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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

| | Page |
|--|------|
| <i>The Easter Myth.—The Editor</i> | 209 |
| <i>Disraeli's Dialectics.—Mimmermus</i> | 210 |
| <i>The Three Trials of George William Foote.—H. Cutner</i> | 211 |
| <i>The Conspiracy of Press and Priest.—Keridon</i> | 213 |
| <i>The Conspiracy of Freethought.—Ignotus</i> | 214 |
| <i>False Friends of Freethought.—J. G. Bartram</i> | 215 |
| <i>Peter Weston's Shop.—T. F. Palmer</i> | 218 |
| <i>A Famous French Philosopher.—W. Mann</i> | 219 |
| <i>The Story of an Ex-Jesuit.—Alan Tyndal</i> | 220 |
| <i>Ritualism.—Alan Tyndal</i> | 220 |
| <i>In Snowdrop Time.—Coila</i> | 221 |

Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums,

Letters to the Editor, etc.

Views and Opinions.

The Easter Myth.

"Now the birth of Jesus was on this wise." He was born of a union between a Jewish maiden and a ghost. And the death of Jesus Christ was on this wise. He was executed on the eve of the Jewish Sabbath, which afterwards became known to Christians as Good Friday. Ordinary human decency would have known the day on which it was alleged a perfect man met his death owing to the religious intolerance of his persecutors as "Bad Friday," or "Black Friday." But the Christian conscience thought otherwise. He was sacrificed in order that by his torture and death God might forgive some of the sins with which man was credited. So the Christian calls it *Good Friday* because he believed that he made a profit on the transaction. And that is all that matters.

But there are some suspicious features about this alleged transaction. In the first place, when we commemorate the death, or birth of a man, a real man, we do it upon a date not upon a day. If a man dies on the first of April the date of his death remains the first of April for ever and ever. For a man can only die once, and when he dies he does it all at once. But in the case of the death of Jesus Christ we commemorate not the date but the day. No matter what the date we must have the commemoration of his death on a Friday. And whoever heard of any man's death being commemorated in this fashion! Historic facts do not occur in this way, and they are not commemorated in this way. If we do not know exactly when a thing happened we say it occurred "about" such and such a date. It is only in the case of Jesus Christ and his kind that we must have his death on a Friday whatever the date may be.

The Nature of the Myth

There is an unconscious satire in the fact that the commemoration of the death of Jesus Christ is determined by the phases of the moon—for of old the moon was supposed to have some causal connexion with insanity. Hence the origin of the words "lunacy" and "lunatic." It is not history, but astronomy that settles the date when Christians shall celebrate the death and resurrection of their god. In this respect Christianity was but following the fashion with all sacrificed and resurrected gods. Sun gods and vegetation gods had always been killed and resurrected in this fashion, and it would not have been practicable to depart too widely from the fashion. A difference of name was nothing, it was the thing itself that mattered. Still, in a religion such as Christianity, God Almighty, whom Christians believe arranged their religion for world dominancy, ought to have looked ahead and have arranged a fixed deathday as well as a fixed birthday, so that the game would not have been so clearly given away. As Abraham Lincoln said, you cannot fool all the people all the time, and the perpetuation of Christianity depended upon fooling all the people for ever, and not for a period.

Easter has no possible connexion with the supposed death of a Jewish peasant just over nineteen hundred years ago. It is not even Christian, save in the sense that it is part of the historic religion known as Christianity. But it is far older than Christianity. A Pagan who was suddenly awakened from the sleep of centuries would find nothing unfamiliar in the Christian celebration of Easter. He would only feel that he was once again assisting at the celebration of the sun-god's victory over winter and death. He would see in what was being done in the name of the slain and resurrected Jesus, only what had been done in his day in the name of the slain and resurrected Adonis and Tammuz. Even the name of Easter gives the game away. It has nothing whatever to do with Jesus Christ. It is, most probably the name of a goddess, the Saxon *Eostre* who was annually glorified in the revivication of vegetation. If Jesus ever lived the Spring festival which he knew was the Jewish *Passover*, a festival in which the sacrifice of the first-born yearlings played a part. This one may assume was a refinement on the more primitive custom of making a god by sacrificing a human being, and so securing a good harvest. But, as in so many other directions, Christianity was a reversion to a less civilized form of religious belief. Our Easter is an ancient nature festival, and whether it be in the name of Jesus or Adonis or Osiris or Attis does not make the least difference to anyone who really understands religion.

* * *

Christianity and Retrogression

There is no doubt whatever in the minds of anthro-

pologists as to the substantial truth of what has been said, whatever difference of opinion there may be in detail. But it is very difficult in an environment saturated with Christian influences to get a clear statement of opinion when the opinion to be expressed cuts across Christian claims. So from even so eminent a Freethinker as Sir James Frazer we get the following:—

On the whole, the evidence goes to show that the great Christian festivals were arbitrarily timed by the Church, so as to coincide with previously existing Pagan festivals for the sake of weaning the heathen from their old faith and bringing them over to the new religion . . . Christmas and Easter, the two pivots on which the Christian calendar revolves, appear both to have been instituted with this intention; the one superseded a mid-winter festival of the sun-god, the other superseded a vernal festival of the death and resurrection of the vegetation-god (*Golden Bough*, Vol. IX., p. 328).

Thus in the very act of summarizing facts that knock the bottom out of fundamental Christian claims we have support given to the superstition that the originators of the Christian cult were men of great spiritual development who were aiming at lifting the people to a higher level, and so utilized existing customs to a better end. I know of no evidence whatever for any such view. That Christianity, in spite of its faults, represented a higher form of belief, is a very familiar assumption, specially favoured by those who try to hide the extent of their departure from orthodoxy by an elaborate geniality towards those who still continue within its fold. But the historic truth is that Christianity represented the dregs of the intellectual world; it was not a superior cult, but a competing one, and the distinction is important. It perpetuated the old superstitions, not in form only but in spirit and in idea. A religion that could so perpetuate a set of beliefs already rejected by large numbers of the educated Pagan world can hardly plead that it was a species of religious Montessori, leading the world to higher things by means of familiar symbols. The world has yet to realize the terrible intellectual catastrophe the triumph of Christianity meant. It survived the Pagan religions, but it survived amid conditions in which a really enlightened creed would have faced and met a honourable death.

* * *

The Death of the Gods.

To do the early Christians justice they never denied the identity of their beliefs with the older Pagan ones. They were too near the source of Christianity to do so. The relation was commented on by the Pagans and admitted by the Christians. The former said that Christianity was but a copy of their own creeds, the latter retorted that the likeness between the two was due to the devil, who knowing that Christianity was coming, copied it while it was on the way. But whether from heaven or hell, the substantial identity of Christianity with the Pagan religions cannot be denied. The virgin-born, slain saviour, and the resurrected God, the event fixed by the phases of the moon, the eating of the newly-baked bread, the eating of the egg, that being the universal symbol of life, the practices that still continue in various parts of Europe where the people are the least civilized and the most Christian, all prove that Christianity is but the older Paganism under new names. But there is this distinction between the two. In the later days of Paganism the connexion of the god with the life of vegetation had reduced the ancient belief to a poetic symbolism. Christianity by connecting these ceremonies with the death of an alleged historical figure made the whole story revoltingly ridiculous.

All that is left for us is to once again reduce this stupid Christian story to symbolism. The Christian story is that of a dying God. And sooner or later all gods die. They are no more immortal than are their worshippers. Indeed the mortality of the gods is less debatable than that of their followers. If there is another world to which these dead gods go they would indeed form a motley crowd. Gods big and little, dark and fair, ugly and beautiful, presenting all the characteristics of man at his best and at his worst. That the gods are born we know; that they die we also know. But, curiously, we know more of the manner of their birth than we do of their death. The conditions of their birth are few and simple. They can be studied among peoples still living. It is their death that is puzzling; for by the time that man is able to give his gods their quietus life has grown very complex, and the causes of the decay of the gods are not easily discerned. All we know definitely is that man, the creator of the gods is also their destroyer. Human thought brings the gods into the world; human thought carries them out again. Man is the great decide; were he not, life would become stagnant and progress impossible.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Disraeli's Dialectics.

"Not a fantastical fool of them all shall flout me out of my calling.—*Shakespeare*.

"This mystery of vending spiritual gifts is nothing but a trade."—*Swift*.

TIME works wonders with reputations. Gladstone's statue "in London's central roar," exhibited but one solitary wreath on the anniversary of his birth a few years after he had passed away. A predominant figure in British political life for over half a century, Gladstone was scarcely cold in his grave before his life's record was being revised. Generations after Disraeli's death his statue is loaded with flowers, and his name acclaimed by the descendants of the people who derided him as a pariah.

After all, Disraeli's personality was as attractive as Browning's "Bishop Blougram," and Freethinkers can hardly fail to be interested in a meteoric Machiavellian career that scarcely has its parallel in a thousand years of English history. The most piquant pages in the life-story of the wily statesman concern his religious opinions. Like that saucy, old, man-of-the-world, Lord Melbourne, Disraeli might plausibly have disclaimed being a pillar of the Church of England by saying: "I am a buttress. I prop it up outside." To Disraeli this church was simply the Government form of religion, a social tradition which blended civil authority with ecclesiastical influence. As to Freethought, he considered it had its proper uses. "Man brings to the study of oracles more learning and more criticism than of yore; and it is well that it should be so." In describing the critical nineteenth-century theologians as "Atheists in domino," he wasted a good epithet, but there is no mistaking the meaning. In one of his novels he spoke even more plainly in describing the Anglican Church as "Parliamentary Christianity." Concerning Church appointments, which the dear clergy so like their congregations to think are the direct action of the Holy Ghost, it is refreshing to find Disraeli writing to Lord Salisbury, who was supposed to represent the High Church Party in the Cabinet: "Can you suggest a good High Church dean who is not a damned fool and won't make himself ridiculous?" Disraeli's attitude in theological matters was always that of the old French aristocrat: "After

me, the deluge!" He thought that the Church of England might be useful as a social and political force, but his own personal beliefs were comprised in a thin, attenuated Theism, which would scarce have shocked Voltaire himself, and have earned the approbation of Rousseau.

Disraeli was a cynic, although a genial one. Recall his jest at the height of the Darwinian controversy: "I am on the side of the angels." Think of his remark on reaching the coveted position of Prime Minister, which he had desired so long: "I have climbed to the top of the greasy pole." One can scarcely imagine the austere Gladstone putting the matter in this light-hearted way. Disraeli has been accused of the gentle art of flattery, and, doubtless, in the presence of Royalty, he laid it on with a trowel. His sugary compliment, "We authors, your majesty," addressed to Queen Victoria, is a case in point. When he offered his condolences on the death of Prince Albert he became almost as dithyrambic as Tennyson, who was actually the salaried court minstrel, or, as Swinburne would have said, "a linnet on the wrist of a queen."

Most interesting reading is the account of Disraeli's relations with the old Queen, and his gradual progress from her aversion to her affection. In one of her letters the Queen told him that "by rising early, taking cold shower-baths every day, and being frequently in the air, she had almost come to defy catching cold." The conversation is very intimate for Royal table-talk. With Gladstone the Queen did not get on well. "He talks to me as if I were a public meeting," was the truly feminine objection. That was, however, a defect of Gladstone's quality. He has been known to have chatted genially to a deputation of hard-headed Radical politicians (mostly Freethinkers) on the value of hymns in public worship, and the proper position for a church organ. Disraeli was incapable of such obtuseness. Recall how he fascinated Matthew Arnold, one of the most sensitive of men, and one who differed from Disraeli on so many points. There is nothing more illuminating than the account of Disraeli's conversation with Arnold, and we have the record in a spontaneous and contemporaneous letter from Matthew Arnold himself to his mother. Being reminded that he had met Arnold years before, Disraeli said:—

Ah, yes, I remember. At that time I had a great respect for the name you bore, but you yourself were little known. Now you are well known. You have made a reputation, but you will go further yet. You have a great future before you, and you deserve it.

This was a real compliment, coming from a master of many phrases. Arnold referred to Disraeli's abandonment of literature:—

"Yes, he replied, one does not settle these things for one's self, and politics and literature are both very attractive; still, in the one, one's work lasts, and in the other it doesn't. He went on to say that he had given up literature because he was not one of the people who can do two things at once, but that he admired most the men like Cicero, who could.

The truth is that Disraeli had imagination, and plenty of it. The son of that fine, old scholar, Isaac Disraeli, Benjamin had "ink in his blood," and was a born writer. He was a master of words, and, whilst his wit was racial, he was much influenced by such stylists as Pope, Swift, and Voltaire. Of his happy and ready expression a good example is his repartee to the crowd at his early Marylebone election. "On what do you stand?—My head!" Or his remark on the Radical Member of Parliament who said he took his stand on "progress." "It occurred to me that progress was a slippery thing to stand on." His

witty description of the Roman Catholic hostess who received her guests, "with extreme unction," reminds us of Byron's barbed shafts. How excellent, too, is his account of a political opponent who advances to the edge of the platform, and for hours "draws yards of red tape from his mouth." As for his happy phrases, they are as "thick as leaves in Vallombrossa." "Batavian grace"; "superior person"; "the hansom, the gondola of London"; the critics, "the men who have failed"; and "little words in great capitals."

In his youth Disraeli was a great admirer of wise old Montaigne, one of those authors, he says, who "give a spring to the mind," and it is a pity that he forgot the teaching of the great sceptic in the scramble up "the greasy pole" of politics.

MIMNERMUS.

The Three Trials of George William Foote.

(Concluded from page 197.)

V.

It will be remembered that in the original indictment against Foote and Ramsey, Bradlaugh was included, and he took his stand with them in the dock at the Court of Queen's Bench before Lord Coleridge, defending himself. His consummate knowledge of the law stood him in good stead and he was permitted by the judge, in spite of Sir Hardinge Giffard, to be tried separately. "His case was," says Mr. J. M. Robertson, in Mrs. Bonner's life of her distinguished father, "a clear and detailed proof, made good at every point that he had ceased to be in any way concerned even in the selling of the *Freethinker*, before the issue of any of the incriminated numbers." Bradlaugh was particularly severe on the underhand methods of the prosecution—a detailed account of which will be found in the *Life*, and which should be studied by those who would like to know a little more about "blasphemy" as a heinous crime in the eyes of the law.

Lord Coleridge summed up "with great literary skill and dignity," and the jury after deliberating for one hour and ten minutes returned a verdict of "not guilty," which was "received with loud cheers." This acquittal was the third victory in succession Bradlaugh had won against Sir Hardinge Giffard, and it is good to think that this particular bigot must have smarted under the crushing defeats inflicted upon him in law (and justice) by a man whom he despised.

Foote and Ramsey, released from their dreadful confinement, even for a few hours, were delighted at the result, and both Bradlaugh and Foote were deeply moved as they shook hands.

Once again the third trial was adjourned, and when at last Foote and Ramsey alone came up before Lord Coleridge, it lasted only two days. "The Judge," says Mr. Robertson, "treated the prisoners with signal consideration and courtesy. . . . The accused defended themselves, Mr. Foote making a particularly able speech, on which the judge in his summing up, repeatedly complimented him." As there was no doubt whatever of the "blasphemous libels," these were not seriously contested. Ramsey read his brief speech for the defence and was followed by Foote, whose table was crowded with books and papers. And here it may as well be said that this speech for the defence was one of the finest, if not the finest thing, ever done by Foote. He had

had two rehearsals, so to speak, and now he put the whole of his knowledge and power and genius into as great a piece of oratory as ever came from a Freethinker on trial for "blasphemy." He was gently rebuked once only by Lord Coleridge for a reference to Judge North, but apart from that "during the whole of my long defence, he leaned his head upon his hand and looked steadily at me without shifting his gaze." To attempt any summary of this masterpiece would be manifestly unfair. It should be reprinted for the new generation of Freethinkers around us to see how Foote fought, nearly fifty years ago, for the liberty we now enjoy.

One has only to read the summing up of the judge to see how surprised he was, not merely because he never suspected for a moment that a "vulgar blasphemer" could so marvellously and masterfully defend himself, but also because he did not know how much "blasphemy" had been poured out, without a word of censure from the authorities, by such eminent men as Huxley, Spencer, Maudesley, Mill, Amberley, Shelley, Byron, Swinburne and many others. Hearing passages from their works for the first time, he said:—

They do appear to me to be open to exactly the same charge and the same grounds of observations that Mr. Foote's publications are. He says many of these things are written in expensive books, published by publishers of known eminence, and that they circulate in the drawing rooms, studies and libraries of persons of position . . . This crime is a constructed crime, originally manufactured by priests in the interest of their own order to put down dissent and heresy. It now lingers among us, a legacy utterly alien to the spirit of our age, which unfortunately we have not had resolution enough to cast among those absurdities which time holds in his wallet of oblivion.

And that was said nearly fifty years ago!

Foote's peroration was a worthy finale to his speech, and Lord Coleridge did not sum up at once. He said:—

Gentlemen, I should have been glad to have summed up this evening, but the truth is, I am not very strong, and I propose therefore to address you in the morning, and that will give you a full opportunity of reflecting calmly on the very striking and able speech you have just heard."

One other quotation from the learned judge. It shows how he repelled the impudent charge of "indecent" so zealously fostered by Sir William Harcourt and his Christian brothers:—

Mr. Foote is anxious to have it impressed on your minds that he is not a licentious writer, and that this word does not fairly apply to his publications . . . I should say that he is right. He may be blasphemous, but he certainly is not licentious in the ordinary sense of the word; and you do not find him pandering to the bad passions of mankind.

That should, to most people, settle the question of "indecent" once for ever.

The jury took nearly five hours to discuss the issue but were unable to agree and so were discharged. "Acquittal," says Foote, "was hopeless; but no verdict amounted to practically the same thing."

The rigorous confinement and bad food, the plank bed and sickness generally, all combined to make it almost impossible for Foote to conduct another defence for some days, and Lord Coleridge took steps to have the foul treatment meted out to a man of Foote's temperament, immediately altered. The result was that he felt "ready to fight twenty Giffards," but no further prosecution took place on that indictment. Sir Henry Tyler and his backers had to pay the whole costs of the prosecution but, as Foote later pointed out, it was also a loss to him and to Ramsey. Had they been found guilty, they

would have had the sentence run concurrently with Judge North's, and they would have been "shifted from the criminal to the civil side of the prison, worn our own clothes, eaten our own food, received and answered letters and spent our time in rational occupation." But Freethought gained in prestige and the newspapers reported the case very fully—particularly the *Times*. In addition, Lord Coleridge's magnificent speech made quite a number of the opposition admit Foote's sentence was "monstrous," and provoked a number of protests from well known people in the *Daily News*, which I should like to quote in full. They formed a bitter remonstrance against the "Liberal" Government. Memorials for Foote's release came from all parts of the country, and the names cited by Foote as some of the signatories would surprise, even to this day, those who are still in favour of the retention of the Blasphemy Laws—whatever their economic opinions may be. Sir W. Harcourt was adamant, "he never does the right thing," said the *Weekly Dispatch*, "when he has a chance of going wrong." And he deliberately lied in the House of Commons when he said the publication was "an obscene libel." Even the *Daily News* could not stomach this and pointed out that Foote and Ramsey were convicted for publishing a "blasphemous" not an "obscene" libel. Mr. Gladstone did nothing, and the prisoners had to serve their sentences out in entirety.

Foote saw there was nothing to do but resign himself to his fate, and so set about to mitigate his imprisonment as much as possible. He was, under a governor such as Colonel Milman able to do so and managed to get in an extensive course of reading, not only of English writers but also of French, and he even took up Italian.

But the ten months he still had to serve were a terrible tax on his powers, and he was eventually too tired and weak to read for more than an hour or so a day.

Kemp suffered terribly. Ramsey, when released, was met by a crowd and had to make a speech at the Hall of Science, and at last Foote's day of freedom drew nigh. It would be difficult to describe his feelings when at last the prison gates opened, and the "mighty shout broke from the huge crowd outside." There was a public breakfast and a speech from Foote, and another from Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant, and at last he was home . . . Foote's trial and imprisonment are historic events. They did not end trials for blasphemy, but the authorities want no more, and obviously hate bringing any action if it can be avoided. Brought up as a "vulgar blasphemer," Foote compelled the admiration of the Lord Chief Justice of England, and even that of a vindictive and bigoted Roman Catholic like Judge North. His twelve month's imprisonment was, in its way, as foul a blot on justice as the burning of Bruno, if we take the difference of the centuries and public opinion into consideration. It was the worst sentence Judge North could give with impunity, and when one takes up the Christmas Number of the *Freethinker* and thinks a man got twelve months for publishing it, it makes one ashamed of his kind and humanity.

The Blasphemy Laws are still unrepealed, and at any moment a man may be called to account for laughing at silly fables because some people call them sacred. That should be made impossible. Our task is to go on making Freethinkers, and so to educate public opinion that it will compel Parliament to repeal the infamous laws; and thus Foote's trials and imprisonment and sufferings will not have been in vain.

The Conspiracy of Press and Priest.

THERE is a religious belief so current as to amount to a common assumption—viz., that there is a God whose attitude towards mankind is that of a merciful father. As he is also credited with being omnipotent man is virtually unassailable, at least in theory.

Primitive man, in all probability, considered himself the very thrall of supernatural beings, gods of some sort or other, who were always watching him. Every success or failure was therefore attributed to them. Belief in this barbaric thralldom of the savage order was, after countless ages, modified. When belief in the gods had assumed the form of monotheism, as was eventually done by the Jews, this supernatural control took the form of theocracy: Jahveh was their ruler and King. It was he who declared war and made peace, through his priesthood, of course. It was for this very reason that Saul was considered to be a usurper; and that is why David, who had ascended a usurper's throne, displayed such sycophantic self-abnegation in his fulsome laudations of his God, in the psalms accredited to him.

This idea, or dogma rather, was taken over, along with their sacred book, the Old Testament, by the founders of the Christian cult, but in a still more modified form which has been perpetuated by the Christian Church.

Jahveh's attitude was now, not that of a Ruler, but that of a Merciful Father. Such was his solicitude for our well being, that the Founder of the New cult is made to say: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." The Church, through its battalions of priests, has by means of infinite repetitions week-in, week-out, in prayers, hymns and devotions, given this supposed deliverance of Jesus the credal status of an axiom. To deny or even to doubt it was blasphemy—a crime that was atoned only at the stake.

Now this dogmatic assumption can be tested or checked in two distinct ways: by studying the established correlations which obtain throughout the sentient world between the different kinds of living creatures. For instance, is there any evidence of a provision universally made to prevent creatures from inflicting sufferings upon one another; in other words, are the organs and faculties with which they are endowed, obviously destined to promote universal amity and goodwill?

Alas! The organs and instincts with which living creatures are endowed unmistakably point to an attitude diametrically the reverse of that.

This relationship is typically exemplified by that which exists between the wolf and the lamb. In short, one half of the realm of life lives by devouring the other half. But as that line of investigation is not the one we are concerned with in this article we will pursue it no further.

The other way of checking the truth of the "providence" dogma with which a merciful omnipotent Father in Heaven is credited, is to observe and to make a faithful record of how inanimate forces of Nature behave towards sentient beings in general and towards man in particular.

We have had this winter an extraordinary display of Nature's giant forces at work. The winds have taken a leading rôle. Gales, hurricanes, and cyclonic blasts of extraordinary violence have been the

order of the day. And even the ordinary monsoons and typhoons have displayed more fury than usual. Jointly they have lashed the oceans into devastating storms which have littered land and sea with their wrecks and carnage.

As I write I read a headline: "Nineteen lives lost in a blizzard." This is typical of the budget of woeful calamities with which the mind is daily "regaled" by the morning papers. There is *never* a storm that does not leave a record of the loss of life and property—a devastation that is always proportioned to its violence and the extent of its sweep.

I will now give a few quotations from the *Daily Herald's* correspondent's account of Nature's playful doings at Brisbane, Australia.

"It is feared that the cyclone which caused the recent floods may return with consequences too terrible to contemplate. Coastal districts up to 100 miles North and 100 miles South of Brisbane have been inundated. In the suburbs of Rocklea and Chelmer, only the roofs of the houses are visible."

And our Thames Valley has had a rare experience of similar floodings which have been regularly recorded in our morning papers.

But no record has ever been made that even one of these destructive powers ever arrested itself or turned aside in case valuable property or precious lives were in its path.

Jesus's deliverance in respect to the sparrow would give one a right to expect it. The press of the world, however, never volunteers a *hint* as to the absolute disagreement between the facts of experience and the dogma of religion, leave alone a categorical statement *how the one belies the other irremediably*.

The only "miracle" that has ever happened to human beings is that which would have happened to a log, a stone, or a carcase had it been in its place, *i.e.*, the chance of position or the chance of a resultant force with an erratic direction.

These devastating forces were not confined to cyclones, rushing floods, and avalanches of snow. No, fulminating Jove joined in the fray and with good effect. He made the cloud-bursts torrential enough to be devastating on a grand scale, as exemplified in the overwhelming floods at Brisbane already alluded to.

Nor was "divine providence" content with the dire holocausts effected by fires and floods though their devastations were prolific enough of ruin and suffering to satisfy any malevolent "providence" however Satanic.

Finally, the earthquake, with its omnipotent powers, was widely brought into operation. And its more than tragic effects were duly recorded in the press of the world.

I will now append an excerpt from the *Daily Herald's* record of the disasters wrought just within one of the regions where it was allowed to do its baneful work of ruin and death:—

"Eye-witnesses of the devastations in Napier (New Zealand) caused by the great earthquake, say, that it is impossible to exaggerate the position. The scene is almost indescribable. The whole business area has been wiped out. Hardly a house remains inhabitable. The streets are a blazing oil inferno. Fires are still raging; but the fire engines were pinned in their station. But as the water-mains were burst, they would in any case have been useless."

"A young girl," the correspondent adds, "rushed into my arms. I endeavoured to pacify her, remarking that it would be over in a second. Then the big crash came; and one of the steel pillars fell across the girl's body, she lay crushed along the counter pleading for freedom. The pillar held her in such a position that within a moment her life was gone!"

The *Central News* states that "when the shock came a number of people were at devotions in St. John's Cathedral, one of the finest ecclesiastical buildings in New Zealand. In a moment they were buried beneath piles of bricks and masonry; and a son sees his mother, that could not be rescued, burned alive."

What a piece of grim mockery are the words put into the mouth of Jesus about the "sparrow," as quoted above, when faced with the tragedy of facts.

And yet the most scrupulous care is exercised by the entire press to avoid inserting even a casual hint how all these sinister facts gave the "lie absolute" to the Christian dogma of a divine providence mercifully watching over mankind.

If only the *attention* of the public (no elucidation is needed) were drawn to how the dogma is daily, yea even hourly, belied throughout the wide world, it would have been relegated to mythland ages ago.

Despite the infinitude of indiscriminate suffering and misery thus faithfully recorded in the world's daily press, the priest nevertheless, never ceases to proclaim his God as a merciful Father that protects us from peril and shields us from suffering and death.

He pretends to be as oblivious of the facts of life as the press is of the dogmatic assumption of the Christian creed. Each party confines his attention to his own business as if no other existed: the press, to the calamities of life; the priest, to the myths of his religion.

Since the above was written, it is now known that Jahveh's celestial artillery has been brought into action. "The earth has been bombarded from space." Three great meteors fell in Brazil and fired and depopulated hundreds of miles of jungle.

But such is the vitality of a superstition, the dogma will serve the priest as heretofore.

Had they fallen on London instead of the jungle of Brazil, it would probably survive after a few thousand apologetic sermons had been delivered. And the conspiracy of silence of press and priest would be as effective as ever.

KERIDON.

False Friends of Freethought.

THE abuse of the term "religious" to describe anyone who is a disbeliever in supernaturalism is attributable to confusion or dishonesty of thought. It will not do to belittle "the machinery of the dictionary." The up-to-date standard dictionary is an essential thing in every thinker's library. It gives us the generally accepted meanings of words—the significance of what words convey to the best informed minds of our age—what they really represent in the view of all educated people. I look up *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, and I find the first meaning of Religion given therein is "The recognition of supernatural powers and of the duty lying upon man to yield obedience to these." And it is notorious from John O'Groats to Land's End that 999 out of every thousand "men in the street," educated and uneducated (or half educated) associate the terms "religion" and "religious" with supernaturalism and belief in the supernatural. The Freethinker who believes in militancy and independence in the campaign against ecclesiastical corporations and institutions disdains to descend to the chicanery of religionists who claim to be "advanced," "modern," or "liberal"; who even claim the name of "Freethinker," and who therefore conversely might be described as "Freethinking Religionists!"—fit bedfellows for "Religious Freethinkers!"

It is the height of fatuousness, futility and folly in

the great work of emancipating enslaved minds to attempt to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. The average individual does not understand how "Religious" and "Atheistic" can be made interchangeable terms when by all speech, writing, custom, usage and experience he has been taught to regard them as representing diametrically opposed ideas. The plain-minded, militant, independent Freethinker regards such a title as "Religious Rationalist" as being composed of mutually exclusive and mutually destructive terms. Is he right or is he wrong?

I maintain that he is clearly and indubitably right. It is strange to find a professed Freethinker writing such a sentence as this: "I like the term 'religion,' though I would usually and, as far as possible, avoid it if it irritated listeners." The main concern of any Freethinker is not the personal susceptibilities of his audience—it is the ascertainment, promulgation and enforcement of Truth. The average man likes a clear-cut, and detests a confused issue. Once we adopt the designation "religious" for those engaged in the battle against superstition and supernaturalism, we render the battle in the eyes of all spectators one of wooden swords—an unreal and farcical affair!

In the minds of 99 per cent of the population there can be no conception of such a thing as a "non-theological religion" or a "religion without a God." Once you speak of "religion" to the ordinary man, the word at once conjures up before him the vision of the priest or parson. You cannot without disastrous results put the new wine of Freethought into the old wineskins of a phraseology which represents old, discredited, tyrannical, oppressive, enslaving and debasing things. We can only learn or be taught by the lessons of past history. What the significance of the term "religious" and the effect of its use a hundred years hence may be we cannot know. At the moment we do know its almost universal significance and that the effect of its use in describing any who disbelieve in the existing ecclesiastical systems is to delibitate Freethought, confuse the issues, and paralyze the efforts of the searchers after Truth.

The Rationalist I have already quoted describes "Religion" as "the personal and social movement for order and harmony in man and man's world." When one contrasts this with the standard Dictionary meaning, one is comically reminded of *Athanasius contra mundum*. But you cannot sow tares and look for a crop of oats any more than our ancestors could do a thousand years since. There are essential things that do not alter. Two and two make four—not five or three. There is an undue and mendacious straining after parallels. But the last things anyone would ever dream of as being associated with "religion" in all ages down to the present is "harmony" or "order." On the contrary. History attests that more than any other influence "religion" has been disruptive, anti-social, and a breeder of ill-will. As Artemus Ward the great American humorist put it: "There is no fit like a religious fit."

It is deplorable—it is saddening—but it is true that the very large majority of men, eminent in art, science, letters, poetry and politics, defer to the conventional religious beliefs of the time, though many of them must be painfully aware of the wretchedness and inhuman conditions they help to perpetuate. There is probably more excuse for this cowardly attitude among artists and writers who are retired within themselves or live in the clouds. But the scientists and politicians have no excuse. What is the purpose of making simple things complex, plain things involved, and clear things obscure except to bluff the uneducated and the unthinking by prideful,

pompous and pedantic language not understood of the common people? There is no place for the egoist or the pedant or the snob in the ranks of the Army of Freethought. The reprehensible attempt to blot out or blur the essential differences between Religionists and Freethinkers is a crime against Humanity. In name, in quality and in its effects religion has ever been the enslaver and degrader of man.

IGNOTUS.

Peter Weston's Shop.

At 77 Newgate Street, Newcastle, over thirty years ago people often stood gazing and reading at a shop window. Some chuckled and grinned; whilst others looked as solemn as the donkeys on Whitley Sands, and left with ruffled feelings. What was the attraction? Only by reading could the curiosity be satisfied. Right in the middle of the window, close up against the glass, would be a copy of the *Christian Herald*, and also the *War Cry*, whilst crucified at it were between the two, would be a copy of a Freethought paper, often with a picture on the front page which raised both grins and groans.

One week might be seen a parson depicted as a card-sharper with his three cards marked Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and the country joskins fumbling in their pockets for something to put on the card. Another week would show a picture of the eye of the Lord scanning his tender mercies over all his works, which included a church steeple being struck by lightning; burning lava streaming down the mountain side on to the villages below; shipwrecks at sea; and devastating floods over fair lands. Another week would show a picture of heaven with Saint Peter sitting just within the gate, with his keys in his hand, and four parsons of different types running in the opposite direction on seeing a skeleton personified as death with his scythe, which they would have to pass to enter. This picture was called "Heaven is our home." Another fine bit was one named "The Clerical Macbeth," where the parson in the pulpit is aghast as he sees the ghost appear as the figure of truth, and he cries "Avaunt and quit my sight, let the earth hide thee, take any shape but that." Yet another week would bring another tickler, showing the priest as a schoolmaster with a class of children and a blackboard headed "Church Arithmetic"; then followed—"Three time one are one. Father equals Son and Ghost; Son equals Father and Ghost; Ghost equals Son and Father"; and one little heretic is made to stand upon a form for punishment because he cannot understand it.

Below these pictures would hang a string of pamphlets with such titles as Mr. Adam, Captain Noah, Juggling Jacob, General Joshua, Professor Sampson, Holy Moses, etc. Such pictures and pamphlets soon made Peter's shop known both far and wide, and often served as a meeting place for heretics of all grades and ages. Even Christian Evidence men, "Anti-Infidels" men, and Spiritualists all found their way to this "den of iniquity," as it was looked upon by the pious.

Peter spoke with an easy discernible Scottish accent, and had many Scottish visitors. One of these, John Wood, was secretary of the local Christian Evidence Society. By the colour of his beard, his strong Scottish accent, and his fondness for snuff, he might have passed for Peter's "verra brither." On his entering the shop one morning he exclaimed, "Whell, Peter, what news hae ye this morning?"—"Aa naething much," said Peter, "Aye jist had Robinson the spiritualist in; he tells me he's had an interview wic Joe Brown." (Jos. Brown, an Atheist, here referred to, had been about a month dead) "Oh, Aye, um hum," says Wood tapping his snuff-box, which they exchange, "Aye," continued Peter, "Robinson tells me Joe is in the third sphere." "The third sphere, Peter, aye, um hum, were that up or doon, then, Peter?" "Damn," says Peter, "I quite forgot to ask him that, mon," bringing his fist down on the counter with such a thud as to frighten his cat as though it had been scalded.

That cat, although it sometimes ran off with Peter's kippers, was a favourite pet. One day the Rev. Marsden Gibson called at the shop, and soon got talking about God. Peter's cat was on the counter and was all attention as he stroked it. After listening for a short time, Peter could stand it no longer, and exclaimed firmly and loudly, "Gibson, ye know nae mair about God, nor that cat."

Poor brave Peter, who long ago went to the same "sphere" as Brown, Robinson, Wood and Gibson, has left us some endearing memories. He was made of that stuff of which martyrs are made. He lived, and would have died if need be, for Freethought. Whilst two persons were being tried in Newcastle, one of whom was sent to prison for selling Doctor Allbutt's *Wife Handbook*, and other booksellers quaked and hid their copies. Peter never took it out of his window except when dusting it. Hats off then, to the memory of Peter Weston, who said he wad nae even take his tie frae a church clock.

J. G. BARTRAM.

Acid Drops.

We desire to enter a solemn protest against the draw in the Irish Sweepstake. The public was assured that everything should be quite fair and above board, and that only persons concerned with the actual drawing of the tickets should be those named. We now find that not to be the case. The drawing of at least two of the tickets was a pure "fake." According to the *Roman Catholic Universe*, of March 27, two prizes were drawn by those who had "sought St. Anthony's aid." We protest against this method of conducting a sweepstake. In a "draw" everyone is supposed to stand an equal chance, but how can it be equal when the unseen hand of St. Anthony is guiding the hand of the nurse to draw the ticket he has been asked to see is drawn. That makes the sweep as much a swindle as though some of the officials themselves had arranged it, and reduces St. Anthony to the level of a common turf sharp. On a race-course a bookmaker who behaved in a way analogous to this would stand a chance of being lynched. We protest against the Saints interfering in the drawing of tickets. Why if the Pope took three tickets we might expect Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to see that he drew first, second and third.

While we are on the question of St. Anthony swindling so many people out of their chance of getting a prize in the Irish Sweepstake, we may record some of the following advertisements which a Liverpool reader sends us from recent issues of the *Liverpool Echo* :—

Grateful thanks to St. Teresa and St. Anthony for work.

Thanks to St. Jude for favours received.

Thanks to St. Teresa of Jesus for huge favour.

Delayed thanks to Sacred Heart for favours received.

Thanks to St. Teresa for favours received. Publication promised.

Grateful thanks to St. Jude for success in examination.

There are plenty more, but all in the same. Generally speaking the Saints appear to lead a very busy life, and to have a finger in almost everything going—provided the proper fees are paid.

Representatives of over fifty Christian congregations and organizations, passed the following resolution at Birmingham :—

"That this gathering, representing all Christian congregations in Birmingham, meeting on the evening of the draw in connexion with the Irish (Grand National) Sweepstake, desires to express its conviction that all such lotteries are anti-social, and that Christian people should have absolutely no part in them.

This is a grave warning to the faithful, and it is to be hoped that they will take it to heart; the next time any one of them is thinking of spending ten shillings in a lottery they must refrain—and give it to the Church

which deals in certainties. The humility in the resolution is touching in its implication that Christians form the bulk of society.

Gipsy Smith told a pious gathering: "You want other people to see Jesus? Then let them see Jesus in you, so that they can't help falling down and worshipping him when they see him!" We hope the parsons appreciate this criticism, by implication, of the effectiveness of their training. They have had control of their clients from tender years, have explained to them how to be like Jesus, and have lectured them Sunday after Sunday for years. Yet their clients are not like Jesus, according to Gipsy Smith. That is a poor compliment for the parsons. They should ask the Gipsy what the devil he means by it. If his criticism is true to fact, then all the parsons should lose their jobs. Seemingly, they have made their clients, not Christ-like, but merely different from ordinary men and women. If that is the case, we extend to the poor devils our sincere commiseration in their misfortune.

Mr. J. S. Hawnt, M.Sc., Ph.D., Assistant Director of Education for Chesterfield has been warning the Sunday schools to be prepared for trouble in the future, when the State's improved system of education begins to be effective. He warns them that the Sunday school will have to deal with better material. He suggests that the boys and girls of the future will be more forward mentally, "with a greater passion for truth in virtue of their work in science, and the demand for increased accuracy in other subjects." It is rather disconcerting of Mr. Hawnt baldly to say that "P.S.A.'s and institute services will not meet the needs of the adolescents of to-morrow." It is equivalent to saying that such things are appealing only to the more backward types of mentality of to-day. And as for the better types of the future which the day schools are to produce, we don't quite see how the present-day Sunday school worker can prepare to meet their "needs." How can the mentally inferior possibly understand the needs of the mentally superior or the working of their intelligence?

The chief difficulty, says the Rev. R. C. Gillic, in persuading people to read the Bible daily is their underlying belief that the Bible is a dull book. They praise it and take it as the foundation of their faith, but if assured it is dull they will be indisposed to spend much time and effort on it. The rev. gentleman adds that "people can be lured to deeper study of the Bible by the steadfast assurance that it is the most fascinating book in the world." Great is steadfast assurance, and wonderfully potent! If the great gullible public, which keeps the parsons off the Labour Exchanges, was steadfastly and continuously assured that Grimm's *Fairy Tales* was a sacred book direct from God, containing unique spiritual truth for mankind, we have no doubt that people could be "lured" into studying the *Tales* deeply and reverently day by day, and persuaded into discovering spiritual inspiration by the bucketful. Parson have nothing to learn concerning the psychological art of suggestion. How cleverly they manipulate it to get the godly to accept them at their own valuation!

Speaking about the new areas opened up around London under housing schemes, and the dearth of Sunday school accommodation for the children, the Rev. Ensor Walters told the following tale—

At Durham a little lad said, "Father will hide me if I can't get admitted to the Sunday School!" In the interest of his body as well as his soul we got him in. (Laughter.)

The father's loving anxiety concerning his son's spiritual welfare will undoubtedly secure him a certain seat in heaven.

The following from the *Sydney Bulletin*, is worth reprinting. We doubt if any London paper would print it:—

"Feng-Shui: Missiandom in China is all agog over the conversion of President Chiang Kai-shek to Christ-

ianity. Chiang gave earnest consideration to all forms of religion, including Islam and Christian Science, and decided that Christianity was the best. Among other things he found that it did not conflict with nationalism, the ethics of big business and China's alleged need of a big army and navy—all objectives of the party he represents. Consequently he went to Shanghai and was quietly baptised by a Chinese pastor at the Young Allen Memorial Church, later leaving for Ningpo, where the tombs of his family are located, to acquaint his ancestors with the step. Three of the Flowery Kingdom's leading war lords now belong to the Christian communion. Missionary bodies are now full of hope that the Kuomintang will change its policy of blocking the activities of foreign Christian schools, but up to date there is not the slightest sign of this. The Chinaman has no intolerance for the native brand of Christianity. It is the imported variety that makes him see red. Chiang's move is probably a far-sighted realization of the fact that Confucianism, with its doctrine of gentlemanly inactivity and pacifism, is no good for a nation eager to industrialize itself.

Ten members of the Scottish Football Association travelled by the train that was smashed-up in the terrible railway accident of March 22. They were accompanied by eleven members of the Association. All were unhurt, and were brought back to London. While the party were having tea the President of the Association expressed his gratitude to God for safeguarding the party. Religious egotism is always ridiculous, but this time it was disgusting. Mere decency would have prevented anyone making such a speech. A god who could spend his time safeguarding the Football Association while permitting so many others to be killed or injured is well worthy of the worshippers who could thank him for his criminal partiality. If that is a sample of the mentality developed by religion, then, obviously the less the world has of it the better.

We see that a Free Church Party is to be formed in the House of Commons, with the object of safeguarding the interests of the Free Churches. Some forty members of the Labour Party are said to have joined. It is this kind of thing that helps to bring parliamentary government into contempt. These men are voted into parliament by all sections of the community, and it is monstrous that having once got there they should use their votes to promote the religious interests of a mere religious section. We have already had the spectacle of a Minister of Education holding secret confabs with a number of parsons to see what they wish in the matter of the schools, and at this rate we shall have the government in power at the mercy of an avowed combination of sectarian interests. We shall be seeing an illustration of this, in all probability, when the government proposals with regard to the Sunday question. For these seem, if the forecasts are correct, to be lacking in either principle or common sense. If the House of Commons agrees to them, then it will agree to anything.

From Halifax comes a lamentation by the Rev. Albert Hall, that: "There are thousands of so-called Christians who have never learnt really to pray, and as for our churches [Wesleyan], in many of them collective prayer has become very largely a lost art." If this is the case, we presume that these Christians deficient in the art of praying are merely getting from God what he thinks they deserve, and are losing the precious extras which right and proper praying wheedles out of God. When this is realized, there should be a great rush for initiation into the art of reverent wheedling. Incidentally, we would point out that in the modern art of praying, you avoid asking for what you personally desire. To ask that would sound selfish. You request a benefit for someone else or a favour to be bestowed on some cause. This shows God that you are oozing good-will and love and altruism from every pore, and what you really desire comes along in due course. It is, however, still fashionable to tell God how wonderful he is and how humble, etc., you are, in case he should have forgotten these important facts.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

C. TOMLINSON.—Pleased to hear from one who has read the *Freethinker* since 1888 with ever increasing enjoyment. With a view to the production of our Jubilee Number we should be glad to hear from those who have been reading the paper from a still earlier date.

S.H.—Meredith's *Prophet of Nazareth* is only to be procured second-hand. It is too large a book for reprinting as a whole. We agree that it is one of the most thorough-going criticisms of the life and teaching of Jesus in existence.

MR. EGERTON STAFFORD writes offering the suggestion that we should issue *Christianity and Slavery, Woman and Christianity, and Creed and Character* in one volume. We have thought of doing this as the whole would form a useful survey of the influence of Christianity on civilization. We may act on the suggestion one day.

MR. R. S. READY sends us an interesting excerpt from the letter of a new member of the Liverpool Branch. He says, "I have been for a long time in the political field, and it has taken me ten years to realize that most of our work in that field is more or less valueless until the tasks of the N.S.S. are nearer completion." We quite agree, and if one desires proof a study of the actions and attitudes of the different political parties should provide it.

H. MORGAN thinks "*God and the Universe* is an eye-opener and a bombshell." We take this as it is meant, although a bombshell, properly directed should serve as an eye closer.

H. B. SAMUELS.—Much obliged for cuttings. It is well to bear such things in mind.

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

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

The National Secular Society's Office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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

Sugar Plums

We beg to remind London readers of the Social and Dance that will take place at the Caxton Hall, on Saturday, April 17. There will be a good musical programme, in addition to the dancing. The price of the tickets will be 2s. 6d. each, which will include refreshments. Application for tickets should be made as early as possible to either the *Freethinker* Office, or to the N.S.S. Secretary, 62 Farringdon Street E.C.4. It will make it easier for those who have the arrangements in hand.

Mr. Cohen brought his winter lecturing to a close with two meetings on Sunday last—the afternoon at Burnley and the evening at Accrington. Both meetings were good ones, and there were many friends present from Preston, Blackburn and other adjacent towns. Mr. Cohen has had an unusually busy season, with both lecturing and writing, and could do with a rest. But that will not be possible until after the Conference at least. Still, the meetings have been good all over the country, and that bears testimony to the spread of Freethinking ideas. That is the main thing.

Next week we hope to be able to announce where the Conference will be this year. The date will be Whit-Sunday. Meanwhile both Branches and members are reminded that resolution for the Conference Agenda must be in the hands of the General Secretary not later than April 11. Individual members have the same right as Branches in this matter. Fuller information will be given next week.

The National Secular Society appears to be the only organization in the country prepared to fight the saboteur bigots. Organizations interested in the rationalization of Sundays, and more powerful than the N.S.S.

have been invited to co-operate, but have definitely, and, emphatically declined. Therefore we fight on alone. Every Freethinker should be in possession of Mr. A. D. McLaren's pamphlet, *The Christian Sunday, its History and its Fruits*, 2½d., post free, from the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, or N.S.S. offices, 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Those who can afford to occasionally leave a copy behind in the train, etc., may be sure of helping in a useful manner.

The course of lectures, at Streatham, arranged through a friend of the movement in Streatham, came to a very successful close on Sunday last, Mr. C. Ratcliffe being the speaker. The meetings have been well attended, and there has been a good sale of literature. We hope the experiment will be pursued in the autumn.

The *Manchester Evening News* describes Mr. Cohen's *God and the Universe* as "A characteristically provocative examination of recent orthodox pronouncements on religion and science, with a notable exchange of views between Professor Eddington and the author." The *New Schoolmaster* says, "Mr. Cohen puts forth in trenchant manner views that will undoubtedly arouse both sympathy and indignation, and consequently should form the nucleus of many a debating milien." If the book does that the author will be well content.

Meanwhile we are pleased to hear from our shop manager that *God and the Universe* is selling steadily and well, although published only about a month ago, the first edition looks like being exhausted in a few weeks, which means a second edition will have soon to be on the market. Bearing in mind the small amount of publicity given to the book—outside the *Freethinker*, this sets up a record in Freethought publications. It is evident that the book is one that is needed; and it is time that the attempts to set up some sort of a reconciliation between religion and science were met with a straight and uncompromising criticism. Orders for the book are now beginning to come in from abroad, including one large order from the United States.

Messrs. Watts & Co., have added four more volumes to their Thinker's Library, which at 1s. each offers remarkably good value for money. The four new titles are *Lectures and Essays*, by T. H. Huxley, *The Churches and Modern Thought*, by Vivian Phelps, *An Agnostic's Apology*, by Leslie Stephen, and an abridged edition of Grant Allen's *Evolution of the Idea of God*. These are four useful volumes, and should do much good. It would have been well, however, if the dates of the original issues of these works had been given for the guidance of readers who are not acquainted with the works. It inflicts an unintentional injustice on men to have their works, written many years ago, put into the hands of readers, who may not be able to apply the necessary corrections, or additions, that time has brought. But the books are among some of the cheapest publications to-day, and we commend them to our readers.

Mr. E. Royston Pike's latest volume *Slayers of Superstition* (Watts & Co., 3s. 6d. net) gives a brief but quite good account of some of the early Deists who risked imprisonment for their uncompromising attacks on revealed religion. The first chapter is a short but well informed resumé of "The origins of European scepticism," after which the life and writings of Lord Herbert of Cherburg, Hobbes, Blount, Toland, Collins, Wollaston, Tindal, Woolston, Chubb, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, Rousseau and other "infidels" are dealt with in a readable manner.

If one may venture a criticism it is that Mr. Pike could have extended his accounts a little further, and at least dealt with some of the Christian replies more fully. Bishop Butler's *Analogy of Religion* is not mentioned and Ieland's *View of the Deistical Writers* ought to have been dealt with. Moreover some bibliographical notes would have made the book of real use in one's library instead of being just a short introduction to the brave old fighters of the eighteenth century.

A Famous French Philosopher.

THE celebrated Gallic seer, René Descartes, shines as a star in the annals of modern thought. A contemporary of Harvey's, Descartes first saw the light at La Haye, in Touraine, in 1596. A cadet of an opulent family related to the nobility, he was destined by his father for a military career. Trained in a Jesuit academy he there studied the classic tongues and displayed a keen interest in such science as the curriculum provided. The inexact sciences he early discarded as furnishing slender support for the certitudes he was determined to establish. In mathematics, on the other hand, he recognized the pathway to reality.

Frail in constitution, he passed seven years in Paris pursuing congenial studies, while striving to strengthen his health. Subsequently, while serving under various sovereigns as a military engineer, he gained considerable knowledge of the countries he visited. He was present at the opening campaigns of the remorseless Thirty Years' War, and later witnessed the siege of La Rochelle in France. He then retired to Paris, but the distractions of the gay capital grated on the nerves of the serious Descartes. Moreover, his questioning spirit proved repugnant to his more orthodox acquaintances, and he was made uneasy by the too curious inquiries of ecclesiastical agents. His naturally nervous temperament urged him to seek a safer asylum. This he found in the freer atmosphere of Protestant Holland, but even there his daring speculations infuriated the Dutch divines.

After residing in Amsterdam and other cities in the Netherlands for twenty years, he was invited in 1649 to the court of Queen Christina at Stockholm in Sweden. Christina was anxious to acquire the rudiments of science, and Descartes accepted the proffered post as instructor. His royal mistress encouraged the philosopher to compose his treatise on the emotions—*Les Passions de l'ame*. But to a man of Descartes' delicate constitution the inclemencies of the northern winter, combined with the imperious methods of his pupil—for Christina appointed her daily lessons at five in the morning—soon proved fatal. In 1650, at the early age of fifty-four, Descartes succumbed to an attack of inflammation of the lungs.

Descartes' writings include mathematical, optical, and philosophical studies. His analysis of the emotions, and his speculations concerning the relations of mind and body are famous. His supremely critical intellect rebelled against the barren subtleties of scholasticism. Unproved assumptions seemed to him a flimsy foundation for any system deserving the name of philosophy. On the other hand, it appeared to Descartes a necessary postulate that the truth of a proposition is demonstrated by its consistency and clearness. By this mode of reasoning he convinces himself of divine existence. His personal existence he establishes by the consideration that he thinks, and to think, is to be. His phrase, *Je pense, donc je suis*, he made the basis of his philosophy. In its Latin form, *Cogito ergo sum*, I think, therefore I am this aphorism has attained immortality. And even if the truth of this proposition be doubted, the very fact of doubting proves the existence of the doubter. *Dubito ergo sum*.

Descartes was a born mathematician endowed with great aptitude for abstract reasoning. He was intensely ambitious to base knowledge on solid foundations, impregnable to all assault. The evidence of our senses, beyond which there is no appeal, proclaims the existence of an external world built up of material entities.

The simplest, and therefore the most essential attributes of matter are represented by extension, mobility, and divisibility. The form theory of Aristotle he dismisses, and he also rejects the atomic doctrines of the ancients. He also denies the existence of space for, he contends, all modes of existence possess the property of extension. Teleology, or the theory of final causes he repudiates, for obviously it is arrogance in man to ascribe limited powers to an infinite and omnipotent divinity. The material universe is a mechanism. Through vortical or whirling activity within material bodies themselves, the varied transformations we see in Nature are accomplished. Matter and the motions of matter are solely responsible for all natural phenomena.

With fearless consistency, Descartes extends these purely mechanical principles from the inorganic or lifeless realm to the kingdom of life itself. Animal organisms he regards as living machines. He cites Harvey's demonstration of the mechanical nature of the circulation of the blood as conclusive evidence of this. Descartes earnestly espouses Harvey's discovery, and was largely instrumental in securing scientific acceptance for the then novel doctrine. And Descartes ran in advance of Harvey, inasmuch as he completely abandoned the remnants of classical misconception to which the Englishman so persistently clung. Again, in the opinion of competent judges, Descartes' theory of the human organism as a mechanical structure forms the real foundation of modern physiology. Moreover, he strove to interpret the functions of the nervous system in terms of mechanics. He contended that impulses are conducted from the brain by means of the nerves to the muscles which are thus stimulated into action.

Automatic or reflex action he clearly understood, and in some measure explained. These reflex motions may not awaken consciousness, and are mainly mechanical. So far as the lower animals are concerned, all their activities are completely mechanical. They are not conscious, he declares, as they possess no soul. Man, however, is a conscious creature divinely endowed with an immortal soul or spirit. Descartes pictures this supposed spirit as an entity that leads a life independently of that of the body. But, as soul and body unquestionably co-operate, he surmised that the seat of the soul's activities lies in the pineal gland of the human brain. In the *glandula pinealis*, he assumed that nervous impulses react upon the immortal spirit "and impart to it a share in mental impressions; there, on the other hand, the soul substance makes impressions on the nervous system, which give rise to conscious actions."

In the psychological scheme of Descartes six primary emotions are recognized. These are: Admiration or wonder, sadness, desire, love, hate and joy. Wonder, he considers as most intellectual, and consequently is more closely associated with the soul than the body. "It is a sudden surprise of our soul which causes it to consider with attention that which to it appears infrequent and extraordinary." The remaining emotions are explained more mechanically. Each of these may arise through the influences of external Nature on the bodily framework. Memory may also play its part, for man's recollections of past pleasurable or painful emotional states may restore these feelings. And even when one sees and remembers some object previously associated with an emotional experience this may suffice to induce the emotion. This appears to have been the earliest recognition of a conditioned reaction.

Descartes' theory of animal automatism in which the lower creatures were regarded as animated machines, destitute of sensation and soul alike, em-

boldened later philosophers to extend this mechanical doctrine to man himself. If mechanistic principles sufficed to explain the phenomena of life in animals why assume the existence of a soul which fails to elucidate anything whatever?

The Cartesian philosophy thus exercised a potent influence on the development of materialism. To what extent Descartes sincerely believed in an immortal human soul is problematical. A brilliant and courageous thinker, he nevertheless, displayed no undue desire to merit a martyr's crown. Judiciously enough, he constantly professes a deep and devout veneration for the Roman Church, and reiterates his unwavering faith in man's immortality. As a further precaution, he disarms danger by his assertion that his theory of the cosmos may be regarded as a mere exercise of the imaginative faculty. Verily, it is quite conceivable that the universe may have arisen in the manner his speculation assumes, but it is everywhere acknowledged that the Church is the appointed custodian and teacher of the divinely revealed story of the creation.

Descartes admits his indebtedness to Harvey, but to no other interpreter of Nature does he make honourable mention. Yet, in the absence of the many and varied discoveries of his predecessors, his own achievements would have been impossible. Descartes' suggestion that what may appear true, philosophically, still remains false theologically, was eagerly embraced. The theory of the double-truth became fashionable, and enlightened ecclesiastics were thus enabled to espouse materialistic opinions without risking the dungeon, the torture-chamber, or the stake.

T. F. PALMER.

The Story of an Ex-Jesuit.

(Concluded from page 171.)

TWICE during his two years novitiate as a Jesuit, Barrett was permitted to receive visits from his mother. Upon the first occasion, he says:—

I felt the impulse to rush madly to her and take her in my arms. It was no doubt what she eagerly awaited. But the cold hand of religious modesty and decorum checked me and I approached her with downcast eyes and pretended calm. The kiss I gave her was in accord with religious prescription, restrained, a kind *pax Christi* . . . Poor mother!! How those interviews must have wounded her gentle and affectionate heart, yet not for worlds would she have allowed me to see her pain. She was trying as best she could to play the game—the game that Catholic mothers are asked to play—that of reinforcing the work of the Church in the ecclesiastical formation of priestly sons. Later on, should the sons grow weary of their servitude the Church invariably bids them think of their mothers, and how any ill-considered action would break their "poor mother's heart."⁴

Behold the "Beauty of Holiness." The happiness and joy that only religion can give! See what great and glorious benefits the unbeliever is depriving himself of. And, above all, see the beneficent effect of Christianity upon woman, and its ennobling influence on family life!

Now although young Barrett carried out all his duties with enthusiasm, and thought nothing too hard and too irksome, yet he never entirely surrendered his will to his superiors, and he soon found himself awakening their "suspicion and hostility." In one matter he admits that he was obstinate and disobedient. He tells us that he was never able to

overcome his inborn prejudice against spying and reporting any fault, or infraction of the strict rules by his companions. Such sneaking and tale-bearing was revolting to him, as it is to any decent youth. Time after time he got into trouble for this, and was accused of lacking in loyalty to the Society.

On the last day of his two years novitiate he went to ask the novice master, Father James Murphy, for his blessing. This priest had once said of Barrett that he was "One of my best, if not my very best." Yet he had come to "fear or to hate some instinct that was in me and not in himself." Kneeling in his presence Barrett said:—

"Father! I have come to ask your blessing, as I am to leave for Louvain in the morning." There followed a long pause. Then something that seemed half a sneer and half an expression of hate oozed up in his full fleshy face and his lower lip fell a little. "Give you my blessing?" he said. "No! Begone without my blessing. I would never give my blessing to one like you!"

He staggered to his feet, reached blindly for the door, and fled horror stricken.

The next step to his admission to the "Society of Jesus," was a four years course of training in philosophy, at the Jesuit College at Louvain, in Belgium, where he won fame among the students for hard work and strict observance. He rose every morning at four, and even in the depth of winter declined to have a fire lit in his room, merely using a blanket round his feet. He says: "The Belgian brethren never understood how I endured the cold. Often in the morning I found that the holy water in the font above my head and the ink in my inkwell were frozen."

After finishing this course he returned to Clongowes College, as a teacher, for three years, and then entered upon a three years' course of Theological study, at the Jesuit Theological College at Milltown Park near Dublin; to qualify for the priesthood. The superior, Father Albert Power, took a profound dislike to him. Not for any lack of piety, or neglect of duty, but for his independence of judgment. As the day of ordination to the priesthood approached he became excited, and his one anxiety was lest he should die before he had officiated at his first Mass.

On the great day he stood at the altar, before him knelt his mother and brothers, and behind them knelt nephews, cousins, and friends. On the altar before him lay the chalice of wine and the bread, and he recalls his emotions:—

Presently, at my words, at my repetition of the eternal formula of consecration, the wine would become the blood of Christ, and the bread the body of Christ. My hands, soiled and sinful though they were, would be privileged to raise aloft in adoration the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. My hands would carry to the altar rails, and place upon my mother's lips the sacred host, giving to her, who gave me life, her eternal God. The blood of Christ I myself should consume together with the large wafer now changed into His Body. (p. 124).

It seems incredible that any sane, thinking person, in this twentieth century, could believe such a monstrous fiction. It shows what men are capable of believing if only they are trained early enough, and shielded from doubt.

Of his experiences in the Confessional, he says, that although many made really edifying confessions, there was also much ignorant superstition in the way sins were confessed. For instance, he observes: "Nervous men, obviously driven by sheer fear of hell, would 'to make sure,' go to ridiculous extremes in recounting their sins. Incapable of judging or reasoning, in the presence of fear, they would pour forth a torrential stream of self-accusations. On the other hand, many women would draw out their

⁴ E. Boyd Barrett: *Ex-Jesuit*. pp. 73-74.

empty confessions obviously for the sole purpose of having a quiet *tête-à-tête* with a man. Some superstitious souls would relate incredible experiences." (p. 129.) He heard "confessions of rich and poor; young and old, soldiers, sailors, priests, and prostitutes." (p. 127.) The practice of the last-named profession does not appear to have been found incompatible with a sound faith in Catholic rites and doctrines. We know that in past times, everyone, however vicious and immoral they might be, sported a religion. Does not history record of Nell Gwyn:—

how on one occasion her coach was stopped by a mob under the impression that it contained her rival, the Duchess of Portsmouth [Louise de Kéroualle] unpopular both as a foreigner and a Roman Catholic, when Nell putting her head out of the window exclaimed: "Good people, be civil; I am the Protestant whore."⁵

But we did not think that the old alliance was still in force, or at least was openly admitted. Mr. Barrett, of course, does not reveal any of the secrets confided to him, under the seal of the confessional, from these ladies, and probably they would be found to be unprintable. They must have been somewhat embarrassing to a healthy young celibate priest; especially in the light of the story he tells—the only piece of humour in the book—of how, when he was serving his novitiate at Tullabeg, three American young ladies entered the building, during an unguarded moment, and surprised the novices at their work, causing them to stampede leaving their brushes and pans behind, and it was not, he says, until the girls had been shoo'd off by an elderly brother that: "We felt that we were delivered from the stark and dreadful vision of sin that had stalked among us." (p. 75.)

Barrett had completed fifteen years in the Jesuit Order, and two years in the priesthood, he was detailed for a two years' special course of study and sent to the London University. One afternoon when passing through the main hall, he saw a notice that a series of lectures would be given by Dr. H. Crichton Miller, on psycho-analysis. He attended the lectures and tells us that:—

After a few hours spent in hearing Dr. Crichton Miller discuss his cases and their appropriate treatments, I realized that in Catholic convents and monasteries, among my own brother priests, there were duplicated all the symptoms he described and there was need of precisely the kind of treatment, namely of analysis, that he prescribed . . . there passed before my mind in vision a long line of neurotic religious whom I had known, priests and nuns, novices and brothers, and I hoped it would be my destiny to bring relief to them, and lessen their sufferings by means of psycho-analysis. The distinguished lecturer more than once referred to the neuroses that sprang from religious enthusiasms, and he gave solid reasons for his personal opinion that religion was a fertile source of nervous trouble. (p. 158.)

A plan developed in his mind. If his superiors approved, as he fondly promised himself they would, he would select a group of intelligent, and suitable young priests and train them in psycho-therapy, and with these, open clinics, in connexion with Catholic churches and colleges, where advice and treatment could be given for all kinds of religious morbidity. "I might have known," he says, "that I was doomed to encounter terrible opposition to the plan I had formed. But . . . I was still under the impression that I could count on the co-operation of my Jesuit superiors, as soon as they understood my plan. That I should be looked upon with suspicion

as an innovator, and even as a potential heretic, for dabbling in a dangerous science, never crossed my mind." And it was a long time before he was completely disillusioned. His superiors could see, if he could not, that this would amount to handing over to science a whole department over which religion had hitherto ruled supreme.

The rest of the book is concerned with his efforts to establish his views, and the unscrupulous and vindictive methods by which his efforts were frustrated. The fact is Mr. Barrett was too independent-minded for a Jesuit, he ought never to have joined the Society. He promised to obey, the first and fundamental law of the Society of Jesus, absolute and unconditional obedience, and he never gave it. Such a condition should never be demanded of any man, and no man ought to sign away his freedom by accepting such a condition by which he becomes a mere slave or automaton in the hands of others.

W. MANN.

Ritualism.

RITUALISM and Secularism may seem to be an odd pair to classify together. There seems to be nothing in common between them. Yet it might prove an interesting speculation whether it might be possible to bring together two such extremes.

We, as Freethinkers smile at the absurdities perpetrated by our Christian friends. Deans with their gaiters and "Bishops in their hats"; the candles, the incense, the holy water, and the genuflections before smoke-screens, keep us in a state of perpetual amusement. Why can't an Archdeacon dress himself like a reasonable creature? Why must the clergy wear their collars back to front? Why the intoning, the swinging censers, the millinery, of so many poor, self-deluded mortals.

The answer is, of course, the people like it. Pray, Mr. C. S. Fraser suggested to us a few weeks ago, and prayer would become of no effect. What is wanted to jog the arm of omnipotence is a kind of snuffle, a song and the language must be archaic.

Yet many of our fellow-countrymen, and more especially countrywomen, appear to find in these fripperies, a good deal of consolation and comfort. Recently I read a book by Sheila Kaye Smith, called *The Last of the House of Alard*, where the whole business turns upon the value of these religious rites for the consummation of the story. She writes with great force and lucidity. In places she reminds one of Galsworthy or even Thos. Hardy, but alas, and alack, she seems to have a preposterous affection for either Catholicism or High Churchism. Evangelical Anglicanism she calls "soup and blankets"; true religion is found in the mass, or Adoration of the Virgin, or similar dope. I understand both she and her husband have joined the Roman Catholic Church. They seem to have all the devotion that may be expected from recent converts.

Many of her characters in this book are indifferentists—one might almost say Agnostic. Such a term as Atheist, of course, would be taboo. Religion sits very lightly on the most of them. Indeed Old Sir John Alard, a typical old squire, was once heard to say "damn" while he was reading the lessons in church. As his son was the clergyman, and belonged to the soup and blanket variety, it was passed over lightly.

Sir John's son, Peter, is madly in love with a doctor's daughter, Stella Mount. Stella is a particularly nice girl, but she is poor as well as religious. Consequently Peter has to throw her over in preference to a Jewish lady who brings grist to the mill.

Gervase, a younger brother of Peter's, also falls in love with Stella. In doing so, he too gets religion. Stella is still in love with Peter, and Peter returns the compliment. Stella, sustained by her ritualism, rejects the pagan offers of Peter, and is only willing to come, as it were, sister to Gervase. The consequence is Peter kills himself, just at the moment of old Sir John's death; and Gervase joins some Catholic retreat thus bringing about *The End of the House of Alard*.

⁵F. Beresford Chancellor: *Old Rouley* [Charles II.] pp. 155-156.

Reading the book, one wonders what it is Miss Kaye Smith is driving at. Peter was a cad to behave in the way he did. Gervase seemed to be a fool to immerse himself in that monastic order, and thus destroy any chance of redeeming the family. Stella was silly for hankering after a cad, refusing the attentions of a decent young man, and worrying herself over beads, and candles and "Tenebraes."

One is always trying to harmonize conflicting interests. Some of us spend our time trying to "split the difference" between opposing factors. We rather like to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. Yet compromise appears to be indissolubly linked up with progress. Is not our British Constitution a standing proof in support? The question then arises. Is it possible to graft upon the Secularist tree, a Ritualistic branch which will enable it to grow and develop, until the great majority are in its shelter?

Something has been said recently in the *Freethinker* about Christian Burial. We all know that a good deal of rubbish is in evidence at this ceremony. The Christian priest is not above using a solemn occasion, when hearts bereaved are too susceptible, to "improve the occasion" for superstition's advancement. At the same time the *Freethinker* is somewhat hampered by the knowledge that his attitude may be construed into a lack of sympathy, or a lack of consideration for the afflicted.

My point is, that in circumstances like these, the parson in outlandish attire, mumbling well-known formulae, promising with the recklessness of his cult, occupies a more influential position than the ordinary layman, who, however sincere and sympathetic, he may be, refrains from practising illusion, and, rather hopelessly bids deceased a "long farewell."

Was it not Ingersoll who declared, he would never deprive anyone of the hope of immortality? It seems to me, that however unscientific it may be, however contrary to what we observe from experience, however much it may be to the good to encourage stoic fortitude, yet, a relief is furnished to the riven affection, if a tiny hope is suggested, that somehow, somewhere, old friends will meet in some Elysian fields, where they will pledge again their friendship, and fight their battles over again.

ALAN TYNDAL.

In Snowdrop Time.

ALL too wistfully anticipating Spring, and eager to review in a certain native bower those first and fairest vestals of the floral race—before they quietly departed as they had quietly come—as snow upon the deserts, I dared a day in February of surly promise and sulkier fulfilment, but the way brightened now and then by sunglints and the gleam of snowdrops here and there in single clumps or myriad spread by cot and farm—glimpses these into the deepest deep of beauty! These, with other mundane magic of the wayside; the steep hirsute slope with crest of solemn leafless trees, austere and still, or shaken by the sudden blast, while the sky frowns over all, and clouds go scudding by; or the pale sunray falls upon a mossy bank in a woodland turning its greenness where it tarries to fulvous, fairy gold. But now the cyclist was nearing the Tarbolton of poet Burns with its switchback hills and hollows and, beyond, that deeper wooded hollow of Stair where flows the river Ayr, majestic here! Oh, could I flow like thee, or float upon thy rippled tide at rest and peace to those destinations of desire!

At her doorway a sweet-voiced Mary Morrison is parleying with a beggar pair; one feared they were not "Jolly Beggars."

Oh, give relief and heaven will bless your store! What country flower can compare with the country lass herself, or that sweet matron of whom I "speir" the way, who seemed to understand, who, with a hundred others in similar cot and hamlet, had they known, would have stopped me for tea on the fainting homeward way. And, yet, what sighing exile of the city would return for long to these all too placid beauties

and beautitudes? Absence makes the heart grow fonder; these solitudes, like many another idle boast, are but a parson's and a poet's theme; yet ask where is the land of the heart's desire? It is there, it is there my child, it is here and now and not hereafter; there are love and life and hope and laughter even here; how fresh and wholesome those bairns and youth, till age steals upon the husbandman and wife and lichens grey encrust the soul; or yet survive "John Anderson My Joe," happy couple, how much more blest than he, the loveless "man was made to mourn!" A few more steep miles and I am arrived by yon mountain stream where it murmurs in the valley; where in the crook of a fallen limb of willow (saugh in Scotland) peeping amid some tangled grasses I find an added treasure, a bran new cluster of the snowy cups. As for those others secured in the plane trees limb, their "roots have memories" of half a century, recalling dear and distant days and sacred dust of one we loved, the loveliest and the best:—

Who loved so well those waters, woods and wilds

With great brave heart, yet simple as a child's.

There also is the huge square block of granite, bearing, roughly chiselled, the pilgrim's name—to-day this margin block is isolated in flood waters. There are patches of blue-grey pebble, a torn island in midstream; below that the two great boulders round which the flood waters have roared and rushed from immemorial time, where little twigs toss and tumble on the brown and swirling waters. Memorable spectacle of those quiet Sundays of long ago when after rain and storm we stole through that sweeping theatre of hanging woods to see and hear by that:—

Incessant roar of headlong tumbling floods.

Time, with the waters that have passed, has taken away most of that first fine careless rapture, but in happier moments I can feel that thrill again!

The way was long, the wind was cold, and it began to rain, the pilgrim was not yet quite "infernal" old, but conditions made fire and tea impossible, which was cold comfort enough! There was nothing for it but the dry bite and the long return journey—not all down hill! Midway darkness fell on the woods, obliterating road and landscape, with but lonely lights distantly gleaming in the formless waste. Drearily one drove along, dizzy in the tiny glimmer of an oil lantern that yet withstood the howling blast. The road seemed interminable, yet I knew not eternal, unless I perished there! would the old bike stand it? would the old man? . . .

And then I spoke—to myself—and swore:—

This is a kind of madness: It has its great rewards, but hardly worth those pains and penalties of danger, endurance, utter weariness. Undoubtedly it is madness! It conduceth not to longer life, but abridges it. You — old fool! What brings you here on such a night? Anyway you are certainly to-night the prize fool in Britain. All the rest in smiles and ease, thou only art grim and stern. Thou wouldst be a hero at sixty; but do your excursions keep you younger? that is the d—d thing: no! Be moderate in future with your wheel—and, really, this time I believe I will keep my resolution!"

But the Lord was not yet done with me: four miles from home I was "all out," when my chain quietly snapped and I had to walk the rest: what might follow would be unprintable; but I am happy to assure you all, Richard's himself again! And, indeed may go again — to

COLLA.

* * *

Yes—it was snowdrop time, but now it is the daffodil and primrose, the moss violet will be here, all the long procession, the march of Spring, of all conquering nature, compared with which the march of armies is vulgar and obscene. Freethinkers and the flowers of Freethought are also doomed to extinction, but are not hurried to the grave as in holy wars, but have exaltations and delights beyond a Christian's narrow dreams, and above all—a very great comfort—we have no hell to fear, and no heaven to desire, save the one we can make on earth and leave behind!

It is not he who forms idols in gold or marble that makes them gods, but he who kneels before them.

Martial.

Correspondence.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

FRANCIS BACON.

SIR,—A letter from abroad is always belated in dealing with any subject from the *Freethinker*, but may be accorded a cursory perusal.

Francis Bacon in an article (February 28) is given more credit than he is entitled to be awarded.

The only "majesty" of Bacon consists in his ability to write sonorous and epigrammatic Latin. Meanness was his main characteristic. He could be even abject on occasion, witness his crawling for favour up to Buckingham, who spurned him. A grafter, accepting bribes, he tried to crawl behind James I. for protection, when his "enemies" (?) fined him £40,000 for bribery and corruption. He connived at torture. (Peacham.)

"Enemies," again! Did he deserve friendship? regard his prosecuting advocacy against his former benefactor, the Earl of Essex. That was venomous.

As Ingersoll observed, Bacon could offer base advice, as seen in his counsel to pass blame and punishment to someone else, if possible.

A contemporary, Herbert, stated that Bacon "had an eye like a viper," and Bacon described himself, unwittingly, in Latin when he wrote, "Some are scientific like winged angels, but in desires they resemble snakes crawling on the ground." Money was Bacon's, and he acted like a reptile in seeking it.

S. F. LAWS.

Canada.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD MARCH 27, 1931.
THE President, Mr. Chapman Cohen in the chair.

Also present, Messrs. Moss, Silvester, Corrigan, Easterbrook, Le Maine, Rosetti, A. C., Mrs. Quinton, Junr., Mrs. E. Venton, Miss Kough, and the Secretary.

Minutes of Previous meeting read and accepted, and the Monthly Financial Statement presented.

New members were accepted as follows: Liverpool, Bradford, Newcastle, Manchester, Glasgow, Bethnal Green Branches, and the Parent Society.

Reports of meetings held at Birmingham, Liverpool, and Eastbourne were submitted. Under correspondence, matters were dealt with from Birmingham, Bradford, Liverpool, Plymouth, and Manchester. A reprint of the President's article on *Simple Bible Teaching* in leaflet form was authorized. Progress was reported in connection with the Annual Conference, the Executive's Social at Caxton Hall, and open air work in London and the Provinces for the coming season.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for April 17, and the meeting closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,
General Secretary.

Society News.

THERE was a good attendance at Conway Hall last Sunday evening, when Mr. B. A. Le Maine delivered the last lecture for the present session. The subject, "Freethought in the Churches," afforded wide scope for dealing with points of considerable interest to Freethinkers. Mr. Le Maine himself visits the churches occasionally, and he gave a very humorous account of a recent confirmation service in St. Paul's Cathedral. Having quoted a number of passages from the writing of Bishop Barnes, Dean Inge and other high dignitaries of the Anglican Church, to show how completely modernism has permeated Christianity in England, the speaker gave some details of the huge cost of organized religion to the nation. He strongly urged Secularists to work for the disestablishment and disendowment of the State Church. A large number of those present took part in the discussion which followed the lecture.—A.D.M.

PERTH Branch held a very enjoyable Social and Whist Drive, the first attempt locally, to try and break down the present dismal Scottish Sunday. A very effective speech was given by Mr. Jas. Wingate, pointing out the absurdities of the Sunday Observance Acts as at present, and it was well received by all present. We hope however to receive hostile criticism during the week, for our action, as we have had a good press locally and a number of letters have been published during the last week or two. I will be submitting some correspondence to you later in the week, which may be worthy of comment.
J.A.R.

Obituary.

ALBERT JOHN LEAKER.

ON Monday, March 23, the remains of Albert John Leaker were cremated at Bristol. For some time in failing health, death resulted through heart trouble at the age of seventy-two years. In his younger years he was very active in the cause of Freethought, and was responsible for most of the arrangements when our late chief, G. W. Foote lectured in Bristol. His Freethought opinions were well known to all who knew him, and were maintained right to the end. His wishes for cremation and a Secular Service were duly honoured by his family, the service being read by Mr. R. H. Rosetti.

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.

OUTDOOR.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): Good Friday, at 3.30, Messrs. C. Tuson, A. D. McLaren; 6.30, Messrs. E. C. Saphin, A. H. Hyatt, B. A. Le Maine. Easter Sunday, at noon, B. A. Le Maine; 3.30, Messrs. C. E. Wood, Charles Tuson; 6.30, Messrs. A. H. Hyatt, B. A. Le Maine. Bank Holiday, at 3.30, Messrs. A. D. McLaren, C. E. Wood, C. Tuson. Wednesday, at 7.30, Messrs. C. E. Wood, C. Tuson. Friday, at 7.30, Messrs. A. D. McLaren, B. A. Le Maine. Current *Freethinkers* can be obtained opposite the Park Gates, on the corner of Edgware Road during and after the meetings.

FULHAM AND CHELSEA BRANCH N.S.S. (corner of Shoreland Road, North End Road, Walham Green): Saturday, 7.30, Messrs. A. Frank, F. Day and F. Bryant.

INDOOR.

HIGHGATE DEBATING SOCIETY (Winchester Hotel, Archway Road, Highgate, N.): Wednesday, April 8, at 7.45, Mr. Lombardi—"Women in Industry."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road): 7.0, Howell Smith—"The Religion of Julian Huxley."

THE NON-POLITICAL METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (City of London Hotel, 107 York Road, Camden Town, N.W.7, facing The Brecknock): 7.30, Miss Wood—"Some Aspects of Marriage."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

PERTH BRANCH N.S.S. (Secular Room, 122 Canal Street) 2.0, Mr. J. Wingate—"Psycho-Analysis Critically Examined."

CONWAY MEMORIAL LECTURE.

PROFESSOR J. W. GREGORY will deliver the Twenty-second Lecture, entitled "RACE AS A POLITICAL FACTOR," at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1, on WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15th, taken at 7 p.m. by Sir Arthur Keith. Admission Free. Reserved seats is., to be obtained from Conway Hall.

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SECULARISM teaches that conduct should be based on reason and knowledge. It knows nothing of divine guidance or interference; it excludes supernatural hopes and fears; it regards happiness as man's proper aim, and utility as his moral guide.

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