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Views and Opinions.

Banning the Bible.

THE Bible is a book with a very wide-spread circulation, and on the strength of its circulation it ought to be one of the most read books in the world. In a sense that may be true, but it is also true that it is one of the least understood books in Christendom—we mean by those who believe in it. Parsons—assuming they are honest in their professions about the Bible—certainly do not understand it. The ignorant take it as the “word of God,” and talk as though we were still living in the Stone Age. The more astute and the more scholarly spend their energies in seeing what they can make the Bible mean, without paying very much regard as to what it actually does mean. Commentaries are written on the Bible, in which the scholarship of the world is raked over with the result of proving to intelligent readers that scholarship may often be a very effective bar to understanding. Not to be behind hand, literary men write a lot of nonsense about the Bible being a fountain of “English undefiled,” and of its vast influence on English writers, without realizing that the English of the Bible was never the English of the people, and that the influence of the Bible consists only in citations, which might have occurred with any book that was given an authoritative position, and which it was dangerous to contradict. And upon the face of it, it was English writers who made the Bible what it is, not the other way about. No one but Billy Sunday or the Bishop of London ever imagined that the ancient Jews spoke the “lingo” of any of the versions of the Bible.

As we have often said, the only genuine way to read it is with the help of a number of volumes describing the beliefs and practices of savages. Then Bible reading is really helpful. When we place the beliefs of Jesus concerning disease side by side with the beliefs of uncivilized medicine-men on the same

topic, when we take the teachings of primitive peoples on the creation of the world, on the origin of languages, or of the human race, or the magical tests for purity, or the judgments of God on those who offend him, or on the birth of Jesus, etc., etc., and contrast them one with another, then we really do begin to understand the Bible. And it is then as interesting and as helpful as any other account of a primitive people and their customs.

* * *

Thus Saith the Lord!

Unfortunately the Bible came before the world as a “sacred” book. It was God Almighty’s first and only efforts at authorship, and he resented all corrections. It was the most disastrous effort in authorship that the world has ever seen. Other books have had bad teaching, false teaching, or ridiculous teaching. But then no one was compelled to read them, and no one was prohibited correcting them, nor—in the days before log-rolling journalism existed—was anyone paid to praise them. But the Bible had all the faults possible to authorship and none of its virtues. People were compelled to read, or at least to believe it. Thousands were paid to praise it. No one was allowed to contradict it. Every hostile teaching was met with a “Thus saith the Lord,” and that settled everything. Every sort of absurdity, and all sorts of brutality were sanctified by the “sacred” book. It caused more hatred, it led to greater obstruction, it did more to keep the world in darkness than any other book the world has seen. Witchcraft, intolerance, demonism, every absurdity in science and numerous barbarities in sociology were sanctioned by the Holy Bible. Judged by its consequences the possession of the “sacred” book was the greatest disaster that has ever overtaken the world. The war was a blessing at the side of it. We may get over that in the course of a couple of generations. Over fifty generations has left the world still under the distressing shadow of the Holy Bible.

* * *

The Bible Handbook.

It is perhaps, to the credit of the Customs authorities of Victoria, Australia, that it has seen fit to prohibit the entrance into Victoria of the *Bible Handbook*, issued with the sole object of acquainting those who would read it with some of the contents of the blessed book. The *Bible Handbook*, by G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball, was issued over forty years ago. It was designed to encourage the reading and a knowledge of the Bible. It did not say as Christians say of the *Freethinker*, “Do not read it,” but said of the Bible, “Read it, only read it with your eyes open and your mind alert. Approach it in a critical, and not in a ‘reverential’ spirit.” So it compiled from the Bible a collection of “Bible Contradic-

tions," "Bible Absurdities," "Bible Atrocities," "Unfulfilled Prophecies and Broken Promises," and "Bible Immoralities, Indecencies and Obscenities," accompanied with very brief notes. In cases where the Bible text was too "thick" to be reprinted, references only were given. That *Handbook* has passed through a number of editions, and is still a steady seller. It has enabled those who wished to put their hands upon a certain type of teaching or practice in the Bible to do so. It was one of the deadliest blows struck at the Holy Bible during the past fifty years. It helped people to see what the Bible really said. And the surest way to kill any religion is to make people understand it. Religiously, men and women are saved by believing, but they are damned by understanding.

No attempt to suppress the *Handbook* has ever been made in this country. Copies go freely through the post, and they are exhibited by any bookseller who is not bullied into not doing so by his religious customers. How could it be suppressed? There is not a line in any of the notes to which any Court in the world, except one presided over by the B.B.C., could take any exception. The only objection that could be raised is against the passages cited. To indict them in a court of law would be to invite Freethinkers to indict the Bible in a similar way and to cite the incriminating passages as proof. I did, many years ago, get the police of Manchester to stop the reading of selected passages from the Bible in the street because they were unfit to be read before a mixed audience, and I believe I am the only person who has ever had this done. But no attempt has ever been made to suppress the sale of the *Handbook*, except by the usual methods of boycott and intimidation. And the only thing that will stop all Christians using these weapons will be the funeral of the last believer.

* * *

Blasphemy and the Bible.

For some time we have been sending consignments of the publications of the Pioneer Press to the Rationalist Association of Australia. Some hundreds of copies of the *Bible Handbook* have been sent, hitherto without any kind of interference. From the last issue of the organ of the Association *The Rationalist*, that has reached us, we were surprised to learn that the copies that arrived in Victoria in December last were held up by the Post Office pending instructions from "higher up." Following this action the Secretary of the Association and Editor of *The Rationalist* received the following notice from the Collector of Customs:—

This publication being blasphemous, the copies arriving have been seized as prohibited imports. Formal notice of seizure is enclosed. Before future action is taken, be good enough to submit in writing such explanation as you may consider necessary. You are also requested to advise whether these publications were definitely ordered by you.

Mr. Langley in commenting on this writes in his paper:—

I feel that if I submit to such a decision I am unworthy of the position I hold. Where a principle is concerned I have never known fear, and in this matter a principle is at stake. G. W. Foote, whose name the book bears, was a man of courage. He went to prison for twelve months in order to establish freedom for Freethought literature, Shall it be said that the Freethought leaders of to-day are of weaker character? Quietly—not boastingly—I write these words in cold determination—I am prepared to do what Foote did. I would rather go down crushed and defeated, beaten and ruined in a fight against the intolerable fist of authority than be a tame spineless creature, who in a righteous cause feared to take a stand.

This is the right kind of spirit in which to meet such an attack, and we do not doubt but that Mr. Langley will be as good as his word. We have written him privately on the matter.

The Australian Governments have the right to ban or bar whatever they please, however ridiculous they make themselves in the eyes of civilized and sensible people. If we were in Mr. Langley's place we should politely tell the Customs Authorities to go to the devil, and supply them with a sketch map of the route if necessary; but we should decline to reply to any sort of an inquisition by them. What we should do—we are taking it that the general law there is the same as here—would be to enter an action for the return of the books, and this would throw upon the Customs Authorities the onus of proving that the books were legally condemnable. If Mr. Langley has taken legal advice this may be what has been done; but I have no other information save that contained in the *Rationalist*. Anyway, if we can assist from this side assistance will be given. And it would really be funny to find a Christian lawyer trying to prove to a Christian Judge and a Christian jury that a book containing nothing that could possibly be questioned, save some hundreds of quotations from the Bible, was "blasphemous."

It is curious that this news should have come to hand immediately following my article of Feb. 28. It does give point to what I said there, namely, that religious liberty is never safe while these blasphemy laws exist. In this matter Australia follows the bad example of the home country, and in this particular incident it shows the bad qualities of its parent without its good ones. For it is certain that much as some would like to do so, no Judge in England would condemn the *Bible Handbook* as blasphemous. Possibly no Judge in Australia will if the issue is properly raised. It is, probably, only some ignorant Customs official who has acted, and he should be put in his place.

But the only way to security is to get rid of the blasphemy laws. And the only way to do that is to educate Christians out of their religion. Dependence upon politicians is useless. Seventy-five per cent of them, whether in high office or in no office, would sell their souls for votes and a continuance in power. We must go on making Freethinkers—not mere disbelievers in Christianity who move in continuous fear of giving offence to their Christian friends and acquaintances, but Freethinkers who realize that Freethought is something worth having and something worth fighting for. Unless we use the freedom we have won to gain a yet larger liberty, we may soon find what liberty we have filched from us. And this Australian case should serve to remind us that our cause is one that is far larger than mere nationality. It is as wide as humanity. When Thomas Paine came across the sentiment "Where liberty is there is my country"; he replied, "No, where liberty is *not*, there is my country." And that put the spirit of genuine Freethinking in a nutshell. Anything short of that is a craving for mere personal comfort.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

BELIEVE AS YOU LIST.

Thou art a foole
To thincke there are or gods or goddesses,
For the later if that they still had any power
Mine beeing the mother of 'em woulde have helped mee
They are things wee make ourselves.

Philip Massinger (1631). (Act iv. Scene iii.)

The Great Lying Churches.

"John P.
Robinson, he,
Sez they didn't know everything down in Judæa."
Lowell.

"The vain crowds, wandering blindly, led by lies."
Lucretius.

"Every Messiah rides into his Kingdom on the backs
of asses."—*G. W. Foote.*

A CHILDLIKE credulity is a marked characteristic of the entire ages of Faith, manifesting itself in a thousand ways. Not only did people swallow the fairy-tales narrated in the Old and New Testaments, but they gazed with filmy-eyed wonder at the faked relics of "saints" exhibited by priests throughout Christendom. This credulity exists to-day. England, enjoying free-trade in the matter of superstition, is freer than other countries in this respect. As belief has waned an element of toleration has shown itself, and extreme bigotry is only to be found now in the slums of Liverpool, where petticoated Catholic priests still rule the roost. But, speaking broadly, the secular power of priests finished in England with the glare of the fires at Stratford and Smithfield. Indeed, the grip of Priestcraft was never so unquestioned and unresisted in this country as in Italy, Spain, France, or even in Ireland. There is a wholesale tendency to resistance, may be obstinacy, in English blood, which is cooler than that of the Latin and Celtic races. As a people, we do not permit the public pantomime of the Vatican, in which the Pope apes royalty in a territory slightly larger than Hyde Park. As a people, we do not encourage the annual swindle of the "Holy" Fire at Jerusalem, or the famous fake of the blood of St. Januarius at Naples. Even hot-gospellers, hailing from the land of tall buildings and big business, no longer find their sorry trade so profitable as in the far-off days of Moody and Sankey, when revivalism was almost as profitable a business as running a bucket-shop.

This abyssmal credulity of the ages of Faith, however, is passing wonderful. According to Didron, the praises of the cross of Christ were sung in the ninth century in like manner as people celebrate those "of a god or of a hero," and right-reverend and most ignorant Fathers of the Christian Church did not fail to remark that its figure was "engraven in the products of Natures, seen in the works of men, in the position of inanimate objects and the gestures of the living." It was even said that the ass had borne a cross on its back ever since Jesus Christ made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, "sitting on an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass." Joyful indeed must have been the heart of the early Christian who, gazing on the coat of an ass, was first struck by the illusion that the particular markings were cruciform. Almost as happy was the schoolboy, who, misled by the Eastern metaphor, imagined that the alleged saviour of a saucy world entered Jerusalem on the backs of two animals, in the spectacular manner of cow-boys or circus artistes.

Attention being once called to the evidence of Christianity supplied by the ass, it is natural that it should be used in encounters with Freethinkers. It is to be hoped that it proved a more effective weapon in the hands of some than it did in those of the priest who endeavoured to subdue the Atheist, Boindin. The pious ecclesiastic had brought all his artillery to bear against the sceptic without avail, and when almost in despair, broke in, "Well, monsieur, will you deny that since the day Our Blessed Saviour made his entry into Jerusalem on a donkey,

they bear a cross on their backs." "Very forcible," retorted Boindin, "turn round, if you please."

This gullibility, this credulity, is not in all cases an expression of wooden-headedness. Credulity is carefully fostered and nursed by priests in the elementary schools of this country. That one fact explains in a nutshell the anxiety of priests to retain their fetish-book in the educational programme of this nation. Millions of school children in Great Britain are still taught to believe in the fairy-tales of religion, and the sacredness of the clerical caste. The legends associated with the Christian Bible are poured into their ears almost daily for years, and, in after life, the "Old, Old Story" has a quite familiar ring even when half believed. The unblushing mendacity of the authors of this Eastern Bible, and the brazen-faced audacity of priests, being in so familiar and homely a setting, fails to make the ordinary child rub his eyes. It is the duty of every individual to think freely. What chance has an ordinary citizen when the priests put blinkers on his eyes from early childhood. Thought should be free, wherever it leads. It is highly significant that even Freethinkers have had to grope their way from clerical darkness to intellectual light. This is not a mere question of being orthodox or unorthodox. The point is that the clergy see to it that millions of children are carefully biassed in favour of their superstition, so that they may exploit them the more easily in after life.

The Christian superstition is based upon these Biblical fairy-tales, for Christianity is inseparably associated with miracles. It is on the truth or falsehood of these stories that this particular religion must stand or fall. In the gospels, Christ proclaimed that he was "God," and his proofs were that he multiplied loaves and fishes, and restored the dead to life. The whole question is reduced to one of facts. If we can believe that Christ was born of a virgin, that he performed miracles, that he left the earth like an aeroplane, and may be careering in space to-day, then we need not hesitate to accept the priestly pretensions of being a sacred caste apart from ordinary citizens. If, on the other hand, we do not believe these yarns, no talk of Christian love, Christian brotherhood, or Christian charity, will make believable the rank nonsense upon which Christianity is based.

The most important Christian body—the Roman Catholic Church—recognizes this, and affirms that its own miracles are a continuation of those said to have been performed by Jesus Christ, the twelve disciples, and regiments of "saints." They pretend that the so-called "cures" at Lourdes, and elsewhere, are precisely such as those mentioned in the pages of the Christian Bible. The tens of thousands of priests of the Greek Church, who have such power in the East of Europe, take the same cock-a-hoop attitude, and contend, with uplifted hands, that the showmanship of the so-called "Holy" Fire at Jerusalem every year is simply the latest link in the great chain that extends back to "Noah's Ark," and the talking snake in the alleged Garden of Eden. Without belief in such marvels, the Christian Religion would be as extinct as Zoroastrianism. It is not a creed of "love" and "brotherhood" which has fascinated ignorant millions through so many centuries, in many countries, and caused them to fill the priests' coffers with money. All the Churches of Christendom batten upon human credulity, and leave Humanity chained within the prison of Superstition and Ignorance.

The power of the priests rests upon their fetish-book. The work which Freethinkers have set themselves is that of freeing their fellows from the domination of Priestcraft. One of the most important steps towards that end is to insist upon secular

education in the national schools, which manufacture young Christians as a sausage machine produces sausages.

MIMNERMUS.

An Overlooked Instance of Design

WHEN Francis Henry Egerton, the eighth Earl of Bridgewater, died in 1829, at the age of seventy-one; it was found that he had bequeathed the sum of £8,000 to be paid to the author of the best treatise, "On the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, as manifested in the Creation." The President of the Royal Society, who had control of the money, divided it into parts of a thousand pounds each, for eight separate treatises; these form the once famous *Bridgewater Treatises*. Now, shorn of their glory, neglected and forgotten, they decay in lumber rooms and eventually find their way to the sixpenny box.

A critic, Prof. Bain, if I remember rightly, remarked that if the Earl wished the matter to be thoroughly threshed out he should have devoted a similar sum for the best presentation of the opposite side of the question. Probably the old Earl would have considered this a most wicked and blasphemous suggestion. However, the Treatises were assigned to the most distinguished men of the time. Whewell compiled one on Astronomy. Buckland one on Geology. Sir Charles Bell, the eminent surgeon, one on the hand, and so on.

Furnished with these, and with Paley's *Natural Theology*, in which the celebrated watch argument appears; the believer was confident in his ability to meet and defeat the sceptic on the ground of natural science. It may be noted in passing that although Paley's name is so identified with the watch argument—which argues that as a watch had a designer, the man who designed it, being more wonderful still, must also have had a still greater designer—so that Paley's name brings to mind the watch argument; and the watch argument brings to mind the name of Paley. Yet Paley was not the inventor of the argument; he appropriated it, without acknowledgment, from the work of a Dutch mathematician named Nieuwentyt, whose work had been translated into English under the title of *The Religious Philosopher*, and published here in 1718; eighty-four years before the publication of Paley's work. There is no doubt about the plagiarism, some of the passages in Paley's work are identical with those in Nieuwentyt's.

Although some daring thinkers had speculated, even so far back as the Greek philosopher Democritus, 460 B.C., and Lucretius the Roman philosophical poet 99 B.C., as to the possibility of the Cosmos existing independent of a creator; and Laplace, the great French astronomer, who declared that he had no use for a god, showed how the solar system could be accounted for by the operation of natural laws, without the intervention of a creator; yet no one had yet propounded any satisfactory theory by which the multitudinous variety of animals and plants had been brought about. Darwin's *Origin of Species*, which was published in 1859, twenty years after the *Bridgewater Treatises*, supplied the missing theory, and immediately, for all free-thinking minds the Design Argument fell to the ground.

Although, doubtless, the Design argument will continue to appeal to the uneducated and uninstructed, at the mental level of Billy Sunday and the Salvation Army, as it is simple, and saves a lot of troublesome thinking; yet it has been abandoned by all thinking minds, and it is difficult to-day to find it used even by the most orthodox educated apologists.

One very striking characteristic of the Victorians

was their capacity for ignoring awkward facts. They dwelt upon the beauty and usefulness of beautiful and useful things, but altogether ignored the ugliness and evil, equally evident in many other things. Take for instance the crocodile the most dreaded of reptiles. Brigadier-General R. G. Burton, in his recently published book entitled *A Book of Man-Eaters* (p. 258) declares:—

Crocodiles are among the most horrible and destructive of all man-eaters. Mr. Theodore Roosevelt says in his *African Game Trails*, that they claim more human victims than lions and leopards in Africa, where they appear to be more destructive than in India. Their method of approach to their prey is repulsive to a degree. They are silent, relentless, horrifying.

Mr. J. Morewood Dowsett, another big game hunter, observes: "It is always a pleasure to me to shoot a crocodile regardless of its age or size, as I know by so doing there is one pest the less . . . In nearly every crocodile you kill you will find the copper or wire bracelets and anklets of the women they have devoured. They look so much like a tree or log of wood that many lives have been lost through this mistake."¹

Mr. John Weeks, the anthropologist, relates: "At Boma [on the Congo] I saw the skin of a crocodile that measured 25 feet long. The trader who killed it showed me twenty-two brass armlets and anklets, weighing 11½ lbs.; that had been taken from its stomach, a proof that in the course of its life it had killed and eaten several people."²

Mr. Chadwick, another big-game hunter, says that in Africa, crocodiles abound in all the rivers north of the Zambesi, and of their fecundity, he says that he has "found as many as forty-eight eggs deposited by one female." Also, he observes:—

The crocodile's approach is deadly silent, and his attack swift as a flash of lightning. Even a large ox has small chance of escape from the great jaws when once dragged into deep water. Yet the reptile has so small a gullet that he can only swallow small morsels of solid food, and he conceals the bodies of the large animals in the reeds below the surface until they decompose before he can enjoy them!³

Another African traveller, Mr. R. C. F. Maughan, says of these "horrible reptiles":—

The waters be they rivers or lakes, of South Central and East Africa abound in these ghastly creatures, and the toll which they take both of human and animal life is appalling to contemplate. Twice since then have I seen persons taken by them, and the horror and rapidity of these terrible incidents were only equalled by my miserable sense of helplessness to aid or save.⁴

The attack, which, says Mr. Maughan, is always delivered in the same way, takes place when the women are filling their water-pots at the river:—

Suddenly, and in an instant there is a terrific, irresistible rush, a wild, piteous scream, a heavy splash, followed by a commotion in the deep water such as might be made by some large body moving rapidly beneath the surface. Far out, a moment later, a human hand is thrown up for an instant, then disappears for ever . . . The entire heart-shaking fatality has probably occupied from five to ten seconds, and should one have witnessed it as I have, there succeeds a miserable despairing sensation of numb, helpless horror, probably the most agonizing which a human being can experience. (p. 58.)

The wonderful "design" displayed in these reptiles we shall describe in our next. W. MANN.

(To be concluded.)

¹ Morewood Dowsett: *Big Game and Big Life*. pp. 145-146.

² J. Weeks: *Among Congo Cannibals*. p. 333.

³ W. S. Chadwick: *Man-Killers and Marauders*. p. 207.

⁴ R. C. F. Maughan: *Africa as I have known it*. p. 56.

Blasphemy, Sediton and Obscenity

STUDIES IN SHIBBOLETHS OF THE SCREEN.

Those who consider that the Freethinker, in his fight against anachronistic restrictions, is merely "flogging a dead horse," should turn up the daily newspapers of February 17, and read the 1931 Report of the British Board of Film Censors: they will find there ample evidence of the urgent necessity for more, and not less, Freethought propaganda, for that report shows only too clearly what an enormous amount of work there still is for the Freethinker to do. Despite the remarkable advances made by the libertarians during the last half-century, the public at large still bears, more or less uncomplainingly, an interference with its liberty that almost makes one despair of establishing the ideal of freedom as an ineradicable characteristic of our social life. Perhaps the general public is satisfied with its lot, having been stupefied with the nauseating cant talked about an Englishman's love of liberty and England being the land of the free, but that is not my opinion. I think that the British public is far from content, but that its voice is inarticulate, and its demands incoherent, and that is a state of affairs that few, outside the ranks of Freethought, will attempt to remedy.

The report of the Film Censors is a glaring example of complete indifference to freedom. The Board admits that it has no standing in the realm of artistic criticism, that it does not deal with technical defects, and that it is not concerned with accuracy, and states frankly that it exists for the purpose of banning "matter calculated to demoralize an audience."

Even if the whole populace was agreed on what would cause or constitute demoralization, the Board would still be in an anomalous position, because, far from being an official body, it is practically self-appointed. That might be considered a minor point if it expressed opinions on the artistic qualities and the technical merits of a film, or if it pointed out inaccuracies, but those aspects are not included in its work. Without even the empty formality of consulting the wishes of those concerned, it demands the right to protect public morals and openly threatens to make its rule more stringent in the future. No freedom-loving people, fully alive to the danger of such Boards, would suffer their dictation for a moment.

During 1931 thirty-four films have been banned and over two hundred others have undergone surgical operations before being passed for public exhibition. The reasons given for this are interesting, multifarious and, in the main, ridiculous. Broadly speaking the Board's activities have been directed against those three ancient shibboleths, blasphemy, sediton and obscenity.

When I saw the reference to blasphemy, I fully expected to find that some Freethinker had directed a film depicting the life of the murdered carpenter or that Hollywood had at last produced a truthful account of Christian origins, but I was doomed to disappointment. Blasphemy had been committed by the material presentation of "Our Saviour," and by comic treatment of religious subjects. Well, well, well! If any screen presentation of religious subjects is funnier than religion itself, the B.B.F.C. has deprived the world of its most superlatively comic pictures. But if the screen presentation of "Our Saviour" was a gospel re-hash submitted as historical fact, I ought perhaps to be thankful for its banning, especially when I remember that the Film Censor is not concerned with accuracy. And yet I must confess to a desire to see the life of Christ on the screen, I feel that the two asses (or is it three?) in the Jeru-

salem Rodeo would be indescribably hilarious. And what interesting problems await the man who first photographs the scramble of the five thousand fighting for sardines on toast, or Jesus, complete with automatics, holding up the local bank officials in the vestry.

However to pass on to the next count, sediton. Little is said, in the newspaper accounts of the report, of the details in this section, but there is little doubt that the Board has been active in opposition to any films of the so-called politically subversive type. The papers merely refer vaguely to incidents in connexion with the Prince of Wales, improper police methods, executions, and birth control. Nothing is said about continental films being ruthlessly opposed on the ground of sediton. That Russian films have failed to pass the censor is common knowledge to any person who belongs to private film societies. The ban in these cases is due solely to the fact that the pictures suggest that the present social order is not the only one, or even the best possible. Some of the Continental films portraying Collectivism in action (and I am not concerned here with its social value) offer food for thought, they provoke discussion, and are therefore valuable, but they have been harried all over the country, by the municipal authorities and police, as well as by the Film Censor. It is high time we realized that sediton is as farcical and meaningless a crime as blasphemy, and that both have been manufactured in the interest of orthodox opinions. The laws and regulations governing official action in both are unjust and tyrannical, and should be swept from any community laying claim to a civilized outlook. But when an unofficial body like the Film Censoring Board goes even further and prevents the display of what it calls seditious films, surely we have reached the limit of endurance. It is another example of propaganda being one-sided. No objection will be raised by Mr. Shortt and his gang to pictures that blind the eyes of the nation to injustice, but no film will be welcomed that criticizes existing institutions in a serious and challenging manner.

With the last count, obscenity, I have little to do here: I discussed that question in a recent article, but I do want to draw attention to some of the censor's views of what constitutes obscenity. He is very much perturbed by screen displays of bedrooms, bathrooms, flippant references to death, contempt for marriage, and too much feminine underwear. I will not sully these fair pages with bedroom questions: everybody knows that bedroom is an obscene word in English, while the very mention of bathroom is enough to get one ostracized. Godliness and cleanliness, though proverbially adjacent, have been enemies for so long that bathroom does not mean bathing place, it is a euphemism for other sanitary arrangements.

For the life of me I cannot see why the censor should consider vulgar flippancy about death immoral or obscene: it is but a few years since men were dying filthy deaths in a very flippant and vulgar manner. At that time the authorities and morality crusaders were only concerned with enlisting men willing to die, they cared nothing for how they died. This belated concern for a reverent attitude towards death smacks of the most indecent hypocrisy.

But what can one say about feminine underwear and undress scenes at the cinema? Only a censor could have found indecency there. I know these displays of the female form and lingerie are meant to be "spicy," but I am sure that few people in the land object to them, and anyway "spiciness" is not obscenity. The screen rarely, if ever, gives more intimate displays of feminine mysteries than the beach or the shopping centre, while advertisements on hoard-

ings and in the daily press (which is often so vocal for purity) have left no room for even the most erotic imagination.

Let us be frank and admit without reserve that all this balderdash about the necessity for purifying the film is but another attempt to restrict freedom and progress, that the reports of Film Censors are designed to carry on the work of narcotizing the public now that the religious dope has lost so much of its potency, and that any supervision of the film which neglects the artistic, technical and truth-telling aspects is socially worthless. The activities of this Board are a piece of impertinent interference, its members are arrogant tyrants.

And yet the Briton sings, and perhaps believes, "Britons never shall be slaves." Our American friends supply the only adequate reply—"sez you!"

L'AIGUILLON.

Crime and the Church.

CRIME is a fundamental phase of human life. Before life became a community of two crime was not possible for obvious reasons, and since that community has multiplied, so crime has expanded until it comprises thousands of offences and millions of offenders.

Crime is defined as a violation of the law, and it might be said that the law has a lot to answer for, as, were much of it non-existent, so also would be crime. Crime is also said to be an offence against morality or the public welfare, but public welfare, too often, means the welfare of a small and special section only, and the remainder, who fare not so well, have a grievance against the favoured ones, and hence, crime. Again our dictionary defines crime simply as wrong-doing. This is altogether too general for particular application.

There is little doubt, however, whatever we understand by crime or its exponent the criminal, the fact looms large upon life's stage, and occupies the concentrated attention, not only of those who practice the noble or ignoble art or science itself, but those also who strenuously seek to thwart the criminal instinct and its venal or vicious evidences by detection and subsequent detention for periods of long or short duration in durance vile.

If the punishment does fit the crime, so to speak, do those who inflict the punishment themselves comply with the abstract moral code by its infliction? That is an open question. And this conjecture brings us to the chief point in this discussion of crime and its antidote the Church, that is, the crime, the criminal, its prevention, his punishment, and the great cure.

Does the punishment ever convince the criminal of the immorality of his crime? Do the officers of the law—the judge, the barristers, the jury, or the agents of detection and arrest inspire the prisoner with a conviction of his transgression against morality? It is to be doubted.

Now, it may be asked, who are the real exponents of the principles of true morality? Surely they are the paid servants of the all-highest, the officials of the Church or Churches, from the Archbishop of the Church by law established, to the humblest lass or lad of the Army of Salvation, or those of the Church Army. It is to these that the potential or kinetic criminal should look, and with hope truly, to realize the error of his ways in his crime against Man and God. And, it may be added, Society, quite rightfully, should regard these saints as witnesses to the eternal verities (whatever they are), as pre-eminently capable, not only of calling the sinner to repentance, but of reclaiming the criminal from his vicious ways.

It is quite true that in His Majesty's guest house—the home from home of the detected and convicted criminal, the Churches' representative, the Chaplain, wields his heavenly influence, but only occasionally and generally collectively, upon the whole House Party assembled at divine service. What would be infinitely more effective is that each criminal should receive the

individual and undivided attention of his own particular father-in-God. This would necessitate an entire re-arrangement of the penal system of the treatment and the cure of criminals.

The Church and its Ministers, with their undoubted capacity for the exposition of the moral law, should themselves take over the control, reclamation, and reformation (not punishment) of the criminally convicted classes, in addition to the others.

All criminals should be classified according to the heinousness of their respective crimes. Concurrently, all ecclesiastical practitioners should be classified in accordance with their official standing in the sight of God.

The Penitentiary should be abolished, the prisoners liberated, but each transferred to the fatherly care of an individual professor of religion, an Archbishop, Bishop, Dean, Canon, Vicar, Curate, Minister, Pastor, or Graded Officer of the two religious armies. The lowest in the criminal scale should be placed under the absolute control and spiritual influence of the highest in the ecclesiastical professional scale. For instance, a contemporary Charlie Peace would be allocated to the Archbishop.

A Dean of intellectual repute could exercise his logical while religious faculty upon such as these exceedingly clever and intellectual, or, shall we say, intelligent operators in faked securities, or the offenders against the joint possessors of the stock of limited companies. Their ten year's stretch spent with the constant companionship and communion of those who most clearly understand the gravity of such offences as burglary—murder, or the relief of the rich of their removeable wealth, or the poor of their massed money, would be fraught with consequences which would surely induce the angels in heaven to sing songs of praise, or the folk still on earth to give expression to votes of thanksgiving.

If the demands of this higher class criminal exceeded the supply of Archbishops, lesser dignitaries such as Bishops would be pressed for service. Petty pilferers, book-makers, sweepstake operators, and keepers of illegal night clubs could be attended to and their evil ways checked by the sweet sympathy and gentle ministrations of the Salvation Army.

Enough has been said to show the unique advantage of this newer method of administering justice in a manner compatible alike with real and rationalized Christian principle.

Of course the average stipend of the clerical professor or the army unit could not cover such additional duties as are here suggested, but the amount of the average cost of maintenance and moral surveillance of a prisoner would be disbursed to the individual clerical gentleman or lady (for this purpose the ladies would be ordained) or could be computed in the ratio of the number of criminals ministered to by the several organized religious bodies, and handed over to them in total, possibly to be allocated on results.

There is just one important matter which must not be forgotten. Since the criminal is in the sole charge, and under the influence of one who, by calling and character, is conversant with all phases of sin or crime, for they are indistinguishable, conversion from his wicked ways should be certain. But, if by chance such conversion does not eventuate, and the sinner relapses into crime, the agent of conversion must in every case be held responsible and accountable for his stewardship. He must not be allowed to relieve himself of responsibility by seeking to shift the blame upon his Heavenly Father.

C. E. COPE.

It is saying less than the truth to affirm that an excellent book is like a well-chosen and well-tended fruit tree. Its fruits are not for one season only. With the due and natural intervals, we may recur to it year after year, and it will supply the same nourishment and the same gratification, if only we ourselves return to it with the same healthful appetite.—S. T. Coleridge.

Man yields to custom, as he bows to fate,
In all things ruled—mind, body, and estate;
In pain, in sickness, we for cure apply
To them we know not, and we know not why.
George Crabbe.

Acid Drops.

On "Petition Day" at Geneva, as it has been called, an American undergraduate, in presenting a petition in favour of World Peace from seventy American colleges, told the League of Nations that:—

Organized slaughter, we realize, does not settle a dispute; it merely silences an argument. He might have added—"and the arguer." We may as well point out, however, that this mode of settling an argument and the arguer would appear, to the impartial student of Christian history, to be a method encouraged by the Christian Church from the commencement of its rise to power. It was the Church's mode of silencing the heretic and sceptic; and quite naturally the Christian nations could see nothing wrong in following this "spiritual" principle and example as regards disputes among themselves. In addition, there was the firmly held conviction, fostered by religion, that God awards a victory to the nation which has justice on its side. Furthermore, there was never any lack of Christian priests willing to "moralize" the excuses invented by an aggressive nation for a war. It is therefore not in the least surprising that the nations have been so belated in arriving at the conclusion that war is wrong and ethically indefensible.

It looks like the band of good Christians who are so against war—when other countries are at it, will not have a chance to risk their valuable lives after all. But apart from other opportunities offering, the Rev. "Dick" Shepherd and his clerical companions have still a chance to show themselves in earnest. War is made possible by preparations for war. Above all, by keeping in a position of prominence a military class, and by surrounding the profession of the soldier with such circumstances as exalt the soldier to the position of the saviour of the nation. Now if the clergy of Great Britain would decide to withdraw from all patronage of warlike preparations, if they would, say at the next Armistice anniversary, devote their sermons to dwelling upon the inevitable degradation brought upon a country by war, and upon the bestiality, the senselessness, and the uselessness of war, instead of talking of the dead as all heroes, their sacrifice, their nobility, etc., they would help to place war in its proper guise before the rising generation, who will be the soldiers in the next war. Cheap heroics of the kind fathered by Mr. Shepherd and Miss Maude Royden soon give way to laudations of militarism, once a war is on foot.

In the course of a *Daily Herald* discussion concerning whether Religion can revive, a Walthamstow reader says:—

One of your correspondents seems to think of a revival of religion merely as a turning back to ideas which have been held in the past. No doubt most of the Church leaders take this view also, and I agree that there is little of it. But the growth of knowledge and the widespread concern for the welfare of mankind indicate a revival of religious thought and feeling.

At this juncture, a reminder of what religious "ideas which have been held in the past" were like is not out of place. And here a recent editorial from the *Daily Mirror* will be useful. In contrasting modern children with the children of former generations, the *Mirror* writer remarks that modern children are brought up. Whereas:—

In old days, they grew up—if they could. But many didn't. They died, and that was stoically supported as the will of Providence. It was also bad hygiene, which, is the Will of Man. Nowadays we do not take illness as a visitation or punishment, but as something that can be treated . . .

What is evident from this is that the religious ideas then held, and also the religious thought and feeling on which they were based, were undoubtedly harmful to the welfare of the race. And one is therefore glad to have the assurance of there being few signs of their revival. What is puzzling is why the Walthamstow reader should imagine that "the growth of knowledge and the widespread concern for the welfare of mankind indicate a re-

vival of religious thought and feeling." For one thing, those signs of advancement have manifested themselves when indifference to religious ideas and religious thought and feeling are more marked than they have ever been. Again, religious thought and feeling have never given any encouragement to the growth of secular knowledge, nor concerned themselves with the material welfare of mankind in this world. Its chief concern was the arousing and focussing the interest of mankind on its alleged welfare in a presumed life after death.

The observance of Lent, however vigorously or with what laxity it may be observed by other Christians, is a happy hunting-ground which yields a rich bag to the Salvation Army. It exploits, not only the Lenten disposition of the pious, but the uncalculating generosity of the public. A pretty flapper attired in the Army "uniform" holds out her appealing hands from a striking poster in the Tubes, and elsewhere. Lassies, similarly arrayed, if not always of such attractive mein, meet the trains at rush hours, leave envelopes at houses, and with the assistance of their "comrades" of the other sex, carry on by every available method the begging campaign. Just as the non-voluntary contributions to the Established Church are a compulsory levy on agriculture, industry and the community, so the so-called "self-denial" of the Salvation Army is a voluntary levy upon the generosity (and, it must be added, the credulity) of the public.

The poster mentioned appeals for the poor and needy; but the Salvation Army, as an organization, is neither one nor the other. It has never been disputed that as a religious denomination it is the most unsuccessful in the world for its size. The vast majority of the converts are, in its own pleasant denomination of them, back-sliders. The factories, workshops, offices and "social" institutions are commercial undertakings, some of them prosperous withal. Its "soldiers" are committed to a vigorous code worse, because not so public, than the King's Regulations of the real Army; its officers are mostly grossly underpaid, and this, especially in the case of the women, is not only unjust but perilous. The "self-denial" money, and all money given by the general public to the Salvation Army bolsters up a religion which would not stand a chance of survival except as an obscure sect but for this systematic trading on the sorrows of the poor and the benevolence of the public.

We note with pleasure that the better elements in journalism are protesting against the lying sensationalism which passes in many papers for descriptive reporting. The *Week-end Review* aptly observes that many newspapers attain "a technical and mechanical efficiency marvellously up to date, which only makes the obsolescence of their ideas the more ostentatious. What is surprising is that men of such push can remain so mentally stagnant." If, however, it is true, as stated by the *Newspaper World*, that the reporters who were responsible for the recent misleading accounts of the Dartmoor Mutiny "knew that their news-editor wanted a good story"; that "he would not carefully inquire as to the real facts"; that "he was himself always afraid lest his contemporaries should outdistance him in sensationalism," it is clear that it is more than many a modern journalist's job is worth to write the truth. Nor is this only or mainly applicable to the news side. As the *Week-end Review* points out the Beaverbrook leader-writer and the front page news item vie with each other in the manipulation of facts to the common end of whatever is the "stunt" of the moment. We doubt if the two professional organizations of journalists can, as is suggested, deal with this matter. When, as in the Dartmoor case, the local journalist, writing for a public on the spot, finds himself discredited and held responsible for stories printed in London, the work of others sent down to "make" news which the local man cannot find and dare not invent, we have a revelation of the degradation that the millionaires of the press have brought upon an honourable profession. Most of the said millionaires are exemplary Christians, as Freethinkers often have occasion to notice in reading the organs of their mendacity.

The current issue of the *Church Times* is exceptionally rich in the puerilities of piety. A few examples. A correspondent is informed that "gloves are worn by acolytes chiefly for utilitarian reasons." Another inquirer is told that "the blessing given by the celebrant should always be said in the natural voice. The priest should never intone it, even at High Mass." As the questions do not appear with the answers we cannot say what is the query to which the following answer is given: "For practical reasons the cord is better than a chain." Two days after this appeared it was reported that a poor fellow had used a cord for a purpose for which a chain would certainly have been less "practical." Here is another choice specimen from our contemporary:—

We have been informed of a somewhat singular dogmatic interpretation of the meaning of the surplice. In a certain village there has been a custom of holding a combined jollification for the Anglican and Free Church Sunday schools, preceded by prayers, which were held in church. The local Nonconformist ministers recently approached the incumbent and said they could not allow their children to participate, because they had been informed that the choirboys would wear surplices. The vicar at once said that they would all discard the surplice for the occasion, and that he would conduct the service in his cassock. This suggestion was met with horror. He was to wear a surplice, because he was "converted"; but it was unthinkable that boys of twelve should be "converted," and therefore they ought not to wear surplices.

Dean Inge declares that "Christianity is a very young religion, and it has never been properly tried." Well, we suggest that the blame for this sad state of affairs should be laid to God's account. First of all, his textbook, the Bible, failed to convey to all believers an exactly similar interpretation as to the meaning of Christianity; and so they have been wasting nineteen centuries disputing about it. Then, it appears, just as Christians were settling the certainties—by burning one another, and slitting each others throats—God let loose a "progressive revelation." Or so it would seem, according to the latest theological inspiration. The consequences were—more confusion, and more disputation. We can quite understand why Christianity has never been properly tried. And if "progressive revelation" is to be a continuous process, Christianity never will be properly tried. Which is a pity; for it ought to be very very good, seeing that its professional exponents in their advertisements speak so well of it.

Sir Walter Gilbey deserves this week's Putty Medal for his speech at some function in connexion with horse-breeding. As an item in the B.B.C. news announcements it was reported that Sir Walter declared that thousands of persons deprecated the laxity in dress exhibited by many who are accustomed to ride in Rotten Row. He averred that this amounted to a national disgrace and that he, personally, particularly condemned the practice of riding without a hat. In these times of national and international distress a pronouncement of such vital importance cannot fail to stir us all to the very depths of our beings. But it should be added, for Sir Walter's information, that there are thousands of other persons who sincerely deprecate the fact that he, personally, is known to have gone a-riding without a sack over his head.

A reader of a religious weekly thinks that the doctrine of the Trinity always seems to him to introduce unnecessary difficulties in Christian thought. His final conclusion is:—

Certainly the insistence or the doctrine of the Trinity must be relinquished, like some others of our cherished beliefs, before the irreverent—perhaps I ought to say, non-reverent—young people of our own time will treat the Churches seriously.

By the look of this, if the irreverent young people only wait long enough, the Churches will have no doctrines left at all. When that is the state of affairs, what will there be left for the young people to treat seriously—nothing!

Percy Payn, a licensed lay reader for over twenty years, was sent to prison by Mr. Boyd, at Westminster Police Court, for persistent misbehaviour at Victoria Station. He had just been preaching at Maidstone. The magistrate's comments were illuminating. He said:—

He appears to have been preaching the gospel to others in the afternoon and behaving in a disgusting fashion in the evening. I am sorry to say this disgraceful conduct is very common.

Now I wonder what the Bishop of London, with his concern about the state of morals among those who have lost their belief in Christianity, thinks of this?

Chapel services have been resumed at Dartmoor. After the first service the chaplain, Rev. Austen Lester, said "It was the best congregation to which he had ever preached." Now that is something like a compliment to the other congregations. This remind us of the story of the clergyman who was appointed to Dartmoor, and on his last sermon to his home congregation preached from the text, "Behold, I go to prepare a place for you."

Imitation is well known as the sincerest form of flattery, and the *Church Times*, like this journal, publishes a weekly extract from its issues of the past. We reprint that extract from the current issue, and we may observe that we entirely agree with its concluding sentence:—(*Church Times*, March 8, 1872.)

St. Lawrence Jewry.—A Thanksgiving Hymn was sung at the High Celebration on Sunday last for the recovery of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales; the vicar paid a high tribute to the way in which the Prince and Princess bring up their children. The night before the Queen left Windsor to go to Sandringham, when the Prince was most dangerously ill, she told his children that their father was very ill, and perhaps they would not see him again, and bade the elder—Prince Victor—pray to God for his father. The next morning Prince Victor said to the Queen, "Grandmamma, father will not die. I have been to God and He says father shall not die!" Such an instance of faith is indeed worthy of record.

Perhaps there has not been such an "instance" since, hence the selection of this one for reprinting.

Fifty Years Ago.

CATHOLIC means universal. There are people who talk of the Universal Church. It never existed. At present Christians of all denominations and sects do not number 400,000,000. Most of them deny the real Christianity of all the rest—except when they find it convenient to run up their numbers for the purpose of minimising the ranks of the Freethinkers. The Buddhists are 500,000,000. How many people are just what fashion makes them? Probably there is not now a real Christian in the world. Where and what is the universal church? About one quarter of mankind may be *nominal* Christians, and these grow fewer every day. Could a paper like the *Freethinker* exist if the Church were universal? Even in England just now—in godly England, the centre of most of the foreign missions, an Atheist is the most popular man; and the Churches can neither pray, nor preach, nor slander him down. Universal Church! The churches are one in cunning, in persecution, in hypocrisy; otherwise they are rival sets of imposters, bent on palming off their own counterfeit wares upon the highest bidders. Universal Church! Why nineteenth of all the efforts put forth for the conversion of men to Christianity are directed towards the conversion of its own nominal adherents—those it has baptized and partly perverted in childhood. Spite of Evangelicism, Ritualism, Mission and Salvation Armies, with drums and banners, and all other sanctified appliances, people don't "convert" as their fathers did. There is something amiss. It is the Church. The Church is a cancer the world has long been plagued and tortured by. The world's health is improving, and the cancer is dying. The Church is a parasite, a tapeworm—the world's health means its death.

The "*Freethinker*," March 12, 1882.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

G. COLLINS.—The field is a very wide one, but we suggest *Pagan Christs*, by J. M. Robertson, and Mr. Cohen's *Four Lectures on Freethought and Life*, and the same author's *Grammar of Freethought*.

W. G. HAWKES.—Very useful. Shall probably reprint greater part as space permits.

J.A.D.—We note what you say. The precise form that Freethinking takes must always be determined by the nature of the environment. It is when a half-hearted expression serves as a dam to a more complete form that harm is done. To be useful compromise must always move in the direction of a desirable end.

R. BELL.—Sorry to hear you have been unwell, but the weather has been very trying of late. Rest of letter duly noted—with appreciation.

J. MCKENZIE.—Glad to learn that Mr. Saphin had such appreciative audiences in Plymouth on Sunday last. Keep on pegging away.

G. F. LAWS.—Thanks.

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 Burtal 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 (March 13) Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Hall of the Beecheroff Settlement, Whetstone Lane, Birkenhead. In the afternoon he will speak on "Do the Dead Live?" at 3.0; and at 7.0 in the evening on "The Benefits of Unbelief." Admission will be free, but there are a limited number of reserved seats at 1s. Tea has been arranged for those coming from a distance. On Sunday next (March 20) Mr. Cohen will lecture twice in the Chorlton Town Hall, Manchester.

On the Saturday evening before Mr. Cohen's meeting a Social, Whist Drive and Dance will be held at the Cornbrook Assembly Rooms, 474 Stretford Road, Old Trafford. Admission will be free, but there will be a silver collection. The function will commence at 7.

Manchester will be the scene of the National Secular Society's Annual Conference this year, which takes place on Whit-Sunday. So far as the country is concerned Manchester is as central as it could well be, and we should like to see the Branches well represented. Notices of motion for the Agenda should be sent in as early as possible, and it must be noted that these may come from either Branches or from individuals. Each has the right to place motions on the Agenda. We have been going in for records in one way or another recently, and we should like to see this Conference a record one. Further details will be given in due course. We write this in order to advise Branches to get ready.

We are glad to learn that the Secular Society's reprint of the great speech of G. W. Foote's on the occasion of the *Freethinker* prosecution is meeting with much appreciation. As we said a fortnight ago that prosecution proved itself to be one of the most important in the history of Freethought, and the speech in defence is unquestionably the finest ever made in a court of law on behalf of freedom of religious criticism. And it was prepared while its author was serving part of a term of imprisonment for blasphemy. The booklet is selling well, and we hope to see another edition called for. Every

Freethinker, and as many Christians as possible, should possess a copy. The price is sixpence, or sevenpence by post.

In another column will be found a letter from the South Country Vicar, to whose communication we replied in "Views and Opinions." In response to a number of requests Mr. Cohen has re-written these articles, enlarged them, and added a new section. They would have been put in hand at once, but will now be postponed until the Vicar has given his reply to what was said in the articles. When published in their finished form we think the pamphlet will be useful as a brief statement of the attitude of modern Freethought towards religion. Something of the kind is needed.

A discussion has been going on in a Newcastle paper concerning Charles Bradlaugh and Dr. Harrison—one of Bradlaugh's opponents in debate. The debate was fortunate for Dr. Harrison, since his meeting with Bradlaugh appears to be his only claim to have survived—in name. But the statement was made that Bradlaugh admitted that Harrison had beaten him in debate. The statement was foolish on the face of it, and in itself deserved no more than a smile. But ever jealous of anything affecting the movement, Mr. J. Bartram promptly wrote denying the truth of the statement. And now Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, Bradlaugh's only surviving child, has written categorically denying that her father ever made any such admission.

Personally we have met any number of Christians who have said from the platform that Bradlaugh was beaten by this man or driven out of a town by that one, or silenced by some old lady holding up the Bible at a meeting, and we have usually replied that everyone knew that Bradlaugh was so incompetent on the platform, and so easily thrashed in debate that it was surprising anyone ever boasted about it. That seemed a far more effective method than seriously arguing the matter. There was, of course, a time when parsons rushed to the debating platform to crush the Freethinker, but the result was that the weakness and stupidity of Christianity was so easily shown on the platform that the most difficult thing in the world is to get a parson to defend his faith in either oral or written discussion. Experience has taught them that they simply have no case for public discussion, and the one clear indication of a little sense with the parsonry is that its members will not debate to-day at any price.

Sunday last was the occasion of the fifty-first anniversary of the opening of the Hall of the Leicester Secular Society. Mr. Cohen attended at the invitation of the Society, and spoke at the evening meeting. Mr. Gimson was, we are glad to see, able to take the chair as President of the Society, and gave an exceedingly interesting outline of the Society's fortunes. Mr. Hassel, the Vice-President also gave a very earnest and interesting address. Everyone present had reason to be proud of the Society's influence in the City. It has been fifty-one years of unflinching devotion to principle, and that influence has been a very healthy one. The evening's speeches were interluded with songs and musical items that formed not the least enjoyable part of the proceedings. On Monday evening the anniversary was further celebrated by a supper and dance. Mr. Cohen would have liked to have stayed for this, but business in London forbade.

Seekers after signs and wonders usually get what they are looking for, and if they do not find it here they will there. In this respect the modern Spiritualist runs true to type. He seeks after the supernatural, "rationalized" as the "supernormal," and gets his anticipated results with the paraphernalia of a number of pseudo-scientific terms as impressive to the pre-disposed to such things as were the victims of the medieval necromancer with the traditional pointed hat, magic wand and charmed circle. And no exposure, no explanation that does not give what is wanted has any effect. Medium after medium is exposed at the business of spirit manifestation, etc., and this has no more effect on the average Spiritualist

than the discovery that a ghost in a village churchyard is someone parading with a white sheet and a lantern has in diminishing the next scare. Spirits and miracles only happen to those who expect them. Perhaps it was a desire to be humourously sarcastic that led Jesus to promise that all things should happen to those who believe.

For these reasons we do not expect that *Regurgitation and the Duncan Mediumship* (National Laboratory of Psychical Research, 5s.) will have any great effect on the hardened believer. Mrs. Victoria Helen Duncan is a lady who specializes in that wonderful stuff called "ectoplasm." Samples of this have actually been taken, only to find that it was chewed paper, or, as in this case some fine fabric, such as cheese cloth. This "spiritual" stuff usually exudes from the medium's mouth, and from this is manufactured a spirit form, much to the joy of the attendant spook-hunters. In Mrs. Duncan's case, too, the earlier sittings provided what some thought quite good evidence for the production of "ectoplasm," by supernormal (Blessed word!) means. But at further sittings Mr. Price was able to prove that Mrs. Duncan had the capacity for swallowing quantities of this cheese cloth fabric, and could regurgitate it at leisure, much as a cow can with its cud. Mrs. Duncan could thus assent quite cheerfully to all the usual tests of being searched, temperature taken, with the other fakements that are duly chronicled as "scientific tests" in Spiritualist papers. There were several samples of spirit stuff taken, but on analysis they were found to be of quite ordinary material. In the end the Duncans—husband and wife—left suddenly for Scotland. Mr. Price publishes forty-four illustrations with his book, and he has no doubt of the fraudulent nature of the mediumship, nor can anyone else who reads the account of the sittings. We would say the book should act as a warning, but we are afraid it will not. Those who wish can always fall back on one of two hypotheses—either the medium is occasionally genuine (that is, when he or she is not found out) or there are other mediums who are genuine, that is, have not yet been found out.

The Science of Ancient Rome.

MODERN obligation to classical antiquity is almost immeasurable. The achievements of ancient Greece in the domains of architecture, sculpture, literature and philosophy have long commanded the homage of modern Europe. Yet, despite their glorious triumphs in so many departments of cultural activity the Greeks signally failed to establish any permanent social structure. Their protracted conflict with Persia, the antagonistic interests of the various Greek communities, coupled with each community's insular outlook, prevented the evolution of a strong commonwealth of City States. They were thus condemned to a state of weakness, which left them vulnerable to the attack of any scientifically organized military power. Debilitated as they were by constant interracial conflict, the Greeks perforce surrendered their independence to Philip the Macedonian invader whose successor Alexander erected a Grecian Empire so structurally unstable that it quickly fell to pieces at his death.

Supreme as were the Greeks in art, philosophy and letters, their attainments in speculative science were of no mean order. But in applied science comparatively small progress was made. Still, in botany and zoology, a firm basis was laid by Theophrastus and Aristotle respectively, while in the mathematical and medical sciences notable advances occurred. The early Greek was essentially a thinker who almost invariably attached greater importance to refined abstractions than to the more mundane concerns of life. In this respect the Hellenes were the antithesis of the

more prosaic Romans who turned aside from speculative philosophy to devote their time and attention to the practical applications of established science as well as towards improvements in civic and industrial life.

This cold indifference to the claims of pure science carried its penalty. For while the Greeks produced scientists and thinkers such as Thales, Democritus, Empedocles, Hippocrates, Plato, Theophrastus and Aristotle, Rome in all its majestic career scarcely gave birth to a thinker of the first rank, save perhaps Lucretius and Julius Cæsar alone.

Far-famed Alexandria constituted the ancient world's scientific capital from the time of the annexation of Egypt by Rome until the deplorable destruction of its Library and Museum by a frenzied Christian rabble in the declining days of Roman civilization.

It is certainly significant that while the Greeks carved and painted natural objects as something subservient to man, the Romans utilized plants and animals in their artistic adornments from the standpoint of the realist. Where the Greek designer idealized his subject, the Roman artist strove to reproduce nature. This is very pronounced in the Roman art of the Augustan Age.

Yet, although the Greeks fell before the conquering arms of Rome, their spirit proved immortal, inasmuch as it survived to permeate the Roman mind. Indeed, all that is best in Latin art and letters reveals the influence of Greek character and intellect. Some of the more austere Romans resented this cultural infusion, but they failed to frustrate its advance. Nevertheless, despite the leavening influence of the Greek mind the Roman retained his matter of fact viewpoint to the last.

Possibly, environing conditions were primarily responsible for this. For while Hellas never emerged from a psychology imposed by its tiny city states, the all-subjecting sway of Rome slowly extended to ultimately embrace the larger part of the territories of the then known world.

As soldier, statesman and administrator, the Roman patrician found no leisure to ponder over the abstractions that captivated the imagination of the Greek. Again, the lack of instruments of precision may have helped to delay the progress of pure science. Also, much must be conceded to Dr. Charles Singer's contention that "scientific instruments are at least as much the result as the cause of the application of scientific method. The matter seems rather to have lain deep in the Roman character."

In deathless lines the Roman poet Lucretius sets down with the zeal of an apostle the philosophical creed of his honoured and approved good master, Epicurus. Lucretius' materialistic and sceptical evangel seems remarkably modern. The spirit of the most brilliant and fearless thinkers of old Greece animates the masterpiece of Lucretius. The Pagan poet will ever rank as a splendid pioneer both of evolution and Freethought.

Varro, another outstanding Roman, was commissioned by Julius Cæsar to classify and arrange the vast collection of ancient literature which Cæsar intended to form part of the great library he was anxious to establish in Rome. Varro wrote on agriculture from a practical point of view. His writings display Greek influence, but he seems a compiler rather than an original investigator, as much of his work is indebted to Greek predecessors.

The elder Pliny was a noble Roman deeply beholden to Greek thought, whose *Natural History* is one of the great treasures bequeathed by antiquity to modern times. This work is admittedly uncritical in its statements, yet it is a veritable storehouse of in-

formation, very aptly described by Gibbon as "that immense register where Pliny has deposited the discoveries, the arts and errors of mankind."

Although Roman contribution to medical science was meagre, a very serious interest was taken in veterinary matters, while the cultivation of the soil was markedly improved. Nor was sanitation neglected. With their public health services they reached a standard of efficiency immeasurably superior to anything dreamed of in the unclean Christian ages that followed. All the leading Roman architects carefully attended to the sanitary requirements of new buildings. So early as the days of the Tarquins six centuries B.C., Rome possessed its subterranean system of sewers, while even in 450 B.C. the "Law of the Twelve Tables" prohibited burial within the city boundaries. In his scholarly volume, *From Magic to Science*, Dr. Singer states that: "The finest monument to the Roman care for the public health stands yet for all to see in the remains of the fourteen great aqueducts which supplied the City with 300,000,000 gallons of potable water daily. No modern city is better equipped in this regard."

Hospitals long ago flourished in the Orient. State medical services and infirmaries were well in evidence in ancient Rome. The physician's profession rose to a high position of honour and emolument. Under a statute of the Antonines medical practitioners were relieved from the burden of taxation, and one of the chief duties of the public physicians was to minister to the maladies of the impoverished, both bond and free.

Rome also excelled in the military services, where its medical methods appear remarkably modern. But the eternal city's most important contribution to the healing art resides perhaps in its wonderful hospital system and its highly successful administration. In numeration progress took place, and the Roman numeral system prevailed in Europe until the Arabian introduction of the Indian numbers which superseded the Roman figures. The art of mensuration was constantly in operation, for land surveying yielded solid results. Excellent compasses and other scientific instruments have been recovered from the ruins of Pompeii. In sober truth, many mechanical devices were well known to the Romans which practically disappeared in the later barbarous period of Church ascendancy.

Cartography appealed to the stern Roman mind, as the maps of the period, mentioned by Pliny, Cicero and other writers testify. Caesar's teeming intelligence planned a survey of the Roman world which, owing to his shameful murder, was left to the hands of his successor Augustus.

The many Roman roads also attest the practical character of their constructors. Milestones date back to Pagan times. In geography little was accomplished. During the reign of Claudius, however, Pomponius Mela prepared an easy outline of the globe. He pictured the earth as a sphere surrounded on all sides by the sea. On the whole, however, Roman ideas of geography were distinctly crude although far more scientific than those of their Christian successors.

Working at Alexandria in Roman times, Ptolemy, the Greek astronomer, conducted important geographical researches and his theory of the earth and its measurements powerfully influenced opinion for over 1,000 years. Sundials were common in Rome and water clocks were known. Vitruvius describes one of these time measurers, so that Shakespeare's reference to clocks in *Julius Caesar* is not the anachronism usually assumed.

That our earth is a sphere seems to have been the

opinion of most cultured Romans, under the Empire. Yet this truth was forgotten for centuries after the downfall of Paganism. Pliny regarded the earth's sphericity as a truism. "Science and the opinion of the mob," he asserts, "are in direct opposition. According to the former the whole sphere of the earth is inhabited by men whose feet point towards each other while all have the heavens above their heads. But the mob ask how men on the antipodes do not fall off; as though that did not present the opposite query why they should not wonder at *our* not falling off." Yet men change little for similar objections are sometimes urged now!

That our lives from birth to death are dependent on the baleful or benignant influences of the moon and stars is a superstition of very ancient standing. With the invasion of the many mystical Eastern cults into the Roman Empire astrology soon asserted its sway over many normally rational minds. Binding men fast in fate, astrology banished man's freedom of will. Augustine and other Christian fathers therefore denounced it as a device of the Devil, and astrology was driven underground to return in later centuries to the light of day when it played a minor part in the renaissance of the astronomy of ancient times.

T. F. PALMER.

Freethought in Fiction. III.

THOMAS HARDY (II.)

(Concluded from page 149.)

FEW poets have been criticized on the ground that perfection of technique robs their poetry of an equal perfection. In poetry the words used should be so chosen that alternatives are unthinkable. If Thomas Hardy achieves this in an unexampled degree it should be to his credit. Another criticism (of his prose and verse) is that it is gloomy and pessimistic. In his last Preface, to *Winter Words*, published posthumously, he says that the latter complaint is "the perennial inscription" of the critics upon his writings. Is it a fair judgment? We believe not. Illustration is better than precept:—

"Life may be sad past saying,
Its greens for ever graying,
Its faiths to dust decaying;
And youth may have foreknown it,
And riper reasons shown it,
But custom cries: "Disown it:
Say ye rejoice, though grieving,
Believe while unbelieving,
Behold, without perceiving."
"Yet, would men look at true things,
And unillusioned view things,
And count to bear undue things,
The real might mend the seeming,
Facts better their foredeeming
And life its disesteeming."

This may be sadness, but it is not pessimism, the sadness of despair.

The fact is that Hardy combines realism and symbolism, courage and caution, art and craft so deftly that the fusion of the two is often more apparent than its constituents. As a critic has said, "he saw men as puppets, but did not treat them as such." The same deliberate conceiving in the large which led him, as he himself tells us, to place his stories in Wessex, not because he was born there, but in order to give "a unity of place to a unity of conception," is seen at its highest in *The Dynasts*—that great "epic drama of the war with Napoleon, in Three Parts, Nineteen Acts, and One Hundred and Thirty Scenes"—which, published successively in 1903, 1906, and 1908, assured to Hardy as a poet as high, if not a higher place in the annals of letters than he had already attained by his novels.

Hardy has been compared, and may be contrasted, with Milton. Like Milton he began with verse, proceeded

to practise and to attain a great mastery in prose, and then returned to the earlier instrument. For every reader who has knowledge of Milton's *Areopagitica*, that most noble plea for liberty of unlicensed printing, a thousand are familiar with *Paradise Lost*. Is it a wilful and unlikely prediction that in a generation as far in time from Hardy as we are from Milton there may be a thousand who will know Hardy the poet for every one who reads *Under the Greenwood Tree*?

With all his thoroughness of thought and expression, his ranging vision, missing nothing from the tremendous to the trifling, Hardy proceeds (as he observes of the *Dynasts*, in particular) "with little eye to a systematized philosophy warranted to lift 'the burthen of the mystery' of this unintelligible world." Man and Nature—of these we may know something, and for the rest:—

"Mere fancy feints!
How know the cuffed what comes after them
Even though it whirl them to the Pleiades?
Turn to the real."

Swinburne and Hardy shared a high contempt for that sort of hostility which fell to both of them, the ignorant clamour of the orthodox. The reciprocal esteem of these two poets is witnessed by Swinburne's solacing letter to Hardy when the racket about *Jude the Obscure* was at its height, and by Hardy's splendid elogy of his brother in art and purpose, concluding:—

"So here beneath the waking constellations,
Where the waves peal their everlasting strains,
And their dull subterrene reverberations
Shake him whose storms make mountains of their plains—
Him once their peer in sad improvisations
And deft as wind to cleave their frothy manes—
I leave him, while the daylight gleam declines
Upon the capes and chines."

In *Moments of Vision* there are some verses entitled *For Life I had Never Cared Greatly*, in which we may detect his motive in abandoning fiction for poetry, and wherein that stalwart fatalism which runs like a fine steel thread through all his work glistens through the sombre words:—

"For Life I never cared greatly,
As worth a man's while;
Peradventures unsought,
Peradventures that finished in nought
Had kept me from youth and through manhood till lately
Unwon by its style.
In earliest years—why I know not—
I viewed it askance;
Conditions of doubt,
Conditions that leaked slowly out,
May haply have bent me to stand and to show not
Much zest for its dance.
With symphonies soft and sweet colour
It courted me then,
Till evasions seemed wrong,
Till evasions gave in to its song
And I warmed, until living aloofly loomed duller
Than life among men.
Anew I found nought to set eyes on,
When, lifting its hand,
It uncloaked a star,
Uncloaked it from fog-damps afar,
And showed its beams burning from pole to horizon
As bright as a brand.
And so, the rough highway forgetting
I pace hill and dale
Regarding the sky
Regarding the vision on high,
And thus reillumed have no humour for letting
My pilgrimage fail."

Thomas Hardy was born near Dorchester in 1840. He died January 11, 1928 (not, as the usually impeccable *Annual Register* (1928) has it, January 1) aged eighty-eight. Like Meredith he had the O.M., and to Hardy came many academic honours. First apprenticed to architecture, in 1863, he was prizeman of the Royal Institute of British Architects. In 1871 his first novel *Desperate Remedies* appeared, and the last, with the exception of *The Well-Beloved* (1897) was *Jude the Obscure*, 1896. Thereafter he gave himself to poetry, and according to the second Mrs. Hardy, who survived him, "there is

more autobiography in one hundred lines of Mr. Hardy's poetry than in all his novels." The latter are too well known to be catalogued here, and the opinion just quoted may induce any reader, whose only acquaintance with Hardy is in fiction, to study him as a poet. With the climax of his greatest effort in that character we close:—

"A stirring fills the air
Like to sounds of joyance there
That the rages
Of the ages

Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered for the darts
that were
Consciousness the Will informing, till it fashions all things
fair."

ALAN HANDSACRE.

Correspondence.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

THE COUNTRY VICAR REPLIES.

SIR,—It was an honour to be asked to let my private letters of "enquiry" to a master of dialectic be used for your three long highly instructive articles. I am grateful for their tone and generosity, and I envy their logic, diction and humour.

This preliminary letter is to plead for time, that is if I am to be allowed to deal with them seriatim, for I am busy with things which must be done and cannot wait. According to the spirit of my original enquiry I wish to be careful to put my cards on the table in these interim remarks.

1. I could not allow that the Freethinker can know the other side from A to Z. Is not that the great disability of all big controversy? On all big subjects the very moment controversy starts that subject discloses difficulties due to the ignorances, and that on both sides mind you, which it exposes. Of none is this truer than of this under discussion. Also to none does it apply more signally that the highest of it cannot be spoken. It can only be fully known through the language of action. Actably far more than speakable. The Freethinker, I know, can only see in this a mere ingenious dodge. But perhaps if Christ's contention, for of course it is His chief claim, is altogether left out, and the Freethinker remembers that this is one of Goethe's great maxims elaborately worked out both by him and by Carlyle, he will see in it something more than that.

2. Both, indeed all, sides will allow that human knowledge is at least very limited. Your *God and the Universe* expressly infers it. That indeed originated my first letter to you. If that is granted, then I contend that all sides—and not least those which most conspicuously and successfully dispel superstition, and for that tremendously difficult and exceedingly beneficial task I am convinced that there must exist an organization, or peoples at least, who make a sort of religion, so to speak, of Anti-all-religion—all sides are serving humanity. Is not this contention tenable? "All" sides! (a) For from the Freethought standpoint does not the earnest religionist do his share—albeit unconsciously—in that he brings superstition to the light which would otherwise work underground? Of course for the point it must be granted that a superstition, which is due always to ignorance, has at one time served a good purpose. "Time makes ancient good uncouth." (b) From my point of view a measure of Freethought is justified in the varied destruction and construction process by which humanity marches on to more and more truth.

But (3) my fuller reply would still be in the nature of an enquiry.

I asked you, sir, to hit hard, and I expected destructive criticism. But I also asked that after robbing me wholesale you give a constructive alternative. My reading of the times is that man is fast reaching the attitude already fairly widespread and articulate penetrating even to Hyde Park, of impatience with the inert negative, and, with civilization almost shattered and life in all its phases in the utmost confusion, is pining for the positive and constructive.

Now with a mind as open as yours, and free of all presuppositions, I find that your three articles utterly fail, in fact I can detect no attempt, to offer me any constructive alternative at all. In saying this I am not trying to score off you. My mind is much too keen to seize upon anything constructive from any and every quarter.

May I with the utmost deference submit that that is what I chiefly look for and that I do not find it in your books nor in the whole, from first page to last, of the January copies of the *Freethinker*.

Do not tell me that destructive criticism is necessary. It is as obvious to me as to you. But I put this to attempt nothing or scarcely anything constructive, what is it but to make that destruction a revolt against all life?

You and your contributors would have me vomit and vomit the "poison." Well, don't leave the poor fellow to die of starvation! I must not be allowed to eat much just after having the poison force-pumped out of me, and though the man at the pump helps me out in the unpleasant process with plenty of clever and humorous quips, at least give me a little milk.

SOUTH COUNTRY VICAR.

OUR FREEDOM.

SIR,—Since the *Freethinker* provides one of the few means for the advocating of freedom of thought in England, I am approaching you with the hope of giving publicity to a recent event concerning the prevention of the landing in England of a German friend of mine. He is a Mr. G. Kumleben, a member of the N.S.S., and he sought admission into England in order to fulfil speaking engagements for the Workers' Educational Association at Canterbury and Ashford. Mr. Kumleben was turned back at Newhaven on January 23, after having been searched and severely cross-examined by the immigration officials there. The final reason given by them for their refusal to allow him to land in England was that he had not sufficient money, a reason which in the light of the true facts seem ridiculous in the extreme. Mr. Kumleben had £1 in English money, 100 francs in French, a return week-end ticket to Paris and an invitation to stay with friends during the whole of his stay in England. The money reason to me appears to be nothing but "bluff" intended to disguise other reasons of more fundamental importance which, I think, we can safely assume are centred in the remark of a rather incautious official that they did not think it wise that Mr. Kumleben should deliver the advertised lectures upon the World Situation. He said, "We think the English themselves know what is good for them to do, and there is no need for people from other countries to come and tell them." The importance of this case is not so much that it is one of personal insult and of summary treatment, though that is bad enough; it rests rather in the fundamental aspect that mere petty officials possess the arbitrary power to decide what and what not the English people shall learn, and with whom and whom not they shall speak. This is clearly not their function, and I suggest that it is equally clear that the curtailment of Mr. Kumleben's freedom to visit England and to speak with English people is simultaneously a curtailment of the freedom of the English people to hear facts and discuss with persons from other countries. It is sufficiently humiliating that our books, our films and our plays are censored, and that the wireless here shows signs of the Catholic and other religious influence behind it. But this curtailment of the rights of the British people to converse internationally reaches the pitch when it is necessary for the matter to be taken up by all Secularists. The Catholics have already worked their way into official positions in many Government Departments. Are we going to supply them with the arbitrary power to decide who shall enter England? What is going to prevent a Catholic immigration officer from refusing Continental Atheists permission to land when they have been invited to address meetings under the auspices of the N.S.S.? It is high time that those who are serious about freedom of thought for themselves and others should take action to defend their rights to the same, not only on present issues but in

preparation for more direct attacks on their liberties. And I, for one, seriously anticipate that these will assume greater force in the near future.

GEORGE F. GREEN.

LAST WORDS TO MR. CUTNER.

SIR,—Mr. Cutner's account of the reasons that induced me to mention my classical attainments is both discourteous and untrue, as any candid reader of this correspondence can see for himself.

I did not "eliminate" Mr. Robertson. I expressly said that I valued him both as critic and historian. His views on the etymology of the name "Miriam" may or may not be correct; but the citation made by Mr. Cutner is quite irrelevant to what we were discussing—the (to me) grotesque philological equation, together with certain mythological deductions made by Robert Taylor and more or less endorsed by Mr. Cutner.

The Moabite Stone is in the same characters as the Siloam inscription, which (let the reader note well!) Mr. Cutner continues to ignore. The latter is in Hebrew, and the former in a language practically identical with Hebrew. The age and the nature of these inscriptions are damaging to the theory that Hebrew is purely a concoction of the Jewish hierarchy. "Bible English" is thoroughly English in vocabulary and syntax. Its style closely follows the Hebrew and (in places) Aramaic idiom of the Old Testament. This is what differentiates it from the English of books written by Englishmen. Mr. Cutner's thesis gains nothing from this fact, with which I am just as familiar as he is.

In conclusion, may I ask Mr. Cutner to name one modern scholar, familiar with Hebrew and having a reputation to lose, who agrees with him on this matter?

A. D. HOWELL SMITH.

MARIOLATRY.

SIR,—Re Mr. Cutner's article on Mariolatry, February 14 and 21. I think Mr. Cutner is not very far out in his reckoning. About forty-five years ago, when I was a pious and sincere Roman Catholic, one of my favourite Catholic Hymns had a chorus as follows:—

Mother of Christ Star of the Sea
Pray for the wanderer pray for me.

Since then I have wandered far from the Blessed Trinity and I'll wander very much if I ever wander back.

J.H.S.

A CORRECTION.

SIR,—You were mistaken in your issue of February 28, when you said that I featured the "Tarnished Lady" on a recent Sunday. This film was *not* shown at a service and it was *not* shown on a Sunday, but as you got your information from the account in the *Methodist Times*, I do not blame you for the mistake, and am sure that you will correct it.

THOMAS TIPLADY.

B.B.C. AND THE 20—200 TALE.

SIR,—In the *Freethinker* for February 21 I pointed out an error in the B.B.C. statement contained in their Year Book, to the effect that only twenty letters of protest were received in opposition to Religious Services.

After I pressed the B.B.C. for a revision of this number I received firstly a reply from the B.B.C. admitting a mistake through overlooking a nought, and secondly a rather long letter from the Rev. D. Sheppard expressing many great regrets, who stated that 200 was the number not twenty.

Now here comes the very bad side of this case. I pressed the B.B.C. to correct this error publicly in one of their publications without success; thus showing clearly that the B.B.C. did not make a mistake, but deliberately gave to their listeners and readers wrong information.

I put the matter before some M.P.'s and others, but no action was taken; in fact it appeared to me they thought this "error" was quite the normal thing to happen in the question of religion.

S. B. SAVILL.

AN APPEAL.

SIR,—The East Lancashire Rationalist Association is desirous of adding to the attractiveness of their meeting place at Burnley, and would be grateful for gifts of portraits of Freethought celebrities for the purpose of hanging on the walls. Any such gift would be gladly received by H. P. Turner, Hon. Sec., at 1 Olivant Street, Padiham Road, Burnley, Lancs.

H. TURNER.

THE CENSOR AND FILM "SOLEMNITY."

SIR,—Among the things to be banned on the pictures are, I note, "incidents calculated to bring the institution of marriage into contempt." I think this can only refer to Church marriage. A film now being shown—I saw it at the Empire, Leicester Square—i.e., Noel Coward's "Private Lives"—opens with two weddings. The first shows a church ceremony (with organ music) and all the pomp and ceremony of a fashionable wedding. The second, a Civil Marriage in France before the Maire is conducted with every device calculated to hold that function—which incidentally is the only legal part of any marriage even in this country—up to ridicule and contempt. No doubt if the first ceremony had been depicted as in the second Mr. Shortt's minions would have used their scissors. This is a fair sample of the bias which, even if it is unconscious, is inevitable in any censorship.

A.F.L.

A PIOUS SUGGESTION FOR THE B.B.C.

SIR,—The B.B.C habitually displays remarkable zeal on behalf of Religion. How strange then that although the Company has at its disposal a most efficacious method of assisting the Revival which is so rapidly filling our neglected churches, it has not as yet made even the slightest attempt to advance this movement by employing the powerful means now in question! During the great Ages of Faith the consecrated finger of Art vividly depicted the terrific doom reserved for those who depart this life unbaptized, or unabsolved; whilst in much later times, pulpit oratory, inspired by widely differing creeds, has described with tongues of fire the horrors awaiting the unsaved. It is for the B.B.C. to repeat these warnings, and thus to rescue the godless from impending destruction. Let the characteristic sounds of Hell be exhibited along with a cursive description of their causes. The wailing of infants, the shrieks of women, the curses of men, and the mocking laughter of fiends could easily be represented. Even such delicate touches as the frizzling of flesh are not beyond the skill of the famous artists and craftsmen who serve the Company. Sir John Reith himself would, of course, supply the explanatory information. By way of Epilogue the orchestra could render the immortal anthem:

"These are Thy works, Parent of God."

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

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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.

HAMPSTEAD ETHICAL INSTITUTE (The Studio Theatre, 59 Finchley Road, N.W.8, near Marlborough Road Station): 11.15, Mr. Graham Carritt, M.A.—"Debussy—and after," with music.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, John A. Hobson, M.A.—"The Recording Angel, IV."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road): 7.0, William Kent and Frank Williamson—"Dickens in Early Life," with illustrative recitals from the Novels.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (New Morris Hall, 79 Bedford Road, Clapham, S.W.4, Hall No. 5, near Clapham North Station, Underground): 7.30, Mr. H. J. Adams, B.A., D.O.—"Medical Freedom."

STUDY CIRCLE (N.S.S. Office, 62 Farringdon Street, E.C.4): Monday, March 14, at 8.0, Mr. A. H. Millward will open a discussion on "The Future of the Freethought Movement."

SEX EDUCATION CENTRE (Century Theatre, Archer Street, W.11): Monday, March 14, 7.30—"Sex Offences and the Law." Speaker, John Stevenson, Barrister-at-Law.

THE CONWAY DISCUSSION CIRCLE (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Tuesday, March 15, at 7.0, T. S. Lascelles—"Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity."

THE METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (City of London Hotel, 107 York Road, Camden Road, N.7, five minutes from the Brecknock): 7.20, Mr. Hesketh Pearson—"This Mad Age."

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S.—Social on Saturday, March 13, at Earlham Hall, Earlham Grove, Forest Gate, London E. Songs, Dances, Games, etc. All Freethinkers and friends are cordially invited. Commence 7 p.m. prompt. Admission free.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIKENHEAD BRANCH N.S.S. (Beechcroft Settlement, Whetstone Lane, Birkenhead): Mr. Chapman Cohen, President of the N.S.S., will lecture at 3.0, on "Do the Dead Live?" At 7.0, on "The Benefits of Unbelief." Admission free. Reserved seats 1s.

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, J. Clayton—"Spiritualism Without Spirits."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (City Hall, Albion Street, No. 2 Room): 6.30, Women's Welfare Clinic and Advisory Council—"Birth Control: Its Moral and Social Aspects." Questions and discussion. Silver collection.

LIVERPOOL (Merseyside) BRANCH N.S.S. (Transport Buildings, 41 Islington, Liverpool, entrance Christian Street): 7.0, A Lecture.—Current Freethinkers and other literature on sale.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Right Hon. John M. Robertson—"Prayer and the God Idea."

PAISLEY BRANCH N.S.S. (Baker's Hall, 5 Forbes Place): 7.30, Mr. Wm. Allan—"Historical Conceptions."

PLYMOUTH BRANCH N.S.S. (Plymouth Chambers, Drake Circus, Hall No. 5): 7.0, Iconoclast—"The Spanish Inquisition."

RATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION (Glasgow District), McLellan Galleries, 270 Sauchiehall Street, at 6.30 p.m. Professor H. J. Laski, M.A. (Oxon)—"The Difficulties of Tolerance."

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Rooms, Green Street): 7.0, Mr. J. Robson—"Is There a Divine Purpose in Evolution?" Thursday, March 10, 8.0 p.m., Debate: "Is Secularism Better than Christianity?" Mr. E. Bell and Mr. J. T. Brighton.

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