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Views and Opinions.

Christianity and Intolerance.

SOME work I had in hand the other day, led me to take down from my shelves the works of D. G. Ritchie. Ritchie was a careful and shrewd writer on sociological and philosophical matters, and I remember reading his works some thirty years ago, with much appreciation. Since then his books have passed through my hands chiefly for the purpose of dusting. In again turning to them, I am reminded of the amount of wisdom there was in the remark made by someone, that every time a new book came out he read an old one; and in looking for what I wanted, I was pleased to note in the work on *Natural Rights*, a pencil mark at the side of the following passage dealing with persecution:—

Persecution in the sense of repression for the purpose of maintaining true doctrine, is the outcome of Christianity. . . . When we speak of Christianity in any comparison between it and other religions, we mean, of course, the Christianity which has actually manifested itself in history, and not what any one may conceive to be the ideal of the religion as originally taught. It is manifestly unfair to compare an ideal of one religion with the actually prevailing precepts and practices of another. Now, in the sense in which we say that Christianity became the religion of the Roman world, in the sense in which we compare the number of Buddhists and Mohammedans, in that sense Christianity has been a persecuting religion, and persecution has been of the essence of it in a sense in which that could not be said of the older tribal or political religions it supplanted.

Now that is well said and it is strictly true. Intolerance is a quality of human nature that can be found in every age in the world's history, but it was left for the Christian religion to give it the standing of a moral and religious duty such as it held under no other religion. No other religion known to the world so carefully elaborated the principle of persecution, preached it so assiduously as a duty man owed to God, more carefully devised penalties, or inflicted more brutal tortures for differences of religious

belief. Christianity not merely legalized persecution, it moralized it, and gave it a standing such as it had never before enjoyed.

* * *

How We have Advanced.

I have said all this many times before, but its social significance is great enough to excuse the repetition, particularly when it receives support from an independent source. *To Christianity we owe the naturalization of persecution in European society.* This has been so thoroughly done in connexion with religion, that we are in the habit of referring with pride to the enormous advance we have made because within the past century we have ceased to drag to prison men and women who have ventured to question the absolute accuracy of the legends of a tribe of Semitic semi-savages. That a man can remain in the same room with another who is denying the truth of the Christian religion still rouses admiration for so liberal a character, and few would be surprised if he left the room in a fit of indignation. We are not ashamed that such persecution has been; we do not feel that it is a blot on human history, or ask how such a monstrous thing as the Inquisition came into existence and was tolerated; we take all of it as quite a matter of course, and preen ourselves on the fact that we have reached the enormous height of intellectual development that enables us to hear another man say that religion is rubbish, without wishing to burn him at the stake—or at least without doing it. We do not see that our pride is a confession of our past degradation. And that, I repeat, is because Christianity made persecution a part of our normal life, and taught men and women to take pride in their own degradation.

* * *

Christianity and Truth.

But there are few writers who, having expressed a truth concerning Christianity, do not at once proceed to insert some qualifying statement to soften what has just been said. So one is not altogether surprised to find on the next page from which the above passage was taken the following:—

The importance assigned to the possession of truth—of the truth—is one of the most fruitful ideas which Christianity has diffused in the modern world.

After that it would seem that Ritchie has small grounds for complaint against those writers who say of "liberty" what he says of "truth," and who claim that Christianity gave freedom to Europe, or who assert that Protestantism (a form of Christianity as intolerant as Roman Catholicism, but without the excuse for being so) gave modern Europe the principle of individual liberty.

We have the same kind of thing expressed in Lord

Morley's *On Compromise*. Contrasting the old religious type with the present one, he says:—

Men were then devoutly persuaded that their eternal salvation depended on their having true beliefs. Any slackness in finding out which beliefs are the true ones would have to be answered for before the throne of Almighty God, at the sore risk and peril of eternal damnation.

Both statements are not merely not true, they are absurdly false. How is it possible for a religion that has always been a persecuting one to, at the same time, have impressed upon its followers, or upon the world generally, the importance of discovering truth? On the face of it persecution is a denial of the right of men to seek truth wherever they think they may find it. The forcible suppression of all opinions but one is a denial of the right of men to hold any opinion but the one authorized. The importance of truth is a belief which Europe owes entirely to the scientific spirit. It is quite unknown to religion, and has but a precarious footing in politics. It is science alone which in season and out of season holds out to mankind the pursuit of truth as the most important of tasks and the noblest of ideals.

* * *

Thus Saith the Lord!

Of course, religion, and Christianity in particular, has talked largely of the importance of having the truth; but by that it meant a special "truth," and of that it permitted no criticism whatever. You were to be saved, not by finding truth, but by believing certain things which were called "the truth." It is staggering to find men such as Lord Morley fathering the statement that Christians have ever believed that their prime duty was to find "which beliefs are the true ones." Why, the persistent teaching of the Christian Church has been that men ran the risk of eternal damnation even by setting out on the inquiry. The last thing any body of Christians encourages or believes in, is the search for truth. They believe in the truth of revelation, and there the matter ends. The greatest leaders in the Church have always treated doubt of the absolute truth of Christianity as of the devil, to be resisted at all costs. How can a religion that has taught salvation by faith, which has held up a little child as the intellectual model for the world, and has counted intellectual pride as one of the chief of sins, at the same time teach the importance of truth, and that eternal salvation depends upon finding out which beliefs are true ones? The devotee on his knees, not the investigator in the study or the workshop, is the ideal of Christian excellence.

* * *

Two Kinds of Martyrdom.

I commenced these somewhat random notes with a quotation from D. G. Ritchie. I may well end them with another quotation from the same writer, but from another volume—*Philosophical Studies*. Mr. Ritchie is contrasting the religious martyr with the martyr for non-religious truth:—

Contrast the "martyrdom" of a Christian under the Roman Empire, and that of a philosopher or heretic at the hands of the "Christians." The Christian (say a slave of a long enslaved race), brought face to face with the awful majesty . . . of force and law, refuses to burn incense before the statue of the very human master of the legions. He believes that this very terrestrial power will very soon pass away; he has no sympathy with it. He looks forward to a speedy overthrow, a terrible retribution. . . . Moreover, he has the personal hope of a heavenly crown. He is a slave, despised, down-trodden here: he will be before the throne of God

with the elect in heaven. The balance of pleasure is clearly on the side of martyrdom. The heretic is resisting all the influences under which he has been brought up. These are solemn, appealing not to the eye, but to the heart and the imagination. They are sanctified by long association to himself and those dear to him. He is under no illusions about its tremendous hold on the minds of men. He knows that, with his talents and knowledge, a safe and honourable career would be open to him among men. He might be a bishop, a cardinal, a pope, a doctor, a saint. In the opinion of those who have brought him up, he is casting away his hopes in the next world. He has, perhaps, no sure belief in a future recompense for himself; the triumph of his cause is very distant, and must come very gradually. Yet for what he believes to be truth—for that alone he dies. Which martyrdom testifies most to the truth of the opinions of the martyr? There may be a greater testimony to truth in the mere refusal of an honest and intelligent man to enter the Church, than in the excited devotee running towards the lions in the arena.

I fancy this is an expression of opinion it would do most Christians good to read and ponder. I am certain there is not one in a thousand who has realized it. It represents the attitude of the man who believes in the search for truth, as contrasted with that of the typical Christian who believes in what he calls "the truth," and refuses to either submit it to the test of fact or to see what truth has been found in other directions.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Farm Street Follies.

"What custom wills, in all things should we do't
The dust on antique time would lie unswept,
And mountainous error be too highly heaped
For truth to o'erpeer."—Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*.

SOMEONE ought to write a book on the Clerical Caste, for few people realize how Clericalism is interwoven in our social system. Not only are there 20,000 priests of the State Church, but there is a larger number belonging to the other denominations of religion, ranging from Catholics to Christadelphians, from Presbyterians to Peculiar People. Without counting on the activities of the Mormons or the Muggletonians, and other fancy religions, there are about 45,000 pastors and priests in this country, which is popularly supposed, even by Socialists, to be entirely free from the machinations of priestcraft.

Of this body, the most reactionary and also the most ignorant are the Roman Catholic priests. This is not generally suspected, but the fact remains, Catholics are a minority, but a noisy minority, and they are astute enough to put all their most showy goods in their shop windows. Publicists like Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton do their journalistic worst to persuade Britishers that Rome is better than Reason, but for one Newman that the Church Catholic can point to there are ten thousand ignorant priests.

The monastic training is the cause of much of this ignorance. The only education that Romish priests actually receive is in the patter of their sorry profession. The curriculum is severely limited, and hopelessly out of date. Anglican curates are the butt of every comic artist and every writer of farce; but they are men-of-the-world compared with their unfortunate Romish rivals, who are actually worse off than prisoners in American jails, who, at least, have access to a library that has some association with the modern world.

The Jesuit Fathers are supposed to be the most cultured of the Catholic priests. Then listen to Father Woodlock, of Farm Street Church, London,

who was selected by a big newspaper editor to place his views before their hundreds of thousands of readers. The reverend gentleman wrote on "Pain," and, let us hope, did not detract unduly from the pleasure of his unaccustomed audience. This is how Father Woodlock carried the good news of Catholic culture to an ignorant Pagan world:—

It is surely a sound moral counsel not to condemn a man till you know his whole story. To know all is to forgive all is proved true again and again in human experience. A play may be a sad tragedy for four acts, and yet turn out happily, and end in happiness with the triumph of justice and vindication of goodness in the fifth. Christianity is often condemned piecemeal, because of some hard sayings detached from the context of the whole complex faith. That is unfair to Christ. There are men who stumble at the doctrine of the Cross because they stop short at Calvary and the Good Friday tragedy, forgetting that the joy of the Easter Resurrection and eternal happiness beyond the grave is as essential and integral part of Christian belief, and an object of Christian trust as sorrow and pain, and the bearing of the cross is an essential part of human life on earth.

Then he adds, "Be fair to God"; "wait till His whole plan is realized." If this is the best apologia that a Catholic priest can give, it is a disappointing production. One expects this sort of thing from a converted dustman, waking the echoes at the corner of a road, with the assistance of a harmonium and six girl friends. Even a priest of the Greek Church, could do no worse. And one does not expect over-much culture from the East of Europe, particularly from its clergy.

Father Woodlock is as mixed concerning plays as he is concerning the religion he professes. He writes of "a sad tragedy" with a happy ending. But a tragedy does not have a happy ending, and a comedy is not a tragedy, sad or otherwise. Perhaps papa is thinking of melodrama, such as "The Girl who Took the Wrong Turning." Even this masterpiece, as is usual with melodrama, is only sad in places, and the heroine reaches home at last, just escaping the milkman.

Then, what is the poor reader to make of papa's plea of knowing all and pardoning all? Father Woodlock professes to believe that "Christ" is a "god," and that this "god" is almighty and omnipotent. How can a mere worm in the dust, who pays a paltry pew-rent, judge, in its entirety, the processes of Infinity? It is a wasteful and ridiculous misuse of language hardly worthy of one who voices "cultured" religion. Does Father Woodlock wish to imply that "the Divine Comedy" is, after all, as simple a matter as buying a pound of candles? It may be so to him, but it is unusual to admit the soft impeachment in public. Even from his own theological angle, this Jesuit scholar deserves caning.

"Pain," declares the egregious Father Woodlock, "cannot be utterly and irremediably evil if it was chosen by Christ." There's humanism for you in the twentieth century. It is a good thing that the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and kindred organizations, are not animated by such extraordinary notions. Let Father Woodlock sit upon the business end of a tintack, and re-read his pronouncement on pain. He might begin to realize that there are more important things than religion, and that one of them is common sense.

This child-like nonsense is not uttered by an ignorant Irish priest, or by a Belgian preacher, with an accent like the kick of a mule. It is uttered by a Jesuit Father, who is used to addressing West-end audiences of the Catholic faithful. It is not only

wonderful that a priest should talk in such a manner, but it is still more wonderful that grown men and women, pretending to some measure of education, should listen to it with humility. To pursue the matter further is to essay an inquiry into the psychology of a crowd, and an ignorant one at that. Let there be no mistake on this point. Roman Catholics are mainly ignorant folks. They are not allowed to read any books or publications criticizing their religion, and the Index Expurgatorius contains the list of all the books worth reading for many generations. They are told that by reading these they are in danger of eternal damnation in the red-hot poker department of the Religion of Love. Even colporteurs of Bible Societies are ill-treated in Roman Catholic countries, for a zealous Papist will no more read a Protestant version of the Christian Bible, than he would the awful works of Chapman Cohen. No Roman Catholic may even become a Freemason, because priests object to all secret societies other than their own. If a Catholic young man attends a Free-thought lecture, he sins more grievously than if he stole his employer's money. Not that the Catholic Church objects to stolen money, otherwise the wealth of the Church would not be to-day what it is.

Fortunately, these mollusc habits of thought are slowly passing. Church-going is now reduced to a minimum. If present tendencies proceed unchecked for another generation, that custom may become merely a memory. Then, ordinary folks will take religion and priests much less seriously than at present—like the American, who was looking round Canterbury Cathedral. "This," said the verger, "is the tomb of Saint Thomas à Becket." "Ah!" replied the American, "then he did fight Jack Dempsey after all!"

MIMNERMUS.

That Blessed Second Advent.

In those far-off days we call pre-war, when the gaiety of nations in general and that of citizens of this country in particular was regularly aroused by the activities of certain women fighting for what a good many of them now see was merely a delusion, it was a pleasure to read the commonsense articles and almost invincible logic of Miss Christabel Pankhurst.

If women wanted the vote, and imagined by its aid this land of ours would become an earthly paradise, there seemed no reason refusing it to them. On the other hand, one could not always take the valiant efforts and antics of the pioneers as foreshadowing a heaven here—if by heaven was meant the ideal dwelling place so long desired and described by Christians. Most of them, however, quite possibly were thinking more of making decent homes and happier lives for working men and women, good food and opportunities for everybody who wished to get on; and certainly this was an ideal worth fighting for.

Well, the suffragettes have had their day, and their great leader, Miss Pankhurst, has had her say, and with her latest book, *Seeing the Future*, before me, I can only express my astonishment.

What has become of the fighting "Joan of Arc," the leading mind, the intellectual general of the war-like women who made history in those days when England was still a little free? Is this the great Christabel?

It is many years ago since I read *Rodney Stone* and *The White Company*, but I still remember the thrill those incomparable stories gave me, and I can take my hat off to their author. But what am I to say of *The Coming of the Fairies*? How can I re-

concile A. Conan Doyle, teller of fine stories, master of great fiction, with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle whose credulity and superstition are the laughing-stock of two continents? How can I reconcile the man who never ceased fighting for Oscar Slater, and who won the freedom of an innocent man, with the man who wrote those dreadful articles on Houdini a year or so back in the *Strand Magazine*? The two personalities seem poles apart.

Again, take our *plus catholique que le roi*, Mr. G. K. Chesterton. In the old days, an article of his on almost any subject, had some magic in it, some marvellous paradox, some flashing jewel of a phrase, some clear horse sense logic, which singled him out as the leading essayist of his day. Hey, presto! Mr. Chesterton becomes a Catholic, a Papist, and fills everything he writes with his religious beliefs; and, in a night, he becomes almost an insufferable bore. Away go those splendid characteristics he was famous for, and in their place come stupid reasons why Catholics are the salt of the earth; why miracles are not mad, but perfectly reasonable; why any Pope is easily the greatest being that ever lived, and why Protestants and sceptics should be shunned as if they were genuine personifications of a genuine Devil.

And now comes Miss Pankhurst. She has lost pretty nearly all those superb qualities which made her a great leader; she has become one of a crowd of those silly people who call themselves Second Adventists; one of a sect which can only be rivalled by the other idiotic sects brought into being by Christianity, for sheer hopeless fatuity and futility.

Miss Pankhurst no longer believes that the vote will bring food, happiness, homes and sunshine into the people's lives. Nothing will, in fact, except the Second Advent of Jesus. Social and economic theories and facts may come and go. Populations may rise and fall, great nations may turn a complete somersault, but Jesus will live for ever.

It is the same Jesus you read of in the New Testament, indeed, the Jesus who is the hero of the complete Bible, the Old and the New Testaments. For her, the Old Testament is permeated with Jesus. All the prophecies deal with Jesus. All the prophets spoke of him and for him, and perhaps with him. I don't know.

I read *Seeing the Future* in a kind of stupor. Of course Jesus is coming again. Didn't he say so? Isn't Science all wrong? Isn't the Bible all true? Are we, or are we not living in the twentieth century? And if so, isn't every word in the Grand Old Book true, full-stops included?

Of course, I should have known that the Bible was not only true in history, but in science. As Miss Pankhurst says, "Let justice be done, even to the Bible! Long before Science knew it, the Bible revealed the sphericity of the earth. Thus, the prophet Isaiah, according to Moffatt's translation, told of 'the round earth.' Job plainly and popularly stated a scientific fact long before Astronomy knew it: 'He hangeth the earth upon nothing.'"

So there you are! A round earth means a round earth, and you can't get over that. But what are the lingering remnants of the Flat-earthites going to say about it? They claim the Earth is as flat as a plate because the Bible tells them so, and they also believe that every word and every comma therein have come straight from God (or Jesus). What a delightful debate we could have between a Flat-earthite and Miss Pankhurst, using the same Bible to prove the earth is both flat and round! But why go to such an age-long controversy? Let us try something more modern. What has the Bible to say about the wireless?—no, let's have something even more wonderful than sound transmission. Let us take "tele-

vision." Does the Bible talk about television? You bet it does. Here is Miss Pankhurst again:—

"Television has come." "Distance no Barrier to Television," headed the news of Baird's transatlantic experiment. What a fresh vindication of the Bible is provided by television! A comparison of the following passages is indeed instructive. "And the devil, taking him (Jesus) up into an high mountain shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time." (Luke iv. 5.) [An extract from the *Observer* about Baird's television experiments is here given side by side with the verses from Luke]. Thus [concludes Miss Pankhurst], we find the Bible to be nineteen centuries ahead of Science.

I have read that passage about Jesus and the Devil many times, but I never thought for one moment it was a sublime proof of television. I have read about fairies jumping from flower to flower, bless their dear little hearts, but I never expected to find anyone who had actually seen it done; I have heard of priests, to the accompaniment of magic Latin words, turning a wafer into a God in the twinkling of an eye, but, heavens above, I never thought some of our leading men would ever believe it. And, anyway, if it is true that the Devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, it looks like the "television" indicated came rather from His Satanic Majesty than the Heavenly God.

I ask in all seriousness if any reader can say now whether Christianity is not harmful? I admit a book like *Seeing the Future* will not be read by everyone, but what can we say of a reputable firm like Messrs. Harper's, in this year of grace 1929, publishing hopeless nonsense like the extracts I have given. The book is packed with childish comments. Most of it is, of course, incomprehensible, but its eulogy of Bible prophecy and our Lord and Saviour is enough to make even a fish weep. That Palestine is now open for Jewish immigrants, is Miss Pankhurst's crowning proof of the truth of the Bible. The fact that most Jews in civilised countries wouldn't touch their own land with a thousand miles in length pitchfork, doesn't disturb the equanimity of Miss Pankhurst in the least. The Bible said the Jews would go back; they are going back; and therefore the Second Advent is also drawing nigh, and are you prepared to meet your Maker? "The half is already done, for as the child of Mary, Christ was born in Bethlehem; as the Son of God, he was given in sacrifice for the taking away of Sin and the giving of everlasting life. Just as surely, will the rest of the promise be kept by His coming again to make the Kingdom of this world His own. Then, indeed, will seeing be believing, and as it is written; the Glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.

Isn't it just too cute? It doesn't come, please remember, from any good old medieval saint, but from Miss Pankhurst, living in 1929, but is there any real difference? I should like to ask one question. If the Jesus of the second Advent is the Jesus described in our Gospels, does any one want Him back? Really?

II. CUTNER.

Why are we to give this Church credit, when she tells us that those books are genuine in every part any more than we give her credit for everything else she has told us; or for the miracles she says she has performed? That she *could* fabricate writings is certain, because she could write; and the composition of the writings in question is of that kind that anybody might do it; and that she *did* fabricate them is not more inconsistent with probability than that she could tell us, as she has done, that she could and did work miracles.

Thomas Paine.

Woman in Ancient Greece.

In old-time Babylonia, Rome and Hellas alike, woman occupied a relatively high position. Indeed, in Babylon thousands of years before the Christian dispensation was dreamed of, the rights possessed by the female sex were far greater than those accorded it in any Christian State until quite recent generations.

It is commonly assumed that throughout antiquity, women were despotically treated. And it is still asserted that the gentle influence of the Christian Church emancipated the softer sex from a brutal Pagan enslavement and placed it on a pedestal of liberty. But this contention is demonstrably false, both in substance and in fact.

That the civilization of ancient Greece was in all things perfect no one seriously assumes. Any State that rests on servile labour, however considerate its treatment of its helot population, leaves much to be desired. Yet the records that remain of that brilliant people prove that Greece was, and must ever remain, one of the chief glories of human life and mind.

It has been sagely said that, "Sculpture and vase paintings interpret history as well as do writings and laws." Truly, the superb achievements of chiselled art which depict amazons and goddesses, silently proclaim the reverence and honour in which women were held.

Labour, in antiquity, was regarded as the destined lot of the inferior orders. The same prejudice prevailed throughout the Christian Middle Ages. Even now, landed estate is considered much superior—at least in old-fashioned circles—to the forms of property represented by industry and commerce. It is still a common disparagement, the saying: "They may be rich, but their money was made in trade." Feudal survivals still sway large sections of our rural contemporaries. Nor are they dead even among the more sophisticated dwellers in our towns and cities.

In Greece there were two distinct classes. There were those accounted free citizens, and those subjected to slavery. Consequently, the high standing of women in Pagan antiquity was necessarily confined to the privileged orders of society.

The researches of Sir Arthur Evans and his colleagues in Crete have brought much that is new to light. The Palace at Knossos was evidently the centre of a supremely artistic culture. In the art fragments discovered, women are represented as frequently as men. These works of art date back to the Minoan Age, about 3000 B.C., and they depict ladies seated unveiled at the palace casements as freely as women sit to-day. Burrows, in his *Discoveries in Crete*, and Angelo Mosso, in *The Palaces of Crete and their Builders*, furnish numerous examples of splendidly attired ladies forming part of processions, of a woman officiating at the sacrifice of a bull, a woman driving a chariot and horses, and other representations of woman's public liberties.

The very numerous representations of women participating in religious ceremonies seems to indicate that they predominated in these functions. Again, the majority of images are female. It is therefore thought that in Minoan times women occupied a highly influential position in religion, and were privileged in performing its rites. The priestess seems to eclipse the priest.

Matriarchy formed the rule of descent, and sons succeeded in their mother's names. As the Mother of the Race, woman was held in high esteem. But although the family centre, she was not the mistress of the State. Mother-rule and mother-descent, here as elsewhere, are very different things.

That fine Hellenist, the late Jane Harrison, in her

Themis, conjectures that, "Probably in Minoan Crete women played a greater part than they did even in Egypt, and it may eventually appear that religious matters, perhaps even the government of the State itself as well, were largely controlled by women. It is certain they must have lived on a footing of greater equality with the men than in any other ancient civilization."

It is significant, but not surprising, that women played a prominent part in sacerdotal ceremonies. All down the ages, woman has proved a more religious animal than man. If the gifted French philosopher, Michelet, speaks truly, then to religion woman has been mother, sole guardian, and faithful nurse. The gods are like men, they are born, they are reared, and they perish upon her bosom.

Miss E. M. White, in her interesting and informative volume, *Woman in World History*, speculates on the curious circumstance that sacerdotal dress is always and everywhere suggestively effeminate. She remarks that, "Whatever its origin may have been, the bisexual dress of men priests, which has been in vogue since the earliest ages, and is continued to the present day, silently asserts a dignity attached to motherhood." This may prove a part explanation, but other factors seem, to the writer, involved.

Centuries before our era, in the stirring events immortalized in the Iliad and Odyssey, the Homeric women of the governing classes were mated in terms of monogamy, and led lives subjected to little restraint. The ideal of matrimony, then, as now, was a happy fireside clime for weans and wife, and unfaithfulness to the marriage vow, save in highly extenuating circumstances, a mortal sin. And, so runs the story, all the turmoil at Troy arose from the rape of the peerless Helen, whose beauty "Wrinkles Apollo's and makes stale the morning."

In Homer's majestic masterpieces, the Iliad and Odyssey alike, marital affection is a dominant note. In all domestic relations, men and women stand equal in the Iliad. And this despite the fact that the poem is so predominantly militant. Woman's influence in the Odyssey is even more pronounced. Indeed, so powerfully is the feminist case presented, that Samuel Butler of *Erewhon* fame strove to trace its authorship to a woman.

Everywhere in Homer home-life is depicted as happy and contented. So much so, that even the wayward Andrew Lang has stated that "no literature in the world displays a happier domestic life, or one more gentle, true, and loving."

The men and women who adorn the epics of Homer seem much more humane than the immortal gods. Male and female divinities in common, display the worst human weaknesses. Hera, "that divine shrew," as Herbert Spencer termed her, was a very turbulent goddess. Yet, scold as she showed herself in all her squabbles with her husband Zeus, she possessed some good qualities. In Argos, at least, Hera was honoured as the parent of civilization. She first taught mankind to plant the earth with corn, and was praised as Hera the Benefactress.

Pallas Athene is a more powerful goddess, the flame of whose sacred lamp was never permitted to expire. Euripides hails her as the mother, mistress, and guardian of the City. The statesman's divinity, her counsel in peace and in war was eagerly welcomed. Athene protected the interests of agriculture and the loom. A virgin goddess, she symbolizes the sovereign sway and masterdom of woman in public life.

As time went on the goddesses receded, and Zeus and Apollo increased in importance. With the evolution of culture, the barbarities of the Homeric immortals were refined, and the deities themselves were

endowed with the poetry and philosophy of maturer thought.

Fully conscious of the frailties of females as Hesiod was, still he personifies Justice as a spotless spinster in his "Shield of Hercules":—

"A virgin pure is Justice, and her birth
From Jove himself; a creature in her worth
And nobleness, revered by gods on high."

Eve tempted Adam and he fell, and the meddling Pandora, by unlocking her casket, broadcast all the ills of humankind. Baneful as females sometimes are to Hesiod, they at times prove serviceable. In the "Theogony" we find this solemn warning to unwedded men:—

"The man who, shunning wedlock, thinks to shun
The vexing cares which haunt the woman state,
And lonely waxes old, shall feel the want
Of one to foster his declining years."

As the centuries advanced, the seclusion of woman became more and more pronounced. The home became the conventional sphere of the wife and mother. The day came when the wedded woman seldom stirred abroad, at least in Athens, save to attend some sacred festival. Yet, many outstanding women continued the older customs and defied the convention which imposed seclusion on their more tractable sisters. In Sparta, women still maintained their ancient liberties, but the spirit of restraint was advancing even there.

An Athenian citizen could not legally wed a woman born in another State. With the increasing seclusion of the wife, unmarried females constantly formed unions with men.

Puritanism and prudery were anathema to the Greeks, hence the rise and influence of the Hetairæ who frequently settled in Athens, though natives of a separate State, or were Athenian women who scorned the sheltered life accepted by the average matron. Aspasia, the companion and counsellor of Pericles, was one of these, and she was certainly one of the most remarkably gifted women of ancient times.

In the fourth century B.C., the independent city States succumbed to the sword of the Macedonian Alexander. The position of woman continued to sink. It has been argued that the overthrow of Greece is partly attributable to the enervated women of the period. The prevalent homosexuality was also a contributory cause of the fall of Greece. Obviously, when the mothers of the race are cribbed, cabined, and confined, they are certain to experience mental and physical deterioration. They tend to produce less virile and intelligent offspring. In consequence the race is continually impoverished, and is, in the long run, doomed to destruction.

T. F. PALMER.

Acid Drops.

The arrangement between Mussolini and the Pope provides that in future the Catholic religion will be taught in all schools in Italy, but in addition it stipulates that no priest unfrocked or under censure shall be kept in employment or office which brings them in contact with the public. This means that no priest who does not please the Papacy can in future hold any public post whatever in Italy. The priest who dares to use his brains for himself will undergo national excommunication. And in effect we fancy it will mean more than this. We shall be greatly surprised if, in effect, it does not mean the rigid boycotting of anyone of anti-Catholic opinions.

This arrangement places Italy definitely among the most intellectually backward nations of Europe. How long it will continue, remains to be seen. After all, the

Italians are a great people, with great traditions; and the Italian brain we believe to be among the finest in Europe. As we said a week or two ago, Mazzini and Garibaldi were both Italians, and their progeny and their spirit cannot be altogether dead. But while this compact between megalomania and religious tyranny may last for awhile, its very ruthlessness will make for its undoing. In spite of official disclaimers, England was one that more than any other nation actively sympathized with the Garibaldian struggle for the freedom of Italy; and in spite of "Jix" and his kind, we fancy that that spirit also is not extinct. We thank the Pope and Mussolini for helping to show the world that the Christian Church has not altered its character.

Mr. Frank Fremlin, late chairman of Fremlin Bros., Ltd., brewers, of Maidstone, has given £30,000 for distribution among the employees of the firm to celebrate his eightieth birthday. That is a nice little sum; its disposal in a world that will always be more or less naughty, is of a very practical nature, and it sets a good example to some of our plutocratic followers of Jesus. They might, for a change, make a beginning by giving some of their fortunes to their congregations—and they might not.

The *Morning Post* draws attention to the practice lately indulged in by magistrates in America, of ordering boys to go to Church for having committed some misdemeanour in the process of growing up. Let us be thorough-going fools while we are about it, and give full praise to the Church. An imaginary magistrate might be pictured as saying: "Johnny Jones, you are guilty of having pulled the hair of a little girl; I sentence you to attend church for two years, and may God have mercy on your soul." And this is the kind of compliment to the Church that we like to see.

A newspaper correspondent records in a letter the existence of the smallest war memorial. It is in Easthorpe, near Kelvedon, Essex, and is in the form of a marble slab measuring twenty inches by fifteen inches. The correspondent should have kept this dark, as there is the risk of pious busybodies wanting to erect a war memorial, find a job for a parson, and by a big stone edifice near a church, show what men did, and what parsons didn't.

The word "priest," says the Rev. Dr. Richard Roberts, has fallen into some disrepute among Protestants. He adds:—

In his origin, the priest was a kind of middleman. He acted for man before God. In times of ignorance, he had his uses. Naturally, it was an important office; but the one condition of rightly discharging it was that the priest should not regard himself as an important person. But that seems to have been too much to expect from human frailty. The priest ceased to regard himself as a middleman, and began to behave like a nobleman. The priesthood became a religious aristocracy, and lorded it over the Lord's inheritance. . . . One aspect of the great revolution that Christianity began was to sweep away the aristocracy, and to replace religion on its true democratic basis, on which every man is his own middleman—that is to say, he stands before God and transacts his business with God in his own person.

But why every man his own middleman? So far as God is concerned, the proper rule should be "Every man his own manufacturer." The trouble is that we are taking the gods that were made for us by more ignorant ages instead of, if we will have such lumber, making them for ourselves and to our own satisfaction.

Someone recently returned from Samoa says that the natives are passionately fond of Shakespeare's plays, which they know solely through a Samoan translation of Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*. Well, if the Samoans got infected thereby with Shakespeare's wide tolerance, breadth of view, and humanity, they will be better off than if they had a craze for the Bible. They wouldn't get these things from Holy Writ. We appeal to Christian history to support that statement.

A letter of the late Thomas Hardy was put up for sale at Christie's rooms. The contents of the document have evidently interested a scribe in a daily newspaper, and Hardy's view on "sport" is, by the famous author, logically worked out. Hardy writes, apropos of contrivances to catch and slaughter fellow-creatures, that, "in the present state of affairs, there would appear to be no reason why the children, say, of overcrowded families should not be used for sporting purposes." "This," says the scribe in question, "smacks more of Swift than of the author of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*." We disagree. It smacks of Hardy, the so-called pessimist, who could scarcely touch the consciousness of a half-stupid world kept so by the rubbish distributed and bawled by Christianity. With Bishops and parsons riding to hounds, with what other methods could Hardy hope to penetrate the skull of the blind leaders of the blind?

We are going to the dogs. On the authority of the Rev. J. T. Barkby, a former President of the Primitive Methodist Connection, we are in a bad way. There is no health in us. It is all up with us. Listen to this, or as they say up North, "Hark at him":—

"Within the central sweep of this city," he said, "there are sights which, if you saw them, would make you think you had seen hell."

This city is London, and we learn further on that in one district eleven out of twenty-four Evangelical Churches have been closed in forty years, which explains the milk in the Rev. J. T. Barkby's cocoanut.

The Lateran Treaties provide for the punishment of persons unlawfully wearing priests' dress. Therefore, the criminal when caught will get it in the neck for his cross-eyed compliment to the tribe whom Napoleon put with the women and camels.

According to Sir R. Murray Hyslop, a simple American visitor on being shown the tomb of St. Thomas a Becket, exclaimed, "Oh, then he did fight Jack Dempsey after all." This all comes through our cousin not having the religious instinct well developed, or, put in another way, not having religious teaching ground into him when he was helpless at school. "Catch 'em young," is a good slogan for religious trade interests.

Extract from a current lawsuit:—

Mr. Moritz (cross-examining Mr. Merson): Should you say the Ritz Hotel is a music-hall if it holds a music-hall licence?—Yes, if it has a dancing and music licence.

May the Salvation Army headquarters be a music-hall?—Yes, a form of one.

Gipsy Smith has been having a wonderful time at Boston, U.S.A. He (and the choir of 2,200) drew a crowd of 20,000 people. Thousands of convinced Christians were converted, and signed "decision cards." A writer in a Methodist weekly suggests that England could do with a return to this type of mass evangelism. He deplores the fact that there have been no big campaigns here which have been backed by the Churches, and which have appealed to the outsider. He thinks something ought to be done "to meet the hunger of the masses for a plain, practical Gospel," and to awaken the whole country, now that the time is ripe for a great revival. Really, this pious story about the masses hungering for religion is getting more than a little threadbare. Most of our biggest newspapers have done their best to get people interested in religion, and it is pretty obvious that the people know where to find religion, either plain or coloured. Yet there are no signs of a sudden rush for the Churches—on the contrary!

Madame J. E. Vajkai, an Hungarian, has been examining social facts in England. The large number of families living in two or three rooms in the slums of London appalled her. She suggests ironically that, if it is really necessary for the welfare of the world that so many Londoners should be born, the families should at least be in a position to pay for as many bedrooms as

they need. Still, is that really essential, so long as there are plenty of churches and mission-halls? What does it matter about material comfort as long as spiritual wants are amply provided for?

The same Hungarian lady dislikes the practice in English courts of forcing a child to take the oath. In Hungary, she says, no oath is demanded of a child, and she refuses to believe that the cause of justice has suffered thereby. We would go further than that, and say that the cause of justice would not suffer in any country if the oath were dispensed with for adults as well as children.

On the medical dispute concerning costly artificial light versus a pennyworth of cod-liver oil, we make no comment. But the dispute suggests an analogy. The Church's "supernatural light" method of inculcating right conduct and morals is a highly expensive treatment that achieves very meagre results. A pennyworth of rational instruction would produce, at considerably less cost, a vastly better and more lasting harvest.

What horrid materialists the King's medical advisers must be! Millions of prayers, in mass formation and single-file, have ascended to heaven, and the doctors cannot but be aware of the fact. Yet they have, so far, not even mentioned that the King's recovery is, as the prayer-mongers believe, primarily due to prayer. Considering the important position of the Churches, it is certainly up to them to get a combined testimonial to that effect signed by the medicos; otherwise many of the prayerites may begin to doubt whether God really did oblige.

Man has been discovering, says Dr. F. W. Norwood, all the wonderful things God has stored up in the world for him. If that be so, we think it a pity that God didn't make the discovery of certain things a little easier. For hundreds of years during the Christian era, God made the discovery of hygiene so difficult that millions of people perished through plagues. And the discovery was postponed by the peculiar Christian belief that glorified uncleanness and condemned cleanliness as a pagan notion. Again, man would have made many vastly useful discoveries much sooner, if only God had not foisted upon the world the Christian Church which suppressed the seminal thoughts of pagan thinkers.

A number of papers have been laying themselves out over some discoveries near Babylon by an American Professor, which it is held proves the truth of the biblical story of the flood. This is rather upsetting, in view of the conclusions of "advanced" Christian scholars, that the Biblical story is untrue. First of all the Bible story is held to be true, then after much controversy it is accepted as mere legend, and just when the whole affair is being settled, it is discovered it is true after all, and all the Christian ignoramuses from Dan to Beersheba are rejoicing.

But, after all, the critics may be right. For taking the story as it is related, and accepting the Professor's discoveries at its face value, all he claims to have discovered is an alluvial layer covering a particular plain. It is something, apparently similar to what might take place in any country subject to huge floods or, say the breaking of a dam. But that is not exactly what the Bible says. That tells us that the whole earth, and all the hills were covered, and it was all done directly through the orders of God Almighty himself. And because the whole earth was covered, Noah had to take two of every kind into the Ark so that the Lord might not be put to the trouble of creating them all over again. The story of some local flood which covered a low lying plain is not quite on all fours with the Bible story, at least, it doesn't look like it to us.

The Imperial Alliance for the Defence of Sunday has invited the Churches to organize a "Sunday Defence Sunday," on April 7. The order of the day is for public

thanksgiving and prayer, and appeals to the pious to help defend "our blessed heritage." We think the occasion calls for a special prayer. The following might serve :—

O Lord, we who have complete freedom to enjoy Sunday as we may think fit, beseech Thee to grant us the power to interfere with the liberty of all men who presume to differ from us and prefer other ways of using Sunday. Help us, O Lord, to do unto others as we would not have them to do with us. *Amen.*

We feel sure the Alliance's God would respond to that, sent up in bulk.

Radio Times prints a gruesome picture of a naked man, on a cross, with blood streaming from his hands and feet. This sort of thing can be done in connexion with religion. But suppose the daily papers started printing photos of every murdered person—what an outcry of disgust would go up from the parsons and their clients!

Radio Times reserves a page for "What the other listener thinks." What is very odd is that "the other listener" never by any chance thinks something adverse about the B.B.C. Sunday policy, nor advocates an alternative programme for the huge majority of non-pious listeners. How queer!

Speaking about war, Mr. Ramsey Macdonald said that it is not enough to pass resolutions against war. Every declaration given in favour of peace, he added, must be buttressed by machinery which could definitely eliminate from the problems of statesmanship the causes which hitherto had led to war. Just so; remove the causes, then no one need trouble about chanting in unison "Give peace in our time, O Lord."

From a daily paper (March 18) :—

Mr. F. J. Spickernell, a member of Portsmouth City Council, last night opened the Plaza Cinema, Portsmouth, to test the validity of the Corporation's ban on Sunday films. A travel picture was shown, and the theatre was packed at each performance. Police had to regulate the long queues, and many people were turned away.

We hope other cinema managers will follow this example. There is no rational objection to Sunday cinemas. Employees can be guaranteed a six-day working week.

An announcement in the *Daily Mail* gives the good news that a carillon of forty-seven bells is being erected for the Roman Catholic Church of St. Mary, Lowe House, St. Helens, Lancashire. The largest bell weighing $4\frac{1}{4}$ tons, has been dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Knowing the earthly blessings enjoyed by industrial centres in Lancashire, perhaps this conglomeration of jangling metal will enable the inhabitants of St. Helens to bear with fortitude their denial of reasonable and mundane prosperity through lack of trade. St. Helens wanted bread, and it was given bells. There is talk about suppression of noises, and it is hoped that bells will come within the scope of the inquiry. Perhaps they will, and perhaps they won't. We must assume that the Catholic God and saints are becoming rather deaf; and require more hullabaloo to wake them up, but it speaks well for Catholic consideration, that people who have no use for gods and saints should be supposed to assent to a medieval performance. Local hospitals and private patients might like to give their opinion. Four and a quarter tons of metal to catch the ear of the Virgin Mary; ye gods! or as they would say in America, bigger and better elephants. Thus do we gently slide towards that feudal period beloved by Mr. G. K. Chesterton—until Prof. G. C. Coulton took the wind out of his outrageous pretensions on behalf of the mother of lies.

In *Christianity and Some Living Religions of the East*, the Rev. Dr. S. Cave shows, says a reviewer, that there has in recent years been a re-valuation, an apparent revival of activity, and a transformation of the Oriental

religions. This, he claims, is largely due to the leaven of Christian truth and teaching. That claim, we suggest, proceeds from Dr. Cave's Christian vanity. If Eastern religions have transformed their doctrines, the real cause of the transformation are the same as those which have forced the Christian religion to whitewash and re-decorate its doctrines. All over the world thinking men are showing apathy to or disgust with traditional religious doctrines. The spirit of the age is that of inquiry, questioning, analysis of all principles, traditions, and beliefs in the light of recent scientific discovery and by the methods of science. Everywhere, as a result, the intelligence of man has been quickened, and his ethical sensitiveness grown keener; and therefore he is more readily detecting what is repulsive, incongruous and absurd in religion. What is causing all the living religions of the civilized world to attempt to transform themselves is the presence of critical cultured opinion outside religion. The theologians of all creeds are realizing that they must "transform" their doctrines and dogmas, or their creeds will perish. Hence the feverish "spring-cleaning"—adjustment, accommodation, compromise—and the endless blather about "progressive revelation" and the need for re-interpretation.

A review of *Black Democracy* in the *Daily News*, elicits a report of Columbus on the inhabitants of "Hispaniola" (Haiti). He writes :—

They love their neighbours as themselves, and their discourse is ever sweet and gentle, and accompanied with a smile; and though it is true that they are naked, yet their manners are decorous and praiseworthy.

The missionaries have changed all that in other places than Haiti, and the religious maggots in the brain of an organized body seems to be subject for all the doctors of the world rather than for a handful of men and women who can only make two and two make four.

Mere knowledge counts for nothing, says Prof. H. F. Armstrong, until one learns to use it with effect. Quite so. The Church's great fear is that knowledge will be used with effect antagonistic to the Church. That is a fear which has been sitting on the chest of Old Mother Church ever since she started to dominate the world.

Dr. Cyril Burt says: "We are beginning to realize that the study of the child is a science." Even the managers of Sunday Schools are awaking to the fact. They are studying the child, and text-books on psychology, to discover how best to persuade the child to suck in the irrationalities of the Christian faith. Is this another example of the misapplication of science that parsons have lately been so very vocal about?

Dr. Temple, Archbishop of York, is a warm friend of the Worker's Education Association, says a contemporary. He was, for sixteen years, President of the Association. One cannot help being suspicious of ecclesiastics who profess interest in education for the masses. As the Bishop of Salisbury said recently, the Church's duty in regard to the desire for education is to see that the desire is turned in the right direction. And quite obviously this means so shepherding education that it shall not be permitted to undermine religion. That is why clerics are always eager to serve on education committees, or to act as advisers to educational associations.

The Rev. T. A. Jefferies says: "One does not need to be a philosopher, or a theologian, much less a mystic, to get hold of the truth of the Resurrection; it was meant to bring conviction and power to common men." Seeing that there are millions of people to-day in Europe who are not convinced about the Resurrection, how would it be to go through the whole performance once again, with movie-photographers in attendance? That would be the best and quickest way of bringing the whole world to God, would eliminate all Atheists, and would put the Devil on the unemployed list.

Special.

Will the very large number of friends who have written expressing sympathy with my wife and myself on the loss of our daughter please accept these words as an acknowledgment. The note of personal affection struck in most of these letters has touched me to a greater degree than I can put into words. If sympathy could heal the wound, the cure would be complete. But the scar remains, and we would not have it otherwise. Time and work will make it less sore, and in this result the warm affection displayed by Mr. Cohen's many friends will play its part. As words have failed those who have written to say what they feel, so I also find them altogether inadequate to express my own feelings on reading their sympathetic letters. But they have helped.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

THOSE SUBSCRIBERS WHO RECEIVE THEIR COPY OF THE "FREETHINKER" IN A GREEN WRAPPER WILL PLEASE TAKE IT THAT A RENEWAL OF THEIR SUBSCRIPTION IS DUE. THEY WILL ALSO OBLIGE, IF THEY DO NOT WANT US TO CONTINUE SENDING THE PAPER, BY NOTIFYING US TO THAT EFFECT.

H.M.—The General Secretary N.S.S. wishes to acknowledge receipt of one pound annual subscription.

IF MR. G. PARSONS, late of Globe Road, Green Street, Bethnal Green, E., will communicate with V. B. Neuburg, The Vine Press, Steyning, Sussex, he will hear something to his advantage.

J. D. STEVENS.—Thanks for note. Will make inquiries.

W. S. CLOGG.—We are glad to hear from so old a friend in the Movement.

F. J. DERRETT.—Next week. Crowded out of this issue.

E.B.S. (Birkenhead).—The Secretary of the Liverpool Branch of the N.S.S. is Mr. A. Jackson, 7 Kirk Street, Bootle.

J. S. ARNOLD.—We congratulate Portsmouth on having so much common sense. Naturally the Churches object to places of entertainment, other than their own, on Sunday.

W. R. DAVIES.—We have read your letter with appreciation. It is good to know that the *Freethinker* has been of so great help to you, and better still to learn that you are doing what you can to help in the work. That is the right kind of spirit.

J. G. BOURDON.—Really we do not see anything objectionable in the practice you name. Of course, it may be made the vehicle of superstition, but in itself it has always struck us as a rather pretty custom. It is well to remember that the human family is one in its sorrows and in its joys. Perhaps there are some circumstances connected with this case with which we are not acquainted.

T.L.—You are quite mistaken in thinking that a parson is an authority on religion. It is the one thing about which he knows least.

R. DODD (Junnr.).—It is quite impossible to start a correspondence on the respective merits of the various writers in the *Freethinker*. As for the poor editor, we would remind you of the old story of the man with the loaded donkey. To edit or write with an eye constantly on the likes or dislikes of this or that reader would rob the paper of all vitality. Please note that it is difficult to find room for letters in the *Freethinker* unless they are brief. And the practice of brevity is healthy for both writer and reader.

S. MORGAN.—We would suggest that the cinema proprietors in your town petition the authorities to stop all religious services through the week because they might keep anyone away from their shows.

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

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munications should be addressed to the Secretary, Mr. F. Mann, giving as long notice as possible.

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

To-day (March 31) Mr. Cohen will visit Plymouth and will lecture in the Co-operative Hall, Courtenay Street, at 3 and 7 p.m. In the afternoon he will speak on "Freethought and the Plymouth Clergy"; and in the evening his subject will be "The Crowning Crime of Christianity." These lectures conclude the winter course, and it is to be hoped that the meetings will be good ones.

We are not yet able to announce the place at which the National Secular Society's Annual Conference will be held this year. The date is, of course, Whit-Sunday, May 18, and three places, Swansea, Newcastle, and Manchester have been nominated. The voting papers are out, and should be all returned by April 10. Meanwhile, Branches and individual members who have any resolutions for the Conference Agenda should send them without delay. The Executive always welcomes suggestions from all quarters as to the extension or the better carrying on of the work immediately before us.

On Friday, April 12, a debate is to take place between Mr. C. E. M. Joad and Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the Caxton Hall, Westminster. The subject for discussion is, "Is there a Purpose in Evolution?" Mr. Joad will, of course, take the affirmative. Mr. Joad has gained quite a reputation as a writer on philosophic questions, and those who attend will have an opportunity of hearing what is to be said on behalf of the thesis by one of the modern school. Seats, numbered and reserved, are 2s. 6d. each; seats, unreserved, but numbered, are 1s. 6d. and 1s. There are a few platform seats at 5s. Those who wish to secure seats should apply for tickets as early as possible, as no more will be sold than the hall can accommodate.

A very appreciative review of Mr. Cohen's *Essays in Freethinking* (Third Series) appears in the *Two Worlds* of a recent date. The reviewer advises all Spiritualists to read it. We hope they will.

Mr. G. Whitehead deputized for Mr. Cohen at Manchester, and two good meetings were held at the Chorlton Town Hall. A number of questions were asked after both lectures, and in the evening two gentlemen opposed the speaker. Mr. Rosetti was in the chair in the afternoon, and Mr. Monks in the evening. Reference was made at both meetings to the loss sustained by Mr. and Mrs. Cohen, the audience in both instances standing for a few moments as a token of respect and sympathy.

Mr. R. H. Rosetti lectured in Liverpool on Sunday last. The attendance at the afternoon meeting was not as good as it might have been, but in the evening the hall was full. The lectures were listened to attentively, and many questions were asked, particularly at the evening meeting. The lectures were obviously much appreciated.

A Letter to a Distinguished Artist.

MY DEAR FRANK,

For more than thirty years we have been intimate friends; so that there is not much chance of your misunderstanding me. I'm going to unveil myself in this letter; to an extent that may, by fools, be mistaken for egotism. That I must risk. Frankly, I don't much mind what may be thought of me, so long as I get home with my message. Why should I? My conscience will be untroubled about it, and unsympathetic critics may think what they will.

You know me, and have known me most of my life—all my mature life, anyway—as a fellow-student, as a transcendental philosopher, as a lyric poet. And you are rather hurt, shocked, disappointed, that I should descend from Parnassus and Olympus, to take a turn in the Theological Cockpit.

You, an ultra-refined, super-sensitive artist, an accomplished musician, a *laissez-faire* philosopher, a distinguished "interpreter," are confounded that one who was—may I say?—at one time your master-in-thought should write controversially and, to the "orthodox," offensively, when he ought surely to be creating beautiful verse-forms and "philosophic" prose.

Your nervous, Epicurean lips curl at the idea of a philosopher troubling to assail cheap journalists and religionists in cheap papers. You, the æsthetic, clean-fingered, mentally-exclusive Modernist, fling—figuratively—Lao-Tse and Buddha at my head. "Why trouble about fools?" you say in effect. "You do no good. Let them carry-on in their own way. What do you imagine Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater would have thought about such things? It is no true wisdom to dally and dispute with the uninitiated. Socrates, my dear Victor; Schopenhauer," . . . and so on. How well I know!

There we are! Artists, dons, the whole crowd of æsthetes would be horrified. "You write vulgar, cheap, slashing articles in unfashionable, unpopular newspapers. Why? You know better; yet, knowing the higher, you deliberately choose the lower."

Really now! Do I? Are you quite sure, mine æsthetic positivist? Which is "the lower"? Have you no doubts as to your wisdom? Are æsthetes always right? Possibly; but I take leave to doubt even that. I am an incurable and irritating sceptic, I know. Forgive me! I cannot help it.

If I really be guilty of choosing "the lower," I prefer my robust guilt to your own delicate innocence. "Guilt" and "innocence" are relative and variable. From a purely human standpoint my taste for life, with its apparently-unending struggle and its rare victories—in my own case artistic (pardon the word)—leads me to prefer completely the rough-and-tumble philosophy, the rude laughter, of my adored Rabelais to the "refined" lamentations of Jesus, and the rapturous negations of Buddha.

Deliberately I choose to write and to say things (as you know!) that the dons and the professors, excellent fellows, call "bad form." "Really, my dear Victor, it is not *done*. It is 'impossible.'"

Nevertheless, despite my well-meaning, respectable, kid-gloved critics, my dilettante, amateur-quietist friends, it is one of my numerous ambitions to make it "possible." That is how our old friend, the Platonic "Idea," takes me.

Of set purpose I turn away from the marriage-feast of Philosophy and Art, whereto, as a poet, I have been invited. I quit the artists' conclave, to wrangle with far less exalted souls about Theology. I leave the Platonic Banquet to swill "bitter" with

boors in a pub. There are times when I prefer bread-and-cheese to ambrosia, and beer to nectar. Life has broken and exalted me so completely that I have no time for the eccentricities of my "intellectual" youth. Out of my shameless Philistinism, however, I am evolving an æsthetic that is worth while. That, I hold, is how life works.

In the midway of this life-journey I occasionally turn aside from the refinements of Maeterlinck, the subtleties of Debussy, the innovations of James Joyce; filled with a longing for the ordinary, common, vulgar things, according to South Kensington standards. But, 'twixt you and me and the gatepost, dearest Frank, South Kensington is not very much nearer to the sun than the Old Kent Road is.

Not for a moment do I blame you for being an orthodox and conventional æsthete; I think your attitude towards life an admirable one—for you. I am merely trying to get at the fundamental difference between us. The difference, I fancy, is this: you tend to regard beauty as an end-in-itself, and I regard beauty as a permeative, elusive, subtle quality, imperceptible often even to æsthetes and artists, when it is obvious (in an almost mystic sense) to grosser and worldlier people like myself.

O fortunate one! You are immersed in an artist's sea of beauty all the time; Beethoven, in his large, Summery way, enchants you; you adore the profound, quietistic aphorisms of Lao-Tse (your latest love!), you are a believer in the transcendentalisms of Socrates. . . . Listen.

A few years ago a dear Friend of mine died; he died as a result of cancer of the stomach, which he acquired as a direct consequence of wrong diet and lack of exercise during his imprisonment. You see how things "work" sometimes? Let me continue with "the chain of causes." According to orthodox standards this man was a criminal; he was jailed for "blasphemy," a crime not unconnected, let me whisper, with the honourable careers of your friends Socrates and Jesus Christ. This man used to edit, at one time or another, certain vulgar papers, *The Truthseeker* and *The Jerusalem Star*. No one in Chelsea or Montparnasse, probably, ever heard of these obscure sheets, but poor Gott—that was my friend's name—managed to get into trouble for them, and he died for them. A perfectly ridiculous sacrifice, according to worldly standards.

Gott had no trace of Oxford accent; on the contrary, he spoke with an obvious Yorkshire burr, acquired not at Eton, but in Bradford. He is now almost forgotten, except by a few eccentrics like myself. You have probably wept over the death of Socrates, so exquisitely enshrined in the "Apology"; you have sympathized with the long-spun-out martyrdom of Heine, dying of syphilis by inches on his famous mattress-grave; you have never heard of J. W. Gott. How should you? He was not a fashionable martyr, and there is a fashion, oddly enough, even in martyrs. If the Battle of Waterloo was won (as they say) on the playing-fields of Eton, the Battle for Free Speech was won in part on Woodhouse Moor, Bradford. In my Philistine, unfashionable way, I persist in regarding the latter contest as being of more importance to mankind than the former.

You, as I say, have never heard of Gott; yet I have never met a 'varsity man who, morally speaking, was fit to black Gott's boots. You will, I know, not misunderstand me here. I mean "moral," not in the stupid, narrow, English, sexual sense; but in its original wide ethical connotation.

Gott died in agony, a martyr for conviction's sake; as clear a case of death for a Cause as those of Socrates and Jesus, and he did not "grouse" at his

fate, as did the latter. Morally speaking, he is as great as either of the others. Indeed, he is greater in the judgment of any impartial ethicist. Socrates and Jesus died in the assurance of a continuation—perhaps an eternity—of conscious, individual existence; Gott had no such glad certainty. Nevertheless, he gladly gave up his life for the sake of Humanity. In my view, odd as it must appear to you and the conventional "thinkers," Gott was a far greater martyr than either Socrates or Jesus; his sufferings were far more protracted than theirs, and he was without the intuitions of salvation that they appear to have enjoyed. Somehow, there is often a touch of priggishness in your orthodox martyrs.

You, my ultra-refined, delicate-handed, mystically-minded artist, lol happily at the feet of the Chinese mystic and the Greek sage, rapt in a happy, easy quietism; as far removed as possible from the noisy brawling agora, the rude contentions of the schools. Delightful! would that the rays shed by the student-lamp reached to the ends of the world! But there is the strange spectacle, beyond that bright circle of light shed by self-contemplation, of poor old Gott dying of cancer of the stomach that you, and I, and the rest of us who are not entirely orthodox, might breathe a little more easily, and be enabled to express ourselves with a trifle more of freedom.

It is clearly not within the nature of things that you and I should successfully emulate Gott. We are both, I know, constitutionally unfitted for his work, and we have our own jobs to do. But when I remember all that we owe to my dead, almost-forgotten friend, I admit that I find your detached impatience with aggressive Freethought a little "precious," and vitally ungrateful. For be this remembered: If anything be true "on all planes," as we say, it is that these people, Gott and his compeers, suffered and died (not under Pontius Pilate! but) that you and I and the rest of us might live mentally, and breathe more freely, and have the pleasure of expressing ourselves with perfect liberty, even if our ideas be hostile to the gods of the moment. That freedom has been won, and—mark you—every single time, without exception, by means of the ungrudging and infinitely noble sacrifices of time, work, money, happiness, health, life itself, by people who were charged with "rudeness," "vulgarity," "blasphemy," "sedition." Their accusers were the refined, cultured, highly-educated, artistic, vitally-ignorant, fundamentally-stupid critics of their day.

What do you and your artist-friends know of these heroes and their struggles for justice? Nothing at all. You do not even know their names, do you? What do you, and the inhabitants of the Brompton Road, know of Peter Annet? of Richard Carlile? of Charles Southwell? of George William Foote? of Edward Truelove? of James Watson? (Antiquarian researches into Freethought lead one into the queerest, most delightful company!)

Yet to these men, and a few hundred others, you and your friends are indebted for the fact that you can live lives of complete mental ease. And see, my gifted one! these are no fabled heroes, whose very existence and date are wrangled over by the erudite, as is the case with some of your high-browed pets and "divine" ones; they are men of yesterday and the day before, who made the rough road smooth for you and for me; pioneers of our race who lived and died for love of man.

You and your take-freedom-for-granted, what-does-Lao-Tze-say-about-it? friends sometimes make me a trifle impatient. The contempt of the self-conscious aesthete for the rude, strong, uncompromising, heroic pioneer sickens me. It is, indeed, the crudest intellectual snobbery. Beneath the swift, cutting,

brilliant, contemptuous speech of Nietzsche I cannot help hearing an undercurrent, the thick, drawling burr of J. W. Gott; for it was he and his like who made "Zarathustra" possible. Everyone has heard of Nietzsche; no one knows Gott, and yet where would Bond Street and Chelsea be, were it not for the forgotten fore-runners and heralds? Where they are, no doubt; but with all their distinctive tang lacking, bodies without souls. Does it never strike you to recall that saying of Blake's? "To create a little flower is the labour of ages." And do you not recognize how potent was the gardening of Gott and his friends? Their bodies lie beneath the earth-breast, but they made possible the coloured star-flowers of thought that are worn so proudly in South Kensington and the Fulham Road.

So, my dear Frank, that is why I sometimes annoy you, I know, when I turn away from the abstract, bloodless wisdom of your contemplationist masters, to consort with a warmer, more human crowd. I take leave to doubt, even, whether Percy Bysshe Shelley was a greater benefactor to humanity than Nicolai Lenin; and I sometimes prefer the society of J. W. Gott to that of Gautama Buddha, although I allow the latter to be the profounder metaphysician.

Forgive me! I am an incurable sceptic, even as regards human and æsthetic values, even towards philosophy and art.

Always sincerely and affectionately yours,

VICTOR.

The Wisdom of Annie Besant

SOME of the Sunday newspapers insert recently-uttered sayings, embodying a kind of concentrated wisdom in epigrammatic form, at the foot of their columns. The practice is presumably a convenient method of filling vacant space when the ordinary material of the paper does not extend precisely to the bottom of the page. Incidentally, it is to the reader sometimes a stimulation to thought, occasionally to reflection, and sometimes to amusement.

In my paper, recently, for example, Mr. Justice Eve tells us that free legal advice is generally very poor stuff; the Rev. H. R. L. Sheppard thinks Christianity badly needs rash men who will not fear the results of stirring up wasps' nests; Mrs. Guedalla brings her memory of a *Twelfth Night* phrase to bear on golf, and says that some people are born golfers like her sister Cecil, some become golfers like herself, whilst others, like her husband, have golf thrust upon them.

It was not these sayings, however, which specially arrested my attention, but another one in the midst of them, by Mrs. Besant, which ran in these terms:—

The nation depends on its womenfolk, and if they fail in their duty, and shirk the responsibility of motherhood, then the nation will go down.

When I first read this declaration, it seemed a very impressive one. Being a man, I am painfully conscious of the stupidity and futility of my sex, and realize that, if it were not for the aid of women, we should be in a very bad way; and it is well that this unimpeachable circumstance should be emphasized. There is, too, that remorseless fact, mentioned by the nervous man at a wedding breakfast, who was called upon to return thanks for the toast of "the ladies." "This," said he, "is a very important toast, as, but for them, we should not be here."

Facts of this kind are very stubborn things; and in this light, it is so easy to understand why Mrs. Besant is concerned that the production of babies should be maintained. But she has now reached a venerable age, and is not now personally involved in such production. Some of us have been familiar with her activities for the past fifty years. One of our earliest recollections of the lady at the date when she could potentially have borne children—there was an external obstacle—was that she thought too many babies were being produced in this country. To borrow an economic simile, she thought

that supply exceeded demand, and that there should be a restriction of output. Her fame may be said to partly rest with the propaganda upon this subject, with which she was so prominently associated.

Mrs. Besant has not resided in this country for many years. She pays us a brief visit, as a rule, during the early summer, when we may hear her preach at Queen's Hall. She has been occupied for a long time in the search for a new world-teacher or Messiah who is to reduce the spiritual chaos of the planet to order, and in telling the British Government how to govern India.

These are high matters, but, in view of her historical interest in baby production, and the warning to which reference has been made, it might be thought that she would be much more concerned with the same question in her new home; for, according to competent persons, the production of Hindu babies is an exceedingly unsatisfactory matter. Ordinary people think far too many of them are being born; everyone is agreed that too many of them die. The conditions of Indian motherhood also are said to be deplorable. Whether Mrs. Besant thinks sufficient babies are being born in India is unknown to me; if she thinks the babies which are born ought to become adults, it seems to be clear that this end could be attained in large measure by the adoption of European advice. If Mrs. Besant has given such advice, it is not known generally in England.

It is plain that her warning is specifically addressed to the women of England, because this nation is assumed to be in peril. I have been trying to find what can have given rise to this perilous anticipation. We are, of course, constantly hearing of a reduction in the birth rate per thousand. These statistics are, in themselves, of very little significance. They are calculated on the entire population, not on the number of potential mothers. Owing to the losses in the War, a large army of possible mothers will not be maternally occupied. The unemployed, however, are bravely doing their duty in the required direction, not hesitating to face the terrors of the Poor Law in their determination that, in so far as in them lies, the nation shall not go short of babies. If there is a lower birth rate, there is in compensation a decrease in the infantile death rate. The population is constantly increasing, and the most palpable fact to the casual thinker is that there are too many persons in the country. Instead of having too few babies, it would seem that the probability is the danger of having too many. If the nation is in peril, it is from excess, and not from scarcity. Some person in the service of the State has calculated that, in four or five years' time, there will be a shortage of children in their teens for employment. He has communicated his fears by circular to the local authorities, and to the press. Flippant persons may be led to think of the old maxim that Satan finds mischief for idle hands to do. Such flippancy should be repressed; for the statement that civil servants—like the fountains in Trafalgar Square—play from ten to four, has been officially denied.

But are these considerations right? Mrs. Besant may not be concerned with statistics of birth rates and unemployment. She has sources of information which are not open to unregenerate persons who think only of things they see under their noses. She soars into planes of higher existence, which are revealed to the theosophic imagination; and it may be in these high regions things are known which are hidden from minds which grovel on the common earth. During the agitation for the suffrage, we were told that women were banding themselves together to refuse to bear children, unless they were given the parliamentary vote. Their enfranchisement was only partial, and, as is well known, it is being extended. When accomplished, there will be more women entitled to vote than men. Has it been revealed to Mrs. Besant that, when women are in the ascendant, they will use their power in the form of declining to have children? They will be able to insist on an alteration in the law, so that motherhood may be declared not to be an essential condition of marriage. Recalcitrant men can easily be reduced to submission by the provision of unemployment insurance for anti-motherhood wives; the speculative possibilities are terrifying and illimitable. Mrs. Besant's conclusion that this condition of affairs would be bad for the nation is hardly expres-

sive enough; there would ultimately be no nation. And there is the dreadful thought that the example of Englishwomen might be contagious, and extend to the rest of the planet, so that the entire human race would die out.

Musing over these things, and endeavouring to console myself with the reflection that, after all, it would not make any personal difference to me if the race did perish—it would certainly last my time—I fell asleep. When I awoke, I resumed reflection on Mrs. Besant's warning.

The longer I mused, the more the doubt grew about the connexion of the words with any reality. The phrase of the old flower-seller in Mr. H. G. Wells's story of *The Last Trump* came to my memory. She saw the soul-shattering and devastating effects of the tremendous blast on the Rev. Mr. Parchester, but reassured him: "But Lord! It don't mean nothing." It is not uncommon for eloquent persons to use a concatenation of vocables which are not designed to stimulate thought, but to sound impressive; and words like nation, duty and motherhood, are admirably calculated to achieve this end. Further, there is—or was—supposed to be a law of physics expressed in the phrase that nature abhors a vacuum. As the human mind conceivably shares this abhorrence, words are the most obvious material to fill a vacuum in it.

There are cynical persons who allege that this is a device which is very commonly used, and that the victims rarely discover it. But one hesitates to connect a venerable and distinguished person like the lady under notice with such an insinuation. For there are those who have rejected the belief in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who yet believe in Annie Besant.

A. S. TOMS.

American Notes.

CHICAGO AND ITS HORRORS.

It is time somebody attempted to make the Chicago authorities "de-religionized." It is the only way in which they can ever understand their own problems. Until 1929, there were never more than an average of two murders a day in this "windy city." The average is probably much higher, and will continue to rise as long as vice, crime and irreligion are classed together by the majority of those responsible for its police measures.

The nature of religion is to confuse all moral values. The test of wise administration is the capacity for using force where force is useful and abstaining from wasting effort where opinion rather than crime is concerned.

After what is called the "massacre" in Chicago, when seven men were murdered by gangsters, the chiefs of the city police and government met to decide on immediate steps to be taken for ending this intolerable situation. But the religionists got there first. Instead of concentrating all effort on tracing these murderers, a religious gang insisted on the police raiding a very harmless "gambling house," where a particularly innocent game of "bunco" was being played for small stakes by a woman's club in a working class district. Seventy women were arrested for this crime, the day after the "massacre." I learn that the churches in the neighbourhood insisted on this "raid," notwithstanding the dire need for engaging all available police personnel on the vitally important murder case.

It is not true to say that prohibition itself is responsible for all the murders which follow the trail of this puritanical proposition. Smuggling is an analogous offence to breaches of the Volstead Law. One has only to think for a moment of how very little violence is required to carry out the provisions of the Tariff everywhere, to realize that some very unpopular laws can be administered without imitating all the phenomena of a ghastly war.

What then is the distinctive feature of prohibition in U.S.A.? Simply this, that the churches have decided to call it a "religious and moral" crusade; and when priests talk thus, they release the ancient instincts of primitive lust for the slaughter of witches, infidels and "moral offenders."

"REMEDIES" FOR CRIME.

It is interesting to see how the United States (Washington no less than Chicago) is preparing to fight the murderers in our midst. Naturally, the first onslaught is to be against "aliens." Next the penalties are to be increased against breaches of the Volstead Act. (In Michigan the fourth offence is punishable by life-long imprisonment. It will be difficult to make the sentence any longer in Michigan!) And finally (here you can trace the finger of God—or the brains of God's apostles) there is to be "a systematic and relentless attack on prostitution, gambling and drinking." It seems strange that murder is not mentioned! Can it be that prostitution, gambling and drinking are always accompanied by murder? If not, one would imagine that these three evils, unaccompanied by murder, might for the moment occupy a subordinate position while murder, even if found in other company, or even if committed by virtuous, unsportive, and teetotal natives should be frowned upon to a certain extent. But this is to ignore the function of the priest. He must preach. He must ever uphold his moral superiority. Murderers are often pious, but gamblers never! **GEORGE BEDBOROUGH.**

Correspondence.

DEAR DAISY PRICE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Reading the remarkable address delivered at the cremation of dear Daisy Price brought home to one how severe is the penalty man has to pay for the daring ascent of becoming self-conscious. The grim fate of death, inseparable from sentient existence, is tragic enough to the beast of the field which virtually is oblivious of its sadness; what it means to man was brought into high relief by the writer's felicitous allusions to the pathetic separations involved in the case of Daisy Price; and the pathos it awoke in one was such that *never* before did I realize the deep sadness of the truth of Amar Khay-yâm's *Rubâiyât* :—

"Ah love! Could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!"

KERIDON.

"FETTERS AND FEARS."

SIR,—With reference to your comments in your issue of January 27 last, upon Mr. Bertrand Russell's article in the *Daily Telegraph*, and some remarks of the *Christian World* thereon, it may interest the conductors of the *Christian World* to learn that at a certain gathering in the Orange Free State, towards the end of last year, the Rev. M. Fick, a Minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, openly and frankly advocated that the Government should deprive all heretics and Free-thinkers of their civil rights. By "heretics and Free-thinkers," he meant all those who did not belong to any of the branches of the Protestant faith; because Mr. Fick, as a staunch Protestant, has no time for the Roman Catholic faith.

The Rev. Mr. Fick did not have the generosity to add that if heretics were thus deprived, they should also be lightened of their obligations to the State, such as the payment of Income and other taxes. The Dutch Reformed Church is the most powerful Protestant organization in South Africa, and includes amongst its many members a large proportion who are direct descendants of the French and Dutch Huguenots, who fled from Europe about the time of that pleasing religious demonstration, St. Bartholomew's Day, which occurred nearly three hundred years ago. Naturally, it is a very bitter opponent and competitor of the Roman Catholic Church, and, to be quite just, it has reason to be.

There was no protest at the gathering referred to against Mr. Fick's savage suggestion, and therefore it must be concluded that his remarks were acceptable to his hearers. I am glad to be able to say that more than one member of the public here took this narrow-minded clergyman to task in the columns of the Johannesburg

Star, in which the original report appeared. It is almost unnecessary to say that Mr. Fick has preserved silence on the subject. It is a biting commentary upon modern Christian methods, that a man whose ancestors fled from religious persecution, should, generations later, be an advocate of the very abomination from which his forefathers so grievously suffered.

That he has learned very little is obvious, whilst his attitude is confirmation of the fact that the Christian teaching (whatever the *Christian World* may say to the contrary), is still one of "fettters and fears."

Johannesburg.

J. H. BLENKIN.

TASMANIA AND RELIGION.

SIR,—In Mr. Palmer's interesting article upon the Tasmanian race, he remarks that it is a pity we know so little of their religious ideas. As far as I can discover they were quite devoid of any idea of a supernatural world.

This is in common with all palæolithic, and probably neolithic, mankind. Religion appears to have first arisen after agriculture became a source of life to settled tribes.

I referred to this notion of all races having some idea of gods in my articles on Evolution, which you printed in 1926, where I showed that the lowest in culture were without religion of any kind, and even in those so far advanced as the Ainu, they only had temporary "gods." Since then I have collected several more accounts of travellers among savages, which all witness to the fact that primitive man never thought of anything outside his material surroundings, and never worshipped in any way either the seen or unseen.

Missionaries have misled Europeans in this connexion.

E. ANDERSON.

MR. A. J. LA BERN'S PROFESSION OF NON-ATHEISM.

SIR,—What unbounded celestial joy some people seem to find in misology and religious sentimentality. Unless they are able to embrace either of these, they are altogether restive—with the result that some spiritual antidote has to be administered to allay this feeling of uneasiness. Religion in some vague form is generally resorted to as an effective agent towards this end. The narcotic effect is sure and certain. Mr. La Bern appears to be one of those who find religion a *sine qua non* for a life full of hope and joy in this world. Like a dipsomaniac who continually craves for alcoholic stimulants, Mr. La Bern has an unsatiable hankering after a religious narcotic. If he would only exercise his "unrelenting reason" a bit and allow his religion a little holiday, he would probably be as reluctant to revert to the religious dope as the addict to intoxicating drink is to return to his inebrious propensities after having been reformed, and who now realizes the detrimentality thereof to his mental and physical health.

The Atheist does not ignore or deny love, emotion or sentiment, but he detests sentimentality—"thinking with the heart instead of with the head," especially that kind of sentimentality which is born of that blight which has for centuries retarded human progress and freedom of speech and thought, namely, religion. He can justly pride himself on his "intellectual superiority," more so, in view of the fact that he has attained this despite the retrogressive and pernicious influence of religion. He assuredly is on the side of truth, and prefers to remain on that side rather than leaning over to the "dreamy delusions" of faith. True, religion "is instilled in the hearts of men"—but by numerous priestly artifices and by force. It sounds very plausible to assert that Christianity is not religion; but take away your Christianity, and precious little of religion, as we know it, remains. It will not pay for Mr. La Bern to endeavour to bind us to his garbled interpretation of religion, for we know what religion is after it is divested of all its trumpery. It is nothing but a jumble of superstition and supernaturalism, however much religious apologists and their docile lackeys try to disguise it.

Good music will not die if the B.B.C. have to switch over from Beethoven to dance music, nor will sports die

out if a heavyweight boxer puts up a poor show; but what will happen is that if good sportsmen and first-class musicians are restrained from participating in either sports and playing music, the latter two things will certainly decline and ultimately vanish, as such. In the same way, if the social parasites termed parsons, and the antediluvian mentalities in our midst are eliminated, then religion, as we know it, will indubitably be eradicated.

Mr. La Bern most appropriately calls his religion "this inexplicable thing." If he were better versed in metaphysical cobweb-spinning, he would have easily been able to frame some sort of definition for his beloved treasure—religion. Atheists will gladly continue to face the facts—the wonders of life, the marvels of the universe, if that is what Mr. La Bern deems "vapid, void, dull and uninteresting," and leave it to him to amuse himself with "dreamy delusions, unseen songs, mirages and optical illusions," and all the imagery and supersensible things which form part and parcel of the pabulum for parsons and their pious, and some reverend, agnostics.

D. MATTHEWS.

Haenertsburg, Transvaal.

Obituary.

MISS HARRIET BAKER.

WE regret to report the death of Miss Harriet Baker, lately of Teddington, and for many years a member of the National Secular Society. The deceased, who was ninety-three years of age, died peacefully on Tuesday, March 19. The funeral was at Woking Crematorium, on Saturday, March 23, a Secular Service being conducted by Mr. F. Mann.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD MARCH 22.

THE President, Mr. Cohen, in the chair. Also present: Mrs. Quinton, Messrs. Clifton, Coles, Corrigan, Hornibrook, Moss, Neate, Quinton, Rosetti, Silvester, and the Secretary.

Minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

Apologies for unavoidable absence were received from Miss Kough, Miss Vance, and Messrs. Easterbrook and Wood.

New members were received for the Bethnal Green and Glasgow Branches, and for the Parent Society.

The monthly financial statement was presented and adopted.

The arrangements for Mr. Whitehead's summer mission, and for other open air propaganda, were considered and completed.

The arrangements for the Annual Conference were discussed, and the Secretary instructed.

A number of items of business, including preliminary steps for organizing Freethinkers at the general election, were dealt with.

Before the meeting closed the Executive expressed its profound sympathy with the President in his bereavement.

FRED MANN,
General Secretary.

Search the Scriptures.

"Pottsville (Pa.)—Armed with a revolver, which had been smuggled into prison in a large Bible, a young man, who had been condemned for the murder of his sweetheart, escaped."

God's Book, with pistol hid inside,
To convict prison brought;
Stern warders cowed, doors opened wide;
And justice set at naught.
When such strange news the cable brings,
'Tis wise, we must admit,
To Search the Scriptures. Curious things
Are found in Holy Writ.

H.S.S.

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.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S.—No Meeting.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (30 Brixton Road, S.W., near Oval Station): 7.15, Mr. J. H. Van Biene—"What Do We Know?"

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY.—No Service.

THE NON-POLITICAL METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (The Orange Tree Hotel, Euston Road, N.W.1): 7.30, Debate on "That the Popular Acceptance of Atheism is Improbable." Affir.: Mr. Victor Fisher. Neg.: Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe.

OUTDOOR.

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

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12 noon, Mr. James Hart, 3.30, Mr. B. A. Le Maine. 7.0, Messrs. Hart and Le Maine. Every Wednesday at 7.30, Mr. James Hart. 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): No Meeting.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S.—No Meeting.

PLYMOUTH BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Courtenay Street): 3.0 and 7.0, Mr. Chapman Cohen. Subjects—"Freethought and the Plymouth Clergy"; "The Crowning Crime of Christianity." Questions and Discussion.

OUTDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S.—Meetings held in the Bull Ring on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, at 7 p.m.

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