called "Free-will Offerings." I am writing at length on this matter in the next number of the *Review of the Churches*, in an article entitled "Demas as Evangelist in 1928." This article was actually in type before Aimee McPherson arrived here; and I wrote because of the things I learned in my journey round the world of the scandal that is being created by the "Sale of Salvation." When our Lord in his anger overturned the tables of the money-changers, he dealt with an evil less than that which exists in the Christian Church to-day through the scandal of these people like Billy Sunday and Aimee McPherson accumulating actually millions of dollars, and our own Evangelists following in their wake as well as they are able.

By the sound of this, Upton Sinclair and Sinclair Lewis have not been drawing on their imagination when revealing the huge profits made by the "Sale of Salvation." The reader will appreciate the usefulness of Sir Henry Lunn as an independent Christian witness.

With reference to the howl of the *Daily Express* for the censoring of Miss Radclyffe Hall's novel, the *Daily Sketch*, under the heading of "Silly Censors," remarks :—

We are not a nation of half-wits or moral weaklings, and we are getting a little tired of the censorship cranks who are continually representing us as such.

Our contemporary should have said that the more intelligent public are tired of noisy self-appointed critics who want to censor or ban in accordance with narrow standards of petty piety. If our friend had said something like that, it would have been helping to educate public opinion and to encourage more liberal views.

LIBERTY IS THE CURE.

There is only one cure for the evils which newly-acquired freedom produces; and that cure is freedom.

When a prisoner first leaves his cell he cannot bear the light of day; he is unable to discriminate colours or recognize faces. But the remedy is, not to remand him into his dungeon, but to accustom him to the rays of the sun. The blaze of truth and liberty may at first dazzle and bewilder nations which have become half-blind in the house of bondage, but let them gaze on, and they will soon be able to hear it.

In a few years men learn to reason. The extreme violence of opinions subsides. Hostile theories correct each other. The scattered elements of truth cease to contend and begin to coalesce, and at length a system of justice and order is educed out of the chaos. Many politicians of our time are in the habit of laying it down as a self-evident proposition that no people ought to be free until they are fit to use their freedom. The maxim is worthy of the fool in the old story, who resolved not to go into the water till he had learned to swim. If men are to wait for liberty till they become wise and good in slavery, they may indeed wait for ever.

Macaulay.

While Europe's eye is fixed on mighty things,
The fate of empires and the fall of Kings . . .
Amid this mighty fuss, just let me mention,
The Rights of Woman merit some attention.

Burns.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

THOSE SUBSCRIBERS WHO RECEIVE THEIR COPY OF THE "FREETHINKER" IN A GREEN WRAPPER WILL PLEASE TAKE IT THAT A 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.—S. Hampson, £1.
 J. GRIFFITHS.—The address of the Secretary of the Liverpool Branch is, A. Jackson, 7 Kirk Street, Bootle. There will be no special report of the debate issued.
 S. HAMPSON.—Sorry we missed you at Manchester.
 T. SMITH.—Thanks. Shall appear soon.
 S. UDAL.—Sorry we are not acquainted with the book you name.
 H. MORGAN.—We deal with the question in "Views and Opinions." The parson's action was a gross and inexcusable insult to the dead man and his family. Only the ill-influence of a creed such as Christianity can explain such conduct.
 C. AVERY.—We are flattered you think so highly of *Materialism Re-stated*. We know that opponents of Materialism continue to say that the Materialist says he can explain everything in terms of physics. Why not ask the one who says, "Who says that?" We know of no responsible Materialist who ever made such an absurd statement. The Cohen-Joad debate will be published shortly.
 ROLAND PRANKHERD.—Glad to know you enjoyed the Caxton Hall meeting. Other lectures may be arranged later. We do not think that the decline of religious belief is open to question by anyone.
 A. BRENDON.—Received. Your estimate is ours.
 B. A. MILLICHAMP.—This is rather a belated reply, but we were glad to hear from you. You are among our earliest recollections of our Freethought Movement. Glad you still enjoy the *Freethinker* so much. The paper keeps its friends well.

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

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When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, Mr. F. Mann, 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.

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

Some time ago Mr. Cohen was invited by the Leicester Secular Society to deliver a course of special lectures. He has arranged to visit Leicester on the four Sunday evenings in November—4—11—18—25. The subjects of the lectures will be "The Meaning of Freethought," "Freethought and God," "Freethought and a Future Life," and "Freethought and Morals." Each lecture will be given in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, and will commence at 6.30. The meetings have been well advertised and good audiences are anticipated. Freethinkers should induce their religious friends to attend the course.

We say so many hard things about the Press that we are the more pleased to chronicle something on the other

side. And, rather late in the day (which is not our fault, because the paper was not sent us), we have pleasure in noting a very good letter, covering over two columns, in *The Times and East Cheshire Observer*, from Mr. G. H. Taylor. The letter is a good straightforward defence of the Freethought position, and Mr. Taylor does not mince matters, although the tone of his remarks leaves nothing to be desired. We congratulate Mr. Taylor on his letter, and the Editor on his courage in publishing it. We wonder when the London Press will develop a corresponding sense of fair play? Above all, we commend the example of this paper to the good and pious *Daily News*.

There were two fine meetings at Glasgow, and the members were well pleased with their first special lectures of the season. The Committee had worked well with some special advertising for Mr. Chapman Cohen's meetings, and the results were very gratifying. The one certain thing to-day is that there are good audiences everywhere if only the proper methods are adopted to make meetings known. We understand the collections were of a satisfactory nature, and there was a good sale of literature. Mr. Hale occupied the chair at both meetings, and made a strong appeal for further local support.

In reply to several inquiries, we beg to say that we have heard nothing concerning the subject of the picture "The Eternal March." The artist has not replied to our very simple question, and in its absence we can only assume that what he said to the *Daily Express* stands, and that in his ambiguous letter to us, he was just "pulling the leg" of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

We are very pleased to see in the *Church Times*, a review of Mr. G. D. Nokes' *Crime of Blasphemy*, which is in most respects excellent. The review concludes by saying:—

The Blasphemy law was always a class law, inasmuch as it was never put in force against the sceptic who catered for the educated classes; while it was often employed to worry the low-born or the radical revolutionary. No doubt it is quite proper that the public should be protected against scurrilous attacks on beliefs sincerely held; but this should be done by proper legislation for the purpose. In days like these, the mysteries of the Faith are not proper subjects for proceedings in secular courts.

The first part of the above is quite sound. The latter is puzzling. We do not see why religious beliefs should have any greater measure of protection than other beliefs. It is the root of the distinction on which all law against Blasphemy rests. But if secular courts are not to punish for offences against the "Faith," which court shall? Is it that the *Church Times* has in view the setting up of Church courts, before which the unfortunate blasphemer is to be brought? That would bring us back to the Middle Ages with a jump.

We are asked to announce that Mr. G. Whitehead is to lecture on Sunday, October 28, at the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Mr. Whitehead's subject will be "Religion and War," and we hope to hear of a most successful meeting.

Mr. R. H. Rosetti will speak to-day (Sunday, October 28) at Birmingham, in the Bristol Street Schools. His subject will be "Spiritualism and Science," and the meeting commences at 7 p.m. Mr. Rosetti's subject provides a good opportunity to bring along Spiritualistic friends.

To-day (October 28), Mr. Cohen will lecture twice at Darlington, in the Phoenix Hall. In the afternoon, at 3.0, his subject will be, "The Logic of Life," and in the evening, at 7.30, "Where Religion Fails."

We beg to remind London Freethinkers of the N.S.S. Social which is to take place on Saturday, November 10. Full particulars will be found on the back page of this issue, but we advise all who wish to attend to apply for tickets as early as possible. The gathering is open to all Freethinkers and their friends.

The Conduct of Marcus Aurelius towards the Christians.

(Concluded from page 679.)

As the above account proceeds from Justinus's party, who were notoriously in the habit of perverting facts and of forging documents, it may not represent the truth, or, at least, the whole truth. But, if it be true, then, since Justinus and the rest were indicted under a certain law, and, since they pleaded guilty to the indictment, and even repeated the indicted fact before their judge, it follows that their condemnation to the penalty prescribed by the law was perfectly legal in all respects, and quite inevitable in the natural course of justice. The principal persons implicated in the affair are Justinus, Crescens and Rusticus. The first, as we learn from his own writings, was born at Flavia Neopolis in Palestinian Syria,⁹ *i.e.*, the ancient Sichem in Samaria. He was originally a Pagan, and, after studying philosophy, became a Christian.¹⁰

Eusebius ascribes to him several works designed to convert Pagans, Jews and heretics.¹¹ He taught his faith at Rome, where he met Crescens with whom he held disputations. Eusebius describes Crescens as a Cynic philosopher. Justinus and Tatian accuse him of envy and vindictiveness, to which Tatian adds peduasty and greed. As Justinus taught his religion publicly, and even brought it to the notice of the Emperors, there would not be any need for Crescens to accuse him of Christianity. He may, however, have urged the authorities to take action, and perhaps have supplied them with private information. A Rescript cited by Mr. Long¹² proves that Rusticus, was prefect of Rome, "under the emperors Aurelius and Verus." We have seen that Marcus studied philosophy under Rusticus; that he respected him the most of all his teachers; that he frequented him for civil and military advice; that he appointed him twice to the consulate; and that he paid him signal marks of honour both in life and after death.¹³ Moreover, he says:—

From Rusticus . . . I learned . . . with respect to those who have offended me by words, or done me wrong, to be easily disposed to be pacified and reconciled, as soon as they have shown a readiness to be reconciled. (i. 7.)

A man of this kind would surely judge impartially; and be disposed to give as mild a sentence as the case permitted.

The martyrdom of Polycarp and that of Justinus probably occurred within the period of A.D. 166-168. The next evidence of how matters stood between the Christians and the authorities is furnished by the *Apology* of Melito, Bishop of Sardis. Therein occurs this clause: "that brilliant Roman power of which thou art, and also wilt be, with thy son, the applauded inheritor." Here the omission of reference to Lucius Verus, colleague of Marcus Antoninus, indicates that the *Apology* was written after his death, which transpired in A.D. 169; whilst the phrase, "thou art, and also wilt be, with thy son," by seeming to distinguish between the present, when Marcus is reigning alone, and the future when he will be reigning with his son, apparently indicates a time preceding the elevation of Commodus in A.D. 176¹⁴ to the imperial rank. The tone of the *Apology* is tactful and courteous. The writer complains of a thing without precedent, namely, that religious men in Asia are being persecuted in virtue of "new

edicts," whereby unscrupulous sycophants extort money night and day. If these orders were given by the emperor, well and good. Nevertheless, he is requested to examine the matter. If however, they are not his prescriptions, then all the more earnestly is relief implored. The empire has flourished ever since Christianity began. This prosperity he inherits with his son, if he only protects that religion. Nero and Domitian alone sought to calumniate it. Hadrian and Antoninus Pius intervened by letters to hinder proceedings against its professors. As the emperor himself has the same disposition towards them, or rather one still more philanthropic and rational, it is felt that he will grant these requests.

The above statements offer many difficulties. As the *Apology* ignores Lucius Verus, it could not have appeared less than two years after the proceedings at Smyrna and Pergamum, when Polycarp and others lost their lives. But these towns were near to Sardis of which Melito was bishop. Why then did he wait such a long time before raising his protest? The matter becomes still more obscure, if, as most critics think, the clause "with thy son" qualifies both "art" and "wilt," and therefore means that Commodus was already upon the throne. For this makes the *Apology* later than November 27, 176, the date of his elevation. As Melito thought it without precedent for religious men to be persecuted in Asia, although he knew that Polycarp and others had suffered martyrdom there, some years previously, I conclude that the alleged persecution must have been more or less continuous from the time when Polycarp suffered to the time when Melito wrote. Again, as Melito writes to expose the disastrous effects of "new edicts," I infer that the repression which began with the execution of Polycarp, or a little before this event, proceeded ineffectively for some years under Trajan's Rescript, and then became effective under a new and severer decree, made shortly before the *Apology* of Melito. Hence, it appears that Marcus, finding Trajan's measures insufficient, had issued drastic orders. This is unintentionally confirmed by Melito himself, for although he expresses a diplomatic uncertainty as to whether the "new edicts" had, or had not, come from the emperor, he betrays the insincerity of his doubts by the false assertion that, excepting Nero and Domitian, none of the emperor's predecessors had spoken unfavourably of the Christians. Besides Justinus and Melito, two other apologists, Claudius Apollinaris, bishop of Hierapolis, and Athenagoras, an Athenian philosopher, addressed Marcus, whilst two others, Theophilus, bishop of Antioch,¹⁵ and Minutius Felix,¹⁶ an African lawyer, addressed the general public. These writings evidence the adverse condition of the Christians at that period. The work of Apollinaris is lost, but Eusebius, who mentions its existence, and its address, quotes Apollinaris as referring (apparently therein) to the affair of the Thundering Legion. This, it will be remembered, was the occasion when, in 174, an unexpected shower relieved the thirst of the Roman army, whilst the hail and the lightning, which immediately followed, discomfited the enemy. The Pagans attributed the event to the intercession of Marcus; the Christians to the prayers of their brethren. The work of Athenagoras bears the following inscription:—

The Embassy of Athenagoras the Athenian, a philosopher and a Christian, to the emperors Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and Lucius Aurelius Commo-

⁹ *1 Apol.* c. 1.

¹⁰ *Dia cum Trypho.* c. 2, 3.

¹¹ *H.E.* iv. 18.

¹² p. 12.

¹³ Quote page of this book from place end of Chap. vi.

¹⁴ *Lamp. Com.* 2, 12.

¹⁵ He addresses a certain Autolyceus who is probably fictitious.

¹⁶ Keim's *Celsus' Wahres Wort.* (1873.) p. 151-168.

us, Armeniaci Sarmatici and, above all philosophers.¹⁷

The writer protests that the Christians are falsely accused of bad conduct; and he complains that "it is not just to be punished for the name we bear." He admits that they are in the habit of kissing one another, but declares that "the Word"—meaning Jesus—has forbidden anyone to take more than a single kiss at a time. He also says that, although they have slaves, some more, some less, none of these ever confirmed the accusations alleged—a statement contradicted by other authorities. In conclusion, he praises the excellenc, the moderation, and the humanity of the emperors, and says that the Christians pray for their sovereign, for the security of his son's succession, and for the extention of the empire over the whole world, knowing that public peace and well-being are the best safe-guards of their own liberty. After his reference to the apologies of Melito and Apollinaris, Eusebius declares that in the seventeenth year of the reign of Marcus (*i.e.*, 177), persecution flamed with exceptional violence against the Christians, through popular excitement at towns; and that over the whole world innumerable persons then distinguished themselves by martyrdom. As an illustrative example, he mentions the case of the Christians in the district of Lyons and Vienne, and quotes long extracts from a letter upon the subject, which purports to have been sent by the Churches in question to those of proconsular Asia and Phrygia.

The substance of this document is as follows. Having for some reason or other incurred the odium of their fellow citizens, the Christians could not appear publicly without danger; and at last, after a great outburst against them, they were cast into prison in the absence of the local governor, an Imperial Legate. He, upon his arrival, showed them no mercy. Some died under the conditions of their imprisonment, and two perished in the arena. Those who recanted got no benefit. Finally, the Legate applied to the Emperor for instructions. Marcus answered that persisters in the faith must be slain; but abjurers thereof, released.

The heroine of the letter is Blandina, a slave whose mistress was also among the accused. She is described as being of weak constitution, yet her endurance was such,

that those who successively tortured her from morning to night, were quite worn out with fatigue, and owned themselves conquered and exhausted of their whole apparatus of tortures, and were amazed to see her still breathing whilst her body was torn and laid open. They confessed that any single species of torture would have been sufficient to dispatch her, much more as great a variety as had been applied.

With the other accused, Blandina was now, thrust into the darkest and most noisome parts of the prison: their feet were distended in a wooden frame to the fifth hole; and in this situation they suffered all the indignities which diabolical malice could inflict. Hence many of them were suffocated in prison.

At a special show, arranged for the purpose, two of the accused, Maturus and Sanctus, who had suffered hideous torments, perished at last. Then, in turn, Blandina, suspended from the stake, was exposed to the wild beasts. . . . None of the beasts at that time touched her. She was taken down from the stake, thrown again into prison, and reserved for a future contest.

When this arrived, Blandina and Ponticus, a youth of fifteen, after having witnessed daily the execution

of their companions, were given the chance of recantation, and upon their refusal,

their torments were aggravated by all sorts of methods; and the whole round of barbarities was inflicted.

This proved too much for Ponticus, who, in spite of Blandina's encouragements, gave up the ghost.

And now the Blessed Blandina, after she had endured stripes, the tearing of the beasts, and the (red hot) iron chain, was enclosed in a net, and thrown to a bull; and, having been tossed some time by the animal, and proving quite superior to her pains was at last executed.

Although this blood-curdling story utterly defies common sense, and bears every mark of fiction, yet it has excited the admiration and drawn the tears, not only of the credulous, but also of some from whom a very different conduct might have been expected. In my opinion, the sufferings of Blandina are so plainly impossible that they throw discredit upon the rest of the narrative, and therefore incline me to classify it with the many false Acts of Martyrs invented by the wits of the pious. Still, there remains the possibility that the tale is an exaggerated record of some proceedings which actually occurred. In this case it is certain that Marcus, whom all acknowledge to have been a most thoughtful and humane ruler, would never have proceeded to such extremities unless he had believed them to have been justified by the conduct of the accused. Mr. Long, whose book I had not seen before recording the above verdict, lays stress upon the improbabilities alleged with respect to the martyrdom of Sanctus, and subsequently declares:—

A man can only act consistently by accepting all this letter, or rejecting it all, and we cannot blame him for either. But he who rejects it may still admit that such a letter may be founded on real facts; and he would make this admission as the most probable way of accounting for the existence of the letter: but if, as he would suppose, the writer has stated some things falsely, he cannot tell what part of his story is worthy of credit.

But to this Matthew Arnold justly replies:—

Mr. Long seems inclined to throw doubt over the persecution at Lyons, by pointing out that the letter of the Lyons Christians relating it, alleges it to have been attended by miraculous and incredible incidents. "A man," he says, "can only act consistently by accepting all this letter, or rejecting it all, and we cannot blame him for either." But it is contrary to all experience to say that because a fact is related with incorrect additions and embellishments, therefore, it probably never happened at all; or that it is not, in general, easy for an impartial mind to distinguish between the fact and the embellishments. I cannot doubt that the Lyons persecution took place, and that the punishment of Christians for being Christians was sanctioned by Marcus Aurelius.

What I observed in the case of the letter describing the martyrdom of Polycarp and his friends, applies even more strongly to that describing the martyrdom of Blandina and her companions. The writers must have been either madmen or liars. But here, as there, the probability remains that a very different account was rendered, and that the existing fictions are of later date. The above facts justify the opinion of Mosheim that the Christians experienced unusual severity during the reign of Marcus; and they explain why Bauer thought that this was the first reign in which regular proceedings against them became extensive. The noble character of Marcus, as exemplified in his just and humane administration is so well established that Christian writers never attempted to persue in his case their habitual tactic of

¹⁷ *Supernatural Religion* p. 398-404. Renan *Marcus Aurelius*. c. 22.

calumniating enemies. Indeed, they took the opposite course, and, with the aid of forged documents, sought to prove against the overwhelming force of all the contrary evidence, that he had given them the authority of his wisdom and virtue by favouring their cause! Tertullian says that in consequence of the affair of the Thundering Legion,¹⁸ Marcus wrote "letters" to protect the Christians; and a forged missive of preposterous description, subjoined to Justinus's first *Apology*, and apparently suggested by one ascribed to Nebuchadnezzar,¹⁹ alludes to the same event, and orders that anyone who accuses another of being a Christian, shall, if the accused confess, be burned alive! Orosius, calmly ignoring the authority of Eusebius, represents all the proceedings against the Christians in the reign of Marcus as being anterior to the above episode. Thus, the hostility of Marcus towards the Christians is made all the more impressive by their vain efforts to disguise it.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

A Homily on the Minor Muse.

OH, that mine enemy had written a book! cried Job. But my friend, a local editor, had written a book and passed it on to me for review. Oh, grant me honest fame or grant me none! cried Pope. And even I could not descend to the humdrum hypocrisy of the average review, even to keep the much-coveted countenance of an editor! The result was general homily, rather than particular criticism, which was declined as "too diffuse"; perhaps not laudatory enough; perhaps carrying conviction to the versifier, wholesome for writer and reviewer alike. A modern poetess has warned us: 'Tis dangerous to let loose our love beneath the eternal Fair: To wear, in apt metaphor, the heart on the sleeve. Alas, poor heart; alas, we poor mortals!

Aye free, off-hand your story tell
When wi' a bosom cronie,
But aye keep something to yoursel'
Ye hardly tell to ony.

To give to the world in print one's innermost musings is not to be lightly undertaken. I speak with feeling, for have I not also written a book—of verse—received in my native county with a "thunderous silence" (William Repton). Still there are some things greater than greatness, as Byron felt when he lamented the lost fragrance of youth and its dew of tears:—

As streams in deserts found seem sweet,
All brackish though they be;
So, midst the withered waste of Life,
Those tears would flow to me!

The consolation here is that one who can so sincerely lament is not wholly lost to goodness—and greatness. Burns had his "Regret, remorse and shame"; but we can have too much of this. Better with O. W. Holmes: "Build thou more noble mansions, Oh my soul." Or Tennyson's:—

I hold it truth with him who sings,
To one clear harp in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to better things.

Also, when mere externals fail, there is the sage advice: "Be substantially great in thyself." Yes, this is better; even if our book is still-born it carries its useful lesson. Nor need the world's verdict be final, it may still be the immortal spark is there, or haply reincarnate in homelier prose this "divinity in man!" or elsewhere in the infinity of human qualities.

There is "body" in my friend's book and some good word-building: thoughts on local friends departed, royal and other elegies, belligerent breathings for times of war, with a concluding "lighter vein," in which he almost escapes from a rather cumbersome style. One is irritated with the omission of prepositions, definite and

indefinite articles, etc., and a line like this is hopeless: "And 'tis hard that after service I can't even get my pay." The little more and the little less—infinitesimal pebbles in the shoe of poesy, but the limp is there. For sheer effete inanity, the poems on War are unsurpassable. The War is recalled, when it should be forgotten; praised, when it should be damned. There is talk of "atrocities," when the whole bloody business was one vast atrocity. Surely the "Great War" can only take its place with Wordsworth's:—

"Old, unhappy, far-off things
And battles long ago."

Certain it is, in spite of monumental piety, it was not to "the glory of God"—or man, in spite of its million sacrificial heroisms.

To return to the homily, which is the kindlier, as well as the only possible reflection on "poetry," such as this: It may be repeated that the adjectival forms, "Miner Poet," "Weaver Poet," etc., are inadmissible, even impertinent. The poetry is the thing. Let the man be saved or damned by that, not by his trade, however "lowly." There remains, of course, the Ploughman Poet, whose verse, nevertheless, will recall the soil and the peasant, his poverty, even ignorance for all time. (Some readers may not have heard the shattering pleasantry of Charles Lamb on the Scottish Poet: The talk was on the schools of certain great men. This and the other had been a "Harrow man." So and so was a "Harrow man," etc., but, mildly stuttered Lamb: "B-B-B-Burns was a P-P-P-Plough-man!")

Then we had the Minor Poets by the million—and still they come, ephemera of Parnassus—whose leaves are dust, with which Burns fervently prayed his might mingle in oblivion if unworthy of time's and the world's acclaim.

Most distressing of all, perhaps, is the minor muse who whines only to be pitied; who confesses himself sensible of the great gulf fixed between him and the elect of time and the hour: how like the addresses of social or pious subservience; yet, vain hope, vaguely flattered he may have stumbled upon greatness unaware; for even the poems of Burns, Ingersoll notwithstanding, did not write themselves: like the spring, they came "whispering to the pebbles," or limned themselves, like the woodlands and the skies, in shady, silent pools; But they had to be caught and fixed, filtered and refined, in form and thought and spirit, with that other lesser, but indispensable, faculty for taking pains; even then elusive or abortive, even as in that stupid aphorism:—

Of every noble work, the silent part is best;
Of all expressions, that which cannot be expressed.

With the crude or commonplace of those minor millions, certainly the silent part is best! Happy and heroic the wistful but wise poetaster who realizes his natural restrictions and resigns himself to them, continuing, minus foolish envy and emulation, to "read much good poetry." The best will sustain him, even when not his own. He will rejoice at last in his greatest greatness—or littleness. In all this one is not denying to the unlettered and uninspired muse his right to expression. Gray, who was *not* a minor poet, gives him, in that noble elegaic homily, his due niche in the Temple, not of Fame indeed, but of pathetic and enduring humanity; over the silent dust the tomb:—

With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd.

Why, the great mass of mankind, even of the "learned," are still "uncouth." Criticism would seem too continuously applicable. For peace and poetry of soul we must often content ourselves with homily.

ANDREW MILLAR.

The sense of right grew up among healthy men and was fixed by the practice of comradeship. It has never had help from phantoms and falsehoods, and it never can want any.—*W. K. Clifford.*

Men fear death as children fear to go in the dark: and as that natural fear in children is increased with tales, so is the other.—*Bacon.*

¹⁸ Quote page of this book from place in Chapter x.

¹⁹ *Dan.* iii. 29.

Bee in the Bonnet Conversations.

As a matter of fact they were not conversations, as the Man with the Bee in his Bonnet did all the talking. My portion of the conversations was limited to "Ahs," "Ohs," "indeeds" and occasional remarks which he either did not hear or chose to ignore.

When I annoyed him, he would peer at me through his glasses, remove them, peer at me without them, replace them on his nose and peer at me through them. When I annoyed him extremely he would waggle his glasses at me before replacing them.

III.

"THE LOST TEN TRIBES."

"THE English," said the Man with the Bee in his Bonnet, "are the ten lost tribes of Israel."

"Indeed," I said. "Has it been proved?"

"Conclusively."

"Ah."

"In the first place, we are the Chosen People of the Lord."

"Do the other Peoples agree to that?"

"That has nothing to do with the matter; we are the Chosen People of the Lord."

"Ah."

"When the ten tribes were lost in Babylonia . . ."

"Was it just carelessness on the part of the Babylonians, or did they do it accidentally on purpose, as one breaks Aunt Martha's ugly wedding present?"

". . . they wandered across Europe carrying with them the stone Jacob used as his pillow."

"Ah."

"That stone is the second proof; it is the stone our King sits on to be crowned."

"But that stone belonged to the Scottish, not the English."

"Same thing."

"Neither the Scottish nor the English think so, still let it pass."

The Man with the Bee in his Bonnet took off his glasses and waggled them at me. "If you're going to be frivolous . . ." he said.

"Oh, I'll be good, tell me what the third proof is, please."

"The third proof is the word 'Saxon.'"

"Saxon?"

"Obviously. It's a corruption of Isaacson."

"Ah."

"The fourth proof is the distribution of the Bible. What nation prints and distributes the greatest number of Bibles? The English. What nation has translated the Bible into the greatest number of languages? The English. That is because the Bible is our book. Why did the Jews refuse to acknowledge Jesus? Because he really came for us and not for them. Why are we all Christians? Because we are the Chosen People of the Lord."

"Then we are really Jews."

"Certainly not. The Jews are quite different; they are the two not lost tribes of Benjamin."

"But would not the fact that we are a commercial people, go to prove that we are Jews?"

"I have told you that we are not Jews, we are the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, which is quite another thing."

"Ah."

"I will bring you the last number of . . . I have forgotten the name of the paper, but it is published to prove that we are the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel."

"Thank you. Does it?"

"Does what, what?"

"Does the paper prove that we are the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel?"

"Conclusively!"

"To people who don't think we are, or only to those who do think we are?"

"Oh, of course, if you have made up your mind not to believe, nothing will make you. Good-bye."

ETHEL BREE.

Correspondence.

CLERICAL HONESTY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—To one with no education except such as was available in the "seventies" to the children of manual labourers, and such evening classes as then existed, it is, even after a life of observation and experience, most difficult to determine whether such men as Lord Halifax, Dean Inge, Bishop Barnes, and others are as well educated and informed as their speeches and lectures would lead one to believe.

If they must be taken at their face value in their representations of Christian doctrine, it can only be concluded that they do not possess sufficient strength of intellect to dissociate themselves from erroneous and blind beliefs into which they have grown and lived, and that they are unable to accept facts disclosed by modern knowledge, facts which to untrammelled minds appear to be as clear as the evidence of our senses.

If, on the other hand, they are capable of appreciating facts and modern knowledge, the only conclusion is that they are insincere and hypocritical; and so long as a wealthy Church can and will provide them with a fat mess of pottage, they are willing to play a game on their ignorant supporters.

If these men are as anxious over the education of the common people as they profess to be, if they are desirous of raising the national, municipal, commercial and political moral standards, they will cease to preach obviously untrue beliefs about the salvation of souls, a subject, I have no hesitation in saying, they know nothing about, any more than does the present writer.

Bishops are fond of saying that the Church was the organization that first provided education, but modern education has gone farther than they like, and at the present time they are being left behind in the advancement of knowledge.

Your own leading articles, and others in your journal, seem to gain a fascinating interest because they appear to be founded in fact and knowledge, though the present writer has always, so far as he may possess any ability, endeavoured to scrutinize them by critical thought, with the memory of Christian teaching, and surrounded by Christian friends who have kindly prayed for his salvation—after he is dead.

There was a Door to which I found no key;
There was a Veil past which I could not see:
Some little Talk awhile of Me and Thee
There seem'd—and then no more of Thee and Me.

And that inverted Bowl we call the sky,
Whereunder crawling coop't we live and die,
Lift not thy hands to It for help—for It
Rolls impotently on as thou or I.

Omar Khayyam.

Yet these Bishops and clergy will persist in babbling over matters founded on the wildest speculations of life, individual life, after death; founded upon the writings of men whose knowledge was less than their own, and whose teachings are now known to be false, to be as false as those Spiritists who make a religious fetish of their demonstrations, often covered by fraud, which, if true, should be left for scientific inquiry and revelation.

CINE CERE.

CURRENT RELIGION.

SIR,—Sunday being the most holy and consequently the most deadly dull day of the week in Birmingham, one occasionally seeks amusement and "enlightenment" in the press. On these occasions the most prominent article usually consists of the poignant details of some recent sensational murder, divorce evidence, religious stunt or other entertaining matter which the Christians of this country seem to revel in. Last week the chief news was most illuminating, as the latest American exports included a 1928 model Evangelist, who was determined to drive the devil out of England in six weeks, although Jesus Christ with his teachings and teachers has not succeeded in doing so in 2,000 years. The

American films are bad enough, but this country must not be made a dumping ground for old and obsolete gramophone records. Glancing at the press to-day, however, one is struck by something more serious than a canting evangelist. Quite recently we have some real proofs of the goodness and justice of God as illustrated by the great rail catastrophe which had just occurred. Side by side with the description of the horrors and gruesome accounts of the moans and shrieks of the injured and dying, one can read of a "miracle" at the shrine of a Scottish Saint (to be). Surely God would have been better employed in preventing these accidents, but maybe he is annoyed, and this is a demonstration of his wrath. After all we have all got to die some time, and it should be immaterial to Christians whether they die in bed or are smashed and mangled in a train wreck. What does it matter if one's flesh is burnt from the bones or one's features are so distorted as to be unrecognizable? God will recognize our souls and judge accordingly. No doubt he will in his mercy restore some of the limbs lost in these horrible results of his negligence. Our spiritual Fathers tell us that all these horrors and miseries are an outcome of the imperfections of our God-made ancestor—Adam. Maybe Adam did sin, but then he was a man and not like Jesus Christ a member of the Trinity. Anyhow, if this is the Christian idea of justice, Satan preserve us!

I see also that services and prayers have been offered for the preservation of the Graf Zeppelin. If it reaches safety no doubt the clergy will thank God for his goodness in answering their prayers—that is the Christian hypocrisy.

LOUIS F. ROBERTS.

Society News.

MR. J. CLAYTON'S MEETINGS.

MR. CLAYTON addressed three meetings on Sunday. In the morning he lectured to the North Street Spiritualist Church, taking as his subject, "The Birth of a Soul." The lecture was listened to with close attention. Afterwards, a few questions were asked. There was no opposition, the case put by Mr. Clayton being admittedly too formidable for the critics. In the afternoon Mr. Clayton lectured at Burnley Market Ground, and in the evening at Todmorden, both meetings being very satisfactory.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH.

At the St. Pancras Reform Club, last Sunday, Mr. H. Cutner gave an address on "Socialism and the Working Man." The main point of the lecture was that it was hopeless to get any idea from Socialists as to the exact position of the worker under the new regime. A vigorous discussion followed, leaving the position exactly as it was before the debate.

To-day (October 28), Mr. R. B. Kerr will lecture on "Labour's Illusions." Mr. Kerr is an exceptionally brilliant and provocative speaker, and should attract a large audience.

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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.

HAMPSTEAD ETHICAL INSTITUTE (The Studio Theatre, 59 Finchley Road, N.W.8) : 11.15, Mr. R. Dimsdale Stocker—"H. G. Wells' 'Blue Prints for a World Revolution.'" Tuesday, October 30, at 8 p.m.—Debate at 41 Cholmley Gardens, N.W.6 (by kind permission of Mrs. Elkan) : Mr. R. D. Stocker, on "H. G. Wells' 'Blue Prints for a World Revolution.'" "

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W.) : 7.30, Mr. R. B. Kerr—"Labour's Illusions."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (30 Brixton Road, S.W., near Oval Station) : 7.15, Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe (President M.S.S.)—"Equal Wages for All?"

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.) : Free Sunday Lectures. G. F. Holland—"The Greatness of Little Things."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (The London Institution Theatre, South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2) : 11.0, S. K. Ratcliffe—"Al' Smith and Herbert Hoover."

THE NON-POLITICAL METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY ("The Orange Tree" Hotel, Euston Road, N.W.1) : 7.30, Mr. Bonar Thompson—"What think ye of Christ?"

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Eclipse Restaurant, 4 Mill Street, Conduit Street, W.1) : 7.30, Mr. Campbell-Everden—"Historicity."

OUTDOOR.

FULHAM AND CHELSEA BRANCH N.S.S. (corner of Shorrolds Road, North End Road, Walham Green) : Every Saturday at 8 p.m. Speakers—Messrs. Campbell-Everden, Bryant, Mathie and others.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Clapham Common) : 11.30, Mr. L. Ebury—A Lecture.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park) : 12 noon, Mr. James Hart; 3.30, Mr. B. A. Le Maine. Freethought meetings every Wednesday and Friday at 7.30. Various lecturers. The *Freethinker* is on sale outside Hyde Park during our meetings.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Ravenscourt Park, Hammersmith) : 3.0, Mr. W. P. Campbell-Everden.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BELFAST (Proposed) Branch N.S.S. (48 York Street) : 3.0, Mr. Lascelles—"The Philosophy of Secularism."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Bristol Street Council Schools) : 7.0, Mr. R. H. Rosetti—"Spiritualism and Science." Admission free. Collection.

CHESTER-LE-STREET BRANCH N.S.S. (Phoenix Hall, Darlington) : 3.0 and 7.30, Mr. Chapman Cohen. Subjects : "Religion and the Logic of Life," and "Where Religion Fails." Railway excursion to Darlington from Newcastle, Durham, Willington and Brandon Colliery. For particulars, see handbills at stations.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY, Branch of the N.S.S. (No. 2 Room, City Hall) : 6.30, Mr. John Grant—"The Index of Prohibited Books."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate) : 6.30, Mr. George Whitehead—"Religion and War." Admission free. Discussion and Questions. Collection.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (18 Colquitt Street, off Bold Street) : 7.30, Dr. Carmichael—"The Freethought Position." Admission free. Collection.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Engineers Hall, 120 Rusholme Road) : 3.0 and 6.30, Miss Stella Browne (London). Subjects : "A New Code of Sexual Ethics," and "The Right to Abortion."

OUTDOOR.

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