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*Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums,
Letters to the Editor, etc.*

Views and Opinions.

God and the King.

I SUPPOSE every one felt some sympathy with King George when the accounts of his illness were published, and one pictured him struggling day after day with death. Reasonable sympathy with the man would extend to his family. I want to emphasize both the words "Reasonable" and "Man," in the last sentence. First, because it is impossible to feel genuine sympathy for a King. A King is a symbol, and one can no more feel sorry for a symbol than one can feel grieved because the flagstaff of the House of Commons gets old and rotten. We may regret the passing of symbols, but we can only grieve with the pain and sorrow of human beings. I emphasize the word "rational," because circumstances must determine the quality of the sorrow that anyone can feel. To say, as the *Daily Express* did, that the whole "universe" sorrowed with the Royal family, and that the nation's "soul" was wrung with grief, was to touch the high-water mark of journalistic stupidity. People were sorry because they realized that a fellow human being was suffering, and they knew from experience what an anxious time his family were experiencing. But it is impossible for anyone to feel the same sorrow for one whom all but a few know by name only, that one may feel for a personal and attached friend. To say otherwise is to lose all sense of the decencies of human relationship, and to rob one's sympathy of all value. The tears of people who cry to order—and newspaper orders at that—cannot be worth much. We were sorry when we heard that the King was ill; we were glad when he was better. We should have felt exactly the same of any decent man who had passed through the same experience.

Who Cured King George?

Well, the King is now, apparently, safely on the way to recovery. In his letter to the nation, he very sensibly attributes his recovery to the nursing and attention he receives. He said in his message to the people:—

I have been brought back from the danger and weariness of past months by the wonderful skill and devotion of my doctors, surgeons, and nurses.

That is quite all right, and only at the end, as a kind of afterthought, and as a probable concession to convention, he says that he hopes on the appointed day to join "my people in thanking Almighty God," for his recovery. But the doctors, surgeons, and nurses evidently bulk largest in his mind as aids to recovery. That is a testimony to his common sense.

But there is the clergy to be counted with, and they evidently think it is time they began to make a show. No one offers to thank them, so they decide to thank themselves. The Bishop of Oxford leads off with the remark, made at Reading, on April 23, that:—

We thank God that in answer to the prayers of all sorts and conditions of men throughout the world, the King has been restored to health.

The King, the reader will observe, gave his first thanks to his doctors and nurses, and formally allowed that perhaps God had something to do with his recovery. The Bishop of Oxford does not thank the doctors at all, so far as he is concerned they never existed. God did it, and in answer to the prayers of all sorts and conditions of men. It was not because God knew the King was ill, and would have cured him anyway, it was because he was asked, or bothered, by the prayers of all sorts of people all over the world that he cured the King. A very artful person is the Bishop of Oxford. You see he is one of the official representatives of God. If people keep up the habit of prayer they are likely to come to his establishment to pray, and the more that come the better his business. If the Bishop sold corn cures or toothache tinctures he would do exactly the same. He would take occasion to advertise his wares whenever possible, and he would take good care to count the seeming successes only and leave the positive and assured failures alone. The clergy of to-day may not be so intelligent as the clergy once were, but they have lost none of the artfulness of their kind.

* * *

Just his Trade.

The curious thing is that during the King's illness there was no outcry for more prayers or for more parsons. Day after day one eminent doctor after another was called for consultation, a fresh specialist visited the King, but never, no never, was the information given that another parson had been asked to the palace, or that the prayers of the Episcopalian parson not having produced any result, it was decided to see what a Baptist or Salvation Army praying expert could do. And the worse the King got the

more the talk of doctors and the less the talk about parsons and God. Really, if God worked the trick, the carelessness of the Royal family was almost criminal. If doctors did it, the speech of the Bishop of Oxford was just eye-wash.

But it is the Bishop's duty, a duty he is paid to discharge, as are all the clergy of the Established Church, to pray for the King's recovery from sickness. If he were the most worthless monarch that ever sat on a throne, and if his death would be a blessing to his family and to the nation, he would still have to do it, and he would still do it. More than that, there are set forms for the maintenance of the King's health. And at stated times these also are said. What sort of an answer did God make to these prayers? Of course, if God wished—to speak religiously—to call the King home, that is to heaven, for no bishop of the Established Church would dare to suggest that a King might go to the other place, there would have been some reason for God not answering the prayers for the maintenance of the King's health. But to ignore these prayers and then answer those for his recovery after permitting him to go through his awful ordeal, is really not playing the game. The only reasonable explanation that I can see is either that God did not hear the first set of prayers, or he wanted to demonstrate what he could do in the curing line. In the latter case, one wonders what would be said of a doctor who inoculated a person with a disease for the purpose of showing what a cure he could work afterwards? These parsons almost invariably succeed in making their God either foolish or contemptible. "And man made God in his own image."

* * *

Why Not Wait and See?

But the Bishop is rather premature, and he is taking some risk. For the King is not yet cured, and there might be a relapse; the King is not a young man, and a fresh chill on an already weakened constitution, a too great heart-strain, might lead to serious results. In that case all the Bishop could do would be to say that God had reconsidered the matter. I do not suppose that the ordinary Christian would jib at even that, but it would make outsiders open their eyes, and the Church is not at present in a position when it can afford to run risks of that kind. Moreover, with all his belief—professed belief—that God cured the King, the Bishop of Oxford cannot count on when the King will be well enough to attend a Thanksgiving Service for his recovery. The King himself says, very sensibly, that he looks forward to being at the service "on some appointed day," but cannot say when that day will be. The Bishop cannot say when the day will be. A Thanksgiving Service for the recovery of the King, with the King too ill to attend would be farcical. Not even the solemnity of a Presbyterian elder could stand the strain of that. So the Bishop must wait—and on whom? Not on God, but on the doctors. It is they who will have the final word. And when the time comes the King will obey his doctors. It is no use the Bishop saying that God wishes the King to formally return thanks for his recovery. The King will say that he must be guided by his medical advisers, and the Lord must await their decision. How have the mighty fallen!

* * *

Our Savages.

What a jumble of savagery and civilization we have all around us? On the one hand we have all the conquests of science, on the other the ideas of the most primitive savage occupying the front of the stage. In the one direction the whole of the clergy of the Church of England, compelled by law to be-

lieve that God actually cures disease, on the other hand that same legal code, saying that if one person is under the care of another who is responsible for him, and that person dies without medical attendance, providing that the responsible person declined to call in a doctor, then the crime of manslaughter has been committed. We ought, apparently to believe that God will cure disease; but we run the risk of imprisonment if we believe enough to leave God to do it! The King says he owes his recovery to his doctors, surgeons, and nurses. The Bishop ignores these, and says that he has been cured in answer to prayer, and, presumably, would not have recovered without the prayers. The King will not, even now, leave the matter in the hands of God, but obstinately, and heretically, declines to give up the doctors. The Bishop tells the King they are arranging a Thanksgiving Service to thank God for curing him. The King says, "Very well, I will come and thank him—when my doctors give me permission to do so"! What a snub for the Bishop—and God!

Will some one please tell me what is the substantial difference between the ignorant peasant trying to cure a disease by touching a relic of some dead saint, the savage offering up petitions to his wooden "Joss" for cure of a disease, and the Bishop of Oxford telling us that prayers to his "Joss" has had precisely that effect! The difference of name cannot matter. The difference between a stone building and a mud hut cannot matter. Is the difference one of sincere pseudo-belief? The difference between paint and feathers and lawn sleeves cannot matter. The savage at least cannot believe other than he does. He is in keeping with the life around him. The Bishop is a survival, as much out of touch with the educated intelligence around him as witch's brew or rain-making wizards—that is, if he really believes what he says. I leave it to his friends to decide whether they will sacrifice his intelligence or his character. They simply cannot have it both ways.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Moonshine and Morals.

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

Shakespeare.

"Jesus wept, Voltaire smiled."—Victor Hugo.

"It is always jam to-morrow, never, by any chance, jam to-day."

THE clergy, taken as a class, are a gloomy crowd. Now and again one reminds a saucy world that a priest may be a man as well as a clergyman, but a Laurence Sterne or a Sidney Smith are so rare that they only prove the rule. The average priest is as lively as an undertaker during business hours. Even Sidney Smith noticed this sad clerical characteristic, for he got into trouble with his superiors for being so light-hearted. He had a brother, who was as jolly as a funeral-horse, but who obtained preferment. "Between us," declared Sidney Smith, "we inverted the laws of nature. My brother rose by his gravity, and I sunk by my levity."

Not only do the clergy dress, more or less, like undertakers, but many of them model their deportment on Uriah Heep, whose supineness would disgrace a shop-walker in a suburban drapery store. Hence it is quite refreshing to find a contemporary clergyman, who so far forgets his professional training as to laugh publicly. Writing in the *Daily Mail*, April 17, the Rev. Austin Lee, M.A., Curate of Kew, offers an unconventional "Plea for a Spree."

Do not be alarmed. There is not the sixteenth thousandth part of a grain of mischief in what the

reverend gentleman has to say, but it is all vastly amusing. Here is his opening:—

The modern world lies under a cloud of boredom. We have lost the capacity for wonder. It is not Jix who has taken the spice out of life. It is ennui which dogs everything we do. Some poor bored things had a cowboy party the other day, and were hauled over the coals by a modern poetess. But the people she condemns were only trying to escape boredom by having a spree. We could all do with an occasional spree.

No one would be so churlish as to chide the reverend gent. from wishing to put a rainbow round his shoulder instead of a surplice. But is he not in a great hurry, and, in his haste, is he not reasoning from the particular to the general? There may be a lot of bores in Brother Lee's parish, and they may even jostle one another in his vestry, but the modern world is not bored, nor has it lost its capacity for wonder. Kew is only a Sleepy Hollow at the best, but its boredom is insignificant. Otherwise its inhabitants would drown themselves in the adjacent river, a thing they steadfastly refuse to do.

Writing of "a cowboy party," serves to remind the Rev. Mr. Lee, of America, which he regards as the "Benighted States." In fact he could not say nastier things if he were describing the culinary habits of the misguided inhabitants of the Cannibal Islands. According to Mr. Lee, the U.S.A. is a terrible place, and is considerably overrated in being called "God's Own Country." Dipping his brush in crimson lake, Mr. Lee paints a shocking picture:—

In America, where domestic work is practically left to robots, lawlessness is almost a national problem. Youths murder for the sensation, and gangs of children commit robberies with violence. And the spirit of adventure surges up behind even such organizations as the Ku Klux Klan.

You see that it takes Mr. Lee but a little time to jump from jest to earnest, and that his humour tends to become turgid at times. It looks as if the reverend critic had obtained his knowledge of the American "cop" from seeing Charlie Chaplin in the movie-picture "Easy Street." Doubtless, after due reflection, he may find that the American police are as brave as our own, and not to be intimidated by mere children. But Mr. Lee is as ready to indict a nation as he is ready to lampoon a police force.

Some of the lawlessness that Mr. Lee complains of is caused by Prohibition, which is a legacy of Puritanism, which, in its turn, is a legacy of the Christian Religion, which is founded on prohibitions. Indeed, the boasted "Ten Commandments" of that religion, are, in reality, nine prohibitions, and one commandment. Perhaps Mr. Lee can explain why the ten "commandments" of the Popish and Protestant Bibles differ in such a remarkable manner. In the former, the "commandment" concerning graven images is conspicuous by its absence, and another "commandment" is split in two to make the number complete. It is no light matter for the poor Christian believer, for he is taught that these ten commandments were written by the hand of his deity on tables of stone. This is quite as exciting as a "cowboy party," and quite out of the rut of ordinary Sunday exhortation.

Mr. Lee says that he likes "to spend a week on the Continent now and then. It is like being in fancy dress. You can expand. And then he adds the distressing words:—

All the little checks of self-consciousness disappear in a foreign country. One cannot help it, but one does always regard people who cannot speak English as being in the nature of half-witted children, whose opinion can be disregarded.

La! La! Mr. Lee is as complimentary to the

countrymen of Moliere and Mazzini (to mention no others) as he is to the citizens of the United States. Kew must be a very provincial place indeed, if Mr. Lee is regarded as a pastor and master in that locality. For his outlook is so very medieval, and not very advanced even for that old-world period, when a man risked a "chop" at the Tower, or a "stake" at Smithfield for laughing at priestly pretensions.

Mr. Lee closes on a less strident note:—

But if only I could go to Church some Sunday, and find all my congregation in false noses, there I should pray for them with a lighter heart. There should be a prayer in the Liturgy for a defence, and succour against boredom. It would be used more often even than the prayer for fine weather.

It looks uncommonly as if Brother Lee was conscious that the "old, old story" bored his congregation like the damnable reiteration of a gramophone record of an old music-hall jingle. The Christian Superstition is far more out-of-date than a song of yesteryear, for it dates back two millenniums, and some parts are far older. Such a system must suffer from a complete alienation from life as it is lived today.

Disguise it as they may, the clergy are but a survival from the bad, old times, and are living entirely on their past. Despite their boasting, no humanitarian movement during the past two hundred years was initiated by a priest. It has always been the work of ordinary citizens. But the clergy like to take the credit of doing all the work. Like a municipal employee, who slowly and ostentatiously swept some dust from one side of the road to the other, and then swept it back again. An onlooker approached him and said: "Look here! You sweep the dirt from one side to the other, and back again. How are you going to get rid of it?" "There's no need to worry," replied the super-workman, "people take the dust away in their eyes."

It is as well to laugh last as well as to laugh first. Mr. Lee dreams of a congregation with false noses. He may yet experience the worse nightmare of a church displaying a beggarly array of empty benches.

MIMNERMUS.

Noah's Flood and Abraham's House.

OUR readers are doubtless aware, from the large type placards of the daily press, if from no other source, that evidence has been found confirming the historical truth of the Deluge as recorded in the Bible.

Excavations carried out at Kish, near Babylon, by the Field Museum Expedition, for the last six years; under the direction of Professor Stephen Langdon, of Oxford University; and excavations at Ur, about a hundred miles from Babylon, under the direction of Mr. Woolley of the British Museum, have both revealed evidence of a great flood which occurred about five thousand years ago.

So the unbelievers, the Higher Critics, and the Modernists, can go and clothe themselves in sackcloth and ashes. All those feeble sentimentalists who declared that God would never be so barbarous and pitiless as to drown all the people and animals, except a select few like the drunken Noah, as if they were so many unwanted kittens, are now shown to be wrong. He could do it, and he did do it. Why not? Shall the pot argue with its creator as to what he does with his creations? Certainly not. These wrong-headed ideas all come of the new-fangled conception of God as a God of Love, whereas the Bible shows clearly that he was a God of Hate, and as In-

gersoll remarked, the Jews never really prospered until their God abandoned them.

The Fundamentalists, the Salvationists, the Primitive Methodists, the Bible Christians, and a multitude of other sects were right all the time, and, as our grandmothers prophesied long ago, the Bible has been vindicated as the Word of God. Such at least would be the impression of the man-in-the-street, if he had no other source of information but that of the penny newspapers, and he will be wondering how the more advanced clergy, who had abandoned belief in the Deluge feel about it. For instance, Bishop Gore, the editor, along with Dr. Goudge and Mr. Guillaume, of *The New Commentary of Holy Scripture*, is responsible for the following criticism of the Deluge story:—

That this story of a universal deluge covering the whole earth so as to submerge the highest mountains cannot be historical hardly needs demonstration. To collect pairs of animals from all quarters of the globe into one place would be a manifest impossibility, even could an ark have been built capable of containing them.

No wonder that Lord Halifax, the leader of the Anglo-Catholics, expressed much uneasiness respecting the new commentary: "Is there not grave reason to fear," he asks, "that its effect in popular estimation will be to encourage a general disbelief in large portions of Holy Scripture?" We think his fears are justified. On the other hand, priests of the good old-fashioned type, like Father Morse-Boycott, who publicly defended the truth of Jonah's three days' submarine excursion in the whale's belly, will be congratulating themselves upon their powers of belief in the incredible and impossible.

The average man unacquainted with the purpose and aims contemplated by these excavations in the East, thinks that they are simply a hunt for hidden treasure, and a search for corroboration of the Bible history; and this view is played up to, at least as regards the Bible part, by the authorities responsible for these expeditions. In fact, they found that the only way to raise money to carry out these researches was to play upon the hopes of finding historical corroboration for the Bible. Professor Macalister, who has personally superintended excavations for the Palestine Expedition Fund, tells us quite plainly:—

Excavation is a very expensive pursuit, and depends on the support and goodwill of subscribers. It must be confessed that, to the majority of subscribers, pure science, as such, makes but little appeal. If it were advertised that investigation was contemplated in some Palestinian mound which it was as yet impossible to identify with a Biblical site, the public would take the announcement rather coldly. Closed would be the purse-strings that would open to an appeal to examine some place connected with Abraham or with David, even though this might hold out less promise of important results than the other. It is melancholy to have to add that any legitimate undertaking would be less widely and generously supported than something crudely spectacular, such as an expedition to find the Lost Tribes, or the Ark of the Covenant, or Joseph's coat of many colours.¹

When the expedition was sent out to Ur, all the daily papers came out with column headings about, Ur the home of Abraham; or Ur the Birthplace of Abraham. As if the one aim of the expedition was to find relics of Abraham, perhaps the very house he lived in! Indeed, Mr. Leonard Woolley, who was Director of the excavations at Ur, recently gave a lecture on the subject, at which the Rev. Dr. Moses Gaster acted as chairman. In introducing Mr. Woolley to the audience, he observed: "he [Mr. Woolley] will show us the place, and perhaps the

very house, where our father Abraham lived some thousands of years ago."²

The Rev. Gentleman must have been of a very sanguine temperament, and Mr. Woolley quickly disposed of this ridiculous suggestion, admitting at the start that: "The title which I have chosen for this lecture might be considered misleading. The main link, that which first presents itself to the mind, between Ur and the Hebrew records is Abraham, and the name of Abraham has never yet occurred in our discoveries. It is true that at any moment it might turn up on some actual monument." (p. 15.) It would say much for his powers of self-control if Mr. Woolley refrained from laughing when he made this pronouncement.

Now Abraham—if he ever existed—was a shepherd chief. Dean Milman gave great offence by describing him as an Arab Sheik; but the excavations at Ur reveal the remains of a vast and wealthy city in a very high state of civilization. How could Abraham find room, or pasture, for his flocks and herds in such a place. Mr. Woolley recognizes the contradiction, and observes: "Abraham, living at Ur, so far from being a primitive Bedouin accustomed only to the wide spaces of the desert and the stern traditions of a nomad tribe was the heir to an age-old civilization." (p. 30.) And again: "in trying to fill in the background of the Genesis story, we must make allowances for antecedents very different from those of the Bedouin tent-dwellers. . . . To most people, this picture of the elaborate conditions of domestic life at Ur will come as a surprise, and must seriously affect their conception of the patriarch"; (pp. 43-44). Instead of confirming the story of Abraham it really contradicts it. There was no place in this mighty city for the chief who lived by his flocks and herds.

W. MANN.

(To be concluded.)

The Descent from Parnassus and Olympus.

THE personal-public contribution entitled "A Letter to a Distinguished Artist," by Mr. Victor B. Neuburg, comes quickly to the centre of a question which may be, in effect, a weighing up of for and against. This question appears in many disguises—it is tantalizing, it is provocative, and it should, in the opinion of the writer, be grasped firmly—the best way of handling a nettle.

In the Odyssey of man he may listen to the sirens of romance without once hearing the distant voice of wisdom. He may decide to dwell on the slopes of Parnassus, content, and satisfied; on the other hand he may not occupy this position for long, as some new thing may send him roving about. Is Byron his love to-day? Tomorrow it may be Shelley. Is Plato his guide? Then let the cobweb-spinner beware!—Lucretius may oust him. Through a careful examination and scrupulous analysis, our man, the wanderer and searcher may say Pish! All is vanity—and retire disgusted to rear chickens. And the goddess of wisdom at the sight is neither sad nor glad.

To the persistent searcher, with a will tempered like the finest steel, with a set purpose, when found, the Goddess says, "I have been waiting for you." And then another problem is flung at the Columbus of the mental world. What is to be done when she is found? Must the discoverer keep his treasure to himself, or make her known in a diluted and distorted form at our academies? Must he treat her as precious gold to be hoarded—or exchanged at a high price? And this brings one to the issue so clearly presented by our contributor, Mr. Neuburg.

Philosophy, like politics has almost become a byword. Philosophy, in some cases, is something like

¹ Macalister: *A Century of Excavating in Palestine*. p. 78.

² Woolley: *The Excavations at Ur and the Hebrew Records*. p. 12.

cheap deal wood stained and polished to look like oak. Philosophy is frequently cleverness, and the world is chock-full of clever people taking mankind nowhere. Much philosophy is frequently only an excuse for filling a big book for which a glossary is needed. In this respect, philosophy jostles mysticism, the devotees of which tell mankind of the beauties of silence in copious numbers of fat volumes. Bergson's philosophy bewildered and bemused General Joffre during the critical and initial stages of the war; to-day, with many voices, we are told that the war was just a big muddle. Certain philosophy at the present moment is tying Italy in the knots of retrogression. Again, the attendant symptoms following the philosophy thrown out by the study of psychology, is a tendency towards excessive self-consciousness, and an ultra-clever and ready-made diagnosis (according to the book) of any poor wretch who is the victim for the experiment. In most cases these philosophers cannot survive contact with the reality of the life of dock labourers, carmen, plumbers and bricklayers. Like the knives and forks kept in red flannel-ette by maiden-aunts and others with magic proclivities, these philosophies must only be brought out on special occasions. "Patchouli" was the prevailing perfume among the audience when Bergson lectures were delivered in this country; in "Dreams," this wise man informs the world that—common sense is very fatiguing. With thanks very much for nothing, we may rest assured that England will never be prostrate on this account—the froth of General Elections, the pother about the Prayer Book and similar futilities, will keep England immune from fatigue of this kind. Neither will fatigue of this kind with our French neighbours ever be a great danger; there were more killed in a Royalist demonstration in Paris during one hour, than the total casualties in England during the General Strike. So that Bergsonism may safely be wrapped up and never brought out in the fresh air, as far as this country is concerned, and that is so much jettisoned cargo in Mr. Neuburg's voyage down the Old Kent Road. His ship will sail more lightly and surely towards those ports where beer and bread and cheese are the neighbours of high thinking—in thoughts not expressed perhaps with an Oxford accent.

It cannot be repeated too often that the debt owed to men like Richard Carlile, Charles Southwell, George William Foote and other pioneers, is colossal. Freethinkers, it is hoped, do not forget; I like Mr. Neuburg's phrase, that because of these men's sacrifices we "can breathe a little more easily." Not the least who should be indebted, are men like Mr. G. K. Chesterton, and his memory shall be poked at this point. In the *New Witness*, 1914, this writer had some verse entitled "Old Noah." Here are two specimens:—

"And Noah would often say to his wife, as he sat down to dine,
I don't care where the water goes, if it doesn't get into the wine

"And Noah cocked his eye and said, 'It looks like rain,
I think.'"

Mr. G. K. Chesterton can poke fun at every character in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, but he shall not do so without being reminded that Giordano Bruno was burned by order of Catholics. Bruno's offence was in natural philosophy; our later pioneers have given everyone more latitude for criticism, and I for one will continue to scrimmage in the Cockpit of Theology with Mr. Neuburg, until everyone is allowed to use his brains without the addition of teleological mud. In this affair we do not wear our best trousers, expect reward in the life to come, or think so meanly of God to expect him to be interested in a provincial scuffle on one of his million branch establishments called the world.

Mr. Neuburg's reference to the late J. W. Gott, in connexion with Nietzsche, is singularly happy and apposite; Christianity is not worth one hour's serious thought if it were not for the fact that its exponents make it necessary for this particular form of tomfoolery to be understood in all its subtle manifestations in human life.

To conclude, Mr. Victor B. Neuburg has made a violent crash with a subject that has long been simmering; he has asked, and rightly so, these tender philosophies, Nietzsche's question—they are good—good for what? And there are many answers, but they do not touch the spot. They are commercial philosophies; they are sold like cheese by professors, dons, lecturers, word-spinners. But here their similarity to cheese comes to an end, and teachers must live in spite of that fine nonsensical phrase of the good French Catholic, Villiers de l'Isle Adam: "As for living, our servants will do that for us." He had to do his own dying, however, this man, whose basis of life was pride, and believed in the soul, and was very sure of God. With the fanfare of tin whistles from Mr. Arthur Symons in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, the artificial poses of praise are laid on thick, and in this orchestra come such figures as Pater, Patmore, and many more pretty-pretty writers whose efforts are on the same plane as jugglers, conjurers, bare-back riders in circuses; in a word, without disrespect, entertainers. Christopher Marlowe, a Cambridge man, in *The Jew of Malta*, gave a vigorous criticism of Christianity at a time when religion was in the stirrups, and his *Alma mater* had her farthingale rumbled in consequence. It is delightful to see that Mr. Neuburg pulls his master's beard in his article; in his going down in the Cockpit, Mr. Neuburg has grown up, for philosophy is not worth a twopenny damn if it cannot be carried on in tram, train or bus, and, yes, into the places where fraternity round a glass is also the brother of free speech.

CHRISTOPHER GAY.

"The Cross in the Sky."

At last, he has spoken! To avoid misconception, let me add that I refer to Mr. James Douglas, whose long-expected article on the peculiar astronomical phenomenon of a huge cross in the sky, seen by certain people on Good Friday evening, appeared in the *Sunday Express*, of April 15. Knowing Mr. Douglas as we do, we cannot but admire his modesty and restraint in refraining from any comment upon this startling event until pressed for an article on the subject by his readers.

It seems almost incredible that anyone with a grain of commonsense should ask for the opinion of Mr. Douglas on such a topic; that would be "asking for it" with a vengeance! Yet we are assured that many of his readers wanted to know whether he had seen the phenomenon, and if he interpreted it as a signal from God!

Such conduct on their part seems to savour strongly of what we might call "mental Masochism." But let us follow the line of thought of our literary philosopher.

He says, in the course of his article: "If our revised chronology is exact, the Good Friday cross appeared in the sky precisely 1900 years after the Crucifixion. But its appearance did not startle the spectators. If God was signalling, His signal was ignored. It was explained as a natural phenomenon like the rainbow."

Mr. Douglas, it appears, accepts the "Crucifixion" (my spelling preferred), but even so, I am at a loss to account for his chronology. The "Crucifixion" is popularly supposed to have occurred in the year 33; and we also have to remember that "Good Friday" does not occupy a fixed date in our calendar. If Mr. Douglas is as great an authority on chronology as he is on "Christian apologetics," he will no doubt have no difficulty in proving to us that the crucifixion actually took place on March 29, 29 A.D. This, by the way, however.

I would also point out though, before proceeding to his chief point, that until comparatively recently, even rainbows were not accepted as being purely natural phenomena. Surely Mr. Douglas knows his Bible! Can it be that the sceptical spirit which he deplores so much in others enters into his own heart? He says, "The point I want to make is that it is impossible to think of any signal which God could devise in order to convey a message to mankind, and which could not be explained as a natural phenomenon."

Surely this is an extraordinary statement, coming as it does from a believer in the Christian God!

Can Mr. Douglas explain then, the alleged miracles of Jesus, especially the Resurrection, in terms of natural phenomena?

On the one hand, we are constantly assured that God's handiwork is to be seen anywhere and everywhere, and then we are told, with equal assurance, that the creator of all is apparently incapable of giving a visual demonstration of his existence. Surely we have reached the height, or depth, of the stupidity which characterizes Christian apologetics when it is urged that omnipotent God, after having created a universe (presumably for the benefit of mankind), and peopling it, and subsequently going to the trouble of getting himself crucified, on the people's behalf, finds himself unable, despite his best efforts, to communicate with the people of his own creation.

Once more, let me refer Mr. Douglas to the Bible. Did not God afford ocular proof of his existence to Moses?

Mr. Douglas evidently does not believe his Bible!

"It would be interesting," continues the crudite editor, "if our men of science could be induced to state what kind of signal they would accept as a message from God."

Now, why all this pother concerning the possibility of a signal from God?

What earthly use would it be? -

True, it would satisfy, temporarily, the psychological cravings of people like Mr. Douglas, but most sensible people would appreciate something on more utilitarian lines.

For instance, the same issue of the newspaper that contained Mr. Douglas' article, also gave us a graphic account of the sinking of the "Titanic," which happened just seventeen years ago. A warning from God then, given the possibility of such a being, could have been given in time to save the lives of the 1,500 people who perished in that awful catastrophe.

Mr. Douglas would have us believe that the universe is governed and sustained by a beneficent and omnipotent being which he calls God, yet who, at the same time, is unable to give mankind a visible sign of his existence. Mr. Douglas is welcome to his belief—whatever that may be; his God cannot be considered to fulfil any useful function in life, and in this respect, while Mr. Douglas confines his attention to bolstering up a case on behalf of such a being, he appears to me to share that distinction. Unless his testimony to having seen the Cross in the sky is intended to furnish an argument in favour of prohibition.

A. HEATH.

IMMORTAL SELFISHNESS.

Like Frederick's grenadier, the Salvationist wants to live for ever (the most monstrous way of crying for the moon); and though it is evident to anyone who has ever heard General Booth and his best officers that they would work as hard for human salvation as they do at present if they believed that death would be the end of them individually, they and their followers have a bad habit of talking as if the Salvationists were heroically enduring a very bad time on earth as an investment which will bring them in dividends later on in the form, not of a better life to come for the whole world, but of an eternity spent by themselves personally in a sort of bliss which would bore any active person to a second death. Surely the truth is that the Salvationists are unusually happy people. And is it not the very diagnostic of true salvation that it shall overcome the fear of death? Now the man who has come to believe that there is no such thing as death, the change so called being merely the transition to an exquisitely happy and utterly careless life, has not overcome the fear of death at all: on the contrary it has overcome him so completely that he refuses to die on any terms whatever. I do not call a Salvationist really saved until he is ready to lie down cheerfully on the scrap heap, having paid scot and lot and something over, and let his eternal life pass on to renew its youth in the battalions of the future.—G. Bernard Shaw, *Preface to "Major Barbara."*

Acid Drops.

Our continuous exposure of the real reason why parsons, and their catspaws constantly oppose Sunday games, etc., seems to be having its effect. Constant exposure is making the stock reason advanced seem very thin. So we see that the Rev. John Bevan, speaking to his clerical brethren through the columns of the *Christian World*, "blows the gaff" thus:—

We tend to wax very anxious about the Ark, just as though our only concern was entirely for the safety of religion. Let us tell the truth. Is not our keenness partly due to the thought that if Sunday goes our churches will go and our jobs too? If people get out of the way of their religious observance, what happens to the Ark? The Sunday has for centuries been the preserve of the Churches, but now that privileged position has been lost.

We have been saying this for years. Now Mr. Bevan says to his brother parsons, "Let us tell the truth." What have they been telling all along?

But that is very dangerous advice to give parsons. In the first place, and so far as religion is concerned, they are not used to telling the truth. Consider how long it has taken Mr. Bevan himself to tell the truth about Sunday. Everyone who has been fighting Sabbatarianism this last couple of generations has known what was the real interest of the average parson in the matter. But how many of them would admit it. And how can Mr. Bevan expect his fellow clergyman to all at once begin to tell the truth about it? If it is told, it is bound to be told in a very amateurish way, and will be told with a number of qualifications and reservations that will rouse more suspicions than they allay. Besides, if parsons begin to tell the truth about Sunday, they may tell the truth about other religious matters, and then the fat will be in the fire.

Of course, Mr. Bevan tells the clergy to tell the truth only about Sunday. And his reason for that is that "It is not a question as to whether we oldish men and women are going to allow a so-called secular use of Sunday. We've got to do it. It's come to stay." That is very frank. It amounts to "Let us tell the truth, the lie will no longer serve any profitable purpose." And yet we advise the clergy to do nothing of the kind. Telling the truth will not bring anyone back to religion, since it will be a justification of their having given it up. And it may lead to other's giving it up also. When a man says to his followers, "My dear friend, after all these years, I am now going to tell you the truth," they cannot help wondering what he has been telling them in the past. No, the safest plan is for the clergy to keep on hiding the truth to the end. And when Lord Macaulay's New Zealander stands on the broken arch of London Bridge contemplating the ruins of St. Paul's, he may, if he wanders about the streets of the ruined city, come upon a surviving specimen of a parson, who will tell him that he is the only one of his kind remaining, and he survived because he would not tell the truth, and could to the end find some one who was fool enough to trust him.

Some people achieve honesty naturally, some have it thrust on them. This seems to be the case with some of our Sabbatarians. We have noticed of late—probably the pretence that all that is aimed at is securing freedom for working men is wearing thin—to fall back on the original and honest plea for the preservation of Sunday worship. Thus in the *Northern Echo*, of a recent date, we note a letter from a Mr. R. G. Suggett, asking the Darlington Council to prohibit games in the parks on Sunday. He does so because "I believe that Sunday games would seriously affect attendances at the various places of worship." That is quite plain. What we should next like to know is whether it is the business of

a Council to see that people go to Church and Chapel? Mr. Suggett evidently thinks it is. That is where we differ.

"Jix" has appealed to the Churches to help him fight the movement for the opening of theatres on Sundays. That strikes us as the most impudent piece of sectarianism we have ever come across. For a Home Secretary to act in this way labels him as one who is utterly unfitted to hold any post in a government of any kind. It is government by sectarianism. We are not concerned here with what party is returned at the general election, but we think that all lovers of decency in political life should see that a man of the stamp of Sir William Joynson-Hicks has all his time to give to visiting evangelical meetings.

Headed "Spoon-fed Piety," the following letter appeared in *John Bull* :—

My grouse at British Broadcasting is that it is much too fond of forcing matters religious upon listeners.

To entertain, to interest, and to educate afford quite enough scope, surely, without the need for evangelizing. That is not the function of a lay body drawing money from persons of all creeds and of none.

Someone appears to have been reading the *Freethinker*. We daresay our contemporary, as well as *Radio Times*, has received many letters in a similar strain. Our readers should seize every opportunity of letting newspaper editors become aware that a large body of broadcast listeners are not hankering after "spoon-fed piety," nor paying for a wireless entertainment licence to enable parsons to evangelize them.

Says Mr. J. D. Beresford: "We are moving toward a wonderful era of world peace." Still, one must not expect too much help in this direction from Christian priests. They have only just got their breath back after cheering on the combatants in the last war.

In 1927, the last year for which there are figures available, there were, in England and Wales, nearly 30,000 charges brought in the courts for the "crime" of Sunday trading. In Kingston-upon-Hull alone, there were twice as many of these charges as in all the rest of England and Wales put together, says a weekly paper. The Lord and the Devil seem extremely active in Kingston. Apparently, the police or pious informers sit all Sunday on the wicked shopkeepers' doorsteps waiting for evidence.

A reader of a Methodist journal is sorely troubled with a problem. He is anxious to make a living and some money. He fancies either a petrol-filling station or a tea-shop. Where the problem comes in is that with either, to earn anything of a living, he must open on Sunday. His conscience—or his narrow Methodist upbringing—is against anything of that kind; and so he is seeking the advice of a Methodist journal as to what he ought to do. It is pretty obvious what he will be told. Our advice would be to go ahead with his garage or tea-shop and open all day on Sunday. Let him have faith in God. If the Lord does not approve, our friend will not be able to make money by his enterprise. This will be a sign from heaven to put the shutters up.

As regards the adult superstitionists, it would seem that the chief agencies for dislodging irrational beliefs are the Freethinking societies and journals. As heretofore, they will get no help from the popular newspapers and weekly periodicals. Yet the popular press could do a tremendous amount of good in the desired direction, if it cared. Apparently the view is that there is more money to be made by pandering to superstition than by undermining it.

We commend the aim of the Roads of Remembrance Committee of the Road Beautifying Association. It desires to beautify the new roads by planting trees in commemoration of those who fell in the Great War, or died at other times; of any outstanding event in our public or private lives; of occasions of national rejoicing or mourning; and of birth, marriages or deaths." We think the N.S.S. would be willing to supply a tree or two on an occasion of national rejoicing connected with the repeal of the Blasphemy Acts, the Lord's Day Observance Acts, and also when various other pious prohibitions are dumped on the scrap-heap. The N.S.S. would reserve the right to affix an appropriately worded label to the trees it supplied.

On the authority of a Methodist reviewer, we solemnly declare that Herr Karl Barth—one of the ablest theologians in Europe—is "one of the greatest thinkers in Europe." It appears that Barth finds within the Bible a strange new world, not history, nor ethics, nor religion, but something deeper. To wit—God's sovereignty, God's glory, God's incomprehensible love. Well, a man with an original mind like that couldn't help but qualify as one of the greatest thinkers in Europe. But we warn him, he has quite a number of competitors in the Salvation Army.

In defence of the broadcast religious services, a daily paper reader declares that crowds of old people and invalids look forward to the service. On the other hand, still larger crowds of old persons and invalids are not a bit anxious for or cheered by dreary Bible-passages, nursery hymn-tunes, and quasi-ethical discourse. They prefer something more merry and bright. When will the B.B.C. cater for them as well as the doleful religious minority? Aren't they deserving of consideration? They ought not to be left to boredom from six to nine every Sunday evening. Gentle Jesus would agree with us on that.

A suggestion is made by a reader of a religious weekly that church-goers should invite people to church by 'phone, as is now being done in America. A writer in the same paper rather takes to the notion, but he thinks great tact would be needed. We agree; there are many outspoken believers who might say something rude if invited to spend a lovely day in a gloomy tabernacle of the Lord.

The Lord seems to have been neglecting Mr. James Douglas of late. Not so long ago he informed the world that on three occasions, when Harley Street was in despair, the Lord saved his life in response to prayer. But the other day he informed *Daily Express* readers, that he had run away from England to avoid influenza? But what has happened to prayer? Or is it that God thinks that saving the life of Mr. Douglas, on three occasions was misplaced economy? How fortunate Mr. Douglas is in writing for a public that never remembers to-day what he said a week ago. And knowing his public it probably isn't necessary for him to remember himself.

A reader of a daily paper points out that Local Option, or to give it its true name, Local Veto, is a gross infringement of individual liberty, since it confers upon one body of citizens, power to restrict and regulate the personal tastes and habits of another body of citizens. Anyone could have guessed this to be the fact, by simply observing the type of pious persons who clamour for Local Veto in relation to the sale of alcoholic drinks. The same persons, it is, who would agitate for Local Veto in regard to Sunday kinemas, concerts, museums, and teetotal refreshment shops, if they thought Local Veto would give opportunity for organizing a vote to enable the personal preferences of others to be interfered with. Making himself a nuisance to other people seems to be a marked characteristic of the pious and temperance fanatic.

There are millions of people in this country, says Sir Arthur Keith, as superstitious as the natives of Africa. The fact should surprise no one. Is not the Christian Bible forced into the hands of every child in the schools of the nation? Is not that Bible packed with stories about spirits, demons, miracles, signs and omens, and a golden ark as a tribal luck-bringer? Is not belief in the supernatural stressed from the first page to the last? The schools, it would seem, can spare time to acquaint the child with ancient Eastern superstitions. But there's no time for inculcating a truly scientific view of life. True, the more advanced schools do teach a smattering of scientific knowledge for memorization. But, in order to dam one source of the degraded state of affairs referred to by Sir Arthur Keith, what is needed is the imparting of a scientific outlook that will serve the child throughout life. At present, however, there are unfortunately some difficulties in the way of getting such an outlook imparted. Two-thirds of the teachers are unfamiliar with it, and the Bible, firmly established in the schools, is inculcating a quite contrary viewpoint. Such being the case, then, we may venture to prophesy that the rising generation will be, in regard to superstition, a very slight improvement on the present adult generation. We think we have said enough to indicate to educationalists the means by which they prevent our prophecy from coming true.

The Professor of Religious Education in the North Western Methodist University, U.S.A., recently submitted a list of questions to 500 Protestant clergymen. The following was the result, in percentages:—

That God Exists	100
That God is Omnipotent	87
That the Creation occurred in the manner and time recorded in Genesis	47
That the Bible is wholly free from legend or myth	38
Eternal punishment for such as reject Christ	61
That death and suffering were brought into the world by the disobedience of Adam and Eve	60
That in order to be a Christian it is essential to belong to the Church	44
That there is a continuance of life after death	97

On the authority of the Rev. Vale Owen, many people will be pleased to hear that there is still a chance for "sport" in the Summerland. On the evidence of spirits he has been in communication with, there are sports of all kinds in the next world. So he told a representative of the *Illustrated Sporting World*. There are games with balls, and racing, and hunting, horse races, etc. Of course, he says there is no betting. We cannot imagine everybody interested in horse-racing not having an occasional "bob on a horse." Of course, it may not be recognized, just as street-racing is not recognized in England. All the same, we imagine that the ghostly policeman will turn the ghostly blind eye, as he passes the ghostly bookmaker accepting ghostly slips from the ghostly backer. As to hunting, Mr. Vale Owen is quite certain that although hunting goes on, there is no pain inflicted. Everybody enjoys it, including the animals that are hunted. But if all animals have their ghosts, why not cats and mice? Mouse-hunting is clearly something the cat enjoys. Anyway, there it is. And Mr. Vale Owen is in the know, and the information should quieten all who object to horse-racing and hunting in this world. And who would object to losing a few spiritual "bobs" on a race? It is the material ones that make the backer feel sore.

We are glad to learn, on the authority of a Christian Evidence paper, that "Those who speak on the platform of the Christian Evidence Society set out to convince rather than confound; and in a spirit of charity and sweet reasonableness, to deal even with ill-mannered

and sometimes violent opponents." We do not feel justified in contradicting this statement, because we are told that Christian Evidence speakers only "set out" with that object. We have read of a man who "set out" on a journey to the moon. But, alas, he never arrived.

The following letter appeared in the *Daily Mirror*, and was signed by "A Churchman":—

Is there any church in this country where prayers for rain are being offered? The Churches concentrate so much on doctrinal controversies . . . that the needs of everyday life are neglected. Do our Churches ever pray for rain till drought has done its worst, or for fine weather till floods have brought irretrievable ruin to crops? What can a mere layman think, save that the Churches have no faith in prayer?

We are inclined to fancy the above was "writ sarcastic"—as an oblique way of hitting out at a Christian belief. If it was not, "A Churchman" needs informing that meteorological experts entirely ignore prayer as a possible influence on the weather. Their science has no use for Christian superstition.

Besides, there is a danger in calling the Lord's attention to the fact that there has been a shortage of rain. Judging from past experiences, he is apt to lose his temper, and let loose an avalanche of water, or to try and make up for three or four month's carelessness by giving us the whole quantity in two or three days that should have fallen during the whole of the time. The best thing is to let the Lord alone.

Scepticism is creeping into the Church—the Roman Catholic Church at that. In the Church of Santa Clara, Naples, a bracelet on the arm of a statue of the Virgin has taken to oscillating, and devotees have been worshipping before the statue. Then Cardinal Acalesi, with a party of experts, looked in the matter and discovered that the statue is worm-eaten, and the oscillation is due to the south wind catching the arm of the figure. Still, many will not have it, and are determined to have their miracle whatever happens. Personally, we consider the action of the Archbishop quite indefensible. If every miracle is to be examined by a party of experts, what will become of them? What would happen, for instance, if the miracle of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius were examined in the same way? This takes place every year in Naples. It is coming to something when a miracle has to be examined like a case of suspected smallpox!

The Rev. Desmond Morse-Boycott is a curious gentleman. In the *Sunday Chronicle* he points out that if the supply of clergy dry up at its present rate, there will come a time when there will be one clergyman left to minister to "the millions who adhere to the Anglican Communion." But who believes that these millions of communicants will continue in the Anglican Communion. Mr. Morse-Boycott should bethink himself, that the same process which is robbing the Church of its parsons will also rob the Church of its worshippers. One would imagine that the shortage is of parsons only. There is a still larger shortage of believers.

A CHILD'S VIEW OF GOD.

Mr. St. Loc Strachey, in his book, *The River of Life*, tells of a friend who once tried to explain the Flood to a little girl aged three. The task was by no means easy. Presently, the child asked why all the people were drowned instead of being saved. The explanation given her was that they had been very wicked, and God was very angry with them, and therefore he drowned them all. The child said quite naturally and spontaneously, "Oh, naughty God!" Mr. Strachey adds this comment: "How pleased the Almighty Father must have been with that dear cry of the heart!"

The National Secular Society's Annual Conference.

THE Annual Conference of the National Secular Society will be held in Manchester, on Whit-Sunday, May 19. There will be the usual business meetings, morning and afternoon, with a public demonstration in the evening. The business meetings are open to all members of the Society, who may speak and vote. The agenda of the Conference appears on another page.

Manchester is the centre of a very thickly-populated district, and I am hoping to see a great many Freethinkers present from different parts of Lancashire, as well as from other parts of the country. A luncheon will be provided for members at a cost of 3s. 6d. It will help in the arrangements if those who wish to partake of this will inform the General Secretary as early as possible, certainly before the 16th. We are in a Christian country, and it is not the easiest of tasks to secure food for a public gathering on Sunday at short notice.

It is to be hoped that every Branch of the Society will see to it that it is represented at the Annual Conference. There are not many occasions during the year when Freethinkers from all over the country may meet each other, and this one should not be missed.

CHAPMAN COHEN,
President, N.S.S.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

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

FREETHINKER ENDOWMENT TRUST.—M.R., 5s.

B. BOTT.—Thanks for article. Mr. Cohen will deal with the matter shortly.

P. SHALLER.—Your recollection is quite right. We should have been unworthy of where we are, and disloyal to the work of a great Freethinker, had we not written as we did concerning the work of G. W. Foote.

W. SARNI.—Shall be interested in knowing the result.

DEPAL.—Mr. Robson's letter is a very good one. Is not the attitude of the clergy to be explained in the one word "Opportunism"?

E. H. (Glasgow).—Shall hope to see you and have a chat at the Conference.

T. MOSLEY.—Yes, we know the *Freethinker* is "read," not skipped. We have constant evidence of that. Glad to hear of your success. Worth does tell in the long run.

R. C. PROCTOR.—We quite appreciate what you say, but although customs officials may seize a book the sale of which has been suppressed, if the case were properly fought they might soon find they had exceeded their powers. There is nothing, for example, to prevent my leading to anyone a book which has been suppressed. Circulation, in the legal sense, has a different connotation from this. There are great many powers taken by officials in this country that are quite unwarranted. The customs may detain anything they please. The question is can they hold it.

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

The Secular Society, Limited, office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, Mr. F. Mann, giving as long notice as possible.

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

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

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.

As will be seen, the arrangements for the 1929 Conference are now complete. All that is wanted now is a good attendance of delegates and members and good weather. There is to be an excursion into Derbyshire on Whit-Monday, and Mr. Cohen intends to be there. There will be an inclusive cost of 3s. 6d. Those who wish to take part in this outing should make their wishes known early, as the number who can be accommodated will be limited. With regard to the evening demonstration in the Chorlton Town Hall. A good supply of advertising slips have been printed, and if friends in towns around about Manchester will send for quantities and distribute them will help considerably.

The West Ham Branch re-opens its summer campaign to-day (May 5). The meetings will be held every Sunday evening outside the Technical College, Romford Road, at 7.0. At the first meeting, to-day, the speakers will be Mrs. R. H. Rosetti, Mrs. E. Venton, and Mrs. Grout, and Messrs. H. C. White, F. E. Warren, A. High, and R. H. Rosetti. We congratulate the West Ham Branch on being able to put three lady speakers on the platform at the same time.

What with the government suppressing all unfavourable criticism of Russia, and our British press suppressing all news favourable to it, it is not very easy for anyone to get at the truth of what is going on. One remembers the municipilization of women story, which none but a degenerate could have invented, and none but fools could have believed. Consequently, whatever one says about Russia has to be said with considerable reservations. But if the news about some new regulations in Russia for the control of the Churches be true, the Soviet is looking for trouble. The experience of the Christian Church should have taught the futility of hoping to kill an idea by the application of force, and anything like the persecution of religion in Russia is likely to help the Church more than the Soviet. For our own part we hate persecution and intolerance, whether it is manifested on behalf or against religion, and the absolute forbidding of religious instruction to even adults without a special permit from the Russian Home Office, is not likely to advance non-religion for long. But the Russians appear to have committed themselves to the belief that if enough pressure is brought to bear, religion can be stamped out in the country. "If enough"! But we doubt whether any country can keep it up long enough, and even if it could it would be at a terrible cost in other directions.

From what we gather the regulation about the adults appears to be quite unnecessary. The real struggle is over the child, and in this direction it is already forbidden to give religious instruction to children. It might well have been left there, although even here it should be restricted to the schools. Probably the root

of the whole trouble that we have in Russia is a dominance of the religious type of mind on both sides. And the religious mentality will always think in terms of actual compulsion, whether it is working in politics or in religion. Given power, it only sees one way of exercising it. Of course, the Soviet theory appears to be that if you can suppress an idea from open expression for a certain time, and meanwhile go on teaching one thing only, in time you will have developed a generation that can only think in that way. That is also Mussolini's idea in Italy. But both Russia and Italy forget that no country is completely isolated to-day, and there is such a principle as variation, and while we can, to a considerable extent, direct the evolutionary process, I do not think we can ever hope to destroy its underlying principles.

The Freethought Thrust.

IN Mr. Cohen's *Freethought and Life*, on page 34, the "Argument from Design" is considered, and slightly elaborated with the aid of a story about a pudding which was not quite up to standard. The main point is that the design argument has no relevance whatever; it is based on faulty reasoning, and a misuse of terms. It commits suicide, in spite of the fact that up to the other day it lived in the curriculum of theological students, and is still the stand-by of crusading Christians. It was generally, and legitimately enough, met with the retort that in Nature were found many things inconsistent with the loosely conceived idea of "order"; the "design" underlying the fact of a cancer germ, for instance, being fatal to the conception of an all-wise and almighty god. In other directions, the terms used in the argument were subjected to stricter scrutiny with a correspondingly greater destructive effect on the object of the Theist's argumentation. But, so far as I have gone, it is done in a somewhat involved fashion; that is, as directed to the ordinary man who has had no special training in dialectical tourney. It is too complicated to be readily assimilated, and consequently, is only in the armoury of the few. But that need not be the case any longer. In his debate with Mr. Joad, at the Caxton Hall, last year, Mr. Cohen asserted that the truth of any given thing need not necessarily be obscure, and in his contribution to the April *Controversialist*, where the "Argument from Design" is the main question discussed, that contention of his is seen in the clear and convincing way a really subtle argument is stated. In a contemporary some time ago, Mr. Cohen was described as dealing sledge-hammer blows at Christianity, but that is not quite the truth. Mr. Cohen is not, intellectually, a navvy. In this argument his sword play is consummate and deadly.

The Rev. Herbert Calnan, arguing the other side of the question, records a great number of extremely interesting cases of "adaptation" in Nature, all of which, he contends, points to the existence of an active Intelligent Creator. The harmony of the universe demands no less. Such a thing as the human eye was obviously constructed for the purpose of vision, just as the human ear was made for hearing and nothing else. All is part of a plan, "a plan which nowhere overlaps, nowhere stumbles, nowhere repeats itself, nowhere is at fault," in fact, the plan of "a self-subsistent Intelligence, God the Creator and Father of us all." Now, let us see how the situation is handled by the protagonist of Freethought. He has elsewhere stressed the importance of accurate definition of terms, and here the argument turns partly on what is meant by "adaptation." As it stands, it can be construed as involving an "adaptor," and with the addition of a sounding

adjective or two as constituting proof of the existence of deity. It is, among Theists, invariably used in that way, but, logically, it cannot bear that construction. "Adaptation" in Nature is simply a name for natural processes and results, and in view of the use to which it is put, a misleading one. These processes are due to the operation of natural law, the consequences of natural forces, and things being as they are, could not be otherwise. If the scientific idea of causation be a fact, there is no room, or need, for any other factor. It is sometimes said this factor = God, for the whole argument is to establish his existence, was around at the beginning of things, and gave them a push off; if that was so, he or it, has been so long retired from business that, as an original prime-mover, he does not count in a present-day consideration of forces. His is the fate of old champions in sport attempting a come-back.

If "adaptation" is not what theologians say it is, neither is "Design." And it is here where the upholders of the design argument destroy themselves. Their contention is that all things are designed, and in the old Paleyian argument, or rather illustration of finding a watch in the desert and inferring design from it, the very first thing done is to assume that everything there but the watch is undesignated. That is a necessity of their argument, you can only infer design by comparison with something undesignated; and when that is done the assumption is dropped, and as Mr. Cohen remarks, the design in the desert is re-discovered. And when they re-assert design in everything, as their position demands, they are simply falling back on the "adaptation" standpoint, which is to distinguish nothing.

Mr. Cohen's chief count against the "Argument from Design," is that it does not apply to the case in point. If the God of the Christian is in existence, it is not proved by showing that the human ear is a more or less efficient auditory apparatus, or that the human eye excels as a camera lens. We do not arrive at God in that way. The Christian very often pretends that the study of the world leads him to God, but the fact is, that is his starting point. He sets out with God; gets the idea through "Revelation" or with his mother's milk, and then is childishly delighted when he fancies he has discovered him in the realm of Nature. He talks glibly of design, but what is design? Mr. Cohen draws upon an illustration which, as in the case of the aforementioned gastronomic undelight, illuminates the whole matter. Suppose, he says, a man is seen tumbling from the roof of a London hotel. He may have been tired of life and decided to end it in that fashion; some enemy may have given him a push or he may have stumbled and gone over in that way, but in any case, his passage from the roof to the ground would be identical. There would be no indication, in the falling, of design or otherwise. That would only be ascertained after careful inquiry into factors separate from and preceding the main incident. If it was shown, say, that he had stumbled and fallen over, it would be plain that there was no intention of taking life, but if it was known that the man had had domestic and other worries and had expressed his desire to be rid of it all, then intention to take life was obvious, and that the man designed his own death. But none of that could be inferred from the falling itself; the physical factors are the same whether intention was present or not. To be precise, you cannot establish design, which in its nature is psychical, by a consideration of factors that are not. That is arrived at in quite another fashion, in a different region altogether. And so with Design in the universe. Assuming that Jahweh created the earth and all that is therein, no examination of the

product would enable one to tell what was in his mind when he started his task. One would have to possess a knowledge of the world-maker; to be coeval with him, to say if Design was present or not. And that is absurd. Christians take it on trust, and when the pressure of criticism becomes too acute, their pastors and other interested persons spin worlds of inverted reasoning to maintain the delusion. "What the Theist does at every step of his reasoning is to read his own feelings into Nature and then worship his own personification." It is imputing to Nature his own emotions. He has got rid of many of the minor manifestations of that phase of his development, such as seeing heavenly resentment in lightning flashes or sadness and cheerfulness in rain and sunshine, but he still clings to the complete fallacy, the ascription of purpose or design to Nature in a total sense. One is just as fallacious as the other. It is the vision of his own shadow that he sees in Nature. "Man's giant shadow, deemed divine"—and his reasoning to justify it is of the same attenuated texture.

I have tried, if somewhat imperfectly, to summarize the argument of Mr. Cohen in the *Controversialist*. It should be read in its entirety, for it is the Editor of the *Freethinker* at his best. And that best should be trumpeted abroad much more than it is. Here, at the service of Freethought, is a cultured scholar and debater, who, in other branches of intellectual activity, would have been amongst the first, however eminent. He brings to his work a breadth of knowledge seldom equalled, and a sincerity and courage worthy of "the best of causes."

H. B. DODDS.

National Secular Society.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

VICTORIA HOTEL, CORNER OF DEANSGATE AND VICTORIA STREET, MANCHESTER, WEDNESDAY, MAY 19, 1929.

AGENDA.

1. Minutes of last Conference.
2. Executive's Annual Report.
3. Financial Report.
4. Election of President.
Motion by Bethnal Green, Manchester, West Ham, South London, Fulham, and North London Branches:—
"That Mr. Chapman Cohen be re-elected President of the N.S.S."
5. Election of Secretary.
Motion by the Executive, West Ham, Chester-le-Street and Fulham Branches:—
"That Mr. F. Mann be elected General Secretary."
6. Election of Treasurer.
Motion by the Bethnal Green and West Ham Branches:—
"That Mr. C. G. Quinton be re-elected Treasurer."
7. Election of Auditor.
Motion by the Executive:—
"That Messrs. H. Theobald and Co. (Incorporated Accountants) be reappointed Auditors."
8. Nominations for Executive.
SCOTLAND.—Mr. James Neate, nominated by Glasgow Branch.
WALES.—Mr. T. Gorniot, nominated by Swansea Branch.
N.E. GROUP.—Miss K. B. Kough, nominated by Newcastle Branch.
Mr. A. B. Moss, nominated by South Shields Branch.

N.W. GROUP.—Mr. H. R. Clifton and Mr. R. H. Rosetti, nominated by Liverpool and Manchester Branches.

S.W. GROUP.—Mr. W. J. W. Easterbrook, nominated by Plymouth Branch.

MIDLAND GROUP.—Mrs. C. G. Quinton (Junr.) and Mr. J. G. Dobson, nominated by Birmingham Branch.

SOUTH LONDON.—Mr. F. P. Corrigan, nominated by South London Branch.

NORTH LONDON.—Mr. S. Samuels, nominated by North London Branch.

EAST LONDON.—Mr. H. Silvester, nominated by Bethnal Green and West Ham Branches.

WEST LONDON.—Mr. G. Wood, nominated by Fulham Branch.

9. Motion by Mr. R. H. Rosetti:—

"That Resolution No. 9 on the 1928 Agenda be rescinded and the earlier practice of Branch members receiving cards from their own Secretaries be restored."

10. Motion by Mr. A. C. Rosetti:—

"That in view of the General Election, this Conference appeals to Freethinkers all over the country to question candidates of all parties as to their position with regard to Secular Education, the repeal of the Blasphemy laws, and other laws either existing or contemplated for the benefit of the Christian sects of this country."

11. Motion by Plymouth Branch:—

"That this Conference regrets that, in spite of repeated promises, no steps have yet been taken by the government to secure to men serving in the Army and Navy the same freedom of religious worship that is enjoyed by civilians; it considers the driving of men to religious services to be an infringement of the rights of the individual, and urges that this question be brought before all candidates at the forthcoming election."

12. Motion by Mr. F. P. Corrigan:—

"That this Conference is of opinion that the interests of the Freethought Movement as a whole would be promoted if an official statement were drawn up setting forth the position of the National Secular Society in relation to political movements."

13. Motion by Birmingham Branch:—

(a) "That in view of the imminent possibility of a larger measure of definite religious instruction being given in State-supported elementary schools, as a result of the overtures between the Board of Education and religious sects, this Conference reaffirms its conviction that the only measure by which peace in the schools can be gained, and justice done to all classes in the community, is by confining education to those subjects defined as Secular in the official code."

Motion by Chester-le-Street Branch:—

(b) "That this Conference instructs the Executive to take whatever steps lies in its power to organize a movement among teachers in favour of the abolition of religious teaching in State-supported schools."

14. Motion by the Executive:—

"That in view of the number of meetings organized by the Executive, it is desirable that in all cases where Branches of the Society exist, some agreed proportion of the total expenses should be guaranteed by the local Branch, such proportion to be determined by the Executive."

15. Motion by West Ham Branch:—

"That this Conference notes with apprehension the growth of police interference with the rights of free speech and free publication, and suggests that in defence of liberties that have been dearly won, the Executive should take steps to form an independent committee to watch all such cases, and to take legal action in defence wherever such step seems advisable."

16. Motion by Manchester Branch:—

"This Conference calls upon all Freethinkers engaged in political and municipal work to do all that lies in their power to secure the complete separation of civil functions from religious ceremonies of all forms, and protests strongly against men and women who are elected to positions of civic trust as representatives of all citizens using their position and influence to advance purely sectarian interests."

17. Motion by West London Branch:—

"That this Conference recognizes, with pleasure, the growth of Sunday amusements, games, and other rational and healthful enjoyment of the day of rest, and while recognizing this as one of the outcomes of Freethought propaganda, urges Freethinkers all over the country to continue to demand the abrogation of all surviving laws that are maintained in the interests of Sabbatarianism."

18. Motion by Liverpool Branch:—

"That this Conference views with the greatest apprehension the growth of the Roman Catholic Church and influence in this country, and suggests the preparation of tracts and leaflets dealing with the influence of that Church on civil life as a means of educating the democracy as to the danger fronting it."

The Conference will sit in the Victoria Hotel, corner of Deansgate and Victoria Street, Manchester: Morning Session, 10.30 to 12.30; Afternoon Session, 2.30 to 4.30. Delegates will be required to produce their credentials at the door; Members, the current card of membership. Only members of the Society are entitled to be present. A Luncheon for delegates and visitors at 1 p.m., price 3s. 6d., will be held in the Victoria Hotel. During the Afternoon Sessions, papers will be read on items of Freethought interest, followed by discussion.

By order of the Executive,

C. COHEN, *President.*

F. MANN, *Secretary.*

The Widened Basis of Rationalism.

DOUBTLESS many readers of Rationalist publications have noted the additional lines of attack on theology and other forms of irrationalism that have been opened during the last century or so. In my own case the point was recalled by a passage in a book review. After commenting on "the combination of strong feeling with invincible ignorance," which is exhibited by some groups of religionists, the writer remarked, "Reason is the sole remedy." This brought to mind Paine's *Age of Reason*, a work which did much to rescue some of us from the slough of superstition, and to set our feet on the comparatively narrow, but firm and ever widening, path of Rationalism.

When the book was written, and for the greater part of the century that followed, a main line of attack on theological belief consisted in drawing attention to the more absurd tenets of Christianity, to the errors, discrepancies, and contradictory statements and ideas contained in the Bible, and to the conspicuous incongruities between the various existing systems of supernatural belief. At this stage reason alone (or in conjunction with common knowledge and experience) was sufficient to undermine some, at least, of the doctrines of the Christian Creed.

The attack was intensified by the work of Hume and others, who showed conclusively, for example, that, so far as we know, mundane phenomena occur in accordance with natural law, that miracles, in the supernatural sense, do not occur, and never did occur. The full appreciation and acceptance of this particular conclusion was largely confined to those who possessed some knowledge beyond common information, some general knowledge, that is to say, of the science on which our conviction of the unbroken chain of natural events is based. Here we note the introduction, in a

small way, of an additional weapon, namely, organized knowledge.

Then, following the abandonment, by some who still cling to the Christian creed, of the belief in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, in miracles and other supernatural intervention, another basis became desirable; and this was furnished by the timely establishment of the principle of evolution, at first in the organic, and then in the inorganic domain. It is, of course, true that some Christians have accepted the principle. But others have not, including not only the lower type of religionists in this country and the Fundamentalists of America, but also some more enlightened persons who hold, with the writer of a recent article in the *Nineteenth Century*, that there is not a shred of direct evidence for evolution. There are also, of course, a host of others who, while not overtly rejecting the principle, have so little acquaintance with it, and the evidences on which it is based, that little, if any, effect is produced on their belief or outlook.

It seems clear, therefore, that there is still a great need for insistence on the fact of and the evidence for evolution, including (1) the newer scientific cosmogony, that is, the evolution of the stars and the solar system; (2) general biological evolution, with its indirect but very strong evidence in the progressive series of existing animals and plants, especially in the similarity of structure and function of the organs of the vertebrates, and the direct and overwhelming evidence in the geological record, in embryology and in vestigial organs, together with the closely associated psychological evolution; and (3) human evolution in particular, both individual and social, as disclosed by recent discoveries in prehistoric archaeology and anthropology, in conjunction with sociology and ancient history.

Exposition of evolution will, of course, take special note of important sub-laws such as that of Recapitulation. After much hasty criticism, this explanation of the numerous features of lower ancestral life that are still shown in the individual development of man, as well as in other higher mammals and to a less extent in plants, and which in many cases persist in the adults in the form of vestigial organs, has been securely established; indeed, Sir Archdall Reid and other authorities hold that it must be regarded as a necessity of biological thought, following necessarily, that is to say, from the laws of evolution and heredity. And eminent psychologists like Professor McDougall assure us that there is evidence of recapitulation in the (post natal) mental development of the child as cogent as that shown in his physical (embryonic) development, and of the same general nature.

Such exposition should do more than it has yet done to spread the conviction that man appeared quite naturally, and that he has naturally and continuously evolved from a semi-human to his present condition; and this, of course, will undermine belief in creative agency, and also in the interposition of divine men, such as "redeemers," "great teachers" (in the occult sense), and the like, and discredit the ideas of resurrection and immortality.

Still another line of attack has become available during the last few decades. This has been furnished by the study of the magico-religious ideas and practices of the Stone Age (as evidenced by ceremonial burial, art, etc., and disclosed by the parallel study of like features among existing uncivilized peoples), of their continuation and development during the period of early civilization in Egypt and elsewhere, and on to the present day. Such study, as is now well known, has established the pure naturalness of the rise and growth of religious and related tenets and practices. It should give the *coup de grace* to the lingering belief in any kind of supernatural revelation, inspiration, prophecy, and divination (astrological or other), and put all such things in their true places as parts of the older visionary explanation of things. Modern re-developments, such as Spiritualism and Christian Science, and revivals in general, will be recognized as belated outbursts of the dying mass of unreal thought which arose in a prescientific age, and which has undergone a process of reduction commensurate with the advance of real knowledge and the spread of education.

While, therefore, the exercise of more or less pure reason will continue to be a rationalizing agent, we seem to have reached a stage where knowledge—of the general facts and principles of science, of evolutionary knowledge in particular, and of the history of religious and allied ideas and institutions—has become the chief weapon in the armoury of the Rationalist.

J. REEVES.

Do We Need a New God?

THERE is something essentially comic in man's "groping after God." In the old days there was no escape from the supernatural. Primitive man did not love God, he feared Him, hated Him even, but he did not go out of his way to "search after Him."

Voltaire's dictum to the contrary notwithstanding, there would be no necessity to invent a deity to replace the vacuum of His absence. The death of a deity should be followed by a funeral (without much mourning: no flowers by request).

Professor Elmer Barnes, of Smith College, is an American Freethinker worthy the admiration and respect of us all. He speaks and writes on the "Passing of Supernaturalism," and he expresses no regret at the "passing."

It is a genuine misfortune that so brilliant an exponent of rationalism should be led to defend so banal a proposition as the affirmative answer to the title of this article. Professor Barnes debates the subject with Rev. Canon Chase, D.D., who defends the old god by all the old arguments, in the current number of the *Forum*.

There is no doubt about Professor Barnes's secularism. "Human problems," he says, "are the only valid concern of man; and the increase of his happiness is the only important issue which confronts him." It seems a pity to find so good a secularist regarding the question of a new conception of God as "of vital social significance."

Professor Barnes discards belief in immortality, and considers that the task of constructing a conception of God compatible with the framework and perspective of modern knowledge is so difficult and baffling as to be, for all practical purposes, futile. But he pays tribute to the "utility" of "religion," leaving one to assume, in the absence of definition, that this "religion" is about the same as the "religion" of Thomas Paine and Robert Ingersoll.

Where then does God come in? Professor Barnes thinks that "the question of a new conception of God is important," but a careful reading of his arguments fails to "precipitate" this God, and we are left vaguely surmising that all he intends to convey is a polite intimation that all the old and existing conceptions of all kinds of Gods are to be discarded as inconsistent with science and human happiness.

The secular scientist looks upon the great volume of religious fears and superstitions and sees that they have not the slightest validity; nevertheless, they continue to terrorize millions. He notes the great wealth accumulated by those ecclesiastical organizations devoted to exploiting superstitions and imaginary fears, and must reflect upon what might be done with such resources of money and potential intelligence in advancing the secular welfare of mankind—indeed, in promoting a sane, secular religion. He considers the unhealthy and unhappy mental states which afflict millions in America to-day, because of false theories of life and conduct which were inculcated in earlier ages when man was concerned solely with salvation, and when he had no scientific means of understanding what constitutes a healthy and happy life here on earth.

In this sane, sound, sober statement of the case against supernaturalism, it seems remarkable (to say the least) to find any plea for any deity. He gives no quarter to those who cite Jesus as a moral teacher. "Yahweh and Jesus," he says, "are a theological and a cultural complex that stand or fall together." He even goes so far as to admit that "we may probably agree with Dr. Dietrich that it is best to drop the God-con-

ception altogether." And in the next sentence Professor Barnes adds, "Yet the quest for God is a noble venture," and he thinks it will help mankind to abandon Yahweh, which would "be a great gain for civilization and humanity."

In the background of all Professor Barnes's rational and scientific teaching there lurks one of the oldest and oddest fallacies which secularism has had to meet in its contention that supernaturalism is not necessary.

He readily concedes that Bertrand Russell, John B. Watson, Clarence Darrow, and George Dorsey have no need of God or religion in order to behave in a seemly fashion; but with half of the American population falling below the intellectual level of the dull normal type, we shall certainly require some form of social control beyond the appeal to pure intelligence. Further, there are many capable persons more sensitive to æsthetic considerations than to matters of cold intelligence. For these two types a social institution which could exploit human emotions and enlist them in support of just and decent causes will prove indispensable.

Presumably, it is for the sake of these "masses" that we must invent a new God. Voltaire never hinted at the process required for placing a new deity on the market. How is it done?

Dr. Chase, intellectually inferior to Professor Barnes in every way, is perfectly right in saying that most of the religionists he knows would vote for Christ to become God if the present deity were retiring.

Nothing would please religionists better than to see the "infidels" wasting their lives in the search for a new God: Professor Barnes means, of course, a new "conception" by way of definition only, not the more literal, or even immaculate form. We can find fine definitions easily enough, without troubling Professor Barnes or Mr. H. G. Wells to give new ones to the world. "God is Love" and almost everything else: and with these definitions on their lips believers have made the world a hell for mankind.

Desire for the retention of the word "God," is in itself an act of worship, a tribute to supernaturalism, whatever definition is understood by the user of the word.

Humanity is a better as well as a more modern word than God. We can work for mankind by every social act, and we can judge our wisdom by actual results. When we make mistakes we can retrace our steps without believing we have blasphemed. God, in any conception of the word, can never be known, tested, or helped by man.

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH.

Correspondence.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Some few years ago I was staying at an hotel in San Antonio, Texas, when I got into conversation with an American drummer (*i.e.*, commercial traveller), he told me he had been very sick with indigestion, and in going round the town he noticed a sign outside a house, "Christian Science Practitioner." He continued, I went in and saw an old gentleman with a white beard, he was wearing spectacles and reading the Bible. I told him my trouble, and after paying him a dollar, he promised to give me absent treatment.

A few days after, not feeling any better, but rather worse, I went to him again and told him I had no benefit from his treatment, he professed to be surprised, and asked me if I had been to any other practitioner. I told him I had, I went to one in St. Louis a short time before. Ah! now I understand, said he, our treatment is counteracting. You must write to him at once and tell him to leave off his treatment, or I can do you no good. I took no further trouble as it put me wise, and you bet I am no longer a sucker.

It seems a remarkable thing that so many thousands of Americans who are cute and intelligent in all business transactions, can adopt such a crazy creed as Christian Science.

S. SODDY.

RUSKIN AND UNBELIEF.

SIR,—In reply to the request of Mr. J. Stephens for evidence "in Ruskin's books," that Ruskin became an unbeliever. Mr. Stephens will find some evidence of this in the "Library" edition of Ruskin's collected works in thirty-nine volumes; where, in a footnote to the second lecture of the *Lectures on Art* (pp. 57-58, Vol. xx) he recants his views as to the influence of religion on Art. He says that after contending "very strenuously in past years" that artists were "stimulated and purified" by working upon religious subjects, he had now come to see that their skill "came not by the precept of religion, but by the secular and scientific training which Christianity was compelled unwillingly to permit, and by the noble instruction received from the remnants of that very heathen art which Christianity had done her utmost to destroy." And, in fact, in the service of religion "their powers were at once wasted and restrained; that their invention was dulled by the monotony of motive and perverted by incredulity."

Augustus Hare, in his Autobiography, says that Ruskin confessed to him that he was an unbeliever. (Hare: *Story of My Life*, Vol. 2, p. 484.)

W. MANN.

BURKE AND FREETHOUGHT.

SIR,—Mr. J. M. Robertson is publishing a *History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century*. Surely there must be some mistake about the date. In 1790, Edmund Burke, in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, said: "Who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of Collins, Toland, and Tindal . . . and that whole race who called themselves Freethinkers?" It is therefore evident that the last Freethinker was born before 1750. Mr. Robertson is perhaps thinking of the seventeenth century.

R. B. KERR.

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE AND THE GHOST.

SIR,—I notice that in your issue of April 18, you accuse me of making "another bloomer," in connexion with the Nairobi photographic incident. It is in truth yourself who make the bloomers, for I have never seen a statement about Spiritualism in your paper which was not either untrue, or else one of those half-truths, the nature of which is proverbial. For example, in this instance, you tell half a story, the whole of which is told in the enclosed extract. This tells how Mr. Palmer, after claiming to be the ghost, admitted to the audience (and to me in a subsequent letter) that the real ghost had afterwards appeared and terrified him. "When I had seen and felt its power," he writes, "I had no heart for further posing." If you believe him in one point, how can you discredit him on the other, and how can you sustain your contention that the incident disproves the existence of this particular ghost?

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

[Our comment was based on a newspaper report of the meeting, we are not further responsible for it. Naturally we know nothing of the after confession of Mr. Palmer, and the ghost that made a late appearance. We leave readers to judge of the accuracy of our statements when compared with those of Sir Arthur's.—EDITOR.]

MAN AND NATURE.

"In harmony with Nature?" Restless fool,
Who with such heat dost preach what were to thee,
When true, the last impossibility;
To be like Nature strong, like Nature cool:
Know, man hath all which Nature hath, but more,
And in that *more* lie all his hopes for good.
Nature is cruel; man is sick of blood:
Nature is stubborn; man would fain adore:
Nature is fickle; man hath need of rest:
Nature forgives no debt, and fears no grave:
Man would be mild, and with safe conscience blest.
Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends;
Nature and man can never be fast friends.
Fool, if thou canst not pass her, rest her slave.

Matthew Arnold.

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.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (The London Institution Theatre, South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11.0, S. K. Ratcliffe—"A Preface to Morals."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): 7.0, Debate—Subject: "Is Vivisection as Practised in this Country in any way Justifiable?" Affir.: Dr. R. S. Aitken. Neg.: Mr. Layton Horniman.

OUTDOOR.

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

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Regent's Park, near the Fountain): 6.0, Mr. G. Whitehead—A Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (outside Technical College, Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7.0, Speakers—Mrs. H. Rosetti, Mrs. E. Venton, Mrs. Grout, Messrs. H. C. White, F. C. Warren, A. E. High and R. H. Rosetti; Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 7.45, Mr. G. Whitehead.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12.0, Mr. R. G. Leonard and Mr. J. Hart. 3.30, Mr. E. Betts and Mr. A. H. Hyatt. 6.30, Mr. B. A. Le Maine and Mr. James Hart.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Ravenscourt Park, Hammersmith): 3.0, Mr. B. A. Le Maine.

COUNTRY.

OUTDOOR.

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

GLASGOW BRANCH N.S.S.—Ramble to Neilston Pad. Meet at Barrhead Centre, 12 o'clock prompt. Mr. Hale, Convenor. Rambles Committee.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S.—Thursday, May 9, 7.30 p.m., corner of High Park Street and Park Road: Mr. J. V. Shortt.—A lecture.

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