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

Views and Opinions.

Mixed Religion.

THERE was a curious incident in connexion with the killing of the Hawaiian, Kahahawai, for the murder of whom a white woman is to take her trial. Kahahawai was himself accused of being concerned in the ravishment of a white woman. Since Hawaii came under Christian influence the natives appear to have shaken off many of their "heathen" virtues and to have adopted in return many of the white man's vices. It is now openly stated that Hawaii is governed by the worst forms of "graft," with scenes worthy of the vilest aspects of Chicago.

A solemn requiem mass for the dead Hawaiian was held in the Roman Catholic Cathedral, in the presence of 2,000 people, while Kahahawai was buried by a Protestant minister. At the same time, at the house of the dead man, there was held an old-fashioned Hawaii wake. Kahahawai was thus buried with all honours, Catholic, Protestant and Native. He had all the funeral honours that were going. Religiously his funeral left nothing to be desired. The reason for this variegated religious display appears to be that he was described as of "mixed religion." That description, as journalists who wish to be thought literary say, "intrigued" me. It admitted of so many meanings, and withal was an accurate description of so much. It might have meant that Kahahawai belonged to those philosophers who believed all religions to be equally ridiculous, or to those politicians who believed them to be equally useful, or to that type of Christian who looks on all religion as a sort of prudent investment, and so speculated in every one of the religions to hand, instead of putting his investments in one company alone. But mainly the expression interested me because it was so descriptive of the present mental state of huge slices of the religious world. Most religious believers are sadly mixed nowadays, and Christian believers are the most mixed of all.

The Archbishop's Prayer.

For example. It will be remembered that for use on the first Sunday in this year a prayer was issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury to all the Churches. The object of the prayer—or prahar, as the B.B.C. will have it—was to lay before God Almighty certain considerations as to the present state of affairs, and to solemnly ask him what he was going to do about it. So far there was nothing different in this prayer from other prayers, and it would probably have been as effective as any prayer that has ever been offered. But there was one important difference. When Christians say they have sinned, they do not particularize how they have sinned, and privately each Christian is thinking of the other fellow's sins, and hoping that God will improve *him*. They then finish by leaving the matter to God—which they would have done just as well by not praying at all.

The form of prayer issued by the Archbishop was of a different pattern. It said something different. It said :—

Because we have indulged in national arrogance, finding satisfaction in our power over others rather than in our ability to serve them. Forgive us our trespasses.

There was also reference to crooked dealing, scamped work, and exploitation; and this was unbearable. No one could prayerfully admit that British people were ever arrogant when dealing with others, crooked dealing was unheard of among Englishmen, we never scamped work, and to exploit other peoples over whom we ruled was simply unthinkable. We had, on the contrary publicly professed that in taking control of native races we had simply shouldered the "White man's burden," and if we had reaped material profit from the burden, that was never our object; it was merely one of the indications that Providence approved our labours and had rewarded us accordingly.

* * *

Religion and Muddle.

So it should cause no surprise that a number of the newspapers protested strongly against such precise prayers being offered. So much so that the Archbishop of York was led to disclose the fact that he was the author of the prayer. He framed it to meet the case of those who when praying needed help to decide what it was they were to ask for and what kind of sins they were to confess as having committed. Those who liked to use the prayer could use it, and those who did not could leave it alone. Thus the Archbishop of York apparently hoped he had cleared up the subject. As a matter of fact it left the whole position more muddled than ever.

First it shows a muddled mind to pray at all. To pray, if one gets through praying something that he would not get without it, is logical, but no one believes that prayers produce any result at all other than

that of self-delusion. If God is what Christians believe he is, he must know already everything that the most detailed prayer can tell him. He must know whether we have been arrogant, etc., etc. Moreover, Christians believe that everything that happens is either arranged by God or permitted by him, and in any or either case forms part of a "Divine Plan," which they profess to find in the universe. And to end in the traditional way with "Thy will be done" looks like adding humbug to the whole thing. Presumably, if there is a God his will is carried out whether we pray or not. So that in the end it looks much like telling God Almighty to do as he darn well likes—he has our permission.

Second, it is tolerably plain to educated Christians that prayer does not really alter things. They know as well as I do that the prayers for fine weather or for rain, which appear in prayer books, are just so much eye-wash. All the prayers offered up by the leading medicine-men for the health of the Royal families in the world do not prevent members of them becoming insane, sick, or sharing the fate that overtakes those who are not prayed for at all. When King George was ill, the finest doctors and nurses in the Kingdom were engaged, and the titular head of the country was treated much as the ruler of Soviet Russia would be in similar circumstances. Prayers are offered when we are at war, when we know that it is men and money and guns and military and political skill that finally decide the issue. We are apt to put all this down to hypocrisy, but it is not. It is sheer mental muddle. It is an example of "mixed religion."

* * *

Christianity a Misfit.

Once upon a time the Christian religion was tolerably "pure." That is Christians had a fairly well defined set of beliefs in which they could profess belief. Thus less than a hundred and fifty years ago Christians were in common agreement on such things as the divinity of Jesus, the inspiration of the Bible, the resurrection from the dead, on heaven and hell, on God and the Devil. Look at them now! Large numbers of them have ceased to believe in a personal God, who has become a mere principle, something like an algebraic sign, but without the clear use to which algebraic symbols are put. The devil has with most simply dropped out of existence. Heaven and hell, as Dean Inge explains, are not places to which we go after we are dead, they are simply "states," although what they are states of no one is quite sure. The Bible is no longer inspired, it is simply a book showing the religious development of humanity, and some of the highest dignitaries of the Church speak of it in a way that would have sent them to prison in the days of Paine. The virgin birth of Jesus is no more than a legend, and as for his resurrection, well, the disciples only believed he had arisen, or the rising was a mere symbol. In the old days the dividing line between Christian and Freethinker was very plain. The State outlawed him in many respects, and his character was such that every righteous Christian shuddered when brought into contact with him. To-day he is well known, he may be highly respected—by Christians—and he may hold high office in the State without protest. And when dead, the Church does not refuse him burial, and if he is eminent it scrambles for the honour of burying him.

Is it to be wondered at that the present day Christian is mixed and muddled? He is living in a world in which he does not quite fit. His religion was born at a time when the world was altogether different from what it is to-day. In that day the Gods ruled and devils lurked down every dark lane and in every unusual situation. The earth was flat, the sky was solid.

Miracles happened all the time, and prayers worked open marvels with all who believed. Men could believe everything because they were certain of nothing. Their religion was the measure of their non-understanding of nature and of themselves. God did as he liked, and men acted as their fears persuaded them. In that world Christianity really lived, and men could believe it because nothing in their experience offered it a flat contradiction. To-day things are vastly different. The Christian is muddled in his belief because he is called upon to adopt an impossible mental attitude. His job is to live the beliefs of the savage in a world where science has secured a commanding position. And that simply cannot be done. The Archbishop's great mistake was in issuing a prayer that was at least intelligible. People could not understand it. And religion never lived by people understanding it. It lived by their believing it. You may believe Christianity and be saved. But to understand it is to make certain of being damned.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Boastful Bibliolators.

"The carpenter said nothing, but 'the butter's spread too thick.'"—*Alice in Wonderland*.

"Laughter is the peculiar property of man."

Rabelais.

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

MANY years ago a popular engraving was framed in thousands of sheltered homes. It represented Queen Victoria handing a copy of the Christian Bible to a dusky African Chief with the remark: "This is the source of England's greatness." It lost nothing in popularity by the fact that the dusky chief bore a close resemblance to one of the corner men of the Moore and Burgess Minstrels, then at the height of their immense popularity. Neither did the engraving lose in popular effect by the still more striking circumstance that the whole story was simply a pious concoction made in the interests of a commercialized Christianity.

The sentiment embodied in the legendary episode of the engraving was enormously popular in Victorian days, and echoes of it still linger in obscurantist quarters to-day. As may be expected, the finest examples are to be found now in the reports and publications of the British and Foreign Bible Society, which are written with a florid incontinence only rivalled in the purple penmanship of the writers of cinema advertisements. The proud and pious penmen who compile these interesting documents get very romantic in describing the alleged adventures of the brave Bible colporteurs. Here is a passage taken from a report of some time back:—

They (the colporteurs) win their way among Russian immigrants in Canada, among throngs of devotees at idol festivals in India, among coal-miners and schoolboys in Japan. One man rides with camels across the deserts of Central Asia. Another wades through swamps reeking with miasma in South America. Another ventures in a frail canoe down tropical rivers infested with alligators.

Is it not romantic to thus read of real he-men in a decadent world? No one would pause churlishly to ask why Japanese schoolboys should be regarded as being as risky companions as alligators or bug-eaten camels. But such is the conquering power of the Gospel that it is a thousand pities that English heavy-weight boxers cannot be persuaded to go into action armed with family Bibles instead of mere boxing gloves.

To-day, it is said, there is a revival of interest in this Bible. According to the very latest report, in Italy monks and nuns now sell gospels in the streets instead of rosaries and pictures of the "saints." What the vendors of baked chestnuts and shoelaces say concerning this commercial crusade is not mentioned. There are far more important matters to attend to, for the British and Foreign Bible Society now circulates portions of the Christian Bible in 651 different languages, the only important omission being the linguistics of Bermondsey where the inhabitants speak Cockney English with an Irish accent.

Curiously China accounts for the greatest number of Bibles sold in any tongue other than the beautiful language used in the Houses of Parliament. This is more than usually interesting, for, in spite of its possession of so many copies of "God's Word," China is in a more hellish state of confusion than any other country in a very troubled world. England, which tops the account for sales, is in the most awful mess it has experienced since the Norman Conquest, so the sacred volume can hardly be regarded in the nature of a lucky mascot. Indeed, this scripture might very easily be mistaken for the exact opposite, for, although over eleven million gospels and portions of this Bible have been disposed of in the last twelve months, the world appears to be growing steadily worse as the sacred pages circulate throughout a distressed universe.

There is still balm in Gilead. Last year five new languages, all African, were added to the list, and now, for the first time, ebony-coloured savages may read of the wonders of Noah's Ark, and the story of Jonah and the Whale. A similar blessed privilege has been extended to a South American tribe, and to the inhabitants of Oceania, who will thus be able to extend the hand of Christian fellowship to the inhabitants of our own Isle of Dogs, the sturdy citizens of Canning Town, and the millionaire of Mayfair.

It seems passing strange that the British and Foreign Bible Society should have sold no less than 11,888,226 scriptural books and complete Bibles in one year, and the entire world still appear to be going to what Signor Mantalini called: "The demnition bow-wows." So far as this country is concerned, the attendance at churches, chapels, and tin-tabernacles, has never been less, and it is steadily decreasing, whilst cinemas and concerts are as steadily improving.

It may be very comforting to people who profess and call themselves Christian to hear that their sacred scripture is a "best seller," and alleged to be "the finest piece of English literature." But more copies of the various editions of *Old Moore's Almanac* are sold in this country annually than copies of this Bible. As for the contention that this Bible is "the finest piece of English literature," such nonsense can only emanate from ignoramuses who know nothing of Shakespeare's works. Hamlet advised that Polonius should play the fool nowhere but in his own house, and such remarks are best left for the pulpit, the coward's castle of the priest.

The financial report of this Bible Society contains columns of figures and pages of statistics calculated to make a professional accountant's hair turn white and curl afterwards. One thing, however, emerges from the mass of figures, and that is the steady income from legacies enjoyed by this organization. In the final analysis it is largely supported by the "dead hand." Thus we have the spectacle of a slowly dying superstition being upheld by the money of dead people. And, mind you, this particular society is but one of many similar institutions which, collectively, possess a huge sum of money for the furtherance of superstition in a democratic country. Unless Free-

thinkers realize that this problem of religion and vested interests are intertwined, we must inevitably fall behind in the race. In fighting superstition, Freethinkers are opposing an enemy entrenched behind mountains of money bags. In money lies the power of the priests and their fetish-book, and it is well to remember, as Shakespeare reminds us, gold can "Knit and break religions."

MIMNERMUS.

The Decline in Religion.

"So far as I am aware, no man of any genuine distinction in the world to-day is a Methodist; if I am in error, I apologize most humbly. The news that a poet had been converted to Presbyterianism would be first-page stuff anywhere—as much so as the news that he had been converted to cannibalism. (H. L. Mencken: *Treatise on the Gods*. p. 339.)

FREETHINKERS may look back upon the last decade with much satisfaction. Religion is melting away before the advancing tide of knowledge, and the superior attractions of a secular civilization, like an Iceberg in the Tropics. Since the great war Free-thought has made astonishing strides. States and Kingdoms, where religion was regarded as most strongly entrenched, and whose subjects were given up as hopelessly enslaved to superstition for many generations to come, have suddenly thrown off their bonds and secularized the State.

Russia—"Holy Russia," as it was called under the Imperial despots—is definitely lost. Spain, regarded as the most Catholic State in the world, a veritable stronghold of the Church, has discarded the Faith with as much unconcern as though it were an old glove. In this they were only following the example of the other great Latin race, France, a quarter of a century ago, when she dis-established the Catholic religion, and expelled the religious fraternities for interfering in the politics of the State.

Speaking personally, I must confess that had anyone, before the war, suggested to me that Religion could be suddenly dis-established in Russia, Spain, and Turkey, without a very serious uprising of the people and much bloodshed, I should have regarded that person as being influenced by his wishes rather than by facts. Yet it has come to pass, and that without any upheaval of the masses whatever. Which leads to the conviction that the religious sentiment is by no means so strongly held to-day as it has been in the past. People are more enlightened. One has only to compare the enthusiasm, with which the manhood of the nations rushed to defend their countries when called upon with the apathy displayed when their religion was attacked!

The Far East is following the West in its rejection of Religion. The great majority of the converts to Christianity in India are recruited among the outcasts and untouchables, and makes the new faith appear contemptible in the eyes of the higher castes. Among the educated, laments Sir George Macmunn, in his recently issued, and interesting book, *The Religious and Hidden Cults of India* :—

In India, unless perhaps from a Hindu family where Bhakti is taught, the young men of to-day have no great anchor. In the Universities it will be found that youth, Hindu, Sikh and even Moslem, scoffs at all religion. Here in Britain, where so many come, and where however complete club and hostel arrangements may be, the divorce from the rule of life of their family is naturally and unavoidably greater, it is to be expected that religious divorce should be even greater. The lads openly scoff, and do not see enough of the more edifying side of Christian life to help them. A vast agnostic

class is growing up among the intelligentsia, that is a great danger to all, and both Hindu and Moslem may well be anxious . . . When half-gods go it is not easy to replace them. (p. 220.)

No, nor for whole gods either. It is the same tale in China, the majority of the converts to Christianity consist of the outcasts and down-and-outs of society, and bring discredit upon the missions in the eyes of the more respectable citizens. To convert the educated Chinese is a hopeless task. As Lafcadio Hearn pointed out long ago it is not difficult, with the aid of modern science, to dispel superstition from the subtle and acute mind of a Chinese, but to supplant it by Western superstitions is not possible since he has more contempt for them than for his own.

In America Freethought has made great strides. Six years ago, all Europe was laughing at the spectacle of several of the more backward Western States passing, and others, trying to pass, laws to prevent the teaching of evolution in the State schools and colleges. The movement culminated in the prosecution of a school teacher named Scopes for breaking the law passed to this effect by the State of Tennessee. Mr. Jennings Bryan, who had run three times for the Presidency of the United States, came especially to Dayton to aid the prosecution, and solemnly argued for the literal truth of every word and every sentence in the Bible. Scopes was found guilty, but the decision was reversed by a higher court on a purely technical point. This Fundamentalism, as it was called, was mainly characteristic of the Western States, where the farmers still held the old theological ideas which their Puritan ancestors brought over with them, and remained untouched by modern ideas. Doubtless they were as much surprised at the laughter their ideas provoked as were those that laughed at them, for the journalists on the papers in the great industrial towns led the ridicule, and termed it the "monkey trial."

Since then there has been a great stride forward. Mr. H. L. Mencken, admittedly the most brilliant writer in the States, is defiantly Atheistic. Theodore Dreiser, considered to be their finest novelist is equally outspoken. We have just finished reading his autobiography up to his coming of age recently published, from which we cull the following:—

If some persons take to drink and others to drugs, a far greater number become addicted to religious formulae, and with equally fatal results. Their brains simply ossify, since independent inquiry is no longer needed, and their natural emotions, being vainly rejected as sinful, transform themselves into a single aspect or expression, and they are for ever on their knees before an immense and inscrutable something which cares no more for their adoration or supplications than it does for those of an expiring beetle. In short, all of the impulses to live and strive (life's first command) are completely dissipated in appeals for mercy and spiritual salvation. Horrible! And to this are dedicated the endless religious edifices of the world! (Theodore Dreiser: *Dawn*. p. 360.)

Mencken and Dreiser are the two most influential writers in America to-day, and their influence extends to Europe where they have a large and appreciative audience.

W. MANN.

(To be concluded.)

All speculative errors must be allowed to state themselves without hindrance, allowing for the special repression of the practical disturbances they would cause.

Aguste Comte.

God was my first, Reason my second, Man my third and last thought. Man alone is and shall be our God. Outside man is no salvation.—Fuerbach.

Criticism and the Bible.

(Concluded from page 45.)

III.—THE GOD OF THE HEBREWS.

IN respect to the conception of God one must not judge according to the external representation but in accordance with whether, in the Elohistic collection of legends and the Yahwist writings, *the so-called polytheistic or monotheistic conception preponderates*, and, further, *as to how far God is thought of as a tribal, ancestral or local god, or as a Judaic national and world-god*. Judged from that standpoint, the Elohistic conception of God stands upon a far lower stage in the history of religion than the Yahwist conception of the divine form of his Yahwe. The Yahwist portrayal is without doubt more simple and perceptual, more sensuous and tangible than that of the Ephraimite book of legends. But that is to be explained partly on the ground of the different arts of description employed by the authors, and partly on the ground of the aims which they pursued.

The Ephraimite legend-collector was not concerned in any way with theological investigations and speculations. He confined himself to the task of simply recording the religious sayings and legends which he found in circulation among the people of Northern Israel. As far as one can judge he was not a priest, but a patriotic Ephraimite who was interested in the early history of his people and, particularly, in the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (both once united in the tribe of Joseph, according to the old genealogical tradition), and who sought to use every opportunity to extol the past of those tribes as the most glorious in the history of Israel.

However, the Yahwist pursues quite other ends. Although he is a priest, he writes for the mass. He therefore seeks to adapt himself to the general intelligence of his time. He readily threads his discourse with all sorts of moral and utilitarian teachings, but avoids all learned explanations. He seeks, as it were, to be a popular propagandist for the cause of Yahwism. His style of writing and presentation resembles those of the great prophets of the people.

The object of presentation prescribes the form of presentation. Since the Yahwist has another object in view than that of the Elohistic Ephraimite, it follows that he must express himself in another form. Actually, therefore, the reasons adduced by the aforementioned theologians, are not the chief motive which impelled them to the conclusion that the Yahwist composition is the oldest, most reliable and most authoritative of the original sources of the Books of Moses. The real reasons for this theological standpoint must be sought for, rather, *in the sphere of theology itself*. The representatives of this standpoint feel the need of holding on to the pretty stories supplied by the Torah and the Books of Joshua, Judges and Samuel; of the exodus of the people of Israel *as a nation* from Egypt; of the rôle of Moses as leader and founder of religious institutions; and of the general veneration of Yahwe as the national god, therefore, of the early monotheism of the people of Israel; and of keeping up their appearance as historical facts in the theological construction of a purified old-Judaic religion. Those theological investigators do not look upon the Hebrew religion as one religion among many, but as the epitome of all pre-Christian religion in which, notwithstanding all human authorship, the will and majesty of the everlasting God stand revealed; and from this standpoint it is easy to understand why that original composition—the Yahwist—upon the accounts of which their entire conception is mainly supported

and confirmed should appear to them as the oldest and most reliable authority.

Professor Karl Budde in his book, *The Religion of the People of Israel up to the Exile* (1900), furnishes a good example of the above point of view. He starts out from the assumption that the origin of the worship of Yahwe, as the religion of Israel, coincides "with the beginnings of the people themselves," and that the Biblical tradition, "from the earliest times" (back to that moment where mention is first made in the Bible of the people of Israel), is to be considered, in the main, as historically reliable. He then assumes that in Egypt, the cradle of the people of Israel once stood, and that, as the second Book of Moses (Exodus) relates, the tribes of Israel went out from there,* that already in the wilderness they formed a nation which selected for itself as a national god, the Kenite mountain-god, Yahwe, who dwelt on Sinai; and, indeed, that this took place in such a way that the Israelites amalgamated with the Kenite nomads.

The theologian who starts out from such assumptions as if they were given historical facts is naturally constrained to regard the Yahwist authority as the oldest and most reliable, since he finds therein the best and often the only confirmation for his conception. It is positively indispensable for him as a support for his reconstruction of the older parts of the religious history of the Israelites; and he would behave very inconsistently if he did not value it as the most authentic document of the old Hebrew world of religious thought. In it he finds the cult of ancestor worship, which stands out distinctly almost everywhere in the Old Testament literature, depicted as a later falling-away from the monotheistic cult of Yahwe, under the influence of the idolatrous practices of the Canaanites.

In the end, this theological criticism believes that it has conferred a benefit upon the Christian religion by securing its foundations in the pre-Christian religion of the ancient Hebrews. Since in the history of the people of Israel it believes to have proved that monotheism was there from the very beginning, the Christian theology fancies itself exempted from ethnological criticism! A truly "uncritical" criticism! But a religion which looked upon itself as a fragment of the history of religion in general, which saw its own past in the religious practices and ideas of other peoples, would cease to believe in itself, *would cease to be religious*, and that is not a pleasing prospect for the leading organs of the religious consciousness!

The religious traditions of the Israelites, which constitute the material of the Old Testament documents, present themselves not as mere transitory phenomena but as something that for over a period of a thousand years has been most deeply influenced from every side, by the religious outlooks of peoples standing on higher cultural levels, *e.g.*, the Canaanite, the Egyptian, and the old and new Babylonian.

* The entire history of the bondage of the Hebrews in Egypt and their exodus into the wilderness, is a mere legend. The patriarchal stories could never have arisen, if already the first generations of Israel had been conscious of the Egyptian origin of their people. The history of the Exodus could only have been acquired by the Israelites at a later time. Still that does not mean that the legend had no historical background. It must have been a strong force which led to its circulation and the belief in it; since it had the effect of afterwards inverting the entire history of ancient Israel.

Furthermore, the organization of the Hebrews in twelve tribes, which, according to tradition, descended from the twelve sons of the patriarch Jacob, took place only in a relatively later time, long after the settlement in Canaan in the twelfth century B.C.; and those tribes were not of pure Hebrew origin, but a mixture of the incomers with the settled Canaanitish population.

Much of the material of the Old Testament represents the grafting of a series of conceptions upon the traditions of the Old Hebrews, which were quite foreign to the natural and social environment in which they lived. The religion of the Israelites has, in actual fact, been most strongly influenced by foreign elements, and therefore one must not attempt to construct out of it alone a history of the earlier religious evolution.

Neither can the student of Hebrew religious development, take as his starting point solely the "reconstructions" of the theological critics of the Biblical text, and without more ado use them as building material for a new and scientific reconstruction. To be sure, the materials of Biblical criticism are not without value for the scientific investigator, notwithstanding the theological character and object of the criticism. Nevertheless, this value can only be turned to good account when the investigator handles the theologically-assorted material *as an ethnologist*. In other words, he cannot lay hold of this material and regard it as if it were ready-made for a scientific presentation. He must re-sift and re-assort this stuff of "higher criticism." He must test the fitness of this or that, for scientific building purposes by means of the comparative method of ethnology, *by ascertaining in how far it corresponds to what has been critically observed among other peoples in a similar stage of evolution, or is confirmed by other historical documents.*

W. CRAIK.

The National Secular Society.

ANNUAL DINNER.

THE Thirty-Fifth Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society at the Midland Grand Hotel, on Saturday evening broke all records in attendance. The company was so large that some visitors were forced to dine in the hotel restaurant, joining the general company after the dinner, and at the last moment a number of applications for tickets had to be refused. Telegrams of regret at non-attendance owing to personal or family illness were also received, so that it is clear that if all who wished to be present had been the numbers would have been even more impressive. As it was it is no exaggeration to say that no more representative or enthusiastic body of Freethinkers has been seen for years.

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, presided, and amongst those present were: Mrs. C. Cohen, Dr. C. H. C. Carmichael, Mrs. J. Chance, H. Cutner, H. R. Clifton, W. J. W. Easterbrook, Lt.-Com. Easterbrook, L. M. W. Easterbrook, T. Elstob, Mr. and Mrs. C. S. Fraser, Mr. and Mrs. G. Finch, Dr. Gompertz, Mr. and Mrs. F. A. Hornibrook, Mr. and Mrs. R. B. Kerr, Miss K. B. Kough, Dr. A. Lynch Mr. and Mrs. Lye, B. A. Le Maine, A. D. McLaren, A. B. Moss, W. McKelvie, Mr. and Mrs. Quinton, Junr., Mr. and Mrs. G. Royle, Lord Snell, H. Silvester, Mr. E. D. Side and Party, Mr. Fincken and Party, Bayard Simmons, G. Whitehead, Mr. and Mrs. G. Wood, Dr. Griffin, Mr. and Mrs. F. C. Watts, and A. C. White. Visitors were present from Plymouth, Birmingham, Liverpool Bournemouth, Worksop, Coventry, Blackpool, Cardiff, Devonport and other Provincial centres.

It was generally remarked that the number of young people present was a good omen for the future of the movement.

The speeches, like the Toast List, were, as Mr. Chapman Cohen suggested they should be, brief. He set an example himself and contrived to pack more into a short address than can be found in many

columns of portentous oratory elsewhere. The N.S.S. year, which ends in March, said Mr. Cohen, had already been marked by a 30 per cent increase in new members. The year upon which we had entered was, at any rate elsewhere than in the Freethought Movement, expected to be an anxious one. A number of politicians of various Parties had recently come together for the alleged purpose of saving the country, but their experience of politicians, as for example the conduct of the Labour Government with regard to the Blasphemy Laws, did not justify confidence that they would be any better in combination than they were apart. He was convinced that the Freethought Movement must appeal not to politicians but to the public, not to Parliament but to the people. All great revolutions and reforms had been brought about by the efforts of convinced, informed and determined minorities. Parliament did not make decisions but registered them sometimes long after they had been made. Let them win the country to a civilized Sunday, to the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws and to Secular Education; let them be clear as to what they wanted and ceaselessly work for it, and legislation would look after itself. Although there were signs of breaches in the enemy ranks, continued the President, there was plenty of fighting to be done. We were not at the end of the road, and there was as much need for militant Freethought to-day as ever in the history of the movement.

The toast of the N.S.S. was proposed in a graceful and forceful speech by Mrs. Janet Chance. She said she was proud to be in the Secularist Movement, for it was one in which there was no beating about the bush. Other and more or less vague efforts were being made to the same end, but the National Secular Society was straight and blunt and definite, which was a great advantage from the fighting point of view. She was all for fighting. Proceeding Mrs. Chance referred to what she described as libels on Freethought and Freethinkers by Dean Inge, Dr. Barnes and the B.B.C. She would like to see action taken which might result not only in rebutting these slanders, but in providing funds for the movement. Unfortunately it is impossible to libel principles, but there emerged from Mrs. Chance's apposite quotations the news that the B.B.C. is definitely committed to "the revival of faith," and the exclusion of "scepticism." The speech concluded with an arresting comparison of religion with the new sky writing for like it, she said, superstition had obscured the clearness of the mind just as this new power would darken the beauty and stillness of the evening sky.

Dr. Carmichael supporting this toast cleverly contrived to give his speech the form of one proposing the toast of the ladies which, as he said was not on the programme for the good reason that the N.S.S. has always admitted women on an absolute equality with men. But they were in fact more than equals, they were superiors. With biological and anthropological illustrations Dr. Carmichael developed this argument to the great delight not only of the many ladies present but to men who, as he said, were under the strange delusion that they were the masters. No toast of Freethought could be proposed that was not a toast to the ladies.

Mr. Arthur B. Moss, the veteran of the company and of the Society, referred to the early fights, and it was hard to believe that he first participated in them more than sixty years ago at the age of seventeen. Mr. Moss, who had a warm welcome, urged the members of the Society to be worthy of those who had carried on its work in days when it needed great courage to face a kind of hostility which was more violent, if not more worth fighting, than that with which they had to deal in these days. Bradlaugh was

stoned, and met by by angry crowds crying "kill the infidel" while people lined up to hear Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle as they now lined up at the pictures. Among those he had known in more than fifty years who had helped the movement with pen and voice were G. J. Holyoake, G. W. Foote, Mrs. Harriet Law, Mrs. Annie Besant, J. Mazzini Wheeler, W. P. Ball, Chas. Watts, Senr., James Thomson ("B.V."), Joseph Symes, W. W. Collins, J. T. Lloyd, and their present President, Mr. Chapman Cohen. They should render thanks to the pioneers and to all who had served the cause.

Lord Snell, in proposing the toast of Freethought at Home and Abroad, made, at the onset, a humorous reference to Mrs. Chance's remark that if people asked an Atheist to their house they would lock up the spoons. In the days when he (Lord Snell) and Mr. Moss were first engaged in Freethought propaganda they were not invited to places where there were any spoons. Freethinkers were then "intellectual untouchables." It was his duty, continued Lord Snell, to speak of movements other than the N.S.S. at home, and of Freethought movements abroad. It was satisfactory to know that in these days of crisis there were in every country organized bodies representing the same ideas, vigilantly and courageously defending the same principles as those which they stood for in this Society. The great aim of all that movement was that the mind of man should be free. Thought was Freethought, and demanded continuous advocacy and support. It was true that in the lives of those present great advances had been made, but they might all be lost if another generation did not carry on the work which they and their fathers had done.

Responding to this toast Dr. Arthur Lynch took us on a mental tour from China to Peru, and with the eye of an experienced traveller, pointed out the features of the international scenery most interesting to Freethinkers. From his inexhaustible store of personal reminiscence and anecdote he lightened his points with a racy wit. Referring to the changes since the war, Dr. Lynch said that terrible as had been its consequences, he was inclined to think that the piers upon which the old superstitions of mankind had long rested had been so undermined that they could reasonably believe that their collapse was, if not imminent, at least assured. Dr. Lynch mentioned that Mussolini was once a Freethinker and a Socialist, but now "the medicine-man and dictator had joined hands for their joint interest and Mussolini had got from the Pope the order of the golden dog collar or something of that sort."

Before, between and after the speeches the company were entertained by Edward Holmes (Pianoforte Solos), Fred Yule (Baritone), Miss Edith Faulkner (Comedy Cameos), Finlay Dunn and a Piano, and Mario de Pietro and Joan Revel (Banjo and Song). The whole programme was so thoroughly enjoyed and enjoyable that it would be invidious to praise one of these artistes more than another. It was evident that they were all conscious of an audience charmed, amused and appreciative, and, each in their turn excelled themselves. Mr. Holmes (who accompanied throughout) made the piano speak, and Finlay Dunn was not less eloquent with most impressive gestures than with that instrument itself. He proved that a certain portliness of body is not inconsistent with the gymnastic exercises of professional "beginners" at the Piano. Mr. Fred Yule's singing, especially the Prologue from *Pagliacci*; and the performance of Mario de Pietro with the Banjo accompanied by Joan Revel were superb. And what can anyone say of the inimitable Edith Faulkner and her "Comedy Cameos"? Who will forget the lady who wanted "A Cave Man's Love?"

It only remains to say that the Dinner was as choice as the service was efficient, and that when the company joined hands to sing "Auld Lang Syne" and the feast (both for body and mind) was over, there was only one thought in their minds—that they had had one of the most entertaining and inspiring experiences of their lives.

To Mr. R. H. Rosetti, who was indefatigable in arranging the function and in his efforts to promote the comfort and pleasure of all present, and to Mr. G. Royle who arranged the capital entertainment thanks are due, and, it is good to know, were expressed in person by many before leaving.

A.H.

Acid Drops.

We all know that when dealing with the Bible and Christianity in this country there are stereotyped forms of stupidity—to use a mild term—to which writers must conform if they are to gain employment, but even the ordinary editor might excuse a man being a little less idiotic than the following. It is contained in a review of *The English Bible as Literature*, and the review is signed "Iddesleigh":—

Any book which sends men back to the Bible is in these times to be commended; for our nation, and America as well, is built upon its acceptance. Now there is surely no need to be quite so foolish as this even when writing for the *English Review*. Of course we "accept" the Bible as we accept Old Moore's Almanac, or the *Daily Mail*, or Jimmy Douglas. But in what other sense do we accept it? We do not accept—that is we do not adopt—the Bible teaching of slavery, or witchcraft, or of the origin of languages, or of the flood, or of the creation of man and woman, or of the nature of disease, or of a hundred and one other things that one might name. We accept neither the legislation, the ethics, the history, nor the science of the Bible. And when we say "we" there is included in the expression a majority of even educated clergymen. When this non-acceptance of the Bible is so general there is surely no need for even a journalist to father the aggressive stupidity of the passage cited.

While the Archbishop of Canterbury is urging the clergy to defy the law in order to vindicate the "sanctity" of marriages in Church, the press is busy with instances of the shameful results of Christian "morals"—albeit the press does not print them as such. Thus in the *Morning Post* (January 6) we have a letter from a doctor, as follows:—

"In my parish," he writes, "the banns are being called of a young couple about whom, in my professional capacity, I know the following facts. The boy is tubercular, crippled and mentally defective. The girl is also tubercular, and a "border-line" case, but refuses to have treatment. The boy has already been a charge on the ratepayers for treatment of various kinds. Now they are to be married—for all I know to the contrary on the dole—and beyond all reasonable doubt they will bring into the world a family of tubercular cripples and idiots, who will probably become a charge on the rates, and who will certainly be destined to lead the most miserable of lives. Ought I to sit in my pew when I hear the banns called? Or ought I to forbid the banns on ethical grounds? And if I did, would it be any use?"

We fear the answer to the doctor's last question is in the negative. If these two unfortunate persons are married and the Prayer Book service is used God will be asked to "bless these two persons that they may both be fruitful in procreation of children." It is true this prayer is to be "omitted where the woman is past child-bearing," but that provision does not apply in this ghastly case.

George A. Birmingham (Rev. Canon J. O. Hannay) in an article in the *Referee*, who describes himself as "an outsider, a mere Irishman, a detached observer of affairs," says that "what matters most is not brains or science,

but character," and everything (including the falling pound and the world's economic troubles, so far as they affect England) will all come right in the end because "the English are not the kind of people whose pound completely collapses." We wish we could share the Canon's confidence, but we observe with surprise that there is not one word about God or religion. People who have stood the cutting down of salaries and doles without a murmur have revealed "the amazing character of inarticulate men," and, contrary to expectations people who have never paid income tax before "are paying without even being dunned." We are a great people for, if the rev. gentleman is right we shall "pull through not through wisdom or knowledge or craft, but through the fortitude that is in us." What, we wonder, has happened to the "arrogance" and selfish profit-seeking that the Archbishop's prayer referred to, and to the God to whom it was addressed? "Mr. Birmingham" does not mention either. They might be as non-existent as his famous General John Regan! True the latter was a character in fiction, but he is evidently not the only one.

"The art of felicitous quotation," as illustrated by Mr. Ernest Brown, M.P., who is also a Lay Preacher. Mr. Brown recently preached a sermon in the Upton Vale Baptist Church, Torquay, his native town. It seems that Sir Hilton Young, M.P. (who is Mr. Brown's Chief at the Ministry of Health) wrote some lines at sea in 1914. Mr. Brown was, we think, hardly "felicitous" in comparing his local patriotism and Torquay with the place and person of those lines which are as follows:—

"And yet, I think, at Golgotha
As Jesus' eyes were closed in death,
They saw with love most passionate
The village street of Nazareth."

It is evident that while Sir Hilton Young had, in a literary sense, "a good conceit" of Jesus and his love of Nazareth, Mr. Brown had a good conceit of himself and of Torquay's love of him. But it might occur to Torquay (if not to Mr. Brown) that "comparisons are odious!"

The quotation below appeared in a signed review of a new detective novel in the *News-Chronicle* (January 7). The reviewer, Mr. Charles Williams, observes of the housekeeper in the house where the murder was committed—a vicarage—that "she was the daughter of a clergyman and had acted as secretary to her father for a critical work on the Pentateuch." He adds:—

If she had come under suspicion, as she nearly did, the training might have been more useful; few things can be such good preparation for any kind of sudden death, official or unofficial, as an intensive study of Genesis or Exodus. Chapter 28 in Deuteronomy is calculated to prepare one for anything.

We may add that Deuteronomy 28 contains sixty-eight verses, of which fifty-two rehearse in great detail all the curses that the Lord threatened to send upon his people if they failed to observe and do all his commandments and Statutes. A sample (verses 34-35), "So thou shalt be mad for sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see. The Lord will smite thee on the knees and in the legs with a sore botch that cannot be healed, from the sole of thy foot unto the top of thy head." When the *News-Chronicle* allows writers to call attention to this sort of thing we must be getting on. But perhaps the "Sub" concerned had no idea there was anything like this in Deuteronomy!

After Marie Corelli, Mr. Justice Hawkins and a whole batch of legal luminaries, we now have "a musician's talks" with his "unseen friends." They include Carmen Silva, Pierre Loti, Emile Zola, Joachim, Beethoven, Hans von Bülow, Victor Hugo, Balzac and—John Bunyan, who must have changed his tastes to be in this galley. Of the author of this instalment of talks from "spirits"—with the assistance of a new machine called an "additor"—and his work the *Times Literary Supplement* pleasantly remarks: "Mr. von Reuter assures us that neither he nor his mother, who worked the "additor" with him, possess such a knowledge of French as would have enabled them to write the communications which came to them in that language. The French, beyond question, is

idiomatic and vivid in expression, and the fact that certain specimens which the author has reproduced are very carelessly printed seems to bear out his statement that he knows French only imperfectly." Unless, of course, the misprints are *not* accidental.

The *Star* asked the Bishop of Chelmsford and the Rev. M. Maldwyn Hughes (Wesleyan) whether "a religious revival is coming?" Since such organs of piety as the Sunday newspapers and the *Daily Express* and the *News-Chronicle* have vied with each other in predicting that England is "coming back to Christianity," it is useful to see what two representative clergymen think of this prediction. The first thing to be noticed is the extreme caution with which they both avoid any prophecy in the matter. The Wesleyan gentleman asks "are there any signs of a Revival," and answers "who can tell?" The Bishop of Chelmsford says, "Even if there were a large increase in church attendance this would not necessarily be a proof of revival of religion," and for this reason: "It is generally said that the national anxieties are responsible for this increase of church going, and I should not regard as genuine the 'Saintliness' of the devil when he is sick! A similar phenomenon was noticed at the beginning of the war: Churches were crowded for a while, but it did not last. The reason it did not last was because religious acts which are due to fear or anxiety are not genuinely religious at all. They are much more of the nature of superstition." And that is not all the Bishop says.

He says "Religion is not a mascot which averts bad luck and makes the path of life easier by inducing God to remove difficulties in our way just like a weak father pets a spoilt child." But the God of that religion of which the Bishop is an official petted his chosen people to some purpose, and a very great number of prayers will have to be deleted from the Book of Common Prayer if this idea that God is not concerned in making the life of Christians easier prevails. What is the use of praying for health, for rain, for peace, for assistance of any sort or kind if, after all, God is not concerned in relieving our difficulties, but we can remove them by our own exertions? That is exactly what we say.

A pious scribe says that "the very fine thing about Methodism in this country to-day is not its talk, but its action." Well, as Methodist "action" appears to be largely concerned with so-called "purity campaigns," and censorship, and the enforcing of old prohibitions and the introducing of new ones, we should say that "fine" is a particularly ill-chosen epithet to describe such activity. But then Methodists always have had an inflated notion of their own importance and of their perverted ideas. Ushering in the "Kingdom of Heaven" on earth by means of censorship, repressions, and prohibitions would seem to be hardly in keeping with the New Testament gentle Jesus, meek and mild. But presumably the people called Methodists have discovered a fiercer Jesus, whose method of achieving the "Kingdom" is not persuasion but compulsion.

Mr. Filson Young, in *Radio Times*, says:—

... so long as broadcasting remains in the right hands and is not commercially exploited, this power to direct and unite the common fund of knowledge and information should become a force more powerful than armaments.

You will notice that I write of the direction of knowledge and information—not of opinion. The essence of opinion is that it should be free, and not directed. It is no function of broadcasting to tell people what they ought to think. But in my view it is a function of broadcasting to give people facts and information on which they can form their own opinions.

Mr. Young would seem to have made out a good case for excluding religion from broadcasting. The sermonizers certainly set out to provide some knowledge and information about religion, and particularly about a God and a hereafter which nobody knows exists. But the main object of the sermonizer is to direct public opinion in favour of religion," to tell people what they ought to think" about religion. As the case of the Atheist is not

as regularly given a hearing, the B.B.C. is therefore repressing knowledge and information which would enable listeners to form a truer opinion of religion. In other words, one may say that the B.B.C. is deliberately seeking to prevent opinion on religion from being free. If that is not "direction of opinion," what is it? And how can it be justified?

A friend sends us a peculiarly impudent attempt to induce people to attend Church on the occasion of the Day of Prayer recommended by the Archbishop of Canterbury. A notice was issued on behalf of Leyland Parish Church and the opening ran:—

His Majesty hopes and expects that every true subject of King and country will this Sunday turn out and turn up at his Parish Church to take part in the great service of intercession arranged for the whole of our land.

Of course there may be many who are stupid enough to take this sort of thing as a Royal command, but for downright impertinence it may be taken as an illustration of the lengths to which some of the clergy will go in the interests of their business.

Lord Wakefield believes that there will be a wave of creative energy throughout the civilized world. If such should be the case, one can only hope that there will not be at the same time a religious revival. For this would mean that a goodly portion of the creative energy would get misdirected into socially unproductive channels. Already in the world's history a vast amount of energy has been led astray or dissipated through the focussing of mankind's attention on matters concerning an alleged other world and God.

Mr. Gordon Beccles asserts that nearly all the people he knows who hunt are either bores or boors. Whether that be true or not, there can be little doubt that all are barbarians, since they seek pleasure by means of cruelty to animals.

Touting for cash with which to square up the balance sheet of a Missionary Society, its Secretary tries to make the blood of the pious curdle by saying that "A reduced income would mean retrenchment, which would be a calamity." The nature of the calamity is not revealed. But we know that the trade of the country will not decline, that the moral and intellectual life of the nation will not deteriorate, and that civilization in general will not suffer an eclipse, if "retrenchment" becomes a necessity for this Missionary Society. The only kind of "calamity" we can foresee in this connexion is that a few socially non-productive employees of the Society may lose their jobs.

Fifty Years Ago.

OUR weak-kneed Christian brethren never more thoroughly display the paralysing and demoralizing effect of their faith than when they contend that at any rate belief is the *safe* side. Superstition, driven back point after point, rests on this as on the last card, and continually plays it as if it were a trump. "If you infidels are right we have nothing to gain and everything to lose, while if we Christians are right we have everything to gain and nothing to lose." A faith founded on truth and manliness would never have given birth to an argument so calculated to make men cowards, indifferent to truth. Apart from the fact that the Biblical denunciations are nearly all against believers who do not act up to their belief, while St. Paul says God had mercy upon him because of his unbelief, these Christians do not reflect that if their God be just, the upright man can have nothing to fear, whatever his opinions; if unjust, no reliance can be placed on his doings. He may punish believers, rather than unbelievers, out of mere caprice. Attributing to him the very human infirmity of desiring praise, they deny him even human superiority to the opinions entertained by his inferiors.

The "Freethinker," January 22, 1882.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A. M. HARTIE.—The question of the private ownership is quite an interesting subject, but we have so little available space, and what we have is heavily mortgaged for some time, that we are compelled to decline your communication. Sorry. Perhaps, one day we may arrange for an independent section in which this and other questions may be discussed.

A.M.—The debate might be interesting, but we have not the space to spare for the purpose.

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.

Letters for the Editor of the "Freethinker" should be addressed to 61 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, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—

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

Sugar Plums.

To-day (January 24) Mr. Cohen will speak in the Battersea Town Hall, at 7.0, on "The Benefits of Unbelief." Battersea Town Hall is in Lavender Hill, and the nearest station is Clapham Common. There is a good service of buses from all parts, numbers 77a and 177, and trams 26, 28, 34 pass the building. The hall is a large one, and we hope that all South London friends will do their best to make the meeting well-known.

A report of the Annual Dinner of the N.S.S. will be found in another part of this issue. The function was a triumphant success. There was a record number of guests, in spite of the bad times, and a fair sprinkling of visitors from Liverpool, Manchester, Plymouth, Coventry, Bournemouth, etc. The speeches were brief, bright, and everything that after dinner speeches should be. The musical part of the programme, was as usual, in the hands of Mr. G. Royle, and was more than up to the high level of previous years. The Society is greatly indebted to Mr. Royle for so valuable a contribution to the success of the evening.

There was only one regrettable thing about the Dinner, which was that so many applications for tickets, both from London and the Provinces had to be declined. The large Venetian room was filled to capacity, and refusals were inevitable. At the last moment the tables were re-arranged and enlarged so as to get a few more, and every inch of space was utilized, but all simply could not be accommodated. This re-arrangement meant a lot of extra work for the General Secretary, Mr. Rosetti, but he had his reward in the evident enjoyment of the company, and in his case we are sure that was enough. Next year the Executive will have to consider arranging for a larger attendance.

On the four Thursday evenings in February a special course of lectures has been arranged for the Fulham Town Hall. Mr. Cohen will open the course with an address on "The World's Need of Freethought." Messrs. McLaren, Whitehead, and Rosetti will deliver the other lectures. The lectures will commence at 8 o'clock, and admission will be free. We hope that West London friends will help in making these meetings as widely known as possible.

Mr. McLaren is doing excellent work, as one would expect, with his Study Circles which meets every Monday evening at 8.0 in the N.S.S. Offices, Farringdon Street, E.C.4. The Circle is intended to act as a preparation for the platform, and also as an opportunity for the system-

atic study of Freethought. Mr. McLaren is an excellent guide in both directions, and is specially anxious to have present as many young men as possible. We hope to find that the opportunity is being made the most of. We are sure that excellent results will follow.

Membership subscriptions to the N.S.S. are due on January 1, and we hope to hear from the General Secretary that at the end of the month that the response this year has beaten last year's record. Members when remitting should bear in mind that the subscription is a very nominal one, and that it is left to them to make their subscription as generous as their means will permit. We know that the times are hard, but it is in just these times that those who can increase their subscription should do so in order to make up for those who are unable to send more than the minimum amount.

January is a very busy month for the General Secretary, and Mr. Rosetti has had his hands more than full with the routine work of the Society and the arrangements for the Annual Dinner. The smoothness with which this function runs hides from many the amount of labour entailed. But it would not run as smoothly as it does if there were not a great deal of work put into it. We say this in order to request the patience of those who have written Mr. Rosetti, and who have not received replies as promptly as is usual. There must be some arrears at the moment, but they will all be cleared up in the course of the month.

We received a letter last week from Mr. H. G. Holt, in reply to the letter from Mr. Morris, the Secretary of the Wembley Branch, which we regret we were unable to publish in our last issue. Mr. Holt's letter does not carry the matter any further on the essential point, namely that Mr. Holt having joined the S.P.G.B. was ordered by his new friends to resign from the Wembley Branch on the quite false ground that the N.S.S. was an anti-working class organization. Mr. Holt now argues that the N.S.S. objects cannot be realized without adopting his own political opinions, and that he can promote the destruction of religion better as a member of the S.P.G.B. than as a member of the N.S.S. That is, of course, a matter of opinion, and it is for everyone to take whatever course seems right. But it is absurd to argue that because the N.S.S. does not agree with Mr. Holt and his new friends that it must be an anti-working class organization, and he must not belong to it. That is a denial of freedom of thought and a foolish assertion that in politics there is room for only one opinion. That is religion at its worst.

We have received a note from the Director of the New York Public Library, to which institution we have for some time sent the *Freethinker*. The Director informs us that "the publication is frequently consulted," and asks for a few missing volumes and numbers in order to complete the file. So far as we can we are making good what is needed, but we cannot supply all. We are pleased to hear that such use is being made of the *Freethinker*.

The Birmingham Branch N.S.S. has arranged another course of lectures to be held in the Bristol Street Council Schools every other Sunday, and on Thursday evenings following, in the Shakespeare Rooms, 174 Edmund Street. Details will appear in the Lecture Guide Notices, and a syllabus may be obtained from the local Secretary, Mr. T. G. Millington, 1 Mayfield Avenue, Pershore Road, Selly Park, Birmingham.

The Perth Branch N.S.S. is arranging a debate between Mr. J. Wingate, and the Rev. Mr. Trotter, of St. Columba's Parish Church, for Sunday, January 31. We hope to have more definite details for insertion in our next issue.

Mr. R. H. Rosetti will lecture in the Transport Buildings, 41 Islington, Liverpool, to-day (Sunday) at 7.0 p.m., on "The God Men of Science Believe In." Admission is free, with reserved seats at one shilling each. The subject should be a useful and interesting one, and we hope to hear of a full house.

A new Act of Parliament (the Patronage Exercise of Right of Presentation) Act, has just come into operation. The clergy, we are told, are doubtful of its advantages. It is intended to give parishioners (if churchmen) a say in the appointment of new incumbents, but as the patron still has his legal rights, and is not bound to take any notice of any representations made to him by the Parochial Council or anyone, we doubt if there is much chance of its coming into operation. The writer of the Church Notes in one of the dailies observes that "the clergy fear that the name of the patrons' nominee may leak out during the preliminary negotiations, and that a kind of parish inquisition may result without the nominee having a chance to defend his reputation." We had no idea that clergymen on the look out for promotion were so touchy about their "reputations."

Can Monism Account for Variety?

(*Monist* affirms: *Pluralist* negates: *Determinism* being common ground.)

M. DETERMINISM demands that all phenomena are inter-related, and that nowhere is there an unbridgeable gap. Nothing comes from nothing; nothing is ever annihilated; everything is concerned with something else. All that happens does so in the play of one active noumenon, or principle of existence; sufficient in itself, and giving variety in its manifestations. I call that noumenon substance—the lowest denominator of science—which has the noumenal property of self-existence.

P. When you speak of active noumenon you at once introduce two different concepts:—

- (1) noumenon, and
- (2) activity.

Here are two things, not one. The conception of noumenon, as active, operates in contradistinction to that of noumenon as inactive. To that inactive substance I add at least one other factor, so as to account for its varied activity. This does not necessitate the repudiation of Determinism. The latter may be the way in which substance is acted on.

M. You have not shown that noumenon *cannot* be dynamic; you have merely insisted that it is equally conceivable as static. Let us appeal to experience. Can you cite any existent that is absolutely static? Were you able so to do, I should consider the possibility of a static noumenon, which relied for its activity on being affected by something other than itself.

P. The fact that an absolutely static existent has not come within our experience does not prove that it nowhere exists.

M. Let us suppose that it did exist. We thence reach this result: A phenomenon *x*, partaking in existence, is inactive, inert. Therefore its surrounding field is also inert; for *x* is *ex-hypothesi* incapable of participating in a mutual exchange of energy. Its surrounding field, however, extends throughout all interconnected phenomena, and pervades the entirety of the noumenon in which *x* resides, *i.e.*, substance. Hence we must envisage a dead block universe in which nothing could happen. But things *do* happen; the universe is *not* devoid of activity; and so, granting Determinism, the whole of the universe is in play. In other words, substance—the only noumenon I acknowledge—is active. The units of substance will thus be events, not point-instants.

P. Without recanting anything I have said, I can also conceive that your noumenon substance is never static. Why should it be? Its activity tells me that my transcendental noumenon is effectively omnipresent, so that nothing escapes its influence. Thus

we never experience absolute stillness; and I still maintain that a dynamic substance implies two notions; viz. :—

- (1) substance, a static noumenon, and
- (2) dynamism (the attribute of my further noumenon, transcendental to substance).

This conclusion is not invalidated by the fact that substance is always "on the move."

M. Surely, the chief merit of a hypothesis is that it should not be extravagant. I consider monism to be simple, yet adequate to account for the facts. Let us, however, assume that there is another noumenon besides substance. Is it still, or active? If (1) it is still, then you have two inert factors instead of one, and are no better off than before. Two, or any number of still things, cannot perform *any* process which would produce activity. If (2) it is active, then you have admitted the possibility of activity being intrinsic to a noumenon. Activity must exist either (a) in *one* thing or multiples of one, or (b) not at all. Hence it is characteristic of noumenon; and there is no reason why we should deny it to the noumenon substance.

P. Allowing then, that substance can conceivably produce action, can it generate variety? An uniformly active substance would meet with no reaction, and so would persist in an unvaried process, *e.g.*, rotation or linear movement. Aristotle criticized the falling atoms of Democritus, which could never impinge on one another so long as they pursued parallel paths. Epicurus, aware of this, ascribed to the falling atoms a modicum of free will in deviating from the vertical.

M. The conception of uniform activity, like rotation, implies that no point in the system ever alters its relationship with any other point; and we thus have gained nothing on staticism. The only action that can be recognized is that which entails variety by change of relationship.

P. Therein we are agreed. You contend that variety is characteristic of a unity. Why did that unity, or noumenon, take one line of action rather than another? Of an infinity of possible worlds, how was the choice made? I hypothesize that your unintelligent monistic substance is endowed with purpose, or otherwise utilized by a teleological agency, causing it to generate variety; seeking a goal.

M. You are withholding from the noumenon substance the capability of generating variety, and bestowing it upon another noumenal principle. Arbitrarily to deny this capability to the only noumenon of which we can form any notion, and to which experience points (*i.e.*, substance) is to take upon yourself the responsibility of showing that (1) substance is by nature precluded from doing what *is* done by some noumenon or other; that (2) another noumenon exists; and that (3) this latter accounts for variety. I contend that for the primary leaning at the root of things we need go no further than substance.

P. Leaning to what and from what? Of all possible leanings, what determines the final choice? I postulate another factor—intelligent or rudimentarily intelligent—which has an axe to grind. It pressed the trigger, envisaged the result, and is now, or will be, enjoying the benefits.

M. I do not discern any conclusive sign of intelligent choice. If we dangle a carrot in front of a hungry donkey's nose it will normally make a bee line for it. Your transcendental intelligence seems to compare unfavourably with that of the donkey; for it has in the course of its muddling career embarked on numerous blind alleys, and wasted innumerable stores of energy. What is more, it never seems to profit by past failures. The very notion of existence implies some elementary feature which both Epicurus and

Schopenhauer called "will." The absolutely featureless is an abstraction, and by virtue of its existence I ascribe to substance some existential characteristic which does not mark it as intelligent; for the concept of intelligence implies premeditation and personality, which are born *within* the monistic process. I affirm, then that the basic inclination of substance is as adequate to account for variety. Einstein is endeavouring to categorize it under the dimension of "direction."

P. It imposes too severe a strain on my imagination to accept the theory that the primary "kink," or deviation from uniformity, is sufficient, unaided, to account for the varied activity we see around us.

G. H. TAYLOR.

The Christmas Legend.

CHRISTMAS has come and gone, with its parrot-cry of "Peace and good-will toward men." With it the people have revelled, sent each other Christmas cards, and have listened with joy to the carol singers, who commemorate the lie of the birth of a saviour in Bethlehem. How few, however, even for a moment, have doubted the truth of the whole story of that reputed event, which is plainly and simply legendary, having its origin in the birth of a new sun after the annual declension at the winter solstice. After this descent the sun rose again from the dead as a new born sun. Innumerable legends grew up around this rising of the new born sun-god in connexion with the lesser deities—the planets and stars, during its passage through the three months to the spring equinox. Similar legends were connected with the sun as a dying god during the last three months of the year. Sol was Mithra "The invincible," who wrestled with and vanquished death. In Malachi iv. 2, we read: "Upon you fearful ones, the sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings." Buddha, son of the virgin Queen Maya, on whom, according to Chinese tradition, the Holy Ghost or Divine Power descended, was said to have been born on this day. Christmas Day was also kept by the Egyptians as the birthday of their sun-god Osiris. Isis, the "Queen of Heaven and Virgin Mother, was delivered on this day of a son and saviour Horus," his birth being one of the greatest mysteries of their religion. The early Christians made use of the images of Isis and the child Horus, as representatives of their newly fabricated legend of Mary and Jesus. Pictures of Isis and Horus decorated the walls of the Egyptian temples, also effigies of the son lying in a manger were common, just as we now see similar effigies of Mary and Jesus in the Roman Catholic Churches at Christmas-tide; and in Rome, the Sacred Bambino—a black child—is brought out of its casket and exhibited for the adoration of the faithful. With the Greeks it was Hercules, Bacchus, and Adonis, whose birth was celebrated at this Yuletide festival. In Rome, the festival of the "Unconquered Sun" was held as a "Saturnalia," whence comes the idea and expression "The Lord of Misrule." A few days before the winter solstice, the Calabrian shepherds came into Rome to play on the pipes, from which originated the modern "waits." The gods were consulted as to the future, sacrifices were offered, and jovial festivities took place. The Author has seen in the excavated city of Pompeii, the steps at the back of the image of the god, up which the pagan priest went to make his oracular statement. The actual date of the birth of the illegitimate child of Miriam, the Jewish maid, is unknown, and when Jesus was deified, it was quite natural to pitch on the same day as that of the old sun-gods, for that of his nativity. The accouplements of all the "Queens of Heaven" and "Celestial Virgins" had taken place

at the end of the three days of the winter solstice. The Christian Church not only purloined the pagan images of Isis and Horus and the festival of the sun-god, but adopted from them the custom of decking their houses with evergreens and mistletoe. Tertullian, an early Christian writer, remonstrated with them for it, accusing them of idolatry. But is not the whole Christian cult idolatrous, from the Host or consecrated wafer, the sacred or "Holy Ghost," and to Mary to whom innumerable "Hail Marys" are continually being poured out? It requires deep simplicity and credulity on the part of any person of ordinary intelligence to convince himself of the truth of any young virgin having had sexual connexion with a ghost, or to hold any belief in the existence of ghosts at all. But such was the common excuse in eastern countries for illegitimate conception; a young and beautiful god had visited them in the night. Miriam, who had fallen under the blandishments and endearments of the Roman sentry hard by, was no exception to the general custom.

In Cromwellian days, the Puritans made strenuous endeavours during the "Long Parliament" to change the date of the nativity, but the restoration of royalty put a stop to further activities. The interests of royalty and the church are identical, each bolstering up the other.

The Christmas legend was supported by bogus prophecies. The gospels reek with such expressions as "Which was to be fulfilled," "That the Scriptures might be fulfilled," and "As was predicted by the prophets," etc. The forging writer of Matthew was very busy fulfilling these bogus prophecies, but the fact of his repeating so frequently these expressions is strong evidence of his guilt. The supposed prophecies were simply references to events occurring at the time at which they were written, and had no connexion whatever with events taking place centuries after. The legend of the divine birth was supported on the twisting of a statement in Isaiah vii. 14, "Behold a virgin will conceive and bear a child," literally "is with child and beareth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel." The passage refers to a war before the walls of Jerusalem, between Ahaz King of Judah and the Kings of Syria and Israel. In the next chapter we are told that a son was born to the prophetess, and that Isaiah was the father. Neither that child nor Jesus were ever called Immanuel, which merely meant the kingdom of Judah. The next bogus prophecy is a garbled version differing entirely from the original in Micah v. 2-5, which runs as follows: "But thou Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel . . . And this man shall be the peace when the Assyrian shall come into our land, and shall tread in our palaces; then shall we raise against him seven shepherds and eight principal men, and they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof, thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian." A great military leader here is foretold, a native of Bethlehem who, with the assistance of fifteen other heroes, would deliver his country from the Assyrian Oppressor. The Matthew garble is as follows: "And thou Bethlehem in the land of Judah art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel." Bethlehem was pitched upon because David, their idol king was said to have been born there. Jesus never was a ruler in Egypt, nor did he ever deliver the Jews from the Assyrian. The attempt to trace the descent of Jesus from David is of course fraudulent. Jesus could not be descended from two different individuals, namely Joseph and a ghost. If from the latter he could not

have had a grandfather; yet the Matthew writer gives his grandfather, through Joseph, as Jacob, while the Luke writer gives it as Heli! The third bogus prophecy is in Matt. ii. 15. "Out of Egypt have I called my son." The original is from Hosea xi. 1: "When Israel (the Jewish nation) was a child I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt, they sacrificed unto Baalam and burnt incense to graven images." If this could have referred to Jesus as the writer of Matthew would have us believe, it apparently did not occur to him that Jesus must have sacrificed to Baal and offered incense to idols. But the idea of taking the child down to Egypt after he had been born to fulfil this bogus prophecy might have deceived the ignorant wonder-seekers of that day, but is childish to readers in these prosaic days.

The Christmas season is held up by Christians as one of "peace and good-will," and much is made of it. But we have yet to learn when these virtues of the Christian deity have been in evidence. St. Paul tells us in 1 Cor. xiv. 33, that "God is not the author of confusion but of peace." Paul evidently did not know what he was talking about, for we are told in Ex. xv. 3, that "The Lord is a man of war," literally Jehovah, and the history of the Jewish god and his cruelties to innocent men, women and children, as recorded in the Old Testament, proves the above statement to be correct. Was Jesus any better? "Think ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you no, but a sword" (division). (Luke xii. 51.) The anonymous writer of the first epistle to John (iv. 16) must have been romancing and in an amorous mood when he wrote, "We have known the love that God hath to us, God is love," for in Deut. iv. 24, we are told, "The Lord thy God is a consuming fire." "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it" (Amos iii. 6.) "I make peace and create evil, I, the Lord do all these things." (Isaiah xlv. 7.)

The history of the Christian religion is one of bigotry, intolerance, persecution and bloodshed. Where was the "peace and good-will" in the Inquisition, the Crusades, the Slaughter of the Albigenes, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, the Burning at the Stake of innocent women for the imaginary crime of witchcraft, of Bruno, Servetus, and Vanini? Can we find it in the cruelties to Copernicus and Galileo for teaching the true theory of the Zodiac, because, contrary to the Bible, which is now admitted by that same church to be true? ALETHEIA.

The Majestic Universe.

In the face of all the facts revealed by anthropology and astronomy, can there be anything more ludicrous to contemplate than the antics of pigmy clerics, who claim that their joss who has been playing the devil with the inhabitants of this particular planet, the earth, for a matter of 2,000 years is the supreme being who created and governs the Universe, and is alone entitled to the submissive worship and obedience of all human beings?

When has the "living God" that Christians adore ever given any proof of his being alive? Spencer truly said that if we could conceive of an intelligence behind Nature as we see it and know it, that intelligence could be nothing other than diabolical. Conditions of life are bad enough without the idea of a God. They would be horrible if the existence of such a being could be proved. At every crisis in the world's—or a particular nation's—history the superstitious Christian Deity as represented by the clerics has been on the side of the big battalions. Clearly, with the Christian Deity Might is Right,

And these observations have a bearing upon the proposals recently made for an extension of the objects pursued by Rationalist or Freethought organizations. I think it may be claimed for the credit of the *Freethinker* as a journal, and the N.S.S. as a militant organization, that both have put first the best interests of the ordinary man. Other agencies have attracted a minority of highbrows, whose main interests are involved in academic, abstract and high intellectual debate. They have pandered too much to a dialectic which the average man in the street cannot follow. The great thing is to break the bread of Truth in simple and lucid forms.

For example, we read at the moment a great deal about "Rational Humanism," as if one could conceive of a Humanism that was not rational. And the advocates of the propagation of a positive ethic and the establishment of a detailed ethical system find the transition easy to a proposal to institute a "natural religion" in place of a supernatural, though as I have shown in these columns before, taking the term "religion" in its ordinary dictionary meaning and general acceptance, the phrase "natural religion" actually is a contradiction in terms. These advocates speak and write of people with "morally enlightened minds," which savours of a presumption and conceit alien to the whole conception and scheme of militant Freethought. As has been pointed out amongst others, by Robert Blatchford, what may commend itself as the right thing to "morally enlightened minds" to-day may be damned as the wrong thing by the "morally enlightened minds" of to-morrow. This coquetting with the phraseology of the Churches is holding a candle to them and rejoices the hearts of the "Liberal," "Modernist," and "Advanced" theologians who are prepared to jettison a great deal so long as they can get their opponents to adopt such terms as "religion" and "religious." Once such terms enter the currency of Freethought good-bye to militancy—good-bye to effective hostility to the enemies of Truth and Freedom endowed and entrenched as they are by and in the great ecclesiastical corporations. A parson in Scotland exclaimed, the other day: "The creed of Materialism is exploded!"—as if Materialism ever had or could have such a thing as a "creed." The stupid confusion of thought among Churchmen who call themselves "Liberal," "Modernist," or "Advanced" must not be copied by the Freethinker, who is all out for the abolition of Ecclesiasticism. It is a booby trap for the incautious, the soft-hearted and the feeble-minded. Iconoclasm is still the great and all-absorbing task of Freethinkers. It needs all their time, brains and energy. There is only one political subject that may be said to engage the attention of Freethinkers, because it is inevitably and necessarily a part of Freethought propaganda, and that is the disestablishment and disendowment of all State Churches. Other political, social and economic questions and policies lie outside the province and purview of the militant Freethinker. He realizes that the imposition of a positive system of ethics to be observed by Freethinkers and inculcated by them for the rising generation may result in the suppression of individuality and the blighting of originality and indeed become a menace to independence of thought altogether.

Nevertheless we may borrow hints from the Scripture. For instance, there is that instructive remark of Paul, "One thing I do." How suitably that applies to the task of the militant Freethinker! Whether he contemplates the infinitely great or the infinitely little, or whatever lies between these extremes, his one supreme aim in the light of what anthropology and astronomy have revealed is to file away the shackles and fetters that as yet bind the minds of his

fellowmen. Change men's minds and you change everything. Replace a dualistic by a monistic conception of the phenomena of Nature; and you not only produce an unpurchaseable thirst for knowledge; but you also provide the best and purest means of satisfying that thirst. Did not Kipling write of "a thirst that you couldn't buy?" Let us apply the idea to the intellectual needs instead of the physical.

We get bogged and obscured in our ethicisms and moralizings. Who is able to devise, draw up and formulate a scheme of morals for general observance? We deny this ability to the supernaturalists. Can we as naturalists and humanists lay claim to it? The Goulds and the Coopers are preaching a scheme that includes elements which are mutually exclusive or mutually destructive. They seem to lose sight of the magnitude of the work which still faces us as iconoclasts. Science has prepared for man and invites him to enter upon an abundant life wherein he can find scope for all his faculties, and facilities for the highest personal development if he were but emancipated from the tyrannous bondage that supernaturalism has laid upon him through the dehumanizing and devitalizing forces of fear and greed.

IGNOTUS.

"The Pious Atheist."

"At the entrance of the modern time stands the "God-man." At its exit will only the God in the God-man evaporate and can the God-man really die if only the God in him dies? . . . The other world outside us is indeed brushed away . . . but the other world in us has become a new heaven, and calls us forth to renewed heaven-storming."—Max Stirner, "The Ego and His Own."

A FREETHINKER is one who has freed himself from the deadweight of traditional superstition and has learnt to direct unflinching criticism at popular prejudices. Too often, however, the Atheist stops short after rejecting religion, and retains unabated all the moral and political superstition to which the centuries of religious domination have given birth. Have we driven God from his throne only to crown in his place "Humanity," "Society," "the Eternal Rights of Man," "Morality," or some other quasi-religious fetish? To use Nietzsche's image, Christianity is the honey-cake which helps us to swallow the poison—Christian morality; the Atheist scorns the sop and swallows the poison neat.

Instead of seeking our soul's salvation we are now to "sacrifice ourselves" for "humanity" and "freedom," to substitute "altruism" for "godliness." The Atheist vies with the Christian in his scorn for the Egoist, who laughs at the good of mankind, and cries with Max Stirner, "All things are nothing to me. My concern is neither the divine nor the human, not the true, the good, the just or the free, but solely what is mine. Nothing is more to me than myself."

Yet, altruism, striving for the good of others is based on the Christian principle of "self-sacrifice," of trying to be something which we are not. And what shallow hypocrisy lies beneath them both. Just as the pious Christian gives up worldly enjoyments with the object of heavenly rewards ("the Lord will repay thee tenfold") so the pious Atheist, who "sacrifices himself" in order to educate his fellows and increase the sum of human happiness knows in his heart that this is merely his way of seeking his own happiness, that he can only find satisfaction in spreading his ideas, and seeing happy, friendly, faces around him. To achieve this egoistic desire he sacrifices other desires, e.g., for wealth, just as the ambitious capitalist sacrifices his desire for leisure or social work in order to amass wealth. The one is as thoroughly selfish as the other; the only difference is in the choice of ambitions.

Let us be honest, let us frankly avow that we are egoists in our every action. If we do not plunge into debauchery, crime, or money-grabbing, but rather devote our energies to dispelling superstition and improving the

condition of our fellowmen, we must renounce all credit for moral superiority. Morality is a legacy from Christianity, and must be as scornfully cast aside. The idea that the unrestrained egoist would inevitably engage in orgies of rapine and murder has its roots in the Christian doctrine of Original Sin. If I choose a different course, it is not that I care a rap for morality or society, but that I prefer the pleasure gained from educational or political activity, I find in it the truest and fullest development of my Ego. Having escaped the Christian dose of Original Sin, the majority of us are not by nature sensual and bestial; we obtain greater satisfaction from intellectual and social activities. But the sacred traditions of morality must be cast out with the religion which gave them birth.

The Egoist alone can look the world in the face and say, "I have desecrated all things; nothing is holy to me."
AGIS.

The Land of Burns.

ROBERT BURNS was born among some of the most beautiful scenery in the world. Not Caledonia stern and wild, but the curving shores of pastoral Ayrshire, but in contrast Nature frowned upon his birth with forbidding looks; neither did Fortune smile upon him; he knew hunger, cold and penury, but in that he was not alone, but merely one of the million peasants of his time, a type surviving to our own day. Even Burns could not wholly shake off his destiny any more that he could the clay from his shoes; but he soared in an Empyrean of his own; he made the rivers of Ayr, as Ingersoll said, sing his name for ever; no need of a plea for the vernacular, he wrote in the Doric that will never die:—

Till the future dares
Forget the past, his fate and fame shall be
An echo and a light unto Eternity!

It is a commonplace and a complacency to say Burns was at his best in his love-songs. Even Burns was many-sided and well-balanced. Take that tremendous epoch-making satire Holy Wullie's Prayer, or the delightfully humorous Death and Doctor Hornbrook; his song of Independence; A Man's A Man; he could mourn with the mournful in profoundest pity—what matters the mere poetry of that? He could rejoice among lords and beggars without distinction, and understood them all. He was a great, though not an academic philosopher. He held that:—

Sense and worth ower a' the earth
Should bear the gree an' a' that.

But, stay; we set out to write of the land of Burns; beautiful in the summer, with Ingersoll's "maniac winters"; most of the nooks and crannies, hills and streams, woods and grottoes, which we have ourselves intimately and lovingly explored. There are poets in every land, most of them not great, those million minors can be discounted, and with the singing Ploughman should learn to be less loquacious. A sense of proportion is lamentably lacking, these minors mostly degenerating into mere piety and drivel—saving only the greater Master who will shine as long as Burns himself:—

The Muse nae poet ever fand her
Till by himsel' he learned to dander
Adoon some wimplin' streams meander
An' no' think lang;
Sae sweet tae muse an' pensive ponder
The heartfelt sang.

Of course this alone does not make a poet as our million minors show. The beauty is present, but the spirit is mostly lacking, they have feet of clay, they lack the towering spirit of the magnificent Robert Burns; many-sided, many-gifted, as said, a whole man and wholly human. His religion was but the accident of his birth.

Nor was beauty confined to Scotland, the deserts of Arabia were as sweet to Omar Khayyam, inspiring his simple and profound philosophy. But, alas! the present writer has suffered interregnum, was shipwrecked in a dead calm. When Richard is himself again—which, under Nature's great recuperative powers, should soon eventuate—he will explore his lovely Ayrshire once again to wander by the streams of his delight with the ever dear associations of the Land of Burns.

ANDREW MILLAR,

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD JANUARY 15, 1932.
THE President, Mr. C. Cohen, in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Clifton, Dobson, Wood, Silvester, Hornibrook, Easterbrook, LeMaine, Rosetti (A. C.), Preece, McLaren, Mrs. Quinton, Junr., Mrs. Venton, Miss Kough, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted, monthly financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Sunderland, Birmingham, Glasgow, Birkenhead, Manchester, Liverpool, West Ham Branches, and the Parent Society. Reports were submitted from Nelson, Liverpool, Cardiff, Perth, Burnley. Arrangements were sanctioned for meetings at Battersea, and Fulham Town Halls. In accordance with the votes of the Branches, the Annual Conference for 1932 will be held in Manchester. Mr. A. D. McLaren reported progress of the Study Circle. Final details concerning the Annual Dinner were announced, and the Secretary instructed to make arrangements for a Social on March 5.

The next meeting of the Executive will be held on February 26.

R. H. ROSETTI,
General Secretary.

Obituary.

MR. THOMAS BRABINS.

We regret to record the death of Mr. Thomas Brabins of Northampton, at the advanced age of eighty-six. Mr. Brabins was an old and ardent Freethinker, and a native of Yoxall, Staffs. He had a distinguished career in the Police Force, and was in private life a most lovable character. He was a great nature lover, and an earnest student of art and music. A reader of wide range, he brought to all his studies an intelligence far above the average, and his death has removed a very earnest follower of the Freethought cause. He leaves a family of five to carry on the battle for Freedom of Thought.

There was a Secular Service at the graveside, Austin Holyoake's service being read by Mr. A. C. Musgrave.

Rationalist Press Association (Glasgow District)

Grand Hall, Central Halls, 25 Bath Street,
Sunday, January 31, at 3 p.m.

Mr. C. E. M. JOAD.

Subject:—"JEANS, EDDINGTON, and RELIGION."
Violinist—Senor Manuel Luna.

Questions and Discussion. Silver Collection.

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SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON.

OUTDOOR.

FULHAM AND CHELSEA BRANCH N.S.S. (corner of Shorrolds Road, North End Road): 7.30, Messrs. F. Day and C. Tuson.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S.—A meeting will be held at White Stone Pond, Hampstead, near the Tube Station every Sunday morning at 11.30 a.m. Speaker to-day Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12.0, Mr. B. A. Le Maine; at 3.30 and 6.30, Messrs. Bryant, Hyatt, Tuson and Wood. Current *Freethinkers* can be obtained opposite the Park Gates, on the corner of Edgware Road, during and after the meetings.

INDOOR.

BATTERSEA TOWN HALL (Lavender Hill).—Mr. Chapman Cohen, President of the N.S.S., will deliver a lecture on Sunday, Subject—"The Benefits of Unbelief." Doors open at 6.30, commence at 7.0.

HAMPSTEAD ETHICAL INSTITUTE (The Studio Theatre, 59 Finchley Road, N.W.8, near Marlborough Road Station): 11.15, Mrs. Ursula Roberts, B.A.—"Gerard Manley Hopkins."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road): 7.0, Hutton Hynd "Robert Burns" (illustrative Readings from the Poems.)

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, C. E. M. Joad, M.A.—"A Reform Bill for 1932."

STUDY CIRCLE (N.S.S. Office, 62 Farringdon Street, E.C.4): Monday, January 25, at 8.0, Mr. A. H. Millward will read a paper on "Unitarianism and Freethought."

THE CONWAY DISCUSSION CIRCLE (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Tuesday, January 26, at 7.0, Archibald Robertson, M. A.—"Eisler's Theory of Christian Origins."

THE NON-POLITICAL METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (City of London Hotel, 107 York Road, Camden Road, N.7, five minutes from the Brecknock): 7.30, Mr. William Leavis—"The Report of the Licensing Commission." Mr. C. E. Radcliffe in the chair.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Bristol Street Council Schools): Sunday, at 7.0, Mr. H. Lemard—"Robert Ingersoll." Thursday, January 28, at Shakespeare Rooms, 174 Edmund Street (near Livery Street) at 7.30, Mr. E. P. Standon—"World Peace, A Dream or Reality?"

BIRKENHEAD (Wirral) BRANCH N.S.S. (Boilermakers' Hall, Argyle Street, entrance Lorn Street): 7.0, J. V. Shortt (Liverpool)—"The Christian Zodiac."

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Annual meeting. 2.45, Mr. J. Clayton—"The Free Churches and the Sunday Taboo."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (City Hall, Albion Street, No. 2 Room): 6.30, Mr. S. Bryden—"The Songs of Burns." Questions and discussion. Silver collection.

HANTS AND DORSET BRANCH.—A meeting will be held at 36, Victoria Park Road, Bournemouth, on January 24, 1932, at 6.30 p.m. All readers invited.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Prof. Robert Peers, M.A.—"Some Aspects of the Population Question."

LIVERPOOL (Merseyside) BRANCH N.S.S. (Transport Buildings, 41 Islington, Liverpool, entrance Christian Street): 7.0, Mr. R. H. Rosetti (London)—"The Gods Men of Science Believe in." Current *Freethinkers* and other literature on sale.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Engineers' Hall, 120 Rusholme Road): 3.0, J. T. Beliby—"The Goddess of Science." 6.30, "The Fallacy of Vivisection."

PLYMOUTH BRANCH N.S.S. (Plymouth Chambers, Drake Circus, Hall No. 7): 7.0, Mr. E. Lynden, Junr.—"Why Assume all that Christians Wish?"

PAISLEY BRANCH N.S.S. (Baker's Hall, 5 Forbes Place): 8.0 p.m., Rev. Dav. McQueen—"Has Religion Failed?"

PERTH BRANCH N.S.S. (City Hall): Sunday, January 31, at 7.30, Debate—"That the Church of Scotland has assisted Social Progress, and been faithful to the Teaching of Jesus." *Affir.*: Rev. R. A. Trotter, M.A., St. Columba's Church; *neg.*: Mr. Jas. Wingate, Chairman, Lord Scone, M.P. for Perth. Questions. Dundee and District Freethinkers please note. Doors open at 7.0.

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Rooms, Green Street): 7.0 p.m., Mr. J. T. Brighton—"Women."

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