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Views and Opinions.

Freethought and Dr. Gow.

The quality of religious thought is well shown by its "advanced" character. When, recently, Bishop Gore published, with others, *A New Commentary on Holy Scriptures*, there were many outcries at its "advanced" views, while the writers propounded their theories and explanations, with the air of daring investigators in a very dangerous country. Yet the "advanced" nature of the views expressed have all been commonplaces in the Freethought world since, at least the times of Thomas Paine. But "advanced" is a relative term, and what is very backward to a civilized European is quite advanced to a denizen of Central Africa. Again, I have often pointed out that the reputation for daring thought enjoyed by men such as Bishop Barnes has little to do with the quality or independence of the thought, but it has much to do with the poor mentality of those amid whom their lot is cast. It is startling to find, in a country calling itself civilized, men rousing attention in special newspaper articles because they do not believe that some 2000 years ago a Jewish peasant was raised from the dead, or more daring still, do not believe that when a priest mumbles his prayers over some bread and cheap wine, that bread and wine does not become transformed into actual flesh and blood. Of course, the surprise ought to be that any civilized person should be able to believe, or to believe that he believes, in such fantastic absurdities. Perhaps it may be said that all is meant is that these men are advanced thinkers—for clergymen. And with that statement I have no quarrel.

Loaded Dice.

The other day a reader sent me a newspaper cutting containing the report of a speech by Dr. Henry Gow, Warden of Manchester College, Oxford, delivered be-

fore the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. The passages picked out in the newspaper summary (*The Manchester Evening News*) emphasizes just one aspect of Freethought, and it is Dr. Gow's use of the term with which I am here concerned. Dr. Gow said the Assembly believed that "truth was to be found in an atmosphere of reverent thought." That loads the dice before the play begins. Why should any thought be "reverent"? All that one is justified to ask of anyone's thinking is, that it shall be exact. A judge on the Bench, thinking about the truth or the falsity of the evidence offered is not expected to take up a reverent attitude but a critical and an impartial one. A scientist does not approach the study of his subject, whatever it may be, in a reverent attitude, but only in a judicial one. Or if either of these can be said to have any reverence at all, it is for truth. In any case, whether a subject is worthy of reverence or not should follow investigation, not precede it. By what right does anyone assume that religion must be approached with reverence? Is it because *he* considers it worthy of it? But to me and to millions of others, the religions of the world are made up of inherited superstitions which in themselves are unworthy of serious consideration, and are only of value and of interest so far as they may throw light on the nature and history of mental development. And I am asked to approach this subject with all reverence, because someone else considers it worthy of reverence from him?

One need only consider the matter from this point of view, to realize that the demand for reverence is little more than a survival of the spirit of the "taboo." Certain things, and certain topics may be touched only in a prescribed matter, because they belong to the class labelled as "holy" or "sacred" or "unclean"—all much the same kind of thing in the language of religion. And, of course, once people can be brought to this frame of mind when dealing with religion the desired result is secured. Enquirers of this kind usually end by believing because they begin by believing. Their posture of impartiality is a mere pretence.

* * *

Timid Heroes.

Dr. Gow was addressing a congregation of Christians, who pride themselves on being less creed-bound than any other section of the Christian world. But not merely does he ask this assemblage of "Christian thinkers" to approach the subject in a spirit of reverence, but remarks:—

It is a daring and dangerous experiment, and one which many many think will surely lead to disaster. The belief in Freethought as the way to religious truth is a daring and heroic act of faith. It does not merely mean "I have no creed." It is the profound faith that God can and will be found and

realized by reverent free-thought. We do not believe that it will lead to any unfortunate discoveries—that there is no God.

What is one to make of a man who holds an important educational position, and who regards free-thinking applied to religion as a daring and heroic act? The proper way would obviously be to take it as the only way of approach, and to point out that in its absence the conclusions reached are almost certain to be without logical value. Instead of this, Dr. Gow says that the advice to approach religion with "reverent free-thought"—is motivated by the faith that God will be found. In Dr. Gow's hands I really fail to see any very great difference between his endorsement of Freethought, and the Roman Catholic condemnation of it. I have not the slightest doubt that if anyone begins his inquiries with a profound conviction that he will find God at the end, he will usually manage to do so. It is by this method that visions of the Virgin, of Jesus, of heaven, and hell are experienced, and it is a very good way to produce them. I know of none better. But it scarcely gives one the right to be regarded as a great discoverer, or an independent thinker.

* * *

Suppose God is Not!

Dr. Gow does not believe that by practicing free-thought, perhaps one ought to qualify by saying his kind of free-thought, we shall be led to the unfortunate discovery that there is no God. But why unfortunate? Unfortunate to whom? Certainly not to me, or to the millions in various parts of the world, who agree with me. As I have never been troubled by believing in God, it would certainly not be unfortunate, to my mind, if someone came forward with a demonstration that there was no God. Dr. Gow may reply that I am only one; but I have enough "conceit o' mysel" to think that I should count for as much as any other one. And, after all, truth is not made clearer or greater by the number of "ones" who accept it.

Let me ask Dr. Gow to be really reasonable, and to seriously consider the situation. Suppose God does not exist. If he does not exist the discovery of that truth cannot affect anything that is, except the belief in his existence. The sun will still remain the centre of our system, the earth will still go round the sun, the forces of nature will remain precisely what they are, the qualities of human nature will remain what they are. If God does not exist he cannot do anything, he cannot affect anything, he never has affected anything. One need not say that things will be the same in his absence because he has never been present to affect them. Everything must remain as it is because it cannot be otherwise. The only possible escape from this conclusion is that Dr. Gow believes something serious will happen unless people go on believing in the existence of something that may not exist at all. If he does believe this, he is actually reducing religion to a system of delusion, which is as much as the most extravagant Freethinker has ever asserted. He is telling us that human nature is such that, unless it continues to believe in a delusion something very unfortunate will happen, or may happen. That does not strike one as very daring, very heroic, or very truthful. It is the philosophy of the taboo, plus that of mental timidity.

* * *

The Fear of Truth.

Some Freethinkers, says Dr. Gow, start with the expectation of discovering that religion is a delusion. I find it rather difficult to realize how anyone can start with the expectation of finding religion to be a

delusion unless he has already a belief in that direction. The actual fact in life, in almost all cases, is that nearly everyone—thanks to early education—starts with a belief in religion, and then many give it up under sheer pressure of evidence. It is only when the investigator has discovered many religious things to be illusions, that he suspects the whole of religion belongs to the same category. But if he had never begun as a Freethinker he would never have got thus far. And when the Freethinker has got to the end of his journey, he has not a suspicion that religion is an illusion, he knows it to be such; and he knows it to be so on precisely the same grounds that we all know fairies and witches to be illusions.

But Freethought, I must remind Dr. Gow, means thought operating free from the restraint or the coercive influence of arbitrary authority and influence. A Roman Catholic cannot be a Freethinker, because he is told on the mere authority of his priest what he must believe, and is not allowed to question it. Other religionists depart from being Freethinkers just in proportion as they admit the authority of a Church to dictate what they shall believe. Dr. Gow himself cannot be a Freethinker, for the reason that he will not permit his thoughts to operate free from the sway of prepossessions. He will examine religion under the sway of the idea that he must approach it with reverence, that is he must think it is a good and noble thing, and therefore it must be found to be good and noble. He will look at non-Christian arguments with the fear that they have unfortunate results such as the proof that God does not exist. The worst of it is that this mental attitude affects others. They too look at Atheism, at disbelief in God, not as something that may be right or wrong, but as something that is unfortunate, and which ought not to be right even if it is. We have had many evil legacies from the long reign of Christianity, but perhaps the worst and the most infectious is that of mental cowardice.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Bluff of the Bishops.

"Who loveth not his brother at his side,
How can he love a dim dream deified."

James Thomson.

"I would have all men come out of Christendom
into the universe."—John Davidson.

THE Church of England is in a parlous state. It has been so for many years, if priests can be believed. A few years ago the Anglican clergy were said to be starving. So the Bishop of London and some of his colleagues stated. Now, the cry is that there are too few clergy. There are more deaths than recruits. Not from starvation, but largely from old age, for the clergy are notoriously long-lived. The number of State priests have dwindled from 25,000 to about 20,000, and the same Bishop of London who, not long since, declared the clerical calling to be "a rotten profession, is quite upset about the matter of shortage of man-power in the English Church.

Why is the dear Bishop so anxious to attract men to the ranks of the State clergy? According to his own statement, it is "a rotten profession," and the men in it are in grave danger of starvation. If it were true, it would be a bad thing to invite young men to sacrifice themselves, especially as there are a million and a quarter ordinary folks living from hand-to-mouth. Why increase the sum total of misery in this country? It seems monstrous to even make the suggestion.

The fact is that the cry of starving clergy, and also the lament at the loss of man-power in the State Church, are simply stunts for raising money. They are tricks of a sorry trade. The plaint of clerical poverty was, for example, largely a matter of heated rhetoric. The Bishop of London himself is a bachelor with an income of £200 weekly, a sum sufficient to keep forty working-class families in comparative comfort. Nor do the bishop's colleagues, like Nebuchadnezzar, eat grass. The Bench of Bishops alone receive between them £182,000 yearly, with emoluments in the shape of palaces and palatial residences. As for the shortage of man-power in the Church, it might almost be said to be the church of the clergy rather than that of the people. There are plenty of parishes with populations under 500. All this cadging and begging on behalf of a State Church is silly and contemptible, when one remembers that the vast resources of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners make the English State Church the one Christian Church in the world "wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice."

The Bishop of London mentions, in an interview, quite casually, that a large sum of money was left for the purpose of sending young men to Cambridge University for three years, and afterwards to a theological college for two years, in order to fit them for the Christian ministry. Why five years' training, a term sufficient to qualify a doctor for the onerous duties of his profession? Any actor of decent education could learn the patter of the priests' trade in a month, and do the thing far better than the average curate. Old sermons can be purchased for a few pence. What else is required except the ability to take part in a tea-fight amongst the girls of one's congregation, and to read the Bible to old women.

Forgetting for a moment his former stunt of the "starving" clergy, the Bishop of London points out that an incumbent with a parish of more than 4,000 people gets £400 a year; the stipend for a parish of more than 1,000 is £350, and for a parish of more than 300, £300 yearly. As only a small percentage of the entire populations attend the State Churches the pay is distinctly remunerative, and the scale very largely in excess of panel doctors. The clergy are not nearer the poverty line than millions of their countrymen. It is absurd to pretend otherwise, for the Bishop says a curate can get £250 a year, and many curates are unmarried. It is even rumoured that curates are seeking to form a trade union, or a guild of employment, and a sceptical world will soon witness the "sons of God" playing the sedulous ape to the Cats' Meat Men's Union.

The blunt truth is that the English State Church is one of the richest Churches in Christendom. At the top there are prelates with seats in the House of Lords, where they never do any good service for democracy; at the bottom are a multitude of holders of benefices better off than the ordinary man. According to Lord Addington's return of 1891, the income of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners from endowments amounted to over six millions annually. Since that date much of the property has nearly doubled in value, and private benefactions have increased the total very considerably. The priests of the State Church are very shy of admitting the wealth of the Church, and the *Church of England Year Book*, and Crockford's *Clerical Directory* only reveal a very little of the financial position of this wealthy corporation. It is not modesty alone that prompts this course of action. You remember what the landlady did to the Scotch lodger who counted the potatoes he brought home. She mashed them.

Whilst the clergy, like sharks, are good to each

other, they are not kind to other people. They pay terrible wages to their organists, choristers and church cleaners. Teachers in Church schools are worse paid than dustmen. Except in such show places as Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, and some provincial cathedrals, the clergy are the worst sweaters in the country. Organists, maybe, leave the churches for the cinemas; but the children in the Church schools cannot leave so easily. Hence they are the worst educated in the schools of England. It is not the fault of the teachers that the school equipment is inadequate, and the classes far too large. It is the fault of the priests, who grudge every penny that is paid out, but take money themselves with both hands. Doing business with them is like dining with a man who wants all the pudding and two spoons.

The dolorous cry of "too few clergy" is simply a device for raising money. It is one of a series of smart trade stunts engineered during the past few years. Money was wanted to save the Anglican clergy from starvation. Cash was necessary to prevent St. Paul's Cathedral falling into Paternoster Row. Now it is a matter of man-power. The Bishops want wealthy people to give thousands of pounds to them for training young priests. First and last, it is a matter of money-getting, and the devices used are not entirely above suspicion. The religious circus is not always so excellent as the posters on the walls. Behind the ecclesiastical mummeries the Church is but a money-grabbing institution. As Mark Twain once said, the chief difference between a theatre and a church was that you paid to go in one, and paid to get out of the other.

MIMNERMUS.

Noah's Flood and Abraham's House.

(Concluded from page 276.)

PUTTING aside the account rendered by the penny press, of the new discoveries at Ur and Kish, let us see what has really been discovered, and what bearing it has upon the Bible record. The writer of the columns of "News and Views," in *Nature* (March 23) informs us:—

Professor S. Langdon, of Oxford, who has revealed some hitherto unpublished evidence from the expedition at Kish, which conclusively points to the historical nature of the Bible story. At Kish, where excavations have been carried down to the virgin soil, are two precipitations of clay containing potsherds and stranded fish lying perfectly horizontal in a way which could only be the result of a flood. This flood took place between 3400 B.C. and 3200 B.C. Another deposit of a similar character on the water level is dated at about 4000 B.C., which he connects with the Sumerian legend of Zidzudra, the last of the ante diluvian kings in the traditional royal lists, who built a boat to escape the waters. This legend was incorporated in Babylonian story, and thence reached the Hebrews. In view of the extreme interest of this theory, it is scarcely necessary to stress the importance of securing continuity of excavation at both Ur and Kish. We hope that public interest may be stimulated by this latest discovery to provide the necessary funds.

We hope the public will subscribe. Even if it does so under the delusion that confirmation of other Bible stories will be found. Perhaps the veritable pillar of salt into which Lot's wife was turned. Or the chariot wheels of Pharaoh's chariot out of the Red sea!

But, it must be pointed out, the account given by Professor Langdon is by no means a confirmation of the Bible account; at least from a Fundamentalist point of view. For, if the Hebrews merely copied the legends handed down by the Babylonians, who received them from the Sumerians, then what becomes of the belief that Moses, inspired by God, was the author of the Bible record?

Then again, according to Fundamentalist belief, the world only came into existence at 4000 B.C., and the Flood did not occur until 1500 hundred years later, yet Professor Langdon says that this Flood occurred 4000 B.C. And, more important still, we are told that there is evidence of *Two Floods*, one at the time indicated, and another between six hundred and eight hundred years later. But we have no record of two Floods in the Bible. The question now arises did God, the all wise, the all mighty, the all benevolent; in his experiments with mankind, destroy all the people and animals twice? And, if so, was Noah's his first, or his second catastrophe? We respectfully suggest that a God who had to drown his creation twice running, was an incompetent bungler who ought to retire from the business unless, indeed, he is a cruel and barbarous monster delighting in our own calamities and misfortunes.

We have two accounts of the Creation in the Bible, what a pity, from a Fundamentalist point of view, that we were not given two accounts of the Flood, then it could have been used as proof of two Floods. Did God withhold the knowledge of the other Flood from Moses? Or did Moses act as censor and eliminate it, as being too great a reflexion on the character of God?

While these problems may be left to the Fundamentalists to solve, let us see what of value has been discovered. First of all, and always regarded as most important by these expeditions, is a great extension of our knowledge of the chronology of the Sumerians who were the predecessors of the Babylonians. The chronology of the earlier reigns has given rise to much discussion and many differences of opinion. Authorities of equal standing differing by as much as a thousand years as to the antiquity of the early period. Both Mr. Woolley at Ur, and Professor Langdon at Kish are agreed as to a great extension of our chronological knowledge.

Mr. Woolley tells us that the royal tombs of Ur are remarkable: "for the witness they bear to the civilization of a period concerning which nothing had before been known. Already, in 3500 B.C., the Sumerians had evolved a culture which was not only materially rich but as fully advanced as anything that was destined to replace it in Mesopotamia during some thousands of years."¹ Which, of course, involves a very long preceding period of evolution.

Professor Langdon, who has always been most cautious and conservative in chronological estimates, goes further still, declaring that: "The beginnings of proto-Sumerian civilization at Kish must reach back to at least 5000 B.C., and it may be decidedly older than Egypt." And the great excavations at Kish: "are steadily yielding a complete scheme of archaeology for the study of the evolution of civilization from 5000 B.C., to the age of Nebuchadnezzar."² The contents of the royal tombs of Ur, says Mr. Woolley: "points to a civilization old and settled; the architects of the time were familiar with the structure of the vault, the arch and probably of the dome, built in brick or stone, as well as of the column in wood or in brick—in short, they were acquainted

with every important principle of architecture, including those which were not to find their way into the western world of Europe until the conquests of Alexander opened up Asia to the Greeks." In their working of gold, silver, and copper "they exhibited a skill in design and a technique in execution such as few ages have surpassed."³

But to return to the Flood, as Mr. Woolley points out, floods in Mesopotamia were the normal experience. The rivers there, as is the case with the Yellow River in China to-day, silt up and periodically changed their course, bringing death and destruction to everything in their path: "the disaster as described could have occurred there, and could not have occurred in a country of a different character; it was local, not universal, and was what might happen at any time by an abnormal combination of the normal circumstances of a Mesopotamia flood." (p. 17.) And further: "the evidence is that from the first Sumerian cities were built on artificial platforms to protect them against the periodic inundations, and were solidly walled with mud brick." (p. 23.)

But what have these local floods to do with the Deluge as recorded in the Bible, which declares explicitly that the Deluge was universal and covered the whole earth? The Ark itself came to rest on the top of Mount Ararat, which stands 17,000 feet above sea level, and if it did that, then it covered the whole surface of the earth up to that depth. Besides, if it was a local flood, where was the need to collect pairs of every living creature into the Ark in order to stock the world again? Noah was not very sharp, or he might have suggested to God that it would be easier to create a fresh lot out of nothing, than bother about saving the old ones.

W. MANN.

Tales of the Creation and the Fall.

MYTHS and legends concerning the creation and fall of man are multitudinous. Traditions treasured by savage and semi-civilized peoples are commonly regarded by Europeans with amusement tempered with pity. Yet, millions of orthodox believers in the most enlightened Christian countries see nothing to smile at in the childish story of Adam and Eve. This legend would awaken laughter, were it heard of for the first time as an integral part of some distant and benighted people's religion. But training and environment together have conspired to hide the intrinsic absurdity of the story. Even now, a tale of a talking serpent who tempted Eve, to her and to Adam's downfall, forms the foundation of the true Christian faith.

Whatever the reasons may have been—and these are still keenly controverted by students of comparative religion—creation stories, all the world over, present striking and suggestive similarities.

In common with many African races, the Tshi-speaking natives of the Gold Coast tell of their sky-god, who designed endless life as the natural lot of man. He therefore sent a goat to acquaint his people with the glad tidings of their immortality. The message ran: "There is something that is called Death; it will one day kill some of you; but though you die, you will not perish utterly, but you shall come to me here in heaven." The goat set out on his errand, but when he reached a village he stopped to feed. The sky-god became impatient with the goat's slow progress, and commissioned a sheep to deliver his message. Away went the sheep, but un-

¹ C. S. Woolley. *The Excavations at Ur and the Hebrew Records.* pp. 26-27.

² *Daily Telegraph.* March 21.

³ Woolley. *The Excavations at Ur.* pp. 28-29.

fortunately she falsified her instructions and told the people, "When you once die, you perish, and have no place to go to." At long last, the tardy goat arrived with the correct message. But the people refused to credit the goat's story, and decided to abide by the sheep's perverted revelation.

In another version, the parts of the sheep and goat are reversed, with the melancholy moral that, "if only the sheep had made good speed with her message, man would have died but returned after death; but the goat made better speed with the contrary message, so man returns no more."

Mr. Frank Worthington, at one time Secretary for Native affairs in Northern Rhodesia, forwarded to Sir James Frazer the following account of the origin of death, which he obtained from a Matotela native, from whom he purchased a wooden jar, on the cover of which was crudely carved the figure of an old man, while on the sides of the jar, a snake and tortoise were represented. After inquiring as to the meaning of these figures, Mr. Worthington was told that all this happened long, long ago, beyond living memory. In the distant past, before white men were seen in the country, no one ever grew old and died. Everyone was in those days happy and contented.

But one dark day all this came to an end. God was angry—"that was God on the lid of the pot." "In his anger, God sent his messenger of death to men. He sent his messenger the snake. Then people began to die—that is the snake on the side of the pot. So many people died, that all became frightened. They thought all would soon be dead. So in their fear they cried to God. They said they were sorry for their foolish act—whatever that might have been. They promised they would anger him no more. They begged him to recall his messenger the snake."

After due consideration, God relented and promised to send another messenger, the tortoise, and recall the snake. But the tortoise was so slow, it has not yet arrived, and the evil brought by the snake still saddens the world.

Remembering the multitude of savage parallels of the Genesis story of man's fall from grace, it is unsafe to assume that the African legend is a mere distortion of the Hebrew tale. In nearly all the stories the two animal message-bearers occur, and one carries tidings of life, and the other bears the sentence of death.

In commenting on this, Sir James Frazer remarks: "In both the Biblical and Matotela version of the story, the agent of death is a serpent, but in view of the frequency with which the serpent figures in the sad story, not only in Africa but in other parts of the world, we need not suppose that this feature of the Matotela version is borrowed directly or indirectly from the Hebrew version; both may be drawn independently from those springs of barbaric fancy which everywhere underlie the surface of humanity; or if there has been borrowing, it is perhaps more likely that Judaea borrowed from Africa than Africa from Judaea." (*The Worship of Nature*, Vol. I, p. 672).

In Frank Melland's vivid description of the creation story of the Ba-Kaonde, Lesa, the sky-and-rain-god created the parents of the human race. As originally designed, this quaint couple were unprovided with sexual organs and lacked an anus. These structural shortcomings occasioned considerable inconvenience to the newly created pair, so Mulonga, the imperfect male, travelled to the abode of Lesa to lodge a complaint. Lesa admitted that his handiwork was imperfect. He then presented two packets

to Mulonga, and instructed him to use one himself, and give the other to his companion. Mulonga then returned to earth, but weary with his long journey, he placed his packet between his legs and fell asleep. When he arose in the morning he found himself transformed into a complete man. The packet intended for the use of his spouse Mwinambuzhi emitted a stench so powerful that Mulonga threw it away.

When he rejoined his wife he said nothing about her packet, but she, woman-like, noted his changed appearance, and was curious to know what had happened. Mulonga explained, so his wife at once determined to visit Lesa, who, without a word, gave her another packet, which soon transformed her into a proper woman.

The sexual embrace then succeeded, but the couple were sadly disconcerted in consequence. They ultimately decided to repair to Lesa, so that their misgivings might be set at rest. Lesa now reproached Mulonga for losing his wife's packet; but he reassured them by saying that their novel experience was perfectly natural. Still, as Mulonga had sinned by neglecting his wife's packet, he ordained that in future, the bridegroom should pay the bride *muketo* (a marriage gift) whenever they wed. And that is the reason why husbands pay *muketo* at every bridal.

Lesa also directed the native honey-guide bird to carry the art of agriculture and other useful knowledge to man. But the inquisitive bird broke open Lesa's sealed revelation, and unwittingly let abroad all the evils which, from that day to this, have incommoded mankind.

There dwells in French Congo a large tribe called the Fan or Fang. Nsambe is their leading divinity, who made heaven and earth and all that therein is. All went well for a time, and the god dwelt in peace with his people. For some unknown reason he suddenly disappeared without a word of warning. But so dependent were his subjects upon his bounty, that they now found themselves starving for want of the bare necessities of life. Messengers were sent to seek him and implore him to supply them with food and fire.

In another version of the story Nsambe is said to have suddenly vanished in company with all the native animals. But he later relented, and sent back the animals, together with a supply of fire and other necessaries. Nsambe's activities all relate to the distant past, and he has now become so remote to his creatures that they rarely trouble about him. Indeed, he has been compared by a traveller "to the head of a great commercial firm, who has retired from the active management of affairs, which he leaves to his subordinates, though he retains a general control over the business, and his name still figures on the brass plate over the door."

Like other discarded divinities, Nsambe is associated with the origin of death. According to the story, he dispatched a chameleon to mankind with the news that everyone should live for ever, and that poverty and misfortune should remain unknown. A weathercock god, he then changed his mind, and sent a lizard with the message that all men would die. The lizard travelled faster than the slow-going chameleon, and came first with ill tidings. Thus, were men first doomed to perish.

The Konde inhabit a territory near Lake Nyasa, in what was German East Africa, but is now part of Tanganyika. Their devotion to the native sky-god has been described as "a mixture of respect and contempt, and worship and neglect." Animal sacrifices are common, and until recently, human sacrifices

formed part of their religion. "As late as 1896," we are told, "there were rumours of a sacrifice of a woman and child in connexion with a ceremony to procure rain."

The Konde also have their tale explaining the coming of death. This story contains the inevitable messengers. In olden times, before death appeared among men, there arose a division of opinion as to whether God should be asked to send death or not. Those who desired death dispatched a sheep to state their case to the deity, while those who wished to live sent a dog to urge arguments in favour of immortality. But the sheep briefed as counsel for death was in court before his canine adversary. The deity after hearing one side of the case only, delivered judgment in favour of mortality, and men have gone to the grave ever since.

The flood legend and the tale of the Tower of Babel have their counterparts in savage Africa. One story tells of man's attempt in long past years to reach the moon. To accomplish this, he placed one tree above another till the structure neared the sky. Then it fell, and great was the fall of it. Other misguided men followed this bad example, but their erections always collapsed and killed them. This is very like the story in Genesis, but as a leading authority has said, "not more so than some other African stories of the same type."

T. F. PALMER.

Plain Bill Smith and A Parson.

THE *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, the leading evening newspaper in that important city, has during the past few days, done a service to its readers, and gained commendation for itself, by throwing open its columns for a controversy on the Sunday question, and taking the discussion out of the usual correspondence columns by giving special headings to the letters.

It seems that a sermon preached by the Vicar of Frizinghall (Bradford) on "Come to Church Sunday" was the beginning of matters. The Vicar told his congregation he would brighten Sunday—by closing sweet shops and drink shops, prohibiting work on newspapers until 10 p.m., prohibiting political meetings on both Saturday and Sunday, stopping Saturday night dances at 10 o'clock, and making us all go to bed early, so that we could get up early on Sunday. Well, the sermon, as reported in the newspaper, roused the ire of a certain "Plain Bill Smith," who wrote a letter to the Editor, suggesting "what a land of gloom this would be on Sundays if his (the Vicar's) brighter Sunday were a fact."

Plain Bill Smith suggested that the Vicar ought to carry this repression of liberty to its logical conclusion by treating all alike and closing the churches as well, and he ended by saying, "Mr. Warner would have us all go to bed early on Saturday so that we could get up on Sunday. Whatever would there be to get up for if he had his way?"

Now it seems that the Vicar was upset that a mere Bill Smith, and a plain one at that, should dare to take him to task—the impertinence of the thing—and he put his head further into the noose by replying. (When parsons lose their heads, and become controversial they usually retire worsted). Bill Smith had also suggested that the Vicar had forgotten Sunday cinemas, but in his reply the Vicar said he had not. It was just that that part was missed by the reporter (who was probably too dazed by the other suggestions to take much notice of mere cinemas, or who had probably heard so much parsonic slobber on the question elsewhere, that he thought it unworthy of his sense of news). However, the Vicar said he had not forgotten Sunday cinemas, and boldly told Bill Smith that, in his sermon, he "suggested that under certain conditions, intended to safeguard the rights of the workers in these places, they might be open for a time on Sunday afternoons." In reply to Bill Smith's

proposal of Sunday games (instead of churches) as an alternative to public houses, Mr. Warner (that's the Vicar) said Sunday games, so far as they had at present been allowed, "have been the chief means of filling the public houses on Sundays, when the games are over, where the spectators celebrate their wins or drown their losses." Ye gods, Mr. Warner.

Now Bill's answer to these two gems of clericalism is worth giving "verb," as the reporter would say. Here goes.

"Mr. Warner suggested that these (Sunday cinemas) might be open under certain conditions intended to safeguard the rights of those who work in them," Bill says: "This concern of the churches for the workers is but a shallow disguise for the bitter opposition to Sunday cinemas, lest they should injure church attendance. Mr. Warner need not fear, if he is sincere in his concern. The machinery of the State and trade unions will protect the workers' hours, and see they get their rightful leisure. If he opposed Sunday opening tooth and nail he would be more consistent, but perhaps he realizes, in conceding that 'places of amusement might be open for a time on Sunday afternoons,' that to be consistent in these days would be fatal to the churches."

Jolly good, Bill Smith, plain and to the point that, my lad. Let's hear what you have to say about Sunday games filling the pubs. Bill says this.

"... he (the Vicar) cannot produce a shred of evidence to show that Sunday games have been the chief means of filling the public houses. Yet there is evidence (see to-night's Budget figures, and recent church attendance estimates) that a reduction in church attendance has coincided with a reduction in the consumption of alcoholic liquors."

That's the style, Bill, rub it in while the Editor gives you a chance. Bill's classic gem, however, was on another subject. The Vicar, in his reply, had spoken about the spiritual invigoration that follows church attendance, and Bill hit back with the following:—

If spiritual invigoration is a product of church attendance, this country is sadly lacking in that quality, though it appears to be mentally better than, say, 100 years ago, when church attendance was the rule rather than the exception.

Finally, Bill demolished the day-of-rest argument by advocating that it was better, after a week in the office, factory, or shop, to indulge in whatever healthy recreation one liked best, rather than mope about miserably in an effort to be a good Christian (and a poor specimen of humanity).

I have waited a week for the Vicar's reply, but he must have decided discretion is the better part of clerical valour; or he has been ticked off by the Bishop for being so foolish and ungentlemanly as to enter into public controversy. Perhaps he has been advised to answer Bill Smith in the pulpit, where Bill can't give him any darned back chat.

Bravo, Plain Bill Smith! Would that more followed your example.

SCRIBENDI.

A FREETHINKER'S VIEW OF TEACHING.

The whole art of teaching is only the art of awakening the natural curiosity of young minds for the purpose of satisfying it afterwards; and curiosity itself can be vivid and wholesome only in proportion as the mind is contented and happy. Those acquirements crammed by force into the minds of children simply clog and stifle intelligence. In order that knowledge be properly digested, it must have been swallowed with a good appetite. I know Jeanne! If that child were entrusted to my care, I should make of her—not a learned woman, for I would look to her future happiness only—but a child full of bright intelligence and full of life, in whom everything beautiful in art or nature would awaken some gentle responsive thrill. I would teach her to live in sympathy with all that is beautiful—comely landscapes, the ideal scenes of poetry and history, the emotional charm of noble music. I would make lovable to her everything I would wish her to love.

Anatole France ("The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard.")

Acid Drops.

John Joseph Cox, was executed at Mountjoy Prison for the murder of a German foreman. Cox battered his foreman's head with an iron for the purpose of robbery. For this Cox was hanged, and he is now in heaven. If he had not murdered the man he would not be in heaven, and if he had died without murdering anyone, his final destination would have been uncertain. Now we know he has gone to heaven. That is where the Christian has an advantage over a poor miserable Freethinker.

Do not think we are merely scoffing when we say John Joseph Cox is now among the angels. It is a record of the assurance that was in the mind of Cox when he died. For he was a good Roman Catholic. He was attended by the priest in his last moments, and people knelt outside the prison reciting the Rosary. Cox spent his last days in prayer, and just before his execution Cox said to those around him, "Well, good-bye, boys, I'll pray for you when I get to heaven." Thus we have everybody's assurance on the subject. The priest prepared Cox for heaven, Cox spent his last days, like a good Christian, in prayer. He promised with his last breath to pray for the "boys" when he got to heaven. The case is complete. Of course the poor German with his battered-in head had no such preparation, and no such certainty, and no one prayed for him. What should we do without Christianity? What other religion can make a brutal murderer so certain of his own salvation as to promise to use his influence with God Almighty when he gets to heaven? And there are some people who are wicked enough to wish to take this glorious and elevating gospel away from men!

We have had several examples lately of policemen taken by magistrates as literary censors, and we have had always with us "Jix" with the mentality of a Methodist local preacher. Now for a change we have boys at the post office who are set to act as censors. A London bookseller sent to Germany for two scientific books. He was informed by the police that the books had been held up by the post office. The books were detained for two months, and were then given him. It transpires that the books were held up by two youths "whose duty it was to examine books," but who could not read German, but who did not like the pictures. Of course, "Jix" has explained that his standard of literary fitness is the mind of a child, but we do not know that any Government office has before had the impudence to make it public that it employs boys as censors to overlook books written in a language they do not understand. What a contempt these officials must have for the public to act in such a way. And what a nice comfortable sort of jackass—where officialdom is concerned—the British public has become! What we badly need is an Anti-Official organization, something that will make it quite plain that the public does not exist for the benefit of the officials that swarm all over the country.

The Rev. H. G. Edmunds says that the missionaries' difficulty in Jamaica is the belief in evil spirits, but contact with Jesus is removing that. This is interesting if taken in connexion with another remark of the rev. gent.'s. Missionaries, he says, encourage a certain house-warming custom. When a new house is finished the minister is invited to speak the first words in it, to read a Bible passage, and to offer a prayer for God's blessing. As this is obviously understood as being the best means of keeping the Devil and his assistants at bay, the reader will appreciate how much the natives progress when brought in contact with Jesus and the Holy Bible.

The latest truthful war-story is to hand. The Rev. J. H. Bateson, a Methodist Army-chaplain, tells it. During the war, he declares, Lord Moulton wished to stand the expense of equipping a Wesleyan regiment, and asked Mr. Bateson to bring the proposal before

Lord Kitchener. He did so, whereupon Kitchener replied: "No, I want your Methodist boys to be distributed among all the other regiments, for the sake of their influence." This must be true, for a parson would be incapable to making up a story to boost his particular sect.

Apropos of the announcement of certain Methodist ministers to stand for Parliament, the *Methodist Times* says that the Wesleyan Conference of 1925 declared it inexpedient for ministers in active ministry to become M.P.'s. The Primitive Methodist Conference, too, definitely prohibited such candidatures. The *Methodist Times* says it sympathizes "with every desire to discharge the lawful duties of citizenship; but we venture to ask our Methodist ministers who are contemplating a parliamentary candidature to consider their position carefully in the interest of their own ministry and the Church at large." Our contemporary shows a nice sense of the fitness of things. A parson's job is talking about God and the Bible and the other world. It is a whole-time job. The lawful duties of citizenship should be left to the other fellow. That is at it should be. The ordinary citizen can be left to conduct the affairs of this world, and the parson can carry on with gasing about the next. We don't suppose the social well-being will suffer by this excellent division of duties. For the average minister in parliament mainly goes there to further the interests of the ministry and the Church at large—interests that manifest themselves in the shape of puritan prohibitions and restrictions for the non-church-going citizen. We cordially endorse our contemporary's discouragement of ministers as Members of Parliament—but no for quite the same reasons.

A conference of Young Electors connected with Sheffield Chapels has resolved to vote for the election of a Temperance Reform Parliament, comprised of members who support the Y.E.'s three-point programme—public control of registered clubs, local veto, and Sunday closing of liquor bars. A country may deserve the government it gets, but we hardly think Old England deserves a "reformed" parliament of that kind—a parliament pledged to impose restrictions and prohibitions on the personal tastes and habits of a large number of citizens. No doubt it appeals to the Young Electors. You see, it would not interfere with their own pet activities and interests.

To the Rev. Stanley H. Dixon we are indebted for the information that the Chinese are practical; they are the realists of the world. And to China this world is clear, but the next world shadowy. Therefore, the best contribution Christians can make to China's life is to give her God-consciousness. Reading between the lines we gather that our missionary friend is really serving up an oblique sort of apology. A vast amount of money is being spent on converting the Chinese, but the net result in comparison with the cost is very meagre. The Chinese, you see, are so very practical and realistic! The Christian "other world," so glowingly painted by missionaries makes little appeal. Therefore, China wants more missionaries, and more money should be given to support them. This is really the burden of Mr. Dixon's song, only he is too wily to declare it.

"The Invisible Tie" is the heading to the following letter in *Radio Times* :—

I feel I must tell you what a boon the broadcast services are to parted friends. One feels in close union with dear absent ones, when you realize that they, in unison with yourself, are listening to the same service. How true that is! Yet another kind of listener could feel in quite as close a union with absent friends if "The Frothblowers' Anthem" were played every Sunday. Perhaps the B.B.C. might care to oblige with this, for the benefit of unison among the other kind of listener? Let's have no favouritism.

Mr. Gordon Selfridge has been giving counsel to young men. He desires to see a return of the Elizabethan spirit of adventure, which tends to develop originality. Young men should develop imagination,

vision, energy, and constructive ability. With these qualities, plus a love of their job, they will live happy lives, full of all the mental exhilaration that the world offers, which, says Mr. Selfridge, is life full and complete. Mr. Selfridge, you note, has concern for only one world at a time. His recipe for a happy life makes no mention of going regularly to church, or avoiding Sabbath games, and Sabbath desecration. He says nothing about reading a Bible chapter every day, and saying a prayer before slumber. He omits to tell the young men to do always what a priest or parson tells them. On the contrary, he wants them to develop initiative, to think constructively—which, as everyone should know, is a thing that has been encouraged by Churches. Mr. Selfridge is a common-sense philosopher, and the young men have got more intelligent counsel in ten minutes from him than they would in a lifetime from a parson. One world at a time, for Mr. Selfridge. And we gather that he doesn't waste his intelligence and mental energy puzzling out what Moses or Jeremiah or Jesus meant, in order to achieve a happy, full and complete life.

The older the Rev. Samuel Chadwick gets the more sure he is of one thing in particular—that the world needs the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Mr. Chadwick is evidently descended from that ancient shoemaker who affirmed his conviction that there's nothing like leather. The world always will seem to be needing the Gospel of Jesus, as long as a parson realizes the necessity for getting himself fed and clothed at other people's expense.

A reader of *Radio Times* says that England is composed chiefly of people who have a day off on Sundays, and want a little invigorating enjoyment, from the wireless. This is telling the B.B.C. what it knows already. See how thoughtfully it caters for such people from six to nine every Sunday evening.

From the *Methodist Recorder* :—

A few weeks since the correspondence columns of the *Methodist Recorder* revealed strong excitement on the question of entertainments, particularly dancing, on Church premises. We do not frown—admitting for the sake of argument that such things are innocent—on innocent amusements. Nor do we deny that the Church must care for the life of her children—the social side as well as all others. But can she afford to regard matters of this sort as of more than trifling moment? . . . In modern days the Church must overcome the world-spirit of frivolity and shallowness, must battle with it and not parley.

Still, the Methodist Church will have to allow his Satanic Majesty to get one foot inside, else all its modern younger clients will take wings to pastures new, where innocent—for the sake of argument—amusements can be had unaccompanied by sour-faced disapproval.

A well-known public man says that it used to take four sheep to clothe a woman, but now a silkworm can do it. It used to take many "sheep" to keep a priest clothed (and fed and housed). Nowadays the sheep seem reluctant to oblige, and there are no signs of willing silkworms coming forward. It's the modern version of Little Bo-peep, but with a sadder ending. The sheep refuse to come home, even though coaxed to do so by popular newspapers with million circulations. Poor Little Bo-peep! She'll have to find another means of earning a livelihood.

If the increase in grey squirrels is not watched, says Sir George Courthorpe, the hedgerows will be emptied of the birds we love. This is obviously a case for prayer. Since God endowed squirrels with predatory instincts, he should be requested to see that the birds do not suffer therefrom. There is, however, one drawback to prayer in this connexion. It may be resented in the Cosmic Workshop as seeming to question the wisdom of the Almighty's original Design, and to hint that six days were insufficient for making the world and all its inhabitants.

Writing is merely a trade, says a well-known author, like selling eggs. And preaching, too. But in this in-

stance the eggs are added—whilst accounts for the difficulty in disposing of the goods. Nor do the free advertisements, circulated through the ether every Sunday, seem to make them any more inviting to average citizens.

The present Lord Mayor of Leeds is a Socialist, and on this point we have no comment to make. But the other day he informed the public that a "sense of God was vital to the realization of true Society." We are not quite sure of what this means, but if it means what it appears to say, it does give us some idea of the value of the Lord Mayor's sociological thinking. A man with that kind of intelligence is unfit to be trusted with the management of anything save the affairs of a chapel, and then only on the understanding that he has to deal with his own members only. For if he is right it means that those without "a sense of God" must be bad citizens. The Mayor of Leeds must be a very foolish man.

We are not surprised that his fellow Socialists have strongly resented this piece of foolishness on the part of the Lord Mayor. They, says the *Leeds Mercury* deny that a sense of God is necessary to their work. They probably remember the very large proportion of their best and most active members who have no sense of God. They also know, what probably Alderman Foster does not know, that the Socialist movement was built up by men without any sense of God, and not by men of the Alderman Foster type. The *Leeds Mercury* asks, "What are we to think of a party which tries to silence a man's religion." But we do not see that anything of the kind is being attempted. There is simply a protest against a man using a position to which he has been elected as a representative of the whole of the citizens, to advertise and promote the sectarian opinions of a section. The Lord Mayor, being a Christian, will probably not see the principle of Justice involved here, and the *Leeds Mercury* will not dare to admit it. But it is there. The Lord Mayor wants to please his chapel followers, and the paper dare not offend its readers.

The Bishop of Johannesburg has made a very ingenious suggestion. He asks why should not the big hotels have a Chapel on the premises, where those who desire it could spend part of the day in meditation? That is quite smart, and we can see its uses. It would be of use, in the first place, in advertising Christianity, something of the "Sanitas is used throughout this hotel" kind of thing. If the prayerful meditate in their own rooms it would not do. Then it would help the Company promoter who takes a suite of rooms in a big hotel. Consider the effect of saying to clients, "Mr. Blank cannot see you at present, he is meditating in the hotel chapel." It would be as good as opening a Board meeting with prayer. Then, later the hotel might feel it good business to provide its own parson, and that would mean a lot of jobs going round. There are other points about the suggestion. It might even lead to every church having its own hotel, or at least bar, where worshippers could go while the parson meditates.

Where should we get, asks the Rev. S. Bates, of Scarborough, unless the Churches called on the people to observe Sunday as a day of rest and worship? Well, we are not quite sure where Mr. Bates might get—it might be in the casual ward. But we are pretty certain what he would get. He would get a nice long holiday.

A schoolmaster said recently, "There seems to be in our age a greater confusion, intellectually and morally, than any other age shows." This is an echo of the pulpit. Our age is one of testing, of inquiry, of investigation. All progress has come by these means. This talk of confusion is the cry of men who are appalled that old things, threadbare ideas, and ancient prejudices, are now being questioned and investigated. Confusion suggests a running around without air or purpose. Let the pessimists take heart of grace. The experimenters have an aim—seeking the truth, and also a purpose—discovering the best.

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.

DON WALTON.—See "Acid Drops." Trust a parson to have an eye for business.

H. BROWN.—Nothing like persistency. If every Freethinker had imitated yourself in protesting against the action of the B.B.C., things might by now have been on a different basis. Freethinkers too often play into the hands of religious leaders by their apathy.

J. G. DOBSON.—Thanks for quotation. It is interesting and useful.

J. LATHAM (S.A.).—Thanks for your good wishes and sympathetic note.

ANONYMOUS.—We are not at all blind to the growth of the Roman Catholic Church in this country, and have often called attention to it. We agree with you that it is one of the most dangerous symptoms of to-day.

J. BRICE.—We greatly appreciate your praise of the general run of the *Freethinker* articles. Our aim is to keep as high a standard as possible in its pages. We pass on your advice, that all Freethinkers should follow the discussion in the *Controversialist*, to all who are interested. Mr. Cohen's articles in *Everyman* have been extended to four.

C. JOHNSON.—Please make a point of introducing yourself at the Manchester Conference.

A. B. MOSS.—Congratulations on your attaining your 74th birthday. We hope to repeat these congratulations for just so long as you find life worth living, and with your disposition that is likely to be for some years yet.

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

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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.

This is the last opportunity we shall have of calling attention to the Manchester Conference. The Conference will meet at 10.30, at the Victoria Hotel, Deansgate. The afternoon session will sit at 2.30. The Conference is open to all members, who will show their membership cards, and who may speak and vote on the business before the Conference. There will be a Public Demonstration in the evening in the Chorlton Town Hall, at 7, addressed by a number of speakers; the chair will be

taken by the President. We hope that Manchester Freethinkers will make the evening meeting known as widely as possible.

There will be a luncheon provided at the Victoria Hotel for members and friends at a cost of 3s. 6d. per head. There will also be an excursion on Whit-Monday, which Mr. Cohen hopes to accompany, into Derbyshire, one of the most picturesque counties in England. There was an error in stating the cost of this in last week's issue, which will be 4s. for train fare, and 3s. for luncheon. Those who wish to join the delegates at lunch, on the Sunday, or to take part in the excursion on the Monday, should write the General Secretary, 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, without delay.

On the back page of this issue will be found a reprint of a circular dealing with the forthcoming General Election. The Circular has been issued by the Executive of the National Secular Society and the Board of Directors of the Rationalist Press Association jointly. (A similar appeal has been issued by the Secular Education League dealing with Education only). It should require no special urging to Freethinkers to induce them to see that these questions are put to every candidate who asks for their vote. Part of the opposition we have to fight in trying to get the reforms indicated arises from the apathy shown by those who should be most active. There is only one thing that will induce politicians to move, and that is the conviction that there is a sufficiently large body of people who are seriously concerned in the matter. For that reason we want every Freethinking reader of this journal to press the matter of the circular before every candidate. And make it quite plain that your vote depends at least upon some answer being given to the questions, whether the answer be yes or no.

One other thing. Candidates must be forced to give an answer if it can possibly be done. When that has been accomplished, we want the answers sending without delay to this office, giving the name of the candidate and the constituency for which he stands. In any move that is made for parliamentary action, these replies will be of great use. *But let everyone get to work at once.*

Mr. C. R. Boyd Freeman has published, through the *Pioneer Press*, a pamphlet *On Trial for Treason*, price 3d., postage one halfpenny extra. His thesis is that the Roman Catholic Church makes its followers bad citizens wherever they may be, and that in this country they all lay themselves open to a trial for treason. We quite agree that a belief in the Roman Catholic Church is a bad thing, but we think his view of the law, so long as Roman Catholics behave themselves, is quite wrong. And then in even the case of bad behaviour the charge would be that of being a follower of the Roman Catholic Church. However, Mr. Freeman states his thesis with his usual force, and those who disagree with him on the legal aspect, may well find themselves in agreement with him in other matters.

There have been many sketches of Mrs. Besant, but Mr. Geoffrey West claims to have produced the first "full length study" of her life, and so far as our memory serves, the claim is sound. And we congratulate Mr. West on his *Life of Annie Besant* (Gerald Howe, 15s.) It is critical and sympathetic, as a biography should be. Life is not merely a matter of logic, and a life that is dealt with on those lines is certain to be unsatisfactory. Mr. Howe does not lose his head in his admiration of Mrs. Besant, and his summing up of her character and attainments is, on the whole judicious. There are some good portraits in the book, and the frontispiece of his subject as a charmingly striking old lady of eighty is capital. Mrs. Besant has led a wonderful life, and her life promises to be active and interesting to the end. We hope she will end in activity. Any other end would be distressing to herself and to her friends.

We never had any personal acquaintance with Mrs. Besant, but we should judge the picture Mr. Howe gives of her as quite good. A sensitive, high-spirited, generous-minded girl, married to an evangelical parson, her real introduction to life was disastrous. Those who prate of the way in which religion improves life might study the influence of religion on Frank Besant. The influence of religion on him was wholly bad, as it has been on so many others. Her marriage was doomed to disaster from the outset, and when her uneasiness, rather than research, led her to unorthodox conclusions a definite breach was inevitable. Henceforth Annie Besant, the parson's wife, became Annie Besant, the Reformer and fighter for forlorn causes; and whatever one may think of the intellectual value of her work, there is no question as to her sincerity, her courage, or carelessness as to where truth led her. She loved every cause for which she fought, and her followers loved her. Her fight, side by side with Charles Bradlaugh, for both Freethought and "Birth Control" is historic. And her break with both Bradlaugh and the Freethought Party, when she wandered into Theosophy, was a fine tribute to her character.

But with all her passionate championship of the causes she took up, in spite of her wonderful power on the platform—she is said to have been the greatest woman orator of her time—her intellectual power was never of a first-rate order. In none of her writings does one discover any indication of the power to actually think alone, or to present any evidence of the power of original thinking on old subjects. She was essentially an echo, not a voice, and W. P. Ball's description of her as having "a mind like a milk-jug; that which is poured into it is in turn poured out of it," while not gallant, is actually true. Neither in economics, nor in Freethought, nor even in that rag-bag of medieval mysticism, Hindoo terminology, ill-digested science, and general flapdoodleism, Theosophy, has she ever shown the slightest ability to add anything to what others have given her, and often enough has failed to see the deeper aspects of what she took hold of.

Mr. Howe says that Mrs. Besant's acceptance of Atheism was "tentative." We do not agree. Her acceptance of any position was never tentative. She had neither the caution nor the balance of the independent thinker to take up a tentative position with regard to anything. A woman who could commence her Freethinking with the belief that the one argument in favour of religion is the argument from instinct, and finally gave up Atheism and Materialism because "ten years study" gave no explanation to hypnotism of memory, double consciousness, the relation between body and mind, etc., could have never really grasped the fundamentals of scientific and philosophic Atheism. She took her Atheism, as she took everything else, from others—one cannot imagine her writing a pamphlet such as Bradlaugh's *Plea for Atheism*—and adding nothing to what was taken save the power of a charming personality, a lovable nature, and an upright mind. But no one who *understands* Atheism can ever give it up in terms of mental sanity. One may go along for ever without knowing, but one can no more un-know what one knows that one can up-pull a man's nose.

The Bethnal Green Branch of the N.S.S. opens its Summer work at Victoria Park to-day (May 12). The speaker will be Mr. F. P. Corrigan, and the meetings commence at 3.15 p.m.

Prehistoric Man and His Ancestors, by Ona Melton, of the Birmingham Branch of the N.S.S., is an attempt, and a successful one, to give an account of the origin and early history of man in a manner suitable to young people. Mr. Melton writes in an easy and simple manner, and we wish his work every success. There are several plates illustrating the work, with an appreciative word of introduction by Mr. R. H. Rosetti. The book is bound in cloth and published at 1s. 6d., and can be supplied from the *Freethinker* office, post extra.

The Humanism of Shakespeare.

IN a great passage Matthew Arnold has said: "More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes for religion will be replaced by poetry."

The popular mind has long been used to blaming and falsifying reason, replacing it by shadows and dreams; but the day will come when we will wonder at ourselves. In a life not short, I have found a more than adequate substitute for the religion which was discarded just as poetry began to occupy the throne. Some people talk of the Bible as the crown of English literature. The Bible is not English literature at all. It is as exotic as the *Arabian Nights*. They are both Oriental books. Dr. Clifford would keep the Bible in the schools "as literature." It will never be put in as literature; and it will never be kept in the schools as mere literature till it takes its place on the shelf with all the other "Sacred Books" of the world. When one who has been brought up on the Bible hears a passage quoted, no matter how meaningless, the archaic language fills him with awe; he feels the Book is not as other books—which it is not. One might quote a passage from the *Arabian Nights* in the same circumstances, with the same effect. All priests have one thing in common. They descend to the paltry and unforgivable trick of robbing men and women of their mental birthright.

Shakespeare speaks no "sacred" language. He never exploited truth, had nothing to hide, nothing to represent other than what it was. He said the highest thing about truth:—

"Truth can never be confirmed enough, though Doubt did ever sleep."

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned." Shakespeare was incapable of writing that. We cannot all believe alike. We cannot all think alike, any more than we can all look alike. Fancy one mind having the unquestioning obedience of all minds! Why, the greatest egotist would get sick of it in twenty-four hours. There was no narrow egotism in Shakespeare. In the plays he is indifferent and unconscious as Nature herself. We must remember that the genius of a great man is as much independent of him as it is of us. He cannot command it; he cannot sit down and say: "Go to! I am going to write something worth reading. He has to wait on what religious people call—and what they need—inspiration. In the brooding of his genius his characters take possession of him; laugh with him, cry with him, talk with him, walk with him, wish him good-night and good-morning . . . But remember, the characters in a play like *The Merchant of Venice*, while they speak in character, their utterance belongs to Shakespeare. You recollect friends and acquaintances you see in your dreams speak in character, but you are the author of what is said. Samuel Johnson recollected one morning having had an argument in his sleep with a friend who had worsted him. Old Sam was much troubled at having been floored by his own mental bludgeon, but consoled himself with the thought that he supplied the other fellow's argument as well as his own . . . Shakespeare's characters, living in his mind, compelled him to make them talk in character.

In the *Merchant of Venice*, the story itself is old. Nearly all his dramas are founded on old stories. This does not show Shakespeare's want of originality . . . that he was not creative. He was in *The*

Tempest. Ben Jonson wrote an original play—*The Alchemist*. Who thinks of putting *The Alchemist* on the stage to-day? To-day the world is full of original plays and fresh plots. The plot is but the peg upon which Shakespeare hangs all the raiment of his genius. He takes a story that has lived in the minds of the people for hundreds of years. It will live because it has lived. A story that affected every life gave him a permanent hold upon the people.

Shakespeare did not believe in the supernatural. What about the Ghosts? you ask. He did not put the ghosts in; he found them there. Shakespeare was not frightened by ghosts. In both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, he uses the ghosts as a dramatist. In *Hamlet's* memorable interview with his mother, Hamlet sees the ghost. The mother neither saw nor heard. "Whereon do you look?" "On him, on him! Look how he glares!"

The ghost of Banquo sits in Macbeth's chair at the feast, and the guests wonder at his agitation . . . Macbeth has just had Banquo murdered, and is just saying to his guests—"would that we had Banquo here!"—and there is Banquo, ghastly, glaring, with gory locks, only seen by the murderer.

You hear in *The Merchant of Venice* of what is called usury. People talk of the savage usurer who lent money at 900 per cent; but usurer simply means a man who lends money in the ordinary way of business. Most Christians then were Catholics, and lending money was a mortal sin in the eyes of the Catholic Church. But we could not do without it; there could be no commerce without credit. It is the same thing as putting the power of buying and selling into the hands of a man who has not already that power.

A Jew might lend money—he was damned already—another faggot to a man already kicking in hell. The Christians wanted to borrow money. In those days they were not very fond of paying it back; and, after all, did not the Jews crucify Christ? The Jew was damned, that was certain. The Jews were equally sure the Christian was damned—"Each one damning damns the other: by none other are they damned," except the damnation which one bigot inflicts upon another. The merchant is a Christian. He and Shylock are old enemies. Shylock, a Jew; Antonio, a Christian. The one a bigot, the other the same. Shylock with greater excuse in his day of vengeance seeks revenge instead of money. For, mark you, there was nothing in all the persecutions of history like that of the Jews by the Christians.

Other characters are worth mentioning, and one worth more—the incomparable Portia. The Bible, we are told, is woman's best friend! Well—not every female in the Bible would adorn a biography. In that book, if anyone wanted a dirty deed performed, a woman was selected for the purpose. But see what Shakespeare says through the mouths of Portia and Jessica. "Why if two gods should play some heavenly match, and on the wager lay two earthly women, and Portia one, there must be something else pawned with the other; for the poor rude world hath not her fellow."

Gratiano is worth mention; a gay gallant, and set against all piety. When he wants to go to Portia's house with Antonio and Bassanio, he is forbidden, he is too light and frivolous; so he protests: "Signor Bassanio hear me; if I do not put on a sober habit, wear prayer-books in my pocket; look demurely; nay more, while grace is saying, hood mine eyes thus with mine hat, and sigh and say Amen; use all the observance of civility, like one well studied in a sad intent to please his grandam, never me more." Piety was a task for Gratiano. Reproved by Antonio, Gratiano

makes the famous reply—"There are a sort of men whose visages do cream and mantle like a standing pond with purpose to be dressed in an opinion of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit, as who should say—I am Sir Oracle, and when I open my mouth let no dog bark!" Shakespeare had seen them in the pulpit. What! a Freethinker go to church? He went everywhere and dramatized all humanity, including the pietists, however vulgar or insignificant bigoted they might be—"My tablets! Meet it is I set it down."

Then there is Jessica, the daughter of the Jew. She runs away with a Christian, and what she carried with her was worth the taking. So Shylock, after all the persecution, all the injustice, finds his daughter gone with a Christian! "Oh that Barabbas had her for a wife than one of these Christians!" "I hate him for he is a Christian!" "He spit upon my Jewish Gaberdine . . . called me misbeliever, cut-throat, dog!" . . . For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe."

Antonio keeps railing at the Jew. When the Jew turns upon him in the name of humanity and . . . Antonio, the Christian, says "I am as like to call you so again" . . . Antonio wants to borrow that Bassanio may go well furnished to the courtship of Portia. A rare excellent woman, but also a rich heiress, with many suitors in all parts of the land. Bassanio has borrowed all he can from his lavish Christian friends, and now he borrows of the Jew on Antonio's credit. Antonio finds that the Jew who lent him the money—when his ships do not come home—has more than personal hatred . . . "He hates our sweet nation."

In the trial scene—"An oath! an oath! I have an oath in heaven: Shall I lay perjury upon my soul? No, not for Venice!" Religion is everywhere intensifying his personal hatred of Antonio; and Antonio, now that he is in trouble, wants the Jew's mercy—and finds it! "You call'd me dog—and now, beware of the fangs!"

And now we come to that wonderful protest of the Jew, as a Jew, against the Christians, as Christians. Shylock's daughter has run away with a Christian, and they have taken wherewithal to support them on the way. Shylock has lost money. He had lost something infinitely more precious—the blessed domestic affection which was to the Jews one of the consolations of heaven—the wife and child of his ghetto.

The messenger says that his daughter spent so many ducats in a night, and gave such a ring for a monkey! "Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal, it was my turquoise—I had it from Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys!"

Antonio's ships have met with disaster—"I thank God! I thank God! is it true?" Religion bolsters the hatred between the two men. Don't forget that "Love thy neighbour as thyself" is not Christ's original saying; it is in the Old Testament, and was there long before it was in the New. The passionate protest of Shylock follows: "To bait fish withal. If it will feed nothing else it will feed my revenge . . . He will 'better the instruction.'"

The Jew was then a hated thing. The Jews were banished from England. I always wondered where Shakespeare found his Jew till I reflected that Shylock was a composite photograph of all the Jews that Shakespeare had found in the Old Testament.

Imagine how it must have appeared to the people of Shakespeare's day! Imagine the audience that heard it for the first time. No sentiments like these had ever been heard before, now uttered once for all in the language of the master mind and greatest

poet of the world. It was just because Shakespeare was a poet that he took this attitude. Burns pities a mouse. Shakespeare pitied the whole nation of the Jews! He knew what their sufferings had been; that they seldom had justice done to them, and knew that all the while they were as good as other folk. Antonio and Shylock are both bigots . . . Religion never suggests kindness and consideration to either . . . Religion makes Antonio a bigot and a persecutor. Religion also makes Shylock a bigot—worse, if you like—than nature had made him. In a sentence: what religion does any good in the world?

Take the plays in their chronological order, and you will find Shakespeare gradually becoming more and more sceptical; and at last in such plays as *King Lear*, he denies divine justice in human affairs altogether. The rebuke for religious bigot and pious persecutor comes from the lips of a beautiful, wise and witty woman—the finest thing on earth—and Portia administers directly to Shylock and indirectly to Antonio the lesson that humanity teaches. When Shylock asks in court why he is expected “on what compulsion must I?” Portia intervenes, and rebukes him:—

“The quality of mercy is not strain’d;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven,
Upon the place beneath. It is twice bless’d;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
’Tis mightiest of the mightiest . . .”

Shakespeare has taken the religion of the Jew and the Christian and held them both up with perfect impartiality. We have the rebuke of Portia; the passionate protest of Shylock, voicing Humanity against the bigotry of both. Natural mercy is Shakespeare’s teaching. Religions are many; mortality everywhere is one; human experience is the same. You may ride in your motor-car at seventy miles an hour—your child is dead! Your motor-car is no more to you than the commonest vehicle of the commonest man. The longer I live, and the more I study Shakespeare, the more I am convinced that he was the unparalleled humanist in the literature of the world.

(The late) G. W. FOOTE.

Religion: Folkways and Experience.

I.

RELIGION, FOLKWAYS AND MORES.

CONSIDERATION of what religion has been and what it is to-day takes us beyond Theism and all its works. This development is inevitable. There is no reversing its conclusion. Nothing corresponding to religious beliefs exists. The religious world is false, invalid, and void. No religious events whatsoever can occur. This is certain, established, and final. It is the point of view for criticizing the present working religion. But religion is really not a matter of arguing and deciding on the truth, adequacy, and usefulness of a certain set of ideas and practices. On a wholly different basis religion continues prevalent. As current religion, it is a social usage, a psychic process, a part of men’s lives. As such religion is actual. The sufficiently answered questions of the origin and value of religious beliefs, activities, and experiences are little relevant to this present fact of religion. The philosophical and scientific examination¹ hands down a verdict that in no way touches on religion as present activity and experience. Its point of view is outside, above, and beyond what it

criticizes. It renders decisions entirely removed from what it evaluates. It criticizes religion from the outside without taking it into account as it at present occurs in man and among men. A closer inquiry must deal with what religion now is in the way of a social activity and a personal experience, with what it is as something which takes place, goes on, and fulfills its function in the society and in the individual, with what it is for its maintainers, and how it works in them in regard both to the person and the group.

The beginnings of religious beliefs and practices are well enough known in essential outline.² The start and early standing of religious customs are not in doubt. And, on the whole, religion has continued one and the same throughout all its developments. But, wherever found, religion is already far past its origin. It is social. It has thus become subject to the working of social processes.³ For with religion as with all other activities, “the struggle for existence was carried on, not individually, but in groups. Each profited by the other’s experience; hence there was concurrence towards that which proved to be most expedient. All at last adopted the same way for the same purpose; hence the ways turned into customs and became mass phenomena . . . In this way folkways arise. The young learn them by tradition, imitation, and authority. The folkways, at a time, provide for all the needs of life then and there. They are uniform, universal in the group, imperative, and invariable. As time goes on, the folkways become more and more arbitrary, positive, and imperative . . . When . . . conviction as to the relation to welfare is added to the folkways they are converted into mores, and, by virtue of the philosophical element added to them, they win utility and importance, and become the source of the science and art of living.”⁴ From the beginning to the present this social process has taken up religion, maintained, enforced and impressed it. Religion has at its source become social, and from this alone derives its present standing, sanction and efficacy.

“The folkways are the ‘right’ ways to satisfy all interests, because they are traditional, and exist in fact. They extend over the whole of life . . . The ‘right’ way is the way which the ancestors used, and which has been handed down. The tradition is its own warrant. It is not held subject to verification by experience. The notion of right is in the folkways. It is not outside of them, of independent origin, and brought to them to test them. In the folkways, whatever is, is right. This is because they are traditional, and therefore contain in themselves the authority of the ancestral ghosts. When we come to the folkways we are at the end of our analysis.”⁵ This is all mass religion and the individual religion derived from it is or can be. The religious folkways are their own, and sufficient sanction, only proceeds beyond and outside the folkways. It does not reach them. It comes from another plane. It is curtailed from the start by the predominantly religious situation. Religion is the result of personal thinking and experiencing. It is a sum of folkways and mores, self-sufficient, self-contained, final.

“The folkways are necessarily ‘true’ with respect to some world philosophy. Pain forced men to

² James H. Leuba: *A Psychological Study of Religion, Its Origin, Function, and Future.* (Macmillan, 1912.) pp. 57-191.

³ William Graham Sumner: *Folkways, A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals.* (Boston, Ginn & Company, 1906.)

⁴ *Ibid.* (pp. 2-3.)

⁵ *Ibid.* (p. 28.)

¹ “The Contemporary Outlook,” *Freethinker*, 1927, Vol. xlvi, pp. 683-684, 699-700, 714-715.

think. The ills of life imposed reflection and taught forethought. Mental processes were irksome, and were not undertaken until painful experience made them unavoidable. With great unanimity all over the globe primitive men followed the same line of thought. The dead were believed to live on as ghosts in another world just like this one. The ghosts had just the same needs, tastes, passions, etc., as the living men had. These transcendental notions were the beginning of the mental outfit of mankind. They are articles of faith, not rational convictions. The living had duties to the ghosts, and the ghosts had rights; they also had power to enforce their rights. It behooved the living therefore to learn how to deal with ghosts. Here we have a complete world philosophy and a life policy deduced from it."⁶

"The folkways are the widest, most fundamental, and most important operation by which the interests of men in groups are served, and . . . the process by which folkways are made is the chief one to which elementary societal or group phenomena are due. The life of society consists in making folkways and applying them . . . When the elements of truth and right are developed into doctrines of welfare, the folkways are raised to another plane. They then become capable of producing inferences, developing into new forms, and extending their constructive influence over men and society. Then we call them mores. The mores are folkways, including the philosophical and ethical generalizations as to societal welfare which are suggested by them, and inherent in them, as they grow . . . Mores are a directive force . . . The real process in great bodies of men . . . is one of minute efforts to live well under existing conditions, which efforts are repeated indefinitely by great numbers, getting strength from habit and from the fellowship of united action. The resultant folkway become coercive. All are forced to conform, and the folkways dominate the societal life. Then they seem true and right, and arise into mores as the form of welfare. Thence are produced faiths, ideas, doctrines, religions, and philosophies, according to the stage of civilization and the fashions of reflection and generalization."⁷

Religion is given an even firmer foundation. "Institutions . . . are produced out of the mores. An institution consists of a concept (idea, notion, doctrine, interest) and a structure. The structure is a framework, or apparatus, or perhaps only a number of functionaries set to co-operate in prescribed ways at a certain conjuncture. The structure holds the concept and furnishes instrumentalities for bringing it into the world of facts and action in a way to serve the interests of men in society. Institutions are either crecive or enacted. They are crecive when they take shape in the mores, growing by the instinctive efforts by which the mores are produced. Then the efforts, through long use, become definite and specific. Property, marriages, and religion are the most primary institutions. They began in the folkways. They became customs. They developed into mores by the addition of some philosophy of welfare, however crude. Then they were made more definite and specific as regards the rules, the prescribed acts, and the apparatus to be employed. This produced a structure and the institution was complete . . . Property, marriage, and religion are still almost entirely in the mores."⁸

The substance, standing and use of religious belief is completely covered in summing up the folkways "If now we form a conception of the folkways as a great mass of usages of all degrees of im-

portance, covering all the interests of life, constituting an outfit of instruction for the young, embodying a life policy, forming character, containing a world philosophy, albeit most vague and formulated, and sanction by ghost fear so that variation is impossible, we see with what coercive and inhibitive force the folkways have always grasped the members of a society . . . We see that we must conceive of the mores as a vast system of usages, covering the whole of life, and serving all its interests; also containing in themselves their own justification by tradition and use and wont, and approved by mystic sanctions until, by rational reflection, they develop their own philosophical and ethical generalizations, which are elevated into 'principles' of truth and right. They coerce and restrict the newborn generation. They do not stimulate thought, but the contrary. The thinking is already done and is embodied in the mores. They never contain any provisions for their own amendment. They are not questions, but answers, to the problem of life. They present themselves as final and unchangeable, because they present answers which are offered as 'the truth.'"⁹ This, at the same time, is all there is to religion.

CURTIS BRUEN.

(To be continued.)

Correspondence.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

THE IDEA OF FORCE AND THE FORCE OF IDEAS.

SIR,—In your issue of May 5, the writer of "Sugar Plums" says: "The experience of the Christian Church should have taught the futility of hoping to kill an idea by the application of force." I fear this is one of the conventional lies which are as common in the Free-thought Movement as in every other Movement. Nothing is more certain than, that ideas and beliefs, held with the utmost fanaticism, have again and again been obliterated by physical force. Mill gives several pages of his "Liberty" to historical instances. Thirteen hundred years ago Palestine, Egypt, Syria, and Morocco were as Christian as Ireland is to-day. Within a century there was hardly a Christian left; the Mohammedans had stamped out Christianity with the sword. In the sixteenth century, Belgium was for a time almost entirely Protestant. In a few years she was entirely Catholic, and has been so ever since. The Duke of Alva and Alexander of Parma burnt Protestants out of Belgium. The same thing happened in France, Bohemia, and various other countries.

Whether falsehood should be exterminated by force is merely a question of expediency. I think the Russian Government is probably wise in its action, and it is certainly far more logical than the Freethinkers who criticize it. Nothing can be more preposterous than the idea that the State can say what is to be taught to children, but has no right to say what is not to be taught. Every state insists that children shall be taught that there are such places as France and Germany. It has precisely the same right to insist that no child shall be taught that there are such places as hell and purgatory, and to punish all who break its commands. If the Russian Government has the force to do this, it is abundantly justified both by logic and by history. There is no difference in principle between teaching in the schools and teaching in the home.

R. B. KERR.

[Mr. Kerr appears to have overlooked the distinction between suppression and extinction. The fact that every idea the Church set out to kill is still alive, and some in possession of the field, appears to be proof of what was said in the paragraph in question. It is obviously possible to suppress an idea for a time, provided enough force is used. But to kill it is quite impossible. We refrain from giving illustrations, every one may supply examples from his own reading.—EDITOR.]

⁶ Ibid. (p. 29.)

⁷ Ibid. (pp. 34, 30, 38.)

⁸ Ibid. (pp. 53-54.)

⁹ Ibid. (pp. 67, 79.)

MOONSHINE AND MIMNERMUS.

SIR,—I am sorry the writer of your paper takes the name of Mimnermus. Does he know anything about him, other than an Eton master once took him to Church?

I never mentioned a police force or a policeman, and you might have made it clear that I wasn't responsible for such a repulsive expression as "God's Own Country." I didn't indict the U.S., I said even there the spirit of adventure shows itself in one form or another. And I abhor the decalogue. If you read a page of the New Testament, you'll find "the Law" condemned wholesale. "We were under the Law till Christ came . . . but Christ freed us from the Law." (Chapter heading, Galatians iv.) Why do you confuse Christianity and the Church? It's cheap and easy, but isn't it better to be honest? Christ preached liberty (what you *seem* to be after), and the Church has only too often imposed bondage. Get the two clear, and you might come to think Christ as at least as great a man as Socrates. Only don't confuse him with a Pope or even an Archbishop of Canterbury—or a Salvation Army General.

ARTHUR LEE.

SIR ARTHUR'S GHOST.

SIR,—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in his letter which appeared in your issue for May 5, rather clumsily evades your contention, that he has made another "bloomer"; well, if mistaking a faked photograph for genuine evidence of the truth of Spiritualism does not constitute a "bloomer," what does?

In my opinion, the most important point has been neglected. Here we have a leading authority on Spiritualism, who has been well and truly "spooferd"; and in such a single manner, too, for we must not forget that Sir Arthur was exhibiting the faked photograph as proof of the existence of ghosts. What would have happened if Mr. Palmer had not been present at the lecture? In all probability Sir Arthur would have completed a very successful lecture, assisted by faked evidence! Truly, a very alarming affair altogether for sincere believers in Spiritualism, for if Mr. Palmer could be guilty of practical jokes twenty years ago, why not now? After this, one feels justified in suggesting a thorough examination of all such "proofs"; Practical jokers could be offered some persuasion to confess: At all events, I commend the idea to Sir Arthur, who would then, at any subsequent lecture, have the supreme satisfaction of knowing that he was offering his audience quite authentic evidence.

J. PLIMMER.

Society News.

MR WHITEHEAD commenced the season's outdoor campaign with a meeting on Clapham Common, which attracted a numerous and interested crowd, which asked quite a crop of questions.

The week-night meetings were held on a new pitch in Liverpool Street, Camberwell, to which they had to move, in consequence of the one announced being occupied. This circumstance and the chilly weather, did not encourage the best results. But the meetings were responsible for the message being heard, probably for the first time, by a number of people, some of whom, to judge by their exceedingly raw remarks and questions, were quite unused to such subjects. This spot should repay the attention of the local branch. Mr. Heath, Secretary of the South London Branch, gave enthusiastic assistance at all meetings, as did other members.

From Monday, May 13 to Friday, May 17 inclusive, Mr. Whitehead will be lecturing at Longworth Road, Salford, Manchester.

Many a man appears to think himself of importance because he is the cause of annoyance in others. It might be well for him to reflect that a flea may keep a philosopher awake all night.

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, Mr. S. K. Ratcliffe—"The Menace of the Movies."

HAMPSTEAD ETHICAL INSTITUTE (The Studio Theatre, 59 Finchley Road, N.W.8): 11.15, Mr. H. Snell, M.P.—"What I saw of Family Courts in America."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): 7.0, Dr. C. W. Saleeby—"Back to Nature."

THE NON-POLITICAL METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (The Orange Tree Hotel, Ruston Road, N.W.1): Thursday, May 9, at 101 Tottenham Court Road, 7.30 to 11.30, Dance; Admission 1s.

OUTDOOR.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12.0, Messrs. J. Hart and R. L. Lennard. 3.30, Messrs. F. Betts and B. A. Le Maine. 6.30, Messrs. A. H. Hyatt and B. A. Le Maine. Freethought meetings every Wednesday, at 7.30, Messrs. J. Hart and R. G. Lennard. Every Friday, at 7.30, Mr. B. A. Le Maine. The *Freethinker* can be obtained outside Hyde Park during our meetings.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Clapham Common): 11.30, Mr. F. P. Corrigan; 6.30, Brockwell Park, Mr. F. P. Corrigan. Wednesday, 8, Clapham Old Town, Mr. F. Mann. Friday, 8, Liverpool Street, Camberwell Gate, Mr. F. P. Corrigan.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Regent's Park, near the Fountain): 6.30, Mr. L. Ebury—A Lecture.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Ravenscourt Park, Hammersmith): 3.30, Mr. R. G. Lennard, and other speakers.

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

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 3.15, Mr. F. P. Corrigan—A Lecture.

COUNTRY.

OUTDOOR.

GLASGOW BRANCH N.S.S.—Ramble to Humble Bridge—Meet at Clarkston Car Terminus, 12 o'clock prompt.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S.—Tuesday, May 14, 7.30, at Edge Hill Lamp: Mr. J. V. Shortt.—A Lecture.

PLYMOUTH BRANCH N.S.S. (4 Swilly Road, Devonport): Tuesday, May 14. Members meeting at 7.30 p.m.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S.—Monday May, 13 to Friday, May 17 inclusive. Mr. Whitehead will lecture at Longworth Road, Salford, Manchester.

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

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CAPABLE Commercial Traveller, taking up residence in South Africa in September, would like to hear from Manufacturers, etc., regarding agencies or sales management. Thorough knowledge of Stationery business.—Box S.A., *Freethinker*, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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BOOKS WANTED.

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The GENERAL ELECTION

... AND ...

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT

A GENERAL ELECTION is at hand, and this affords to all lovers of freedom of thought an opportunity to use their personal influence in the fight to secure that public administration shall be based upon justice to all citizens, independent of religious or other opinions. It is proposed to test and record the opinions of candidates on three important matters.

1.—SECULAR EDUCATION.

For nearly sixty years the State schools have been the cockpit in which the different sections of the Christian Church have fought to gain supremacy. The contest has at present reached a stage which threatens to impose upon the public a larger measure of definite and dogmatic religious teaching than has existed since the passing of the Elementary Education Act in 1870. The Government is only waiting for the various Christian bodies to reach a sufficient measure of agreement to justify such amendments of the law as will give to the sects what they desire. Once this agreed measure becomes law it will take many years of hard fighting to effect the removal of the injustice.

2.—THE BLASPHEMY LAWS

are still unrepealed, and the Christian religion still occupies a privileged position before the law. It is true that prosecutions are to-day rare, but a law is never dead until it is repealed, and a recrudescence of religious bigotry might once more bring this instrument of religious oppression into active use.

3.—BROADCASTING RELIGION.

The British Broadcasting Corporation, while not actually in the position of a Government Department and directly under the control of Parliament, enjoys a monopoly in virtue of its Charter. Protest after protest has been made against the time occupied on Sundays in the transmission of religious matter to the exclusion of the entertainment to which the listener is justly entitled. Demands for a programme alternative to the religious service have been unjustifiably refused. Perhaps a more united protest and the knowledge that members of Parliament have been asked to act in the matter will induce the Corporation to remove an injustice which never should have been allowed to come into existence.

Below are set out three questions dealing with the above matters, and it is suggested that readers take an opportunity to put these questions either orally or in writing to all candidates for election in their Parliamentary area.

If the questions are put to the candidates at a public meeting, the effect will be enhanced. Answers to the question, with particulars of the candidates and constituency, should be set out in the manner indicated and forwarded to the Editor of the *Freethinker*.

QUESTIONS:

1. Will you, if returned to Parliament, support any measure designed to restrict the education given in all schools receiving State support to secular instruction in the sense indicated by the official code?
2. Would you be prepared to vote for a Bill for the abolition of the Statute and Common law of blasphemy?
3. Would you be willing to oppose the continuation of the B.B.C. charter in the absence of an undertaking to provide within a reasonable period for the transmission on Sundays of a programme of entertainment alternative to the religious service?