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Letters to the Editor, etc.

Views and Opinions.

Leaving Religion Alone.

APROPOS of some comments in our issue of February 24, dealing with a review of my *Four Lectures on Freethought and Life*, I received the following from the writer of the review:—

SIR,—I was much interested to see the remarks in your current issue on my review of *Four Lectures on Freethought and Life*. May I point out that the review appeared in *The Harrogate Herald*, and not *The Harrogate Journal* as is stated?

As you had no objection in publishing extracts from the review, you will doubtless allow me space for a further explanation of the point of view taken in it.

If Mr. Cohen has "made up his mind to expose falsehood whenever he sees it," he might take a look at a play of Ibsen's, called "The Wild Duck," in which, if I remember rightly, there is depicted a gentleman who made precisely the same resolve. We imagine a race of men free from all delusions, comforting or otherwise, and it would be glorious indeed for such a race to inhabit the earth. But it would be a race of Super-men and not of men; and the time of the Superman is not yet. I myself have no more belief in "personal immortality" than Mr. Cohen. I'm not sure that I want to live "after death"; and as for living for ever, I haven't the faintest conception of what "for ever" means. But I would not spend one half hour of my time in labouring to destroy the idea of immortality in anyone's head. If I saw that more than two or three men in a million had nowadays sufficient faith in that idea to persuade them to under-rate the value of Life, or otherwise to work mischief, it might be different. If a man cannot find anything better to do in this world of boundless possibilities than to indulge in endless arguments as to whether he is going to live for ever or not, I think I am right in saying he is in the grip of an obsession, whether he is a Bishop or an Atheist.

I don't think the review could give anyone the impression that I was "angry" at anything that Mr. Cohen's extremely able series of essays contained.

DENZIL, ENGLAND.

First of all, I must express my regret that I read into the review a feeling which the writer repudiates, and I readily accept his correction. Nor should I have followed up the matter, further than by publishing the letter, but for the fact that he expresses certain things which are not at all uncommon with critics of Freethought propaganda. On that head his letter invites comment.

* * *

Free Speech for All.

I wrote my comments with two points in view. First, the remark that the *Four Lectures* were written under the obsession of a desire to destroy everything that I did not think absolutely true; second, that it was unwise to level destructive criticism at the belief in immortality, although such freedom might be advisable in the case of a leading scientist such as Sir Arthur Keith. With regard to the first, I certainly do not make it my business to expose falsehood whenever I see it, desirable as I think that would be wherever the falsehood is not of that harmless kind which provides satirists with much of their material, and does little harm because everybody recognizes its quality. But life is too short, and serious lies too numerous for me to spend my time in exposing them all. It is enough for me to expose the lie of religion, with such passing comments as are possible on other lies. So far as the second point is concerned, I certainly do not see that a freedom which is granted to Sir Arthur Keith may not be given me. I take it that I know as much, and have always known as much, as any living person about a life beyond a grave. As to the dead, if one may judge from spiritualistic communications, my information about another world is as reliable as theirs, even though it may not be so fanciful. Of course, if it were a question of the structure of the brain, or the antiquity of man, I would cheerfully defer to the opinions of Sir Arthur Keith. He is an authority on these questions, and I am not. But, if I may say it without undue conceit, I am as much an authority on the belief in a future life as he is; and the admitted duty that devolves on him to say what he thinks about a soul and a future life, falls also upon every man and woman who has made any careful study of the subject. Such statements should not be confined to persons who have sworn to say only certain things about religion, long before they knew anything of the subject, and to simpletons of all ages and classes who talk without any information whatever.

* * *

A Positive Programme.

I am glad to find that my critic agrees with me in not believing in immortality, and even approaches me in not desiring it. For my part, so long as one conceives the implications of eternal life, I can consider nothing more horrible. It is welcomed only because

people have been taught to be afraid to die, and because they have never really considered what it means. Where I join issue is on the statement made in the last paragraph but one of his letter. Probably without intending it, Mr. England does the "Four Lectures" an injustice. Only one lecture of the four deals with an after life, and that does more than merely point out the absurdity of the belief. It shows, or attempts to show, the manner in which the social side of man's nature is deliberately misunderstood and exploited in the interests of a belief in a soul, the origin of which is traced back to the "psychological blunder" made by primitive mankind. If what I say is correct, it gives those who accept my explanation a better and truer understanding of human nature, and indicates the road to a more satisfactory development of life in the interests of society as a whole. I gather from Mr. England's remarks that he would not seriously disagree with that statement, he merely questions whether it is worth while making it. And on that head I would be content to put to him, and to others, the question: "How are we intelligently to work for the realization of the 'boundless possibilities' of human society in the absence of an understanding of the qualities and possibilities of human nature itself?"

It is at this point that Mr. England does an injustice to what he is good enough to call my "extremely able series of essays." For of the other three lectures, the first is wholly positive, and makes a plea for the exercise of the free and unfettered use of reason in all matters, and in the interests of a better social life. It asks for honesty and intelligence in political and social life, and deals with the function of free informed thinking in social affairs. The second essay, dealing with the belief in God, has for its main thesis, not the mere disproof of the truth of that belief, but the social and other causes that have led to its perpetuation. The fourth lecture contains a criticism of the religious conception of the nature of morals, and then deals with the natural, and social, basis of morality, and indicates the only sane method of development in morality. On the whole, I make the claim that Mr. England would find it rather difficult to select any four essays of equal length dealing with these subjects, which contain a greater amount of positive and constructive work. And if that work is a waste of time, then any attempt to understand human nature, its possibilities and probabilities, is a waste of time also.

* * *

Obstructive Religion.

I quite agree that if not more than two or three men in a million were to be found wasting their time on the belief in immortality, and if not more than that number permitted their religious beliefs to interfere with their view of life, it would be idle to spend time in disproving religious beliefs. If Mr. England were better acquainted with my work he would know I have often said that, intrinsically, the whole circle of Christian beliefs is not worth an hour's serious consideration. But the depressing fact is that there are millions of men and women who think otherwise; and, moreover, this particular belief in a future life is only one—a very important one—of a cluster of beliefs that go to make up the whole of religion. Has not the expenditure of some thirty millions a year on religion some bearing, for good or ill, on our social life? Is not the activity of some sixty or seventy thousand preachers in the country some bearing on the present state of Society? Let Mr. England seriously set himself to work on fundamental social reforms, and see how long he will be before he finds himself up against religious convictions, the truth of which he will have to concede, tacitly at least, and

therefore find his aims frustrated, or must fight and destroy before he is able to proceed with his work. If he aims at municipal or parliamentary honours he will be almost forced into mental dishonesty to realize his aim. As a working journalist, he will find it impossible to get editors to admit any honest criticism of religion. I question whether his own paper, while willing enough to print advocacies of Christianity, would dare to publish any direct challenge to its claims. If he is in a small way of business he will find it expensive to be honest. If he works to get the "Day of Rest" spent in a healthy manner, to open the way for healthy entertainment for such as wish it, to open the public playing grounds for the children and the youth of the nation, he will find he is up against Christian Sabbatarianism. If he is interested in education, he will find the parsons with their religious quarrels blocking the way. If he wishes intelligently to revise the marriage laws, he will find Christian beliefs almost the only obstacle blocking his path. He will find Churches and Chapels demanding preferential treatment, relief from taxation, and the protection of the law for their peculiar opinions. On a wider survey he will find all over Europe that where reaction requires a helping hand it is to religion the reactionary turns for assistance. Will Mr. England seriously state that the beliefs of millions of Roman Catholics, who obey without hesitation or question the orders of the most reactionary priesthood in the world, make no difference to their value as citizens? Would it make no difference to life if all the Methodists, and Presbyterians, and Salvationists, and other odds and ends of the Christian world dropped their religious beliefs and studied life from the standpoint of social welfare alone? Will he say that if all the time and energy spent in fighting religious obstruction to science had been expended in grappling with the problems with which science deals, that we should not now be nearer the realization of those "boundless possibilities" than we are to-day? Religious beliefs may be harmful or beneficial; on either ground there is room for reasonable debate, but to treat them as negligible is surely the strangest kind of a delusion with which one may be obsessed—and ultimately, the most costly one.

* * *

Can We Leave Religion Alone?

I could say something—probably a lot—on the value to the race of the mere love for truth and the thirst for knowledge, as such, without any regard whatever for what is called its practical value. I do not suppose for a moment that the man who first discovered how to make a fire was hunting for some method of cooking food or lighting up his cave, or that the man who first noticed the power of steam was bothering about how to get a quick method of travel. Neither have those who have stood out for justice in social affairs been consciously aiming at an immediate value. It would not seriously have harmed Hampden to have paid the ship money demanded by Charles; and if Freethinkers had not possessed a better sense of truth than the Christians around them, they would have gone on taking an oath that was to them meaningless. Science has been built up by men whose first thought was knowledge at all costs; and social righteousness owes nearly everything to the men who put "practical" considerations on one side, but who would have truth and justice whatever happened, and struck at falsehood and injustice wherever they saw it.

That line of argument would, however, take too long to pursue. I am content to submit that we cannot afford to let religion alone. And we cannot let religion alone, because religion will not let us

alone. The plea to let it alone is, too, usually made by those who are afraid to attack it—by the politician, the journalist, the man who in any way is dependent upon the support of public opinion. For I find that the man who says that religion ought to be let alone does not mean that nothing must be said in its support, he means that nothing must be said against it. For my part I can only say what I have said in the "Four Lectures," namely that religion touches life at too many points, it serves as a buttress for too many institutions and for too many interests, it acts as warranty for too many prejudices and a support for too many injustices, for any man who takes an intelligent view of social evolution to leave it alone. Religion can only be let alone when it is dead. That is why I should be very pleased indeed were I able, one day, to leave it alone.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Smile of Rabelais.

"Laughter is the prerogative of humanity."

Rabelais.

"I class Rabelais with the great, creative minds of the world.—Coleridge.

"Rough work, iconoclasm, but the only way to get at truth."—Holmes.

SOME innocents imagine that men and women of letters exert little or no influence in politics and upon politicians, in statesmanship and upon statesmen. It is a fond illusion. What far-reaching influence did not Rousseau exert in world-politics? Instead of being a voice crying in the wilderness, his was the most potent voice in Europe of his day. The question is suggested by the issue of a cheap edition of Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, with an Introduction by D. B. Wyndham Lewis, in the popular "Everyman Library." For Rabelais has a double claim on the attention of reformers and lovers of literature.

French literature is one blaze of splendid scepticism from Abelard to Anatole France, and the name of Rabelais is one of the greatest in this heroic bea-roll. The popular idea of Rabelais coincides with Pope's famous line depicting the great writer "laughing in his easy chair." He is often pictured as one who laughs and mocks at all things, a hog for appetite, a monkey for tricks. His genius has baffled many, and he has been described as a great teacher, a grossly obscene writer, a buffoon, a Catholic, a Protestant, and a Freethinker. To paint him as a moralist is to ignore the drollery of his character. To set him up as a clown is to forget the reality underlying his writings.

To treat Rabelais as destitute of seriousness in art or life is a great error. Whatever Rabelais may have been, he was not a trifler. He had seen ecclesiastical life from the inside, and he hated priests. He studied Greek when it was a forbidden language, and was an enthusiastic student when scholars carried their lives in their hands. His zeal for intellectual freedom, untrammelled by priestcraft, entitles him to rank with Erasmus and Von Hutten as an apostle of humanism.

Of middle-class parentage, Francois Rabelais was born in the fifteenth century, near the lovely little city of Chinon, on the Vienne. Always he regarded Touraine, its cities, rivers, and vineyards, with affection. "Noble, ancient, the first in the world," so he called it in the fulness of his admiration. His father, an innkeeper, wished to make him a priest. Accordingly, little Francois was sent at nine years of age to the Benedictine monks at Scully, so young that the white vestment was put over the child's frock. Later he was removed to the Franciscan

monastery at Fontenoy le Comte. The Franciscan vows included ignorance as well as celibacy and poverty. For fifteen years he remained there, taking priest's orders at the age of twenty-eight. Always inquisitive, he amassed that encyclopædic knowledge which he put to so excellent a use in his immortal *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.

It is to this long period among the bigoted, narrow, intolerant sons of the Catholic Church that we owe his undying hatred of priestcraft. It breaks out in nearly every page that he wrote, here passionately, there sorrowfully, with a cry of rage, a sob of pain, or a mocking laugh of *sanglante derision*. He hated the "monk-birds" more bitterly than even Erasmus, for his nature was stronger.

At the age of forty he came into the world a free man, at liberty to study, enthusiastic for knowledge. He threw aside the monastic habit, and became Secretary to the Bishop of Marlelzeais. Afterwards he went to the University of Montpellier with the object of getting a medical degree. When he attended the lectures he was within sight of his fiftieth year, and sat by the side of men young enough to be his sons. Two years later he became physician to the Lyons Hospital. His friend Etienne Dolet, the Freethinker, was a printer in the town.

Rabelais' connexion with the first reformers of France is certain; the extent difficult to determine. He had no desire for the martyr's crown, and he never contemplated following Calvin into exile, or Berguin to the stake. As he humourously explained, he was "too thirsty to like fire." His sympathies, too, were antagonistic to all dogmas. "Presbyter," to him, "was but priest writ large." Luther and Calvin were as bigoted in their way as the priests they opposed. The Society of Des Perriers, Dolet, and the Lyonnais Freethinkers, was more congenial to his habits and thought. Moreover, he had an intimate knowledge of the power of the Catholic Church, and the extent of its malignity.

Heretics were then handed over to the secular arm to be burnt for the good of their souls, and the greater glory of God. Rabelais did not intend, if he could help it, to be butchered to make a Roman holiday. When he was denounced as a heretic, he challenged his enemies to produce an heretical proposition from his writings. They were unequal to the task, but, nevertheless, the heresy was there. Rabelais' caution was necessary if he wished to live. Some of his contemporaries suffered severely for heresy. Dolet was burnt to death, Des Perriers was hounded to suicide, Marot was a half-starved wanderer in Piedmont. Men had not forgotten how Giordano Bruno had been done to death in the accepted Roman manner. Rabelais had many reasons for not ardently desiring to be "saved by fire."

His writings, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, which have kept his memory green throughout the ages, are a series of satires in a vein of riotous and uproarious mirth on monks, priests, pedants, and all the solecisms of his time. With all their licentiousness and freedom of language, they reveal Rabelais' love of liberty, and desire for the triumph of truth and justice.

It has been said with truth that Rabelais despised women. Remember, he did not write till an age when the passion of youth had consumed itself to ashes. Love was killed in Rabelais by that hateful system of monkery which has filled Christendom with unspeakable horrors. Half of humanity was anathema to him. The damnable monkish discipline surrounded Rabelais from the time he wore a child's frock till he was a man of forty. He had no more respect for women than an eunuch in an Eastern seraglio. Nay, more, there had even been crushed

out of him that love for his mother which characterizes every Frenchman worthy of the name. Poor Rabelais! The priests spoiled his life. Originally, his nature must have been different, witness those exquisite chapters in which he describes the monks of Thelema, whose motto was "Liberty."

Rabelais went further than contempt for the trumpery trappings of the Christian Religion, and he rejected it. He hoped to cure the evil of religion by spreading knowledge, by bringing priestcraft into contempt, by widening the boundaries of thought. It was his desire that his writings should be read. To read rationalistic thought is to think rationally, and is the first step toward Freethought. Rabelais knew as much as any man of his time, but he carried his weight of learning with a smile. Liberty was Rabelais' sovereign specific for the ills of his time. Finding his contemporaries bound with chains of their own manufacture, it was his life-purpose to break the fetters and set them free. MIMNERMUS.

Religious Fanaticism.

A BOOK entitled *Religious Fanaticism*, by Ray Strachey (Faber and Gwyer. 12s. 6d.), throws a flood of light upon some perplexing problems of American history, both of the past and the present; in the past, regarding the sudden rise and rapid progress of Spiritualism in America in the middle of the nineteenth century; and in the present, the phenomena of Fundamentalism which is such a feature of some of the Western States.

The book consists of extracts from the papers of Hannah Whitall Smith, edited, with an "Introduction," by Mrs. Ray Strachey. The Introduction is the longest part of the book, consisting of 125 pages out of the total of which the book consists; it gives an account of Hannah Whitall Smith, and also an account of the many curious and astounding religious sects and communities of America during the early and middle years of the nineteenth century.

Hannah Whitall Smith was born of Quaker parents, at Philadelphia, in 1832. We are told that:—

The great interest of her life was her search for religious truth, and in the course of this great adventure she wandered into strange places and met with strange men. Always, from first to last, she looked for good rather than evil, and believed that something of value might be anywhere revealed. She approached all creeds and all believers in a perfectly simple and straightforward hope that the Lord might be speaking through them, and although her hope was constantly frustrated, and her trust continually shaken, she never lost her conviction that the false prophets and the wild cranks of her acquaintance were more mistaken than wicked, more deluded than deliberately deceitful. (p. 11.)

Between the years 1890 and 1900, she put together the *Fanaticism Papers* published in this book, telling her children: "You must not publish them until after I am dead, nor until all the people I mention are dead. But then I think they ought to be published. It won't hurt any of us when we're dead to have it all known, though it would cause a lot of trouble now." (p. 16.)

Hannah followed with great interest the careers of many of the religious cranks and fanatics who founded these mushroom sects and communities, many of which soon died a natural death because they were incompatible with human nature. She made a great collection of newspaper cuttings, tracts, and pamphlets showing their delusions, and stored them in a large wooden chest. In 1911, Hannah died, and for some years the chest remained un-

opened. In 1916, an attempt was made to issue them, but no publisher would take the risk of publishing them; the subject being, they said, too unpleasant, and the papers too outspoken. However, by 1927 public opinion had advanced in this respect since the Great War, and this objection disappeared; but as Mrs. Ray Strachey observes, events have moved so rapidly since the war, and society has so changed, that things which were well understood and taken for granted when the papers were written, are now forgotten and ignored, so she has given some account of the sects and religious peculiarities of America at that time, to show the background out of which her experiences arose. She also points out, "the fact that delusions, deceptions and religious maniacs continue to flourish to this day. The sects and aberrations of half a century ago seem wild and outrageous now, and well nigh incredible; but they can be paralleled quite closely by recent examples . . . Every creed has had fantastic variants, and the number of strange sects has been enormous; for the human mind seems to love mystery, enchantment and excess. If the field of religious aberration is vast, however, and if the phenomena it presents are staggering, they are not difficult to understand. For there is much similarity in the manifestations of different ages, and the same problems, and the same solutions recur again and again." (pp. 19-20.)

The Nonconformist Churches are never tired of telling how the heroic Pilgrim Fathers set off across the ocean to a land where they could worship God after their own fashion. A land where liberty of conscience was allowed. What they really wanted, however, was liberty of conscience to worship how they pleased and to make everyone else worship in the same way; for, as Mrs. Strachey observes:—

They brought with them a burning flame of religious excitement, and were as full of the zeal of persecution as the ecclesiastical authorities from which they had escaped. Religious cruelties in seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were as natural in the new lands as in the old, and the men and women who had left their homes for Christ's sake expelled heretics from their midst, and even burnt and hanged them with a holy joy, firmly believing that everyone who did not share their convictions would be damned. (pp. 22-23.)

The multitude of wild and freakish sects that now began to arise was such, says our author, as "The world has never seen its like before, and probably never will again." Although the Pilgrim Fathers had power to persecute heretics in their own community, and where they happened to be strong enough to impose their beliefs upon others, still there was no over-ruling state church like those of Rome, or England, to oppose the multitude of new sects that now arose. As Mrs. Strachey observes: "Men, if they were strong enough, and rebellious enough, could make their way against the uniform pattern of the time, and attract adherents and followers. And when they did so, there was nothing external to stop them short. There was room enough for new experiments, and there was credulity and ignorance enough too, so that America for all its conformity, offered a field for strange and wild social and religious theories, in which the bold and adventurous could sow what seeds they chose. In the early and middle years of the nineteenth century, queer crops grew up from these sowings. The tale of their planting and their ripening is strange; their harvest, when it came, was sorrow and disillusion; and it would have been better had the seed fallen by the wayside for the birds of the air to devour." (pp. 28-29.)

Apart from the Quakers and Puritans, the first

religious vagaries to find a footing in America came from Germany—peasant sects with Anabaptist tendencies, spasmodically persecuted at home for their beliefs. These Mennonites, or "Brethren of the Free Spirit" as they called themselves, were divided into several groups, the most important of which was the Amish who came to be known as the "Hookers," because they had a scruple about wearing buttons, and fastened their clothes with hooks.

W. MANN.

(To be continued.)

"Good Sense" and B. D. Cousins.

I HAVE been fortunate enough to trace the history of the first English edition of the *Bon Sens* of the Curé Meslier. This edition was the one issued by Richard Carlile, and its journey through the press may be followed in Volume xiii. of *The Republican*.

On page 1 of this volume (January 6, 1826) Carlile writes: "The first book [i.e., of the newly-formed Joint Stock Book Company] which is the 'Bon Sens; or, Good Sense of the Curé Meslier,' was put into the hands of the printer on Friday last, and it will be proceeded with, with all the rapidity that a careful revision and printing will admit, in an office, as yet, rather too small for the work required to be done in it."

The first book issued by the Company was, however, Hammon's *Answer to Dr. Priestley's Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, which appeared, according to *The Republican*, in February, 1926.

There are several further references to the forthcoming issue of *Good Sense* in succeeding numbers of *The Republican*, but the only one I need quote is the one in the number for March 27. It runs: "The book entitled *Good Sense* has gone on but slowly, in consequence of the labour which a gentleman has imposed upon himself, to read the American translation by the French copy, and to mend the Americanisms and the inelegant English with which it abounds. This task is little short of a new translation."

The Republican for April 28 announces that, "after encountering many unavoidable delays," *Good Sense* was ready. The price was 'Five shillings in boards.'

Volume xiv. of *The Republican* mentions, in the issue dated July 28, 1826, that "*Queen Mab* and *Good Sense* are the best selling books which the company has printed." The issue for December 29 gives the information that the edition consisted of one thousand copies, whereof one hundred and fifty had up till then been sold.

There is no doubt whatever that Carlile's edition preceded the one published by Cousins, about whom I can give a little information.

Between 1832 and 1841, at least (and most probably for longer), B. D. Cousins' address was Duke Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields; in June, 1832, he left No. 14 for No. 18. For this information I am indebted to *The Isis*, which, in its imprint for June 9, 1832, records the change. Later, he removed to Helmet Court, Strand. My copy of Cousins' edition of *Good Sense* is published from Helmet Court, 337½ Strand. The imprint says, "338 Strand."

Cousins seems to have inherited or acquired some, at least, of the Carlile "good-will," for many items originally issued by that imperturbable pioneer appear in Cousins' catalogue. He was a most "faithful" producer, giving Carlile's text with absolute fidelity, even obvious misprints being followed.

At least five "advanced" periodicals were printed by Cousins: *The Isis* (1832); *The Antichrist* (1833); *The Crisis* (1834); *The Shepherd* (circa 1836-8); *Legends and Miracles* (1837).

The following quotation is from J. M. Wheeler's *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers*:—

Mitchell (Logan), author of Lectures published as *The Christian Mythology Unveiled*. This work was also issued under the title *Superstition Besieged*. It is said that Mitchell committed suicide in November, 1841. He left, by his will, £500 to any bookseller who had the courage to publish his book. It was first published by

B. Cousins (*sic*), and was republished in '81.

I have reason to believe, on excellent evidence, that Cousins was in business until the early 'fifties of last century; but these ramblings of a bibliomaniac must already have wearied you and your readers.

For further information I can refer you to my friend, Mr. A. G. Barker, of Walthamstow, who probably knows more about popular English Freethought publications than anyone in the world.

VICTOR B. NEUBURG.

Hell in the United States.

(Concluded from page 141.)

NATURALLY, the peace of God was not increased by these constructive criticisms nor by the occasional stock retort from the more spirited Universalist theologians that the orthodox had been deceived in the object of their adorations and were actually worshipping the Devil. In time clashes took place not only between verbal controversialists in the bar-rooms and opposing battalions of holy scandal-mongers over the tea-tables, but between definitely pugilistic champions of the God of Wrath and the God of Excessive Mercy on the public streets.

In time, as it was observed that the Universalists beat no more board hills and ravished no more virgins than members of the Hell-dedicated sects, these martial ardors abated. To be sure, the Universalist doctrine got worse, and in 1818 the majority of the sect abandoned even the principle of a regenerative Hell for the belief that "you get it on earth" and, at dissolution, through Christ's sacrifice, leap directly from your career of crime into bliss everlasting. Nevertheless, so far as the superficial amenities were concerned, the sect by the 1830's was being treated with almost as much respect as the Unitarians.

In a cheerful book called *Doom Eternal*, the Rev. Dr. Junius P. Reimensnyder urged his fellow citizens . . . not to forget that "the most direful portraiture of Hell have fallen from the lips of our gentle, pitiful and exquisitely sensitive Lord Himself." For God to keep a universe going in which anything less than His Son's sacrifice was efficacious to cleanse it of sin would be, he insisted, a confession of failure in Omnipotence. He lashed out at the pseudo-gentle and refined spirit of the age which, merely because it was too queasy-minded to look the Bible's "harrowing . . . and revolting" Hell-fire language in the face, proposed to turn God into a doddering sentimentalist incapable of seeing through the job of divine justice. Worst of all, he threatened that, if Protestantism showed any "false charity to these negative movements," it would drive sincere yearners for faith to Rome where, with all the notorious vices of the Pope and College of Cardinals, faith at least was absolute.

One of Reimensnyder's allies in the stick-to-Hell movement was the Rev. Dr. Nehemiah Adams of Boston, who conceivably had experienced some leanings toward the sentimentalized Nineteenth Century Deity himself. In 1878, to confirm himself in the faith he wrote *The Scriptural Argument for Future Endless Punishment*. This was fundamentally a plea that although Adams understood how natural it was for tender-hearted Americans to associate angels with elves, flowers and fairies, he preferred to remember that the angelic host had slain 185,000 of Senaccherib's soldiers in a single night and "to correct my natural or acquired feelings by the word of God." God, as a matter of fact, said Adams in his reassuring climax, was really a more terrible divinity in the New Testament than the Old, since before the divine atonement He had occasionally relented with the Jews, but could not be expected to do so after trying to discourage natural depravity by sacrificing His Son. If you didn't believe this, urged Adams, just sit down for a while with the ablest damnation utterance of Jesus, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire" and try to imagine what kind of a Divine Saviour you had if He didn't mean a curse when He said it.

In the same period in Wisconsin, not yet the Progressives' holy ground, the Rev. John P. Gulliver, D.D., in *Law and Penalty Endless in an Endless Universe*, gave

forth the somewhat novel illumination that the nation's straying from the paths of Hell-secured salvation might be due to the decline of faith in a personal Devil. The Devil with all his faults, Gulliver reasoned, was the sole personage in the cosmos responsible for keeping us out of Hell at all. For if Eve had eaten the apple in Eden entirely of her own volition, God would have had no recourse but to damn her and her progeny for the disobedience without mercy, whereas, seeing that she was tempted by an infernal emissary from the outside, He could consistently yield to an ungodly impulse to be generous about it. Thus, when the sinner did not believe in a personal Devil, he was in fair way to lose his salvation by failing to give due weight to the only circumstance which could warrant self-respecting Omnipotence in adopting a plan of redemption at all. Gulliver admitted that a proper faith in Satan was more difficult since the arch-fiend had lost his license to appear in visible form at the beginning of the Christian era, but insisted that the Christians were well paid for this slight disadvantage by the atonement achieved on Calvary.

Gulliver also introduced a few novel notes into his answers to the stock objections of the Hell-doubters. If you did not imagine you could be happy in Heaven while your friends were elsewhere, he argued, you should remember that in Hell all friendship ceases and the most devoted partners in crime sit around in the flames blaming their former associates for getting them there. The suspicion that the saints in bliss might find it unpleasant watching their erring children roast in Pandemonium he answered by daring the doubters to say that a loving Heavenly Father was not happy watching His children roast.

Finally, when Hell doubts were beginning to be tinged with evolutionary optimism and material prosperity, came the Rev. Dr. L. B. Hartmann in 1898 with his "Divine Penology." The evolutionists had been denying Hell and the Last Judgment on the principle that all progress was upward, and Hartmann, quoted "science" in the generalized way theologians sometimes have, as presenting "positive" proofs that the race's doom as announced in Revelations was infallibly approaching. Earthquakes, exploding planets, new stars and dead cinder stars presaged the worst, he argued. In addition, "the element of ammonia in our atmosphere is constantly increasing its proportions and which (*sic*) as it increases ever heightens the tendency of the atmosphere to explode with a flash of lightning or a spark of fire . . . [If] one of the three elements of our air were extracted, the heavens and the earth would be wrapped in an instantaneous conflagration."

To materialist skepticism Hartmann had the equally instructive answer that England's rise and fall in power and prosperity throughout the ages was precisely "according to her theology," especially as respected orthodoxy on the point of eternal damnation. But he had evidently been touched to the raw by the Universalists' jibes at a Hell-feeding Jehovah's lovingkindness. The very warnings of Hell-fire, he declaimed, showed how God loved us, but in any case God could not be rebuked for harshness to His children, since we were not His natural children at all but only adopted ones. In fact, when we chose to follow the lusts of the flesh, we weren't even that, but, in Jesus's own words, "children of your father, the Devil."

No self-respecting God, Hartmann proceeded, could be expected to deal tenderly with the children of his worst enemy, and if after that you chose to call the Lord God of Hosts cruel, look out for the penalties on judging Omnipotence!

These were the distinguished theologians of their time, and from their incandescent penal illuminations they smelted the last golden flow of American pulpit dialectic. They have been succeeded by nitwit controversialists squabbling ignobly and for the most part with weasel words over the question of whether woman was made from a man's rib or from a bacilli in a frog pond and how far the church should go in social service.

The great Beecher, who stopped preaching Hell about the time he began to catch it in the Tilton case, was in his way a magnificent fore-runner. Through a glass shrewdly he saw that the nation favored of God and its

own oratorical tributes as being the greatest on earth would take its Hell here rather than in theology, if you please, and not very much of it here. Beecher foresaw, and the modern clergy sees with him, that the American people, quick to deny the mildest insinuation that Terre Haute or Wallis Walla may not be the best little city on God's footstool, propose to be told that when their Heavenly Father uses the word "damn" He smiles.

So to-day, despite all the labors from Jonathan the First to Hartmann, the Congregationalists and the Unitarians have essentially adopted the Universalist doctrine, the modernists are in all sects Hell-doubters, and it would be as indecorous to preach Hell from an Episcopal pulpit as to search the guests at one's dinner party for the flask lost on last week's motor trip. The more ardent Fundamentalist sects still keep the Hell-fires burning nominally, but even with them the sense that it is not done by the upper classes restrains them from brazenly trotting it out in public. Ask even a select list of Southern Fundamentalist pastors how much they preach it, and the chances are that all of them, as happened to me in my recent investigations, will hedge with the answer that God and the day's Rotarian illumination have shown them that preaching ought to be "constructive."

Hell, in fact, as an attachment to the United States exists in 1928 chiefly as a protectorate of the half dozen going sects of Holy Rollers. At least two of their living saints have visited it during their conversion orgies and annually they gloat over its horrors and colonize it with the millions dying in infidelity and with the false comforts of "the sectarian Babylon."

Acid Drops.

Considerable notice has been taken in the press of the Home Secretary's latest declaration, that in these days a man cannot be permitted to do what he pleases with his own, and generally with strong disapproval. It is what one would expect from a character such as Joynson-Hicks, who appears to embody in himself the worst type of Nonconformist with the most arrogant type of the Church of England man. Armed with a little brief authority, and without any intellectual endowments worth bothering about, his idea of a Home Secretary's duty appears to be that of interfering with things that he does not like, and his dislikes are such that soon what he damns will not be a bad indication that better men ought to consider them in the most favourable light.

In the first place, he has either ignorantly or deliberately misunderstood and misapplied the nineteenth century maxim that a man has a right to do what he will with his own. That, in the eyes of sensible men, never had any application to opinion. It was an economic generalization entirely. It was offered as a resistance to the government regulating hours of labour, or to a trade union regulating wages, or to legislation concerning property, and in that direction has an application that admitted of reasonable argument. And the case against it was that property, or financial power, or the ownership of wealth or position might, if men were really allowed to do exactly as they liked with "their own," become tyrannical and react to the injury of the community. It was the recognition that wealth and position had a social origin, and therefore social responsibilities, that eventually broke down the theory that a man should be permitted to do exactly as he liked with "his own."

But our own delightful Home Secretary has given this maxim an altogether foreign application. By it he is justifying the interference on all sorts of occasions with a man's opinions. Within the past week or two, a private packet sent by a well-known writer through the post, has been seized and confiscated. No one knew of the contents but the writer, but the postal authorities, acting under instruction, settled that the packet should be confiscated. Of course, everyone knows that letters are often opened in the post and re-sealed, but it is not often that it has been done so openly. Generally the government has disowned the practice, although most

people took the denial at its proper value. Then a book was seized, but as this is *sub judice* at the time of writing, we pass that by. Another item is concerned with a Labour paper. Here the police simply walk in, attempt to see the copy on which the compositors are working, make examinations here and there, and apparently without any proper authority. How many other cases of this kind occur without news of them appearing in the press, it is impossible to say.

Where is the matter to end? To make intellectual freedom dependent upon the caprice of a Home Secretary or the whim of a policeman is to reduce British freedom to a lower level than it has been since the seventeenth century. Once upon a time one might have counted on a considerable measure of resistance from one or other of the political parties, and, at any rate, there would have been a feeling of uneasiness created in the mind of the general public. But to-day we have got so used to the passing of niggling and vexatious restrictions, to the creation of armies of officials to administer more or less ridiculous Acts, that the idea that human beings have the right to move about with any freedom whatever is rapidly decaying. The policeman was once a terror to the wrong-doer, he is rapidly becoming a terror to every citizen. No one, thanks to the multiplication of orders and regulations, can be quite sure where police powers begin and where they end. In one city the police are ordered by the magistrates to supervise Sunday musical programmes, in order to see whether in their opinion the proper Sabbath atmosphere is retained. In a recent case, a policeman was examined as to whether in his opinion a certain book was "indecent" or otherwise. Had a policeman, fifty years ago, entered a newspaper office to examine copy then being set up, he would probably have been thrown out, and the general verdict would have been "serve him right." But fifty years ago such a thing would never have been attempted. It is said that we won the war against Germany. Not a bit of it. The truth is that the average Englishman appears to have been so jealous of Germany that he handed over the country to the spirit that Germany was held to personify.

To all criticisms the Home Secretary replies—if he is addressing a public gathering—with a lot of nonsense of what he heard at his mother's knee; and, if he is addressing the House of Commons, by a reference to powers given him under certain Acts, and that when his attention was called to this or that he at once sent for the police to act. One would like to know who are these people who have the ear of the Home Secretary, and at whose word he so obediently moves. But it is not whether there exists certain Acts which warrant the Home Secretary in acting as he does, but, first, whether such Acts ought not to be swept out of existence; second, whether a reasonable person with some regard for genuine freedom would not decline to be pulled this way or that way at the behest of certain anonymous informers; and third, the state of public opinion which submits to this kind of thing existing. The latter is, perhaps, the most alarming of the three. We have reached the curious position that we are living in a time when the voice of authority is slavishly obeyed, while the people who create the authority are held in general contempt.

Since writing the above, the case of Miss James and her novel *Sleeveless Errand* has been before the magistrate. The defence put in was that although vices were depicted or referred to, they were clearly held up for condemnation. We have not read the book, and so cannot say anything of its character. But the Magistrate's ruling was that intention did not matter. The question was "whether the book was or was not calculated to deprave or corrupt those whose minds are open to immoral influences." The italics are ours. So we are led to assume that as the magistrate, the policeman, or one or two policemen, and Jix, and Jimmy Douglass, say that in their opinion the book is indecent, they come under the ruling of "those whose minds," etc., etc. Now we know on what rule these prosecutors work. Whenever

one or more reads a book and finds it suggests immoral things to him, that book should be destroyed. The rule is simple. Its only fault is that it makes "those whose minds are," etc., rulers of the literature of the nation. So we shall have the usual sequel. Copies of a six shilling book will be sold for anything up to £10 per copy; English people will rush to get abroad copies they cannot buy at home, the author achieves a fame and amasses royalties that would have been impossible but for our "Jixes," and other struggling novelists will hasten to produce novels which go as far as maybe in the direction of the envied one that has been prosecuted. Well, one cannot breed Jixes and Jimmy Douglasses without paying the price.

We suggest that the only way to meet the present state of affairs is to form an organization that will make the protection of speech and publication and movement its sole concern. Every case should be watched and, if necessary, fought. Every time such interference is fought, the authorities are getting a lesson in good behaviour. If Freethinkers had submitted to interference with their criticism of religion as people are now submitting, press and police censorship, the Blasphemy laws would still be what they were in the days of Richard Carlile. But the rule of Freethinkers was "fight every charge for blasphemy, no matter when and where brought, or against whom brought." Gradually the bigots learned their lesson. The "blasphemer" was generally convicted, but he made the bigots pay. And surely there is still enough public spirit left in Britain, still enough attachment to intellectual freedom to teach even a Joynson-Hicks that there are things to which the public will not submit.

Mrs. George Cadbury regrets that the Bible is not studied as it used to be; for this means a tremendous loss to the life of the nation. The Bible, she says, used to be taken for granted. Now the very fact of criticism heightens its value more than ever before. "In every book in the Bible there is a wealth of wisdom and truth and beauty and philosophy." It certainly does seem a pity that all this wealth should be neglected. Still, modern Christians cannot agree about which is which, and what is what. And it would seem far from sensible to encourage study of the Bible when such is the case. Each generation of Bible students discards the wisdom of truth and beauty and philosophy of the generation previous. The modern generation rejects the wisdom, etc., venerated by the Early Christian Fathers, and the next generation will do the same with this. So after all there is no tremendous loss if people refuse to study the Bible, and set to work instead seeking wisdom and truth and beauty and philosophy from the great thinkers outside the Christian fetish book.

Says Edison, "we do not know a millioneth per cent about anything." Some one should introduce him to a few parsons who profess to know all about God, how he created the world, and the system by which he governs it.

The motto adopted by Portsmouth is: "Heaven's light our guide." This sounds as if Portsmouth will be in no hurry to adopt Sunday games.

A Nonconformist paper tells "a story with a warning" all about Sunday tennis. The pastor of a church organized a tennis club among his congregation, and became president of the club. "Outsiders" were admitted also as members in the hope that they might be induced to join the church. The Committee, composed of church members, retained control of the club's affairs. But, sad to relate, some new members wanted to play on Sunday, but were told that the rules forbade this. At the next general meeting, however, the "worldlings" rolled up in force, and gaining a majority, rescinded the rule against Sunday play! The committee and church members met in dismay to consider the situation. On the pastor's advice they resigned en bloc. The result to date is that they have lost all their pioneer labours. Their funds have fallen into other hands. All the material of

the club, formed by the church for church members, has passed to the "worldings." That is the story, and the lesson is as follows. The pastor-president is to organize a new club, but he will get inserted in the lease of the ground hired, a condition prohibiting the use of the ground for play on Sunday. And the moral is: "Club secretaries, beware! Look to your leases, revise your rules, mind your membership, secure your safeguards, and thus preserve your properties." This is indeed a sad story. The pastor's bright wheeze to snare cliends badly misfired, and the Devil registers another win for Sabbath breaking. It's a thing too deep for tears.

An inquest was recently held on an old lady in Sunderland, who had been sent home from a hospital without the authorities making any inquiry as to who was to look after her. The woman lived alone and was found dead. The Coroner said it was a case of trusting to God and good neighbours. We imagine that had the neighbours known, some of them would have looked after her. We have no doubt, however, that some will blame the neighbours; but what about God? Every Christian will believe that he knew, but he did nothing. And what about those Christians who believe in God sending a special inspiration to some one to forward a donation to some humbugging Christian Mission? Here was a chance for him to "move" some one to a kindly action. As usual, God did nothing.

His Excellency Jan Masaryk, of Czecho-Slovakia, told a pious gathering that the supreme need of the day was that emphasis should be laid on the greatest romance in the story of the world, the story of Jesus Christ. We regret to inform His Excellency that it is difficult to get people to take notice of the great romance. Interest in fairy tales is not what it was. And the mass of people in this country prefer romances that are a little more true to life.

Pity the poor gods! From being everything, they are getting rapidly reduced to nothing, or to mere passive spectators of a cosmic pageant of which they were once the prime movers. Divested of power in other directions, it looked as though they might be left in control of the weather—the changeful, and apparently incalculable weather. But even this has been taken from them, and meteorologists give us the weather of to-morrow or the day after, or the day after that, without the saving grace of a "D.V." "Good God," said a member of the House of Commons to Charles Bradlaugh, "what does it matter whether there's a God or not?" That is the pass to which we are coming. Does it matter whether there's a God or not? On the answer to that question hangs the existence of every god in the world.

The new spirit in China, judging from a recent article in the *Times*, has not only decided that it does not matter whether gods exist or not, but has decided that it is of some importance to get them out of the way as not being of even picturesque importance. In various parts of the country the government has closed some of the temples and dismissed the monks. It is admitted that some of the monks were crowds of idle and worthless fellows, sometimes criminally so. The lands belonging to the monasteries have been confiscated, and the money realized by their sale devoted to educational purposes. In many places the "Idols" have been dragged from their pedestals and broken. The precise nature of the attacks appears to vary in different parts, but the general feature is their hostility to the temples, the monks, and their gods. China has had many thousands of Christian missionaries sent there during the past hundred years, and we daresay the attacks on the native gods will appear in missionary reports as evidence of a move towards Christ. It is, of course, nothing of the kind. The Chinese are too far advanced along the road to civilization to get rid of their own gods for the purpose of taking up with the Christian deity.

We have often pointed out, in reply to the Christian claims about marriage, that the only marriage that is legal in this country is the civil marriage. The distinction being that in a church you have the civil marriage performed by a parson, who accompanies it with some hanky-panky of his own; in the Registry Office, the hanky-panky is omitted. The proof of this is seen in a Bill just introduced by the Home Secretary. The churches of St. Michael, Bramcote, and St. Mary, Nightwick, were built in 1855 and 1861, but the necessary legal "instrument" was, by some means, omitted. There was thus some doubt about the validity of the marriages that have been performed in the two churches. So the Home Secretary puts the matter right by a special Act of Parliament. In other words, so far as the religious formulas were concerned, the couples might as well have jumped over a broomstick. It is the sanction of the civil power and none other that makes a marriage legal. That is what we have always contended is the case, although, owing to the unfortunate habit of Freethinkers accepting a statement of the case as laid down by Christians, they have usually been content to argue that that civil marriage is as legal as the religious marriage. Whereas, as a matter of fact, and so far as the law is concerned, there is no such thing as a legal religious marriage. A marriage in a church is a marriage performed by a parson who, for the purpose of the marriage, becomes a civil official licensed to perform marriages. We hope Freethinkers will bear this in mind.

So far as a certain type of religionist is concerned it seems almost useless to expose the false, and sometimes fraudulent, nature of the faith-healing cures effected. The next time a faith-healer comes round they are as ready as ever to swallow the same tales, and the newspapers—quick enough to expose an ordinary case of fraud—where religion is concerned, remain silent. Thus, some of our readers will remember the campaign of Hickson the faith-healer who went round England, and may still be doing it, healing people. He received the support of many of the clergy, who are never very punctilious about the quality of the evangelist so long as he "draws." In the circumstances, however, the following two cases of Hickson's, reported in the *Daily Mail* of February 18, are worth noting. One of these, the case of Miss A. Riley, was reported as:—

"The day I was taken to the mission I was able to walk, and have walked ever since."

One may assume that the wording of this was dictated by some "artful cove," for it hides the salient fact brought out by Dr. P. Lodge, who attended Miss Riley:—

"I should doubt the paralytic complaint. The limbs were not wasted, and the skin had no alteration. In my examination I never detected that she had any organic disease . . . The power to walk must have been there, but she did not use it."

Another case, Miss E. Alderson, was said to have been cured of paralysis. Of her, Dr. Sharp says:—

"She is a sort of paralysis case. She is no better and no worse as the result of the mission. She is able to get about but not to work."

Now if this class of "healer" set up in Oxford Street and sold belts or pills to the public, and made claims such as these evangelists make, we should have the *Express*, and the *Mail*, and the *Daily News* shrieking for their imprisonment as public frauds. But as the healing fraud is worked in the name of religion it is passed over quietly. Decidedly, if one wishes to work a fraud in this country, do it in the name of Christ. One is quite safe then.

The Rev. Dr. Basil Yeaxlee believes that "the greatest of all ways of growing is to grow up into . . . Jesus Christ." Our observation of people who have "grown up into" Jesus suggests that their mental age—as the educationalists term it—has only grown up as far as that of the primitive shepherds who produced the Bible. We should hardly term that an age grown to maturity, nor should we care to recommend it as an ideal for emulation.

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"WELLWISHER" (Swansea).—Thanks, it is just a bad habit on our part. You are quite correct.

D. RALEIGH.—Sorry, but we know nothing about the tomb of the Atheist out of which God caused a tree to grow. But, in the case of the Christians who believe such twaddle, we venture the opinion that all God would need supply would be the leaves, their heads could furnish the wood.

E. J. WHEELER.—We agree with you that the *Freethinker* has enough to do to fight superstition without taking up all sorts of subjects. To clear a man's head of superstition is to open the way for useful work in other directions.

D. NORMAN.—Thanks, but regret we are unable to use.

H. WILLIAMS (Bombay).—Pleased to see you when you visit England. Thanks for the high opinion you express of the *Freethinker*.

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

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One year, 15/-; half year 7/6; three months, 3/9.

Sugar Plums.

A second debate has been arranged between Mr. C. E. M. Joad and Mr. Cohen, to take place at the Caxton Hall, on Friday, April 12. The subject of discussion is to be "Is there a Purpose in Evolution?" This subject should afford a lively debate, particularly as not a few books have been issued of late attempting to give the thesis of purpose in evolution something of a scientific character. The tickets are, seats numbered and reserved, 2s. 6d.; unreserved, 1s. and 1s. 6d. There are a few platform seats at 5s. Tickets can be obtained from either the *Freethinker* office, or from the office of the R.P.A., 5 Johnson's Court. Early application is advisable.

Mr. W. H. Williamson, the author of *Thinker or Believer*, will lecture for the Manchester Branch to-day (March 10), in the Engineers Hall, Rusholme Road. At 3 p.m., his subject will be "Man's Amazing Credulity," and at 6.30, "Live—Here and Now." Manchester friends will please note.

On Sunday last, Mr. F. P. Corrigan paid a visit to the Chester-le-Street Branch. He lectured at Houghton-le-Spring in the afternoon, and in the evening at Chester-le-Street. We are glad to learn that both meetings were well attended, a conspicuous feature being the number

of young people who were present. That has been a feature of most Freethought meetings of late, and it holds out great promise for the future. The Chester-le-Street Branch has had a very busy winter season, and intends pursuing a "forward" policy so soon as the fine weather commences.

Messrs. Watts & Co. are just issuing a remarkably cheap series of volumes in what is called "The Thinker's Library." Four volumes are issued, each one well bound, at the low price of one shilling each. Three of the titles are Haeckel's "Riddle of the Universe," Spencer's "Education," H. G. Wells' "First and Last Things." There is no need to say anything on behalf of the first two. Mr. Wells is, as usual, provocative, and while quite endorsing his opinion that people would be better for an understanding of a rational metaphysic, we venture to suggest that clearer understanding of metaphysics on his own part would make his introduction more satisfactory.

The fourth volume of the series of special interest to readers of this journal. This consists of Charles Bradlaugh's "Plea for Atheism," "Doubts in Dialogue," "Humanity's gain from Unbelief," and "Who Was Jesus Christ?" These are in one volume, and three have been out of print for some years. Any volume of the series will be sent from this office, post free for one shilling and twopence.

A writer in a religious weekly says:—

It is often said that the heroic side of the Christian life has been obscured by over-emphasis being laid on a virtue such as humility. I have, however, heard it suggested that it is not the emphasis which is mistaken, but our interpretation of humility, which, if rightly understood, is neither cringing nor weak, but the forgetting of self in devotion to a person or cause.

Christians have had 2,000 years to discover what the Bible means by humility, and now it is suggested that the interpretation is wrong! But whatever beautiful theory Christians might have had, it didn't prevent them from being the heaviest armed, and the most aggressive of bloodspillers.

In his pamphlet, *Adult Religious Education*, Mr. J. Thrift, according to a review, defines religious education as meaning "not merely instruction in a limited range of so-called sacred subjects, but a training which enables man to take up habitually a religious attitude towards life," in action as well as in thought. Considering that man, one is always being assured, is naturally religious, is supposed to possess religious instincts, this notion of man having to be trained to take up habitually a religious attitude to life is very odd. We have observed that the natural instincts invariably force man to habitually take up certain attitudes to life. To secure this, no training is necessary. Why the difference with "religious instinct"? And that suggests another question—When is an instinct not an instinct? When is it a habit formed by training.

The latest thing to upset the clergy is boxing on Sunday. Not that they object to boxing, as they explain, but it keeps people away from church. The Rev. Vesper Thomas, of Christ Church, Southwark, said that boxing was all very well, and he had nothing to say against it, but "people should realize that it is their duty to attend a place of worship on one day a week at least." That is quite candid. You may box, but please attend church. We suggest that this parson has a boxing match before and after each service. He will probably fill the church. The Rev. Basil Bourchier objects because he thinks that everyone should have at least one day's rest a week. I think if Mr. Bourchier inquires he will find that every boxer has at least that amount of holiday. The concern of Mr. Bourchier that boxers should not be overworked is quite touching. But what a state when Father, Son, and Holy Ghost cannot stand up against even a boxer! How have the mighty fallen! People simply will not go to church if there is anywhere else for them to go.

The Flower of Freethought.

In the fair land of France, the pansy is, above all, the flower of Freethought, and even in our less emotional clime the pansy-button is an emblem of emancipation from theological prepossessions. "There is pansies—that's for thoughts," says Ophelia, in *Hamlet*, while Shakespeare's great and scholarly contemporary, George Chapman, in his *Comedy of all Fools*, 1605, sings:—

"The pansie, O that's for lover's thoughts."

The plant grows wild in sheltered fields and forsaken gardens. Its name is derived from the French *pensee*, a thought; while in the earlier Latin we find *pensare*, to think or ponder. Probably, the drooping attitude of the pansy blossom, so suggestive of thoughtfulness, may account for its name.

The pansy has been cultivated in Europe for at least 400 years, and has been spread to all moist and temperate regions where choice blooms are appreciated. *Viola tricolor*, an Old World plant, is the wild species from which the pansy appears to have been evolved by artificial selection. It is true that the pansy is found in North America, but it has clearly been introduced there from Europe.

Mr. Frederick G. Savage, in his excellent *Flora and Folk-Lore of Shakespeare*, suggests that the poet's reference to the pansy under the title of Cupid's flower is peculiar to him as:—

"Yet mark'd I where the bolt of Cupid fell:
It fell upon a little western flower,—
Before, milk-white; now purple with love's wound—
And maidens call it Love-in-Idleness."

This from "A Midsummer Night's Dream." In "The Taming of the Shrew" the pansy is again called Love-in-Idleness. In Act I, Sc. I, we find the lines:—

"But see! while idly I stood looking on
I found the effect of Love-in-Idleness."

This is an old Warwickshire name for the pansy, and the writer can remember his Atherstone grandparents calling it love-in-idleness. "That this old title was in common use in the Midlands until recent years," writes Mr. Savage, "is shown in *Glossary of Northamptonshire Words and Phrases*, by Annie Elizabeth Baker, 1854, under entry 'Love-in-Idleness.'—'The very small old-fashioned purple pansy, more commonly called Pinkeney John: the cultivated garden variety of the *viola tricolor*, or white pansy.'"

The pansy has borne other quaint names in rural places. One is "three faces under a hood"; another, "a kiss behind a garden gate." In his *Names of Herbes*, 1548, William Turner mentions the flower as "two faces in a hood or panses. Thys is like unto a Violet in the flower and it groweth oft amonge the corne."

With innumerable other blooms the pansy possessed magical properties. Oberon, in "Midsummer Night's Dream," utilizes its mystic powers in producing a lovers' delirium. This potency resided in the sap of the plant.

"Fetch me that flower; the herb I show'd thee once:
The juice of it, on sleeping eyelids laid,
Will make a man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees."

Having once this juice,
I'll watch Titania when she is asleep,
And drop the liquor of it on her eyes
The next thing that she waking looks upon
(Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull, on meddling
monkey or on busy ape),
She shall pursue it with the soul of love."

Later in the play the Fairy King restores Titania to her sober senses by nullifying the effects of the

love charm. After applying Dian's Bud (wormwood) as an antidote, he conjures her to:—

"Be, as thou wast wont to be;
See, as thou wast wont to see;
Dian's Bud o'er Cupid's flower
Hath such force and blessed power,
Now, my Titania! wake you, my sweet Queen."

Long a favourite flower with horticulturalists, the pansy well merits the esteem in which it is held. Yet, with all its wealth of colour, it lacks perfume. Its near relative, the sweet violet (*Viola odorata*), more especially the white variety, is one of the most sweetly scented blooms of the countryside.

It is much to be regretted that in most London gardens, slugs and other pests so frequently preclude successful pansy culture. Various diseases attack the violet family, and it is much preyed upon by insect pests. The black-fly, the green-fly, gall-fly, violet saw-fly, and other enemies, including the red spider mite are all inimical to the plant.

The violet, even more than the pansy, has appealed to the emotions of the poets. Tennyson's inimitable passage at once occurs to the mind:—

"'Tis well; 'tis something; we may stand
Where he in English earth is laid,
And from his ashes may be made
The violet of his native land."

And again the wondrous lines in *The Winter's Tale*, where the daffodil and the violet are linked to celebrate the sweet of the year. The brave daffodils:—

"That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath."

The poets have sometimes associated the violet with death. In *Hamlet*, poor crazed Ophelia when referring to her father's tragic end cries to Laertes, "There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died."

One of Shakespeare's democratic moments seems reflected in "King Henry V," where the monarch bluntly declares: "I think the King is but a man, as I am; the violet smells to him as it doth to me; the element shows to him as it doth to me; all his senses are but human conditions; his ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man."

Some captious critic may say that the title of this article is a misnomer. Well, we must remember that the pansy, the favourite flower of Freethought, and the violet are cousins german.

The violet (*viola*) is a genus of herbaceous plants of the family *violaceae*. Hundreds of species have been described by botanists, and members of the violet family extend from the temperate to the tropical regions of the globe. The violet is an extremely variable plant, the flowers differing greatly in size and colour, and to this variability is largely due the wonderful novelties plant-breeders have produced.

Art, it is sometimes claimed, is more beautiful than unadorned Nature. Be that as it may, the wild flower that blows in its native home is almost invariably the bloom that wins the poet's love. It is the untamed flowers of the vernal time with their dainty petals that Shakespeare celebrates in "Venus and Adonis." He tells us:—

"Love keeps his revels where there are but twain;
Be bold to play, our sport is not in sight:
These blue veined violets, whereon we lean,
Never can blab, nor know not what we mean."

The poet's fine frenzy rolled not only when meditating on the violet's beauty, but he also confers immortality on the fleeting perfume of the flowers:—

"That strew the green lap of the new-come spring,
Breathing upon a bank. Stealing and giving odour."

And then to requote the well-known, but never palling passage, and to conclude:—

"To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
To throw a perfume on the violet,
To smooth the ice, or add another hue
Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light
To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to garnish,
Is wasteful and ridiculous excess."

T. F. PALMER.

Design? Perfection? Purpose?

It is almost an axiom that Life—or more strictly speaking, human life—has a Purpose, or possibly, several purposes; the majority of us find it difficult, if not impossible, to entertain the proposition that human life is without aim or object.

Holding a belief that design is manifested in the visible world about us, we could argue (and quite justifiably) that purpose is personified, for instance, in a completed house—the purpose for which it is intended is fulfilled when it provides satisfactory protection for its inmates.

But what is life's design and what is life's purpose? Unless you can see in your mind's eye the completed house, you are unable to form any judgment as to the merits or demerits in the design. The basis on which an architect draws up his plans is restricted to the ensemble of the finished edifice. How then can we evaluate life's design unless we are already acquainted with its purpose?

Opinions differ as to the nature of life's purpose, but generally speaking, it consists of a vague declaration implying the cultivation of qualities which will culminate in the production of a "perfect being." Life's aim, then, is a perfected humanity.

(I exclude considerations of heaven as being incentives to perfection, on the grounds that the promise of eternal bliss is rather old-fashioned nowadays, and makes less and less appeal to modern minds).

Our problem now is to find as precise a meaning as is possible, implied by "perfect," and for the sake of simplification, suggest that we consider Jesus Christ as representing the only "perfect being" on record.

This assumption will, at any rate, contain the merit of receiving the whole-hearted support of Christian apologists, whom we can regard also as committed to the dual belief in design and purpose.

Christ's qualities, we are told, were unselfishness, charity, toleration, sympathy, forgiveness, kindness, goodness and so on. If then we agree to accept Christ's life as a standard approximation for perfection, we must conclude that "perfection" entails the cultivation or realization of these particular qualities. Presumably this catalogue of virtues is one that we can, with profit, all refer to when we are concerned with our own self-improvement!

But, indeed, these very desirable, ideal human qualities are not, in any way, related to life whatsoever. They are merely gratifying or useful acquisitions which we are anxious to develop as adjuncts to the art of living. But living is not life! Living is confined to such acts as enable us to meet the needs of the moment. Living is a process severely restricted to human activity.

Life is a process that neither starts nor ends with our species. Life flourished luxuriantly for millions of years before man made his appearance; and presumably can do so again if, and when, man "shuffles off this mortal coil." Our virtues, and indeed our vices will leave no trace on the face of time. They

will not survive our bodies. How then can it be urged that human "perfection" is in any respect ultimate, when we are forced to recognize its transitoriness?

All attempts for "perfection" are limited to the human species, but life is not so limited. Life ignores our endeavours.

We are told by Sir J. H. Jeans, the famous astronomer, that our Solar System originated about 2,000 million years ago, and it is significant to note that at the termination of this colossal period of time, only one "perfect man" has emerged. I hope I shall not incur the displeasure of the opposite sex by suggesting a rather obvious, and perhaps, odious comparison!

How are we to regard a process that can only produce one "perfect being" in 2,000 million years? What can we say of a design that fails with millions (how many millions?) of striving humans, and only succeeds with one solitary exception? Truly design and purpose, with perfection as motif, are reduced to absurdities.

I think it was Ingersoll who declared that "The object of life is to be happy; the place to be happy is here; the time to be happy is now; and the way to be happy is by making others happy." With no intentional disrespect to the memory of a great mind, I would suggest that his first sentence could read, "The object of living is to be happy"—without impairing the essential nobility of a great thought.

Is it worthy of note that the cultivation of "perfection" cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be extended to the animal kingdom? Such an hypothesis results in the inevitable conclusion that the animal kingdom has for its justification none other than that of providing nourishment both for its own representatives—or for man.

Viewed "vegetarianly," animals are created but to be devoured by their natural enemies, or die by accident, or old age. They live—only to die.

"Change and decay in all around I see" may be a rather discouraging line in a popular hymn, but, at any rate, has the merit of presenting two incontrovertible facts. We need make no distinction between life and living in insisting that the essential principle in either case is change. Is it possible to indulge in, or contemplate activity of any kind whatsoever without introducing its corollary, change? It is not.

We must, therefore, accept the remorseless conclusion that as change is inseparable from life or from living, any possibility of "perfection" or "purpose" is for ever unattainable. "Perfection" and "purpose" both imply permanence, finality. They imply limits beyond which it is neither desirable nor possible to go.

The ultimate goal can never be reached. Permanence and finality in a process that is for ever changing is a contradiction both in terms and in meaning.

Inasmuch as "perfection" is an impossible human achievement, we are forced to admit that "purpose" is robbed of its meaning.

For fear these remarks may be interpreted as a diatribe designed merely to strip life of meaning or purpose, and thus land us inevitably in "the slough of despond," I must in self-defence conclude by pointing out that the objections raised are inapplicable when considered in relation to the more important aspect of living.

Living is an ever-present human necessity—urgent and pressing. Life is a process, the origin of which, as well as its finale, are, as yet, only dimly apprehended.

MONTAGU COLVIN.

Eos.

THE name of this rosy-fingered dawn goddess of the Greeks (Aurora of the Romans) has been adopted by Dr. Jeans, the well-known mathematical astronomer, as the main title of his recent booklet on the new, scientific cosmogony—the conception of world-building which, in the view of probably all workers in astronomy and readers of astronomical works, has replaced the legends of creation by supernatural or other occult means, whether the account given in the Bible or others that are current in various parts of the world.

The idea that our solar system was produced by natural agencies arose more than a hundred years ago, and followed naturally the establishment of the principle that all the geological phenomena of our planet were so produced, to the exclusion of a supernaturally produced flood or other cataclysms. Kant formulated a theory that the sun and the planets were once a single nebular mass, our "ancestral star," and that under the influence of natural forces the several bodies were subsequently formed from the mass. Laplace's somewhat similar nebular theory posited an intensely heated original mass, in rapid motion, and that this, as the poet says:—

"...whirling, cast the planets."

But both of these theories have proved to be incompatible with various facts that are now known; and though it is still held that the system was once a single mass, the separation of the parts was more probably due to the passing, close by our "ancestral star," of a larger star mass, and that intense gravitational action pulled away a portion from which the planets were formed. The moons may have been formed at the same time or at a later date by the separation of portions from the planets while they were still very hot. Several lines of evidence make it probable that the planets were formed about two to three thousand million years ago.

It seems to be quite likely that the process has occurred in other cases, and it may be going on now. But the great distances between the stars renders it probable that it will not happen to more than one star in 10,000, or once only in 1,000,000,000 years. The distances to the stars are also too great for the phenomenon to be directly observed.

When, however, we turn to the question of the formation of stars, we are dealing with a phenomenon that is practically observable. It has now been fully proved, by spectroscopical and other methods, that the stars of our system (galaxy) are of various temperatures, ranging from cold to intensely hot masses. The cool bodies form the two ends of a great series. At the lower end are masses of relatively enormous size, in an extremely diffuse, nebulous condition. These are contracting and growing hotter. A maximum temperature is gradually attained; and then, while continuing to contract, the masses become cooler until, ultimately, they become cold and "dead."

The cold, dark stars are well known and are very numerous. In the interesting case of Algol, a double star, it was definitely concluded that the alteration of the light of the bright body was caused by the eclipsing effect of the dark member, before the latter had been directly observed. But it has now been photographed on the very sensitive selenium plate; and this has shown that the body, though invisible, still retains a little heat and gives off a little light.

The stars of our galactic system, in going through the stages mentioned, "light up," or begin to shine, as reddish stars at about 3,000 degrees centigrade. Then, if they are large enough, they become yellow-

white- or bluish-hot. Subsequently they cool down; and they "go out" when the temperature falls to about 3,000 degrees.

Again, it is now practically certain that stars are formed from nebulae. In a spiral nebula, such as that of the Great Bear, the observable dots or "drops" in the great mass of gas are evidently stars that are being born. They are centres of condensation; and Dr. Jeans tells us that the amount of matter that will go to each drop can be calculated, and that the calculated masses prove to be about the same as the masses of the stars of our system. It is therefore confidently concluded that star systems like our own are now being formed. These systems, like the nebulae, their forerunners, will be, like our own, disc-shaped, owing to the flattening of the mass (which would be spherical if it were stationary), and each will show to an observer who is near the centre of the system a Milky Way, like ours, an appearance due to the larger number of stars which are to be seen when looking from a point near the centre toward the circumference of the disc.

The influence of these newer facts and conclusions when they become generally known, will undoubtedly be very great. To the Rationalist the primary aspect considered will be the final extinction of the old supernatural beliefs in creation, and the relegation of these to their proper place as visionary explanations of things existing and occurring around man during his mental childhood. Other notions, such as heaven, purgatory and hell, considered as locations, whether within or without the earth, or other planets, or stars, or moons, or nebulae, become too ridiculous for further consideration.

The absorbing interest of the newer views will also act as a powerful mental tonic; it will further the naturalistic interpretation of things in general; and it will discredit still further the numerous surviving elements of mystic or occult thought. And we need not "stand abashed" (as has been suggested) before these far-reaching conceptions, and take too literally the poet's idea that man is:—

"...but a crowd of ants

In the light of a million of million of suns."

Man is, at all events, the highest evolutionary product we know, and by reason of his mental nature and activity far surpasses in importance any possible aggregation of inorganic matter and the permutations and combinations it may undergo. He has discovered and interpreted the things mentioned; and it will be by persisting in the same path of natural investigation that further advance, whether mental or moral, individual or social, will be made.

J. REEVES.

Unorganized Christianity.

MR. JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY recently wrote a biography of Jesus of Nazareth (or of Bethlehem). It bore some marks of the literary distinction of Mr. Murry's style; and the character of Jesus was not wholly unattractive. Needless to say, Mr. Murry's book had none of the vulgarity of the singularly banal author of *The Man Nobody Knows*. In the opinion of the present writer, Mr. Murry's Jesus was distinctly superior to the traditional Christ. I prefer Mr. Murry's biography, not only to Mr. Bruce Barton's, but even to the biographies said to have been written by Messrs. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Mr. Murry's view of Jesus is a peculiarly personal one; even Mr. Barton's "Boss"-eye view has obtained a far wider circulation; and the Churches will continue to prefer the traditional view of their Christ. None of these facts deter Mr. Murry from believing that he, and he alone, knows the real Jesus. Like Bruce Barton, the

author knows the facts which are unknown to all the rest of the world.

In the current *Forum*, Mr. Murry has a very sensible article on "Modern Marriage." But it contains one phrase which is remarkable. He comments on the evil which has been wrought by

the profound mistrust of human nature which has been the worst legacy of organized Christianity.

What other kind of Christianity is there? What on earth is "unorganized Christianity." Here, apparently, is another new Christianity to add to the existent myriads.

How can a Church be other than an organization? How are you going to "unorganize" religion? When was Christianity unorganized? And in any case, what sense is there in Mr. Murry's allusion to "organized Christianity," when quite obviously his condemnation applies to the only Christianity known to mankind?

As it happens, there is complete accord between the teachings of Jesus (as given in the only documents which profess to record his utterances) and the teachings of "organized Christianity." Christ taught a more ascetic, brutal and unreasonable ethic of sex and marriage than did Moses. Like Tolstoy and other extremists, Jesus may be quoted as softening and humanizing some of the older commands, but Jesus and Tolstoy were adamant in their insistence on what Mr. Murry rightly calls "the profound mistrust of human nature," when marriage, adultery and all sexual experiences are concerned.

It was not only "organized Christianity"; it was the sweet and gentle Nazarene himself who said (in the greatly over-praised "Sermon on the Mount") :—

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time "Thou shalt not commit adultery." But I say unto you that whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

It is clear enough from Matthew xix, that Jesus had no desire to reform the old Mosaic laws of marriage and divorce. On the contrary, he wanted them strengthened : as we should say to-day, he was a conservative reactionary. He himself proclaimed the "glad tidings" that a divorced woman should not be allowed to re-marry, and Matthew xix, 8 shows Jesus opposed to every form of divorce.

Much nonsense has been talked about Jesus once having been present at a marriage. The story appears only in one gospel, and is contradicted in the other three as regards its being "His First Miracle," and even John, who tells the story, seems decidedly shaky as to whether Jesus was present or only invited. He might have performed the "miracle" from outside the house, where the feast, but probably not the ceremony itself, took place.

Jesus had extraordinary views about sexual life, and he deserves all the criticism usually reserved for Saint Paul (and "organized Christianity") for having recommended castration as the proper course for all true believers. It was the gentle Saviour who said :—

There are some eunuchs which were so born from their mother's womb; and there are some eunuchs which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it let him receive it."

It was Paul (the "organizer of Christianity") who took Mr. Murry's "human nature" so far into account as to add : "it is better to marry than burn." Gentle Jesus omits even this cynical modification.

Mr. Murry is barking up the wrong tree. If he wants to condemn the Christian Church he will have to wipe his hands of the whole tribe, organized and otherwise.

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH.

The morning drum-call on my eager ear
Thrills unforgotten yet; the morning dew
Lies yet undried along my field of noon.

But now I pause at whiles in what I do,
And count the bell, and tremble lest I hear
(My work untrimmed) the sunset gun too soon.

R. L. STEVENSON.

The Wayside Pulpit.

I FREQUENTLY pass a certain chapel at the door of which is a notice board headed "Wayside pulpit." On this board a different poster is displayed each week, with a message for the week.

The sentiments contained in these messages vary from sound commonsense to sheer nonsense. For instance; Bobbie Burns' "O! wad some power the giftie gie us, tae see oursel's as ithers see us," is excellent, although one may be permitted to doubt its sincerity in that particular place; at any rate I question if Christians really wish to see themselves as Freethinkers see them.

Or, "Never judge another man until you have stood in his shoes," is a piece of advice of which many Christians stand in need.

One day the message ran, "It's not so much the job as the way the job is done that matters." A very comforting thought for the burglar to read on his way home from a successful crib-cracking expedition.

I think, however, that the height (or should it be depth?) of nonsense was reached when the poster read "Ignore the great truths of the Christian Religion and life becomes a meaningless mystery."

Let us consider a few of the GREAT TRUTHS referred to. First of all there is the rib story followed by the "Eat more fruit" episode. Personally, I am inclined to think that Eve tempted Adam with a banana and poor old Adam slipped on the skin and fell. Whether it was a banana or an apple matters not, life without this tale becomes a meaningless mystery.

Then again, how empty and meaningless are our lives if we ignore Noah and the Ark.

Imagine what life would be without these. Think of the procession when Noah marshalled his forces preparatory to embarking. What a wonderful feat of organization to see that the elephants did not collide with the fleas—or perhaps he arranged for the fleas to go with the monkeys—and to keep the tapeworms away from the thrushes, but maybe the tapeworms were allowed to travel inside.

We can only wonder at, and admire, Noah's great skill and thank Providence for these GREAT TRUTHS, reserving our pity for the poor wretches whose lives are blasted because they have never heard of these things.

Later on we get the story of the Virgin Birth. I suppose Joseph would be more pleased than anyone else to learn that this was a GREAT TRUTH. Had he had any doubts on the matter, life would have held another mystery for him.

Or to deal with matters less remote from the present time. How blank is life for us unless we partake periodically of a few sips of cheap port wine, which the incantation of a priest has turned into blood, and a biscuit which the same operation has converted into Christmeat.

And then we have the glories of Ash Wednesday. I quote from an article in the *Daily Herald*, by J.A.G.

This is what really happens. Ashes are made by burning the palm leaves which were used to decorate the church the previous Palm Sunday. The priest, vested in a purple cope, sprinkles these ashes with holy water three times and then incenses them three times. The congregation then kneel in turn at the altar rails, and the priest, dipping his thumb into the ashes, marks them with the Sign of the Cross on the forehead, saying at the same time :—

"Remember, man, that thou art dust and unto dust thou wilt return."

I expect it would be very awkward if the priest lost his purple cope, or ran short of holy water, but we need not worry ourselves about such trifles.

Finally, we have the greatest of all the GREAT TRUTHS—THE HOLY TRINITY.

When we understand this, the meaning of life becomes crystal clear to us. There is God the father, God the son and God the holy ghost; three in one and one in three. So God becomes his own son, and at the same time his own father, the son does ditto, and the Holy Ghost is the father and the son of both of them.

Therefore, let us humble ourselves and thank our lucky stars that we are not born in some heathen or pagan land, and praise the Lord that he has sent us these GREAT TRUTHS without which life becomes a meaningless mystery. 'Struth!

FRED HODDAY.

Correspondence.

FREETHOUGHT, RELIGION AND MORALS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Will you submit this question of the importance of attending to morality to all your readers for discussion? Let me try to state my position briefly.

Let us admit that morality ought not to rest—ought never to have rested—on superstition. Let us admit that morality is or ought to be nothing but the rules that will make the best job of life here and now; and that its foundation is or ought to be merely the realized fact that it is so. Nevertheless, it is unfortunately true that for centuries morality has been represented as the will of God—quite arbitrary—and the reason for obeying it, love of God or fear of hell. That being so, if Rationalism knocks out the ideas of God and hell, the inevitable result will be that the mass of human beings will have no criterion for morality at all, and no incentive to practise any. Take a case: Man was told not to lie or cheat in business—because God says he must not, and will punish him in hell if he does. Well and good—so long as he believes in God and hell. But if the Rationalist knocks out these absurd ideas, is it not incumbent on him: (1) To worry it out whether we may lie and cheat, or not; and (2) If not, to give good, clear, convincing reasons why not? I think it is incumbent on him. If you differ, I shall be very interested to hear your reasons.

As for the futility of preaching morality—that depends on the preaching: it is no more silly to preach sensible morality sensibly than to try to persuade people to use Sunlight Soap because it is the best, or to buy the publications of the Pioneer Press.

Allow me to refer to a remark in this week's *Freethinker* that illustrates very clearly the spirit I must criticize. "Jesus cursed and slandered his religious opponents"; "no intelligent student of history would dream of claiming Jesus . . . as the pioneer of tolerance in regard to religion." Think of Jesus and the prostitute: "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone." "Neither do I consider thee: Go, and sin no more." Or, rebuking the disciples for checking those who cast out devils in his name though they did not follow him. "He that is not against us is for us." Or on the cross: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Real or fictitious, to call such a character intolerant is pernicious nonsense. He did curse the Scribes and Pharisees—did he slander them? Do you not, yourself, curse hypocrites with all the virulence of which you are capable? Would you be content with the justice of calling your scorching truth slander—yourself intolerant? Such wild, indiscriminate abuse can only do the Cause harm. The Rationalist or Freethinker must be cool to see the good anywhere—in Christianity or out of it; to stand up against stupidity and viciousness wherever he meets it—even if it be in those professing his own religion.

Consider this: "... preaching a religious doctrine . . . so crude and so ignorant . . . that there are not a dozen educated Christians of standing who are not ashamed of it." That is the way to win the Christian to your side—but as it is, it is quite inconsistent with many of your remarks about Christians.

RONALD R. WHITCOMBE.

Society News.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH.

LAST Sunday, Mr. F. A. Hornibrook's lecture on "Posture and Health," was listened to with the greatest interest by a small audience. Though the speaker has always insisted that he prefers a few people who are really interested, more than a large number who are more or less indifferent, it was a great pity that the room was not packed. Mr. Hornibrook is a master of his subject, and his wit and humour and plain speaking make any of his lectures perfect gems. Mrs. Hornibrook also gave some valuable recipes.

To-night (March 10), Mr. H. Cutner will lecture on "The Germ Theory of Disease." Vivisectioners are particularly invited.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

Lecture notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, by the FIRST POST ON TUESDAY, or they will not be inserted.

LONDON.

INDOOR.

HAMPSTEAD ETHICAL INSTITUTE (The Studio Theatre, 59 Finchley Road, N.W.8): 11.15, Mrs. H. M. Swanwick—"Is Mankind Growing Up?"

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W.1): 7.30, Mr. H. Cutner—"The Germ Theory of Disease."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (30 Brixton Road, S.W., near Oval Station): 7.15, Mrs. Janet Chance—"The Home Education of Children in Religion and Sex."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): Free Sunday Lectures at 7 p.m., A. D. Howell-Smith, B.A.—"Nietzsche's Indictment of Christianity."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (The London Institution Theatre, South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11.0, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., D.Lit.—"The Spiritual Power."

THE NON-POLITICAL METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (The Orange Tree Hotel, Euston Road, N.W.1): 7.30, Mr. F. A. Hornibrook—"Religion and Dancing." On March 16, at Slater's Oak Restaurant, High Street, Kensington: A Dance. 7.30 to 11.30. Tickets 2s., from 9 Victoria Grove, Kensington, W.8. All cordially invited.

OUTDOOR.

FULHAM AND CHELSEA BRANCH N.S.S. (corner of Shorrols 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. F. Corrigan—A Lecture.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12 noon, Mr. James Hart. 3.30, Mr. B. A. Le Maine. 7.0, Messrs. James Hart and W. P. Campbell-Everden. Every Wednesday at 7.30, Mr. W. P. Campbell-Everden. Every Friday at 7.30, Mr. B. A. Le Maine. The *Freethinker* is on sale outside the Park at all our meetings.

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BELFAST SECULAR SOCIETY (I.L.P. Hall, 48 York Street): 3.30, Mr. G. Roberts—"God, the Curse of Belfast."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Still's Restaurant, Bristol Street, opposite Council Schools): 7.0, Important Committee Meeting. Members requested to attend.

CHESTER-LE-STREET BRANCH N.S.S.—7.0, Conference of North Eastern Branches. Business interesting and important. All Freethinkers in district cordially invited.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY, Branch of the N.S.S. (No. 2 Room, City Hall, Albion Street): 6.30, Mr. George Scott—"Some Impressions of Germany."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. Harry Snell, M.P.—A Lecture.

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