

*The*  
**FREETHINKER**

FOUNDED · 1881

EDITED BY CHAPMAN · COHEN · · · EDITOR · 1881-1915 · G · W · FOOTE

Vol. LII.—No. 15

SUNDAY, APRIL 10, 1932

PRICE THREEPENCE

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**Views and Opinions.**

**The Sabbatarian Conciliation Bill.**

I AM writing these notes before the Second reading of the new Sunday Performances Bill, and on enquiry find that the printed copies of the proposed measure are not yet available. So far I am writing in the dark, but as it has been authoritatively stated that the present Bill is a re-issue of last year's, with only such alterations as were introduced in Committee, we need only emphasize what was said in criticism of the Bill in the *Freethinker* for April 26, 1931. This Sunday Bill was, and is, a thoroughly contemptible measure. It is the outcome of cowardly opportunism, framed and fathered by men who regard the retention of place and power as the governing consideration in all they do. The Bill shows neither the unyielding persistency in a wrong course that one might expect from a religious bigot of obvious sincerity, nor the sincere attempt of earnest reformers to take a step in the right direction. What it does is to take a stupid sabbatarianism that is rapidly becoming discredited and give it a new lease of life. Our Sabbatarian laws, dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were obviously out of date. The new Bill will bear the date, if it becomes law, of 1932, and the difference between old and new laws is considerable. It officially draws a distinction between things that may be done on the "Sabbath," and things that may be done on other days of the week. It establishes the principle—quite new in English law—that men following a legitimate profession may not earn the profit from their profession on Sunday that they may earn on other days in the week. It officially enables local religions to say what things may or may not be done on the Christian taboo day, or under what restrictions they may be done. It will make local politics the scene of religious warfare to a much greater extent than is the case at present. And it places—for the first time—restrictions upon the rights of public meetings, as such, that are held on Sunday. It is not often that I find myself on the side

of the bigots, but in this instance I wish that most stupid of all organizations, The Lord's Day Observance Society, every success in its efforts to kill the Bill. If I were in the House of Commons I should vote with the bigots. They are logical in their efforts, and may be honest. The friends of the Bill are certainly not the first, and individual evidence would be required to establish the second.

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**A Threat To Liberty.**

The bulk of the Bill is merely ridiculous. The part restricting the freedom of public meeting is dangerous to all who have any regard for freedom of thought and speech. Up to date the position has been that any meeting or performance that was legal from Monday to Saturday was legal on Sunday *provided there was no charge for admission*. No permission need be asked because no one had the power to prohibit. Certainly no one has ever questioned the right to hold a public meeting on Sunday, subject only to such conditions that govern public meetings for the rest of the week. But in this the governing clause runs as follows:—

The Council of any County Borough may by a licence granted under this Act . . . permit any place within their area to be opened and used for public entertainment or amusement or for public debating any matter on Sundays, notwithstanding that persons may be admitted thereto by money payments, or for tickets sold for money, but only for such purposes as may be specified in the licence, that is to say, the purposes of (a) musical entertainment; (b) cinematograph entertainment; (c) exhibitions of animals or inanimate objects; ((d) debate.

It is the inclusion of (d) in the list of things for which the licence of a local governing body is essential that I regard as the most serious infraction of the freedom of public meeting that has taken place for a considerable period. The old law said you may hold any debate or public meeting you please on Sunday, provided you do not charge for admission. The proposed new one says that you must get the permission of a local licensing body to hold a meeting whether you charge for admission or not. There can be no other meaning to "notwithstanding" a payment of money for admission. It means that the licence to hold a meeting may be granted even though there be a charge for admission. And a debate does not of necessity mean a discussion between two persons. A court, I fancy, would hold that "debate" covered a lecture on any debatable subject in which the pros and cons of an argument were stated by the speakers. If this Bill means what it says, it means that every Sunday meeting can only be held at the good will of some local body, who must be convinced that there is a substantial demand for it in that locality. Could anything be more ridiculous? In practice it would mean that whether there was a substantial

demand for a meeting or not would depend upon the political or religious opinions of the ruling body on the Council granting the licence. And that body would probably act as the B.B.C. has acted with regard to its religious services, and with the same deliberate disregard of honesty, truthfulness, and fairness. It is left for the majority of every local area to say whether certain opinions—religious, political, sociological, or ethical, shall be heard on Sunday or not in any public hall or even a room in a private house to which the public is invited. It is a deliberate embargo upon opinion. It is handing over the control of public meetings on Sundays to the least enlightened and the least liberal part of the population. And wherever religious questions are involved it also means the still further strengthening of religious influence in local politics; and than that no greater corrupting influence exists. The plain and sensible course would be to let the people who provide such meetings decide whether there is a substantial demand for them or not, or whether the demand is worth working for. It is a piece of downright impudence to make the holding of a public meeting dependent upon the opinion of a Council, whether there is a demand for it or not. One wonders what would have happened to a meeting of the twelve apostles if they had been compelled to apply to a Jerusalem Borough Council for permission to preach their new gospel. Or what would happen to-day in scores of places to a proposed meeting for the advocacy of Socialism, or Conservatism, or Communism, or Free-thought, or any subject in which the majority of the licensing body did not believe. Parliament has not of late advanced in the public esteem, this last Bill will go far towards making it completely contemptible. We helped to ruin Europe in order to save the world from Prussianism. And having destroyed it—in Germany—we straightway find a new home for it in England.

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#### A Cowardly Measure.

The straightforward course would have been for the Government to have repealed the Sunday Acts, leaving the control of all entertainments and meetings the same for every day in the week. If the Government had the courage even to stand still, it would be better, for then the general breakdown of Sabbatarianism would repeal the laws by ignoring them. Sunday entertainments, Sunday games, Sunday excursions, etc., have developed in spite of religious bigotry, and the movement in these directions would have gone on developing. You cannot logically indict a nation, and you cannot in practice punish for the breaking of a law when the vast majority of a people have failed to observe it. But the Government lacked both principle and courage, and in the end it decided to permit what it could not prohibit. If legalized what is already being done and satisfied its sabbatarian supporters by giving to Sabbatarianism a kind of hole and corner perpetuation, meanwhile taking advantage of the situation to attempt the placing of a new obstacle in the way of freedom of speech.

I am writing, as I have said, before the Second Reading, but one can safely say there will be the usual silly chatter about protecting the day of rest, guarding the working-man from exploitation, the value of the English Sunday, etc., not a word of which is true. The working-class owes nothing to Sabbatarianism for the decrease in the hours of labour. This was gained without definite religious support, and in the face of much religious opposition. Abroad similar improvements have been realized without the creation of our stupid Sabbatarianism. Improved conduct owes nothing to Sabbatarianism. All over

the country the police and other independent testimony is unanimous that the provision of recreation and entertainment on Sunday has resulted in an improvement in manners. Even the *Church Times* points out in its last issue that since the majority of people will not go to Church on Sundays it is well that Cinemas and other forms of entertainment should be available. Sobriety has increased with the decay of Sabbatarianism, just as drunkenness in England developed with its growth. Nothing more demoralizing than Sabbatarianism has existed in the past three centuries of British history.

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#### The Fight With Superstition.

There is nothing more at the foundation of Sabbatarianism than a sheer superstition, the belief in a primitive taboo day, and later, the desire to prevent discussion of "dangerous" subjects. The seventeenth century Act had avowedly none but a religious object. It was to preserve the puritanical Sabbath. The eighteenth century Act also had this as its object, but it also aimed, by making a charge for admission to "debates" illegal, at preventing badly paid and overworked working-men finding the wherewithal to carry on the propaganda of their "dangerous" views. The present Bill owes its existence to the fact that the Government feels something must be done to legalize what large numbers resolve shall be done, and to the desire to retain the votes of the chapels and the narrower sections of the Church. It is a hybrid begotten by opportunism out of stupidity, and it bears the impress of its parentage on every feature. It is too much to expect that the House of Commons will not pass the Bill. I expect it will. It will pass anything that promises a continuance in power. But I do hope that if it does pass, the part referring to "debate" will remain a dead letter from the outset. For ourselves, Freethinkers will, I hope, treat the Act as it has treated other Acts of a similar kind. So far as it lies within our power we shall ignore it, meanwhile educating public opinion to the same end. We must go on making Freethinkers. That is the only way by which we can feel sure of driving the last nail in the coffin of religious bigotry.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### Dangerous Dogmatists.

- "Freedom is the life-blood of science."—*Oliver Lodge.*  
 "Light, more light."—*Goethe.*  
 "Truth is only unpleasant in its novelty."—*Landor.*  
 "Life is but a little holding,  
 Lent to do a mighty labour."—*Meredith.*

THE Christian Bible is one of the greatest pieces of fiction in the world's literature. It has much in common with the "Arabian Nights," and the stories of the talking snake in Eden and Jonah and the whale might, conceivably, have figured in pantomime had they been characterized in a secular instead of the so-called sacred volume. But, unfortunately, this Bible has been the source of recrimination and not recreation. A sword has lain upon its pages, and not infrequently the weapon has been stained with blood and tears.

That such stories as those of Noah's Ark, and the feeding of the five thousand, told in this Bible should have appeared as the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, to the unlettered and unsoaped Orientals to whom they were first addressed was only to be expected. But that so many people to-day, in an alien country, pretending to some degree of civilization, should treat such yarns with respect, requires some explanation. Not only do they do

this, but they actually support an army of forty thousand priests to perpetuate the tragi-comedy. This bare fact is the best testimonial to the success of the wiles of Priestcraft that could be obtained.

There is no getting out of it! These Biblical yarns, from the apple story in "Genesis" to the nightmare of the Apocalypse, are the silliest and most contemptible anecdotes from which innocent people sought to extract religious sentiment. What concern have decent folk in England with the infamous Lot and his daughter, or with the central figure in a solar myth? Every schoolboy should know that the Christian Bible is but one of so many Sacred Books of the East, and that a legendary background is incorporated with each and all of them. Yet at Easter the British Broadcasting Corporation actually introduced four marches in a single programme in order to commemorate the execution of a man who never lived at all, and five millions of listeners pay ten shillings yearly to have "Down among the Dead Men" played to them on a public holiday. Elsewhere, tens of thousands of people wrap themselves in melancholy thinking of alleged events of two thousand years ago.

What is the explanation of it? It is that the priests and their catspaws have control of national education, or its shoddy substitute. Millions of money are expended on education, and the net result is that the population has a respect for superstition, and is only a single step removed from illiteracy. This was proved during the last war. Censors, reading the letters of hundreds of thousands of soldiers and sailors, remarked that the vast majority of missives were the productions of the half-educated. The Education Act has been in operation for over half a century. Three generations have been reared under it. Yet the result is that the vast majority of the population is so ill-informed that it is a ready prey to charlatans of all kinds. In almost every street quack doctors flourish, and the best houses in almost every district is inhabited by a Christian priest who is just as much a charlatan.

During my own business career I have had over fifty office-boys under my charge. Not one could type a letter, not one could even write decently. Some were thieves, others honest, but all had a respect for religion. A boy of my acquaintance left school last week, and addressed a letter, "Dear Ant," as if his relative were an insect and not a woman. He had attended school nine years, and hundreds of pounds of the ratepayers' money had been expended on his educational upbringing.

Priests are very clever at their own sorry game. They can, and do, make the bulk of people in a civilized country care for a highly imaginative blend of solar myth and deceased Nazarene. They are the bitterest enemies of Democracy, which teaches Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Priests uphold class divisions. They pray for Royalty, they pose themselves as a sacred class apart. They divide ordinary people into believers and unbelievers, and promise rewards to the one and damnation to the other. They do not promote accord, but discord. Liberty is repugnant to priests. They prefer that men should behave as camels, and take their burdens kneeling.

Freethought, of all things, incurs their hatred, and no enmity is more unscrupulous, more relentless or more venomous. Their garbage is thrown at Freethinkers and writings of men and women who look too critically at the doings of priests. The Church never rebukes her followers for lying for the glory of God. Formerly, she used scaffolds, stakes, prisons, and torture-chambers. To-day, in a milder age, she relies on lies, libels, and misrepresentations.

It is a grievance and a bitter thing that boys and girls, silly women, and ignorant folk, should be taught mischievous nonsense in language which leads them to believe that millions of their countrymen are outcasts and liable to damnation. For no one can be a loyal Churchman without renouncing his mental and moral freedom, and placing his civil loyalty and duty at the tender mercy of a priest. These same priests, from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the greenest curate, claim to be sacred persons, holier than other men. Unless a man accepts them and their nonsense, without doubt he shall be damned everlastingly. That is Church teaching for the masses, tempered with polite reservations for the classes.

The priests themselves, who ought to be the poorest are rich; who ought to be humble are the most rebellious; who should be obedient are refractory. Mammon is their God. They take money from school-children. All their trouble and piety are vicarious. They send missionaries, at the cost of others, abroad, to teach ideas which are superseded at home. At their ordination they promise solemnly to do things they renounce afterwards. They blow hot and cold as occasion requires. They babble the beatitudes, and christen battleships and bless regimental flags. They resort to every trick and subterfuge by which an impudent and audacious set of imposters can gain an easy livelihood. And so well have they done this work that they have had a place in the sun for two thousand years, whilst their credulous followers have dwelt in darkness.

We are the heirs of all the ages, and yet so many of us can barely read and write. There are plenty of us who keep our hearty appetite for nonsense with a religious flavour to it. There are a hundred forms of religion, and forty thousand kind gentlemen who will condescend to take our shillings for expounding the way of salvation, from Catholicism to Christadelphianism, from Methodism to Mormonism. Until education is speeded up and the priest's fetish-book is deleted from the scholastic programme, Britain will be handicapped largely by a semi-literate and uncultured population of petty people with narrow ideals and views. Almost as if they had been born in ginger-beer bottles, and never looked over the edge.

MIMNERMUS.

## The Dark Ages of Christian Faith.

"When, towards the end of the fifth century, the Roman Empire was broken up, there followed, as is well known, a long period of ignorance and of crime, in which even the ablest were immersed in the grossest superstitions. During these, which are rightly called the Dark Ages, the clergy were supreme." (Buckle: *History of Civilization* (1904) p. 346.)

THE claim is constantly advanced, especially by Roman Catholics, that it was through Christianity that the ancient Pagan classics, such as Plato, Seneca, Cicero, and others, survived until modern times. It would be nearer the truth to say that they survived in spite of Christianity.

The early Christians hated Paganism with a fervent hatred. Paganism stood for this world, and the betterment of this life, Christians turned away from this world and concentrated all their attention upon the world to come, and how to attain to the kingdom of heaven, and what was still more important, how to escape the torments of Hell.

Christianity cut the sinews of social betterment

and progress. What was the use of striving for a better world if, as they believed, it was very shortly to be destroyed and Christ appear to judge the quick and the dead?

Moreover, as Christians are fond of boasting, the founder of their faith sought his audience among the poor, illiterate, labouring class, and not among the learned and cultured. The first Salvation Army was, in this respect, not unlike the one we know to-day. The educated Pagans derided the new revelation. Paul complains that when he preached to the Greeks at Athens, about the resurrection of the dead, "some mocked" and others said, jeeringly, "We will hear thee again of this matter." (Acts xvii. 32.) And to the Corinthians he said, "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." (1 Cor. i-23.) "Hath not God," asks Paul, "made foolish the wisdom of the world." (1 Cor. i-20.) No wonder the Greeks mocked and derided, when they were asked by this uncouth Paul, to exchange the Greek wisdom, which appeals to the greatest and wisest intellects of to-day, for this puerile Syrian superstition of a god-man crucified for our sins in order to satisfy his father's sense of justice, and then rising from the dead.

As Mr. H. T. Peck, a competent classical scholar truly observes:—

The spread of Christianity was perhaps even a more important factor in blotting out a taste for literature and destroying the literary records of the past. The general failure to appreciate and admire what was fine in preceding centuries was only a negative injury. The teaching of the Christian, on the other hand was aggressively and offensively directed toward their destruction. In the early days of the Church, Christianity spread chiefly among the ignorant, who not only failed to value what was æsthetically precious, but felt that suspicion and dislike which the vulgar always exhibit toward what they cannot understand. Later, when men of education and culture—men like St. Augustine and St. Jerome—appeared, they regarded the writings of the pagans as thoroughly pernicious in their influence—all the more because they could themselves appreciate their attractiveness and power. St. Jerome was, in fact, a scholar thoroughly familiar with classic literature; and this was even made the basis of an accusation brought against him by his fellow Christians. He was at last openly charged with defiling his works with quotations from pagan authors; of having employed monks to copy the writings of Cicero; and of having even on one occasion polluted the minds of children at Bethlehem by explaining to them various passages of Virgil. He tells us in one of his Epistles how he was rebuked in a dream for his guilty admiration of Cicero, being borne in the night before the throne of Christ, accused of "being a Ciceronian rather than a Christian," and scourged by the angels so that when he awoke in the morning his shoulders were covered with bruises. (H. T. Peck: *A History of Classical Philology* (1911). pp. 195-196.)

Pope Gregory I. rebuked Desiderius, Bishop of Vienna, for having taught the classics and thus "mingled the praises of Jupiter and Christ . . . polluting the mind with blasphemous praises of the wicked." Mr. Peck tells us that: "It was believed and taught that the writers of the classics were burning in hell. In such monasteries as still kept any manuscripts of the secular literature, and where vows of silence were imposed, it was customary when any monk wished to copy a Virgil, Horace, or Livy, to indicate it by scratching his ear like a dog, this being the animal whom the pagan writers were supposed to resemble" (p. 196) although the money they received for the copies enabled them to overcome

their religious scruples regarding these Pagans. To the sterner zealots and fanatics, like Tertullian and Montanus, says the same author: "the whole mass of Pagan literature was sweepingly and savagely condemned."

"This was the age," continues the same learned author, "when asceticism suddenly burst into life to teach men that salvation in the next world was incompatible with comfort in this; that the enjoyment of the beautiful in literature and art was of one flesh; and that squalor and filth and intellectual ignorance paved the way to a heaven beyond the grave. To the early ascetics the refined pleasure of pure literature was as dangerous and little less sinful than the love of women." (p. 197.) He points out that St. Anthony, the founder of monasticism, refused to learn the alphabet; and another priest, famous as a linguist, imposed upon himself a penance of silence for thirty years. St. Jerome declared, "It is the duty of a monk to weep and not to teach." The Church preserved the ancient Classics forsooth! This is what Christians, inspired by the Church did: "The same species of fanatical frenzy marked the course of the early Christians. Innumerable rolls of papyrus covered with copies of the great masterpieces of Roman literature were used for wrapping goods. Parchments were scraped of their original texts and used again (palimpsests) for religious writings. The libraries that contained them were pillaged by mobs."<sup>1</sup>

In the recently published *Outline of Modern Knowledge*, compiled by twenty-two professors and authorities on science, philosophy and art, Professor A. Wolf, of the University of London, in the first contribution, after describing the great achievements in Philosophy and Science, of the ancient Greeks and Romans down to the fifth century, when it came to an end, observes: "In the meantime Christianity had come on the scene and grown powerful. Its gospel was a gospel for the lowly, and it was rather hostile towards the "high-brow." Of philosophy and science it was frankly contemptuous, and some of the Apostolic Fathers, like Tertullian, not only did not mind being unphilosophical in their faith, but seemed rather proud of it." This is putting it somewhat mildly; however, Prof. Wolf continues:—

But the general attitude of the Christian Church towards philosophy and science was decidedly hostile. In 390 Bishop Theophilus destroyed one of the libraries of Alexandria. In 415 Hypatia, the daughter of Theon the astronomer, and herself a teacher of mathematics, was brutally murdered in Alexandria by a mob of Christian fanatics. And to crown it all the Emperor Justinian had all schools of philosophy closed in 529. The first great period in the history of human thought thus came to an end, leaving the West to darkness and the Church.<sup>2</sup>

The long night of the Dark Ages, the Ages of Faith, had commenced. It was to continue for a thousand years.

W. MANN.

(To be concluded.)

<sup>1</sup> H. S. Peck: *A History of Classical Philology*. p. 198.  
<sup>2</sup> *An Outline of Modern Knowledge* (1931). p. 16.

All great men are partially inspired.—Cicero.

Every step of progress which the world has made has been from scaffold to scaffold and from stake to stake.

Wendell Phillips.

Gold is tried with the touchstone and men with gold.  
Chilton.

## A Little Milk.

The honest doubter is by no means a rare phenomenon in these days. But the honest doubter who is willing to rely wholly upon his own common-sense is a rarity still. He craves, as a rule, to thrust the responsibility for his doubts upon some exterior scape-goat, as well as to find some other prop for his thoughts than his own reason. Hence the frequently reiterated complaint: "You take away my faith and give me nothing in its stead."

Fortunately for myself, it is a complaint which I never thought of making—for the simple reason that, having become an Atheist without assistance from any other person and in total ignorance of any anti-religious writings, I was quite unable to blame any specific person or book for "taking away" beliefs which common-sense had proved to be either purely theoretical or else utterly false. I do not hereby claim that my common-sense is of a superior order to that of the usual honest doubter. I merely assert that the dissolution of false beliefs does not necessarily require the assistance of any outside influence of the nature indicated. All that is necessary is the application of ordinary reasoning, such as one uses every day upon matter-of-fact problems, to those beliefs which cannot be proved and often are actually contradicted by experience.

As long as we pay no attention to such contradictions and do not choose to reason about these beliefs, so long will we cling tenaciously to them. But if these beliefs are a matter of serious import to us, and if our actions are dependent upon our being convinced of their truth, we cannot help applying a certain amount of reason to them. Given the urge to prove them true, and granted a modicum of leisure in which to put them to the test of experience and reason, there is nothing to stop every man and woman of normal mentality from becoming an Atheist. Children, if left to form their own conclusions upon questions which are open to doubt (and religion is one), will inevitably become Atheists, in the sense that God will rank on the same mythical plane as all other gods and supernatural beings.

Now, in the absence of any influence from specific books or persons, what becomes of the complaint: "You take away my faith"? It is, of course, an absurd one. The only person responsible is oneself. And this is equally true in the case of persons whose doubts have been caused by reading or hearing others speak. One does not normally believe every word one hears or reads. Even the most credulous persons have been known to doubt the truth of some statements. Consequently the person of average intelligence inevitably applies, or consciously refuses to apply, his own reasoning powers to the statements and situations which he encounters. If his judgment decides in one or other direction, who but himself is responsible for the direction he finally decides upon?

No, my dear honest doubter, do not delude yourself, nor try to salve your conscience by putting the blame for your doubts upon some other than yourself. Rather—if you must blame somebody—blame your elders and teachers for instilling irrational beliefs into your head when you were of such a tender age that you were unable to verify them. But, better still, do not waste time in blaming anything or anyone. For your parents and teachers were no more responsible for their own ignorance and credulity than you are for yours. And you have the advantage over them in that you are a generation younger and have at your disposal additional knowledge which they and the generation before them had not. If, in the acquisition of this additional knowledge, you con-

clude that some of the beliefs which you had hitherto taken for granted are false, do not shed bitter tears—like the child who discovers that Santa Claus is Daddy after all—but rejoice that your mind has become a shade less muddy than it was.

So much for the complaint: "You have taken away my faith." But what of the request to "give me something in its place"? Is this a reasonable request? Is it one that should be satisfied?

A south country vicar, writing in this paper, made a similar request a short while ago. He concluded his letter with the following analogy. "Don't leave the poor fellow to die of starvation! I must not be allowed to eat much just after having the poison (*i.e.*, of religion) force-pumped out of me . . . at least give me a little milk." The pathos of such complaints does not lie in the sad state of spiritual chaos which all persons who repudiate religion are supposed to suffer from, nor in the supposedly innutritious nature of the mental pabulum provided by Atheism. It lies in the fact that religion creates a state of mental flabbiness which renders it extremely difficult, not to say unpleasant, for religious persons to think logically about matters of belief. Deprived of their chief narcotic, namely, the reliance upon traditional and antiquated authority, they find the light of present-day facts and reason too strong to bear with comfort. Yet what blind man whose sight had been restored, would wish to return to his former state of darkness because of temporary discomfort caused by the light of real vision?

Why then does the vicar ask for milk? He uses an analogy—a dangerous habit of thought unless its limitations are borne in mind—which implies that the removal of something bad cannot itself have beneficial results unless something else is put in the place of that which has been removed. But the analogy of the blind man is equally applicable, if not more so, as an illustration of the particular situation we are discussing. And the analogy of the surgeon who removes a dangerous cancer from the body is also equally applicable. In neither case does the patient who has been operated on ask for something to replace what he has lost. Men and women who have been forced by the logic and evidence of undeniable facts to recognize the influence of religion for what it has been and still is, do not cry for some ethic or constructive policy to replace the faith they have lost. For not only do they come to see that faith, as such, is no guarantee of a just and humane outlook, but they also realize that a faith which is based upon contradictions and untruths is bound to be unethical and destructive. And if they take the trouble to use their reason further, they also find that the dissolution of false beliefs leads automatically to the growth of a truly ethical and constructive attitude towards life.

For more than two thirds of my adulthood I have been a Christian and had closely associated with ardent evangelicals. In spite of this it is still somewhat bewildering to me to discover how difficult it seems for Christians to appreciate the obviously ethical and constructive nature of the beliefs which must follow on a conversion to logical Atheism. Yet when I come to think about it, the explanation is simple enough. All of us were brought up to regard unbelief (*i.e.*, incredulity) in matters of religion as positively wicked, as something inevitably leading to a loss of morality. Why, then, should we make any effort to try and understand what the term Atheism meant or implied? If we thought about it at all, it was a thought which prejudiced the whole question and cried "Ecrasez l'infame!" But how can any thinking man or woman "crush the infamous thing" unless he or she knows something about it? And it is just this necessity to know about the thing one wishes to crush, that the Christian avoids.

Honest doubters cry for "milk." Why? Because they have not taken the trouble to discover the logical consequences of a disbelief in the supernatural and in a so-called future life. They are, as a rule, so perturbed at the thought of their own decease; the natural egotism which we all possess is, in their case, so rudely upset at the idea of real death, that the only "logical" attitude for them is to fall back upon the illogical teaching of their own religious book. "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die," is the only alternative which ever seems possible to them as a result of believing that their own personalities do not continue to exist for ever. Yet this is no more than an added proof of the illogicality and mental obfuscation which religion breeds. For, in the first place, whether we die to-morrow or live for ever, eating and drinking is a necessity of life which even the most religious person usually takes some pleasure in. And, in the second place, what is the profoundly immoral nature of being cheerful? Of course, it is not the literal but the metaphorical interpretation of this saying which the Christian emphasizes. And this metaphorical aspect contains the implication that to be an Atheist, one must necessarily live in a state of bestial selfishness, from which all forms of altruism are excluded. But this is a favourite lie of religion whose sole purpose is to blacken Atheism at all costs.

The absurdity of this implication must be obvious to all except those who are incapable of reasoning beyond the end of their own noses. If I believe that when we die we are dead in every sense of the word as literally used, then it follows that there is no time like the present for getting things done which we want to get done. I cannot console myself with the thought that everything will come right at some time in the remote future, or that some mythical super-being will adjust all the maladjustments I find in my own or other people's lives. I am forced to make the best of the here and now. Again, following logically from this, the most casual glance at my own little environment convinces me that what I may regard as the best for myself is not by any means necessarily the best for my neighbour—a logical conclusion which is in flat contradiction to the attitude of Christians, who assert that nothing can be better for their neighbours than their own religion. As an Atheist, however, I am bound to admit that my neighbour is as much entitled to differ from me as he is to agree with me, and I cannot claim to adjudicate for both of us without consulting him. I am compelled, automatically, to spurn all bigotry and dogmatism. I do not, if I happen to be in power, assert the eternal truth of some authority, nor do I attempt to force it upon my neighbour because it upholds my views as against his. Automatically I am led to consult with him and he with me, and to discuss what may be for the best of each individually, and of both together in all such spheres where our lives are bound to coincide. Automatically we base our investigations and judgments upon the needs of the case and upon facts to which both of us agree, not upon theoretical suppositions or unproven beliefs. And where we disagree, it must be upon points which do not lead to the curtailment or interference of the freedom of the other. "We will not do to others what we wish others to do to us," we would say, "unless we have it from their own mouths that they so wish it." Or, alternately, "we will act towards others as they wish us to act towards them, but only provided that they reciprocate."

The answer, then, to the request for something to replace lost faith is just this: Atheism has nothing and has everything to take its place. It has nothing, in the sense that nothing is necessary to replace a

curse which has been removed. It has everything, in the sense that when the curse is removed, the whole of life becomes a field for enjoyment, improvement and active, acquisitive and happy co-operation—co-operation for the immediate diminution of human ills, both mental and physical; co-operation for the immediate increase of human welfare. What more can man desire? The craving for support from some entirely helpless "omnipotence" is banished in the knowledge that man can stand unsupported with as great, and even greater, security. The uselessly passive method of prayer, with its fatalistic thrusting of responsibility upon some "unseen" and wholly inactive power, is discarded for the active method of personally tackling the problems of life with a view to their immediate solution. And lastly, the belief in a future life, with its inevitable temptation to postponement, its inevitable callousness towards the ills of others in this life, its inevitably egotistical concern for personal salvation—all these are swept away in the wider and more humane egotism which recognizes that happiness in this life should be the one great motive force of human existence, and that no genuine personal happiness can arise without some prompt individual contribution to the general fund.

If this "milk" be too strong for the Christian, then let him continue to cling to his helpless deity and his futile personal immortality. Whatever his beliefs may be, his end will be the same as the Atheist's. But if he realizes the falsity of his beliefs, let him no longer cry as though he had lost something of value and gained nothing. Let him stand up and be what he knows himself to be—a man, human and humane.

C. S. FRASER.

### Robert Burns in the Sinner's Seat!

MRS. CATHERINE CARSWELL'S *Life of Robert Burns* (Chatto and Windus), a work of notable merit, is distinguished by its faithful pictures of that special brand of piety against which Burns so early and so often rebelled. Mrs. Carswell truly observes that "in the past the implications of the charitable have perhaps harmed his memory more than the aspersions of the ill-natured. But happily the time is come when the best minds can find nothing shocking in that frankness of the normal man which was so dear to the Bard, so characteristic of his best hours, and so disastrous because of the gentility that hemmed him in. It was "the contumelious sneer" of that gentility, not honest disclosure, that he rightly feared. Even so, he as rightly foresaw that the potential sneerers would be gone to 'the regions of oblivion' when he and his songs remained an evergreen branch stretching out beyond the confines of the classic grove and over the pathway of the way-faring man."

It is clear from the records that, in the time of Burns and it may be still, in remote regions, youthful breaches of the seventh commandment were in Scotland, as they are to-day in Catholic Ireland, the particular hunting-ground of pious propriety. In Scottish churches these delinquents were "formally cited from the pulpit," even as in Ireland they are "spoken from the altar." Mrs. Carswell gives a good description of these proceedings in the case of Burns in Mauchline Church.

"Immediately below the pulpit there was a box that housed the precentor . . . Between the precentor and the first row of worshippers, somewhat to one side, was a small platform like a throne for an artist's model, so placed as to be in view of all. Here any member of the lower orders who had been detected in Sabbath-breaking, blasphemy, or lechery was required to sit throughout the service, sometimes throughout many services week by week, upon a small uncomfortable three-legged stool. At the close of the sermon, on the summons of the

beadle, the culprit stood up to receive pastoral rebuke, the length of which was determined by the speed with which convincing evidence of contrition was obtained. Sometimes this was a slow business. There were sinners who turned a deaf ear, even sinners who argued. Once an Aryshireman had called the minister to order. 'It isn't adultery I'm herefor,' he objected, 'it's but simple forni' . . . In the early days many a young woman committed suicide rather than endure the suttly stool.' . . . Occasionally evil-doers were allowed to stand in their own pews . . . "Where it happened that a man and a girl of the same class and parish had transgressed together, it rested with the minister to decide whether they should stand in their respective pews, or side by side in the high place of humiliation. If, however, the man happened to belong to the land-owning class he was absolved from appearing, and got off with a private censure before the Kirk-session and a substantial fine for the poor-box (The plebian sinner paid a guinea). The Scottish sense of fitness could not abide that a broad-cloth bottom should come into contact with the sinner's seat."

It was not surprising that Burns should have expended his wit and indignation in parodying these proceedings by himself presiding at a mock "Court of Equity," in which "a grotesque blend of Scotch civil and ecclesiastical procedure" were combined. Despising what he called "the scum of sentiment and the mist of sophistry," he had no use for the Presbyterian bigot who "cannot forgive anything above his dungeon bosom and foggy head."

These quotations are but samples of Mrs. Carswell's work, which in its thoroughness and accuracy is a splendid addition to Burns literature. If we have, for reasons of space and relevance, only quoted some lines that may have special interest for the readers of this journal, we must not be thought to imply that the whole story of the Life of Burns as herein told is not as graphic and detailed as the fragments here reproduced. In her preface Mrs. Carswell says, "my sustaining faith has been faith in my subject, which has increasingly appeared to me as far above calling for condescensions of excuse or the suppressions of partial representation, however well meant." Never was an author's faith in a subject more justified by works.

ALAN HANDSACRE.

\*The Life of Robert Burns, by Catherine Carswell, Chatto and Windus, pp. 466. 15s. net.

## Acid Drops.



The Trinidad Legislative Council passed a measure, long over-due, to provide legal facilities for Divorce in the Colony of Trinidad and Tobago, one of the few British possessions in which no such facilities exist. The measure had to be remitted to this country for the Royal Assent. A number of Roman and Anglo-Catholic members of both Houses of Parliament approached the Colonial Office praying that His Majesty be advised to refuse assent pending a Referendum in the Colony. The Colonial Secretary replied to these representations that the proposed Ordinance imposes no obligation on anyone, and interferes with no man in the exercise of his religion. "It merely affords to the British citizens of Trinidad precisely the same facilities to which they would be entitled if resident in this country." Commenting on this business-like and correct reply the *Church Times* says woefully "the Government is determined that indissoluble marriage shall no longer exist under the British flag." (Cheers.) The cheers are ours.

In the same issue of the *Church Times* is a story which might be summed up in two riddles (1) When is a Catholic not a Catholic? (2) When is a priest not a priest? We will leave our readers to guess the answers when they have read the following particulars. [Not

being a "popular" journal we do not offer a prize for the correct answers.] Two weeks ago a person, signing himself "Sacerdos" wrote a letter to the *Church Times* saying, in effect, that no Catholic priest abroad could, without a breach of his duty, admit an Anglo-Catholic to communion. The *Church Times*, referring to this letter, described the writer as a "Roman" Catholic. The writer protested that to call a Catholic a Roman Catholic is "offensive." A (Roman) Catholic newspaper infuriated the *Church Times* by "the startling announcement" that "to-day Anglican clergymen call themselves priests!" Will it be believed that after this exhibition of temper our pious contemporary loftily observes that "one of the oddest things in the world is that people who are most regardless of the feelings of others are nearly always most picky where they themselves are concerned." This is a case of Pot and Kettle; and, we may add that as both varieties of Catholics declare, in one of the few formulas on which they agree, viz., *Quicumque vult*, that everyone who does not agree with them will "without doubt perish everlastingly" the less they have to say about "offensiveness" the better.

Any absurdity will interest people so long as it is connected with a future life or some other religious delusion. "Margery," the well known spiritualist medium, who seems able to have deceived most people except Houdini, now claims that she has received an impression of the footprints of an unborn baby. The expectant mother lives in Boston. That beats the book. Still there is a possibility of faking the footprints of a baby that is about to be born. We suggest that the more convincing plan would be to get the footprints of a baby that is to be born, say, a century hence. We feel certain that if this were done it would command the support of thousands of Spiritualists, and they could defy any sceptic to disprove the evidence. The date of the paper from which the baby story is taken is April 1!

Miss Margery Lawrence, a novelist also provides the readers of the *Weekly Dispatch* with explanations of how things work. She has interviewed the spirits of a number of famous people and they have told her how things are done. People who "pass over" desire all kinds of things, some want plenty of dresses, others fine houses, others jewels, and so forth. So she expounds thus. When one wants a house on earth they go to an architect, the architect thinks of a house, and finally his thought has bricks put round it. Voila! a house. But in the spirit world one just thinks a house—and the house is there. The same rule applies to jewels, and everything else. We fancy it also applies to Miss Lawrence's yarns. She just thinks they are true, and they are true. She thinks people believe these tales, and sometimes they don't. We warn Miss Lawrence that when we get to the summerland the first thing we shall do will be to think she is not there, and she will be somewhere else.

In Kenya fifty-nine natives have been sentenced to six months, and one to three years imprisonment for killing a witch. Their judges were professed Christians, and the sentence has doubtless received the support of all the Christian missionaries in the colony. And the people at home subscribe for sending out Bibles with the message, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." All that is left is for the African Christian to become as big a humbug as the white one—accept the Bible as the Word of God, and then punish as criminals those who practice its teachings, and those who regard these teachings as barbarous and superstitious.

Mr. John Heygate writes in the *Daily Express* that "We are finding God anew, and if we are English there will be something English about our God." We think Mr. Heygate is wrong. "Our God" is a Jerusalem God, and if we bought British only we should return to some of our native British deities who were ousted by foreign competition in the days before we had a Protectionist Government.

Mr. Evelyn Waugh, the novelist, believes that Tolerance—his notion of it—is one of the deadly sins of modern life. Twenty-five years ago it was, he declares, the fashion for persons regarding themselves as enlightened and progressive to cry out against intolerance as the great sin of the time. Mr. Waugh admits that the agitation was well founded and that it resulted in the elimination from our social system of many elements that are cruel and unjust. He suggests, however, that in the general revolution of opinion which followed, more has been lost than gained. He adds:—

It is better to be narrow-minded than to have no mind, to hold limited and rigid principles than none at all. That is the danger which faces so many people to-day—to have no considered opinions on any subject, to put up with what is wasteful and harmful with the excuse that there is "good in everything"—which in most cases means an inability to distinguish between good and bad. There are still things which are worth fighting against.

This is merely an echo of the stuff poured out by the most narrow-minded of our pulpiteers. These godly men delight to assume that if the man of to-day refuses to share their petty views and pious prejudices, he must necessarily be devoid of all principles and opinions. Large numbers of people to-day ignore the parson's dogmatic assertions as to what is "good and bad." The parson therefore seeks to revenge the snub by accusing them of inability to distinguish between good and bad.

Mr. Evelyn Waugh may flatter himself that he possesses "considered opinions," but we fancy that they are little more than second-hand ones—which were pumped into him during adolescence. Really, the people of to-day are not deficient in opinions and principles. Their opinions and principles happen to be broader, more tolerant, and less petty—and therefore different from those cherished by the Victorian-minded in our midst. But, of course, the cardinal sin in the eyes of the intolerant is that other people should dare to possess opinions and principles different from those of the intolerant.

The Rev. Dr. W. R. Maltby says that we live in an interesting but bewildering age, on every hand we see men baffled, and this state of affairs has been produced by man's long mis-management of God's resources. Dr. Maltby omits to mention one significant fact, namely, that man has been allowing himself to be guided by the "spiritual inspiration" of Christian priests for many centuries. That fact will explain quite a lot to those with the wit to put two and two together.

A Methodist paper says:—

In consequence of representations made by the shopkeepers' Union, the Bill promoted by the Grocers' Federation to restrict Sunday trading to two hours is to be amended so as to include an unbroken day of rest for assistants. It is a humane and right restriction. But it would be better still for the Unions to work for the restriction of Sunday trading altogether.

Our pious friend means, not "restriction," but "prohibition." And the prohibition is purely in the interests of the churches, however much the Sabbatarians may prate about their deep concern for the workers in shops. What is wanted is not restriction or prohibition of Sunday trading but a limit set to the number of weekly hours worked by both shopkeepers and their assistants, so as to enable them to have one day of rest in seven, which day need not be a Sunday. The majority of citizens in the country have declared for travel, recreation and amusement on Sunday. Their needs must be catered for. But there is no reason whatever why these needs should entail hardship to shopkeepers and employers.

Pastor J. S. Choate, of Midhurst, believes that there is great blame to be attached to the Church generally for the present neglect of religion. He adds: "We don't want the dismal, old-fashioned Sunday. We have not catered for the people as we should do. Directly the service is over, everybody rushes away and all the doors are locked. Yet we don't want the people in the streets to go to the cinema. As for hikers, they have a right to

enjoy God's sunshine if they can't get out at other times. Can't the [Wesley] Guild do something in the way of services for them?" This grave concern for the "outsider" is very laudable. It seems rather a pity that he would rather pay to be amused in a Sunday cinema than attend a service for nothing. As for hikers, they should be thrilled at knowing that they have a parson's gracious permission to enjoy the sunshine, provided they can't enjoy it at other times. They will probably retort that they didn't care a fig for the parson's approval, anyway he is only trying to appear broad-minded because he cannot prevent them from enjoying their Sunday pastime. Nor do they hanker after his special services. If they wanted religion they would stay at home to go to church.

Many people, declared a speaker recently, have a wrong conception of Jesus, for which may be blamed many famous pictures. Jesus, we learn, should be commended not as one who was weak and effeminate, but as one who was strong and manly. After that, we are moved to enquire how it was that the painters of the famous pictures came to be divinely mis-inspired. Really, when one comes to think about it, how odd it is that for nineteen hundred years people have been misled as to what Jesus was like. And even to-day, there are nearly as many notions as there are believers. Each believer produces one according to his personal fancy. It is a pleasing pastime, but it unfortunately does little towards making Christians love one another.

"Have Christian people any message for a world sick, visibly perishing?" asks Rev. George Evans, whose diagnosis of the world's troubles is that "man is at cross-purposes with God." We should put it the other way round ourselves, but whether the cross-purposes are God's or man's, what is the way out? "The air about us trembles with the weighty issues of life and death." What are we to do about it? Pray. "Yes pray without ceasing." This is, after all, the twentieth century; yet the primitive notion of invoking powers other than men, the ancient craft of "spell-binding," the magical conception that the mere repetition of certain words is potent, the Buddhist praying wheel; the Catholic Rosary, the Protestant prayer-chain or prayer meeting—all these are in the same category as what Mr. Evans calls "God's prophetic voice to the nations" which, in the case of his God and modern circumstances, are as potent for the delusion and misdirection of human life and activity and as impotent for any useful purpose than was the first scared invocation of primeval man of the sun.

The Vicar of St. Augustine's, Grove Park, London, announces that since he has been at his Church there has been about 200 burglaries in his district. We don't wish to make the Rev. gentleman responsible for any of these, but his influence in the district doesn't seem to have been a very beneficial one. He says he thinks of hiring himself out as night watchman to any of his parishioners who wish to visit the theatre. But why not try the power of prayer. That is part of his job, to act as night watchman is not.

The Bishop of Durham thinks that we are stimulating the wits of men and developing their bodies and sending them from the schools moral and spiritual barbarians. All this appears to mean is that the more men develop the less Christian they become. We have often said the same thing, and we thank Dr. Henson for his support. Perhaps he reads the *Freethinker* occasionally.

At a meeting of the Committee of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, which is carrying forward a deficit of £10,000, it was pointed out that "the resources of the Church had not by any means been fully tapped." This is but another way of saying that there is hardly any limit to the extent to which pious fools can be parted from their money. For parsons to air such a cynicism would seem hardly politic. But perhaps one ought to credit the parsons with the ability properly to assess the dullness of their sheep.



## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

G. F. BUDGE (Ipswich), Dr. R. K. NOYES (Boston), S. EMERY, S.W., are thanked for cuttings received.

R. A. HARDY.—We should be very glad to introduce the *Freethinker* into all the Churches. We would cheerfully supply them free. We quite understand your resentment at the advantage taken of you by priests in your early years.

W. LEE.—Mr. Cohen will not be lecturing again in the Midlands until the autumn. The dates and places will be duly announced in these columns.

W. S. BRYAN and C. A. SEVERANCE.—Manuscripts received, but we regret we are unable to use them at present.

R. TISSYMAN.—We agree with you as to the utter foolishness of Mr. Hannen Swaffer's endorsement of the Bishop of Liverpool's stupid talk on the Resurrection and modern thought. But in the struggle for a large circulation the *Daily Herald* must encourage such stupidities if it is to realize its ambition. A really sensible newspaper would have difficulty in achieving 100,000 circulation.

W. HUMPHREY. Much obliged for cuttings.

R. T. WHITE.—Shall be pleased to see you. Please advise us of date a day or two in advance.

M. H. WHITEHEAD writes pointing out that we have described Dr. R. T. Glover as "Reverend." Dr. Glover is a layman of the Baptist Church. We regret the errors of description.

W. J. MILES.—Glad to hear from you. We note what you say about the movement in Australia. Hope that the general condition of Australia is not quite so gloomy as your picture.

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

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

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

Letters for the Editor of the "*Freethinker*" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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

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

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

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.

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

Lecture notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

## Sugar Plums.



The Annual Conference of the National Secular Society, to be held at Manchester on Whit-Sunday, is already shaping towards success. It will help considerably in delegating, and members intending to be present, will send their requirements, such as Hotel accommodation, Conference Luncheon, Conference Outing to Blackpool on Whit-Monday, to the General Secretary, 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, as soon as possible. Early attention to those details helps towards the smooth running of the general arrangements. Motions for the Agenda should also be sent in without further delay.

A few weeks ago we chronicled the seizure of a number of copies of the *Bible Handbook* by the Customs officials at Victoria, Australia. Information of the seizure was conveyed to the Rationalist Association of Australia, at whose order the books were sent out, with

the explanation that the book was "blasphemous," and accompanied with an impudent query as to whether the Association had any explanation to offer. We are glad to learn that the Association declined to give any explanation whatever. Instead it placed the matter in the hands of its solicitors, who wrote asking the Customs to cite the passages they considered blasphemous. The Customs declined the task, and replied, "It has been decided to permit delivery of these books." So for the moment the matter ends.

It is evident that the officials were trying a game of bluff, and in many cases this kind of bluff comes off. In this country we have several times taken action against police superintendents and others who have presumed on their official position to issue orders they had no right to issue and no power to enforce. So soon as these jacks in office found they were up against an organization that was prepared to defy them and to call them to book, the bluff was dropped. Where the person affected is a poor individual, often ignorant of what his legal rights are, the official bullying succeeds. If one may point a moral it is that of the old tag, "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance," with the addendum that those Freethinkers who value freedom of speech and publication cannot afford to stand aloof from such an organization as the National Secular Society.

A debate will take place in the City Hall, Perth, on Sunday, April 10, between the Rev. R. V. Ferguson, and Mr. J. Wingate, on "The Belief in the Christian God is Reasonable." Mr. Wingate represents the local Branch of the N.S.S.. Admission will be 1s. and 6d. Proceeds to the Perth Royal Infirmary. Dundee and local Freethinkers will please notice.

A week's open-air Freethought mission by Mr. G. Whitehead can be arranged in the Potteries during the summer if a few local saints willing to give a hand will notify the General Secretary at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, without delay. Lectures would be held each evening from Sunday until Friday, and the Executive of the N.S.S. will undertake the expense. There are many Freethinkers in the Potteries, and here is an excellent opportunity for a little useful work.

A book of interest to Freethinkers has just been published, in Mrs. Margaret Sanger's *My Fight for Birth Control*. (Faber and Faber, 15s.) It is significant of the change of opinion that has taken place that even the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer remarks on the arrest of doctors employed by Mrs. Sanger at her clinics "in circumstances somewhat discreditable to the police," and that the abandonment of the final prosecution of her paper, *The Woman Rebel*, was decided upon "ostensibly because the authorities did not want to make a martyr of her, but really, as she points out, as a result of the press campaigns her first arrest aroused." Mrs. Sanger's father was what Mr. Birmingham calls a "mortuary sculptor," who counted Ingersoll among his friends.

*Adventures in Religion*, by H. C. Mason (Watts, 3s. 6d.). The author, who says he has been a teacher, a farmer, a traveller, an astronomer, a journalist, a soldier, a land-surveyor and a civil and municipal engineer—rather more of the latter than of the others—tells how he "lost the faith of childhood," and arrived at a position which, while it is hard to say exactly what it is, makes him "like the prophets, burdened with a message." We have an account of the courses of "honest doubt" that does not differ much from the experiences of thousands of persons in the last half century. The personal story is helped out by genealogical, topographical [S. Africa] and philosophical observations, the latter in "a semi-devotional liturgical" style. It is pleasant to know that Mr. Mason, who says he cannot afford to go on publishing his books at his own expense has managed to publish this "one as a result of labours of a more material character." This "adventure" in

search of readers is perhaps more heroic than those precipitated in the past by such quiescent volcanoes as Colenso on *The Pentateuch* and Seeley's *Ecce Homo*.

Bach's Passion Music, a hardy annual at this time of the year, is a favourite with Church choirs. Mr. P. Robinson, in an article in the *Musical Times*, says he "cannot find evidence that Bach was exceptionally religious," but "perhaps others may be more fortunate." He pleads however that "truth reached by divination should be carefully distinguished in biographies or histories of music." Thus the claim of the Church to be the mother of the arts is assailed from another angle. We do not mind confessing that we have often suspected that the B.B.C. had some reason other than his musical merits for its partiality for Bach and even that reason has gone.

An interesting fact emerges in the Life of Sir George Otto Trevelyan by another of that family of historians, Professor G. M. Trevelyan. Writing to his constituents in 1870, when he resigned from Mr. Gladstone's Government as a protest against the increased grant then given to denominational schools, he said he regarded that matter not "as one of expediency, but of right and wrong." Sixty-one years after, his son, Sir Charles Trevelyan, resigned from the Labour Government (in 1931) on the same issue. Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, not less than Mr. Gladstone, had no room for the fine consistency of the elder Trevelyan, who said that nothing could so "profoundly demoralize public opinion than the discovery that a principle . . . is supposed to have only a partial application." That principles only apply so far as their application can get votes is, we fear, more true to-day than in 1870, and no Party is better than another in this matter.

## Rural Piety in Latin America.

THE tiny jangling of the bell on the far-off church reminds me this is the Sabbath and that I should be on my way to worship. So I light a sweet, brown cigarette and start along the brick-red road that leads down through a sunken pass bordered with royal-palms and feathery bamboos. What a glorious sun! And this tropic sky, how ineffably azure! Here, if anywhere, man's thoughts must be led in adoration to the Creator of such beauties unspeakable.

Little *palomites*, or wild wood-doves, are throating their sugary *coo-oo!* *coo-coo-coo* in hidden groves, from afar and near. Many and many a year this sound has meant, to me, the essence of the tropics; a trifle melancholy, yearning, and with an unanswerable question in its elusive note. I pause on the hamogany bridge over the arroyo to listen, and to admire a perfect reflection of coco-palms, of banana-clumps, in the still waters. To be led beside the still waters is delightful in a thirsty land. No wonder so much of our biblical imagery, like that of the Koran, revels in cool streams, unbrageous boscages *et hoc genus omne*.

Past the arroyo, my way leads across a wide and rolling plain, its sun-drenched ridges clothed in long-leaf pine and guana-palms, with here or there clumps of paunchy bottle-palms and star-palmettoes. A rain-crow caws with unvoiled voice from a yagruma-tree. The natives call this fellow *arriero*, because he speaks melodiously as a mule-skinner. The *arriero* in his tree doesn't know it's a day of rest. Long-tailed and agile as a squirrel among the branches, he keeps right on with his job. So do the jewel-eyed chameleons, darting, snapping flies. Likewise the buzzards.

Dustily trudging along the bricky road, I see afar the gleaming tin roof of the church, its tiny steeple.

*Cling-clang! Cling-a-ling-clang!* The bell gives due notice to all and sundry. But though the whole district is thickly dotted with *bohios*—native, thatched huts—and with *fincas*, or farms, I can't see anybody starting. The tropical countryside receives the ecclesiastical announcement with supine indifference. Meanwhile, though, there's a healthy line-up at the bar of the *posada*, in near-by Santa Caridad; and the click of billiard-balls drifts from the *posada* windows.

Honk-konk! Ah, a car! The car comes bounding along, kicking up a sanguinary dust. Well, anyhow, somebody's hurrying to church. There's at least one attentive worshipper. The car klaxons me clean off the road. It zooms past. I catch a glimpse of an unshaven driver, and of the *Nuevo Leon* priest. It's the priest, then, who's in such a rush? Yes, for he's already late. He's overdue at the little tin-roofed church on the ridge. So honk-konk, driver! Step on it, *muchacho—y vamos!*

As the car flashes by, I glimpse the padre; a divine whom I already know and admire. He's fat, and has a blue-black chin, also squint-eyes; all in all as engaging a type as a Goya ever painted or a Zuloaga ever drew. He's wonderful—a vivid species. Makes you think of Gil Blas and monasteries, and all kinds of jolly old Inquisitions and *autos-da-fé*, and pyres, and such-like. An ordinary auto—what they call a *Fotingo*, down here—seems far too tame for this holy man. You dream again of Conquistadores, and exterminated Indians, and loot, and all the glorious old Spanish epic of heresy-hunting and world colonizing. Oh, a most evocative padre!

You admire his immense jowls, bullet-head and ponderous neck; his long black cassock, and his little flat hat jammed down on his tonsured and annointed cranium. The hat has a hemispherical crown, and a brim held up at the sides by cords. It needs a shave, the hat does. An extraordinary whiskery hat. It looks very much like an old-fashioned Spanish brass basin, such as the barber-surgeons of old employed indifferently for giving you a close shave or for bleeding you.

Yes, I thoroughly approve of the hat, the cassock and the holy padre. As he waves a pudgy hand at me, and I return the salute, I feel he couldn't possibly be improved on, even in the pages of Calderón or the deathless Cervantes.

And so, onward to the little, superheated, tin-roofed church; the concrete church with the plain glass windows and the bare, sandy yard all round it. The *Fotingos* are standing in front of the church. One is the priest's; the other belongs to some worshipper already inside the sacred edifice. The bell clangors violently, squeaking and creaking on ungreased trunnions. Bits of hemp from the frayed bell-rope drift down the sweltering air. A dog scratches fleas on the concrete porch. From the *posada*, not far distant, echoes a burst of laughter.

I glance into the church. Only a few women and children are perched on the narrow, hard benches. So I sit down with the dog, outside, to wait a while. A German couple arrives. They're both fat and wheezy. An aged Irishman shows up. Lots of Irish and Germans in Latin-America. This present Celt runs a little truck-garden, three miles away. All week he labours, barefoot and in rags, among his peppers and tomatoes, his *boniatos* and *malangas* and what-not. Now he's shaven, and dressed in his appallingly poverty-bitten best. He's pale, thin and sweating, after his long grind on foot under that blistering sun. The Irishman opines:

"Sure, then, we need rain, awful bad. My garden's fair burned up wid the lack of it." I suggest praying for rain, but the Milesian looks dubious. If

he could only afford an irrigation-system, now—! Faix, prayer's all right, but some good pipes and a hydraulic ram would help, too. The Irishman and the Germans pass a few words. Then the frau goes in and sits on a hard bench, and her husband installs himself at a parlour-organ.

Two little dark-skinned acolytes, in patched and oft-scrubbed clothes, issue out with a couple of bottles that look like vinegar-cruets. They head for a neighbouring *bohío*, and presently return with their cruets full of water and *lacilli*. Once more the bell goes *Clang-a-lang-a-lang!* A fat, brownish, much-powdered native woman arrives, with a much-powdered, brownish, fat little girl, whose skirts are as short as possible; an extremely leggy little girl. Both the girl and her mother, as they approach the sanctified edifice, adjust white mosquito-netting over their oily black hair. Bare legs are permissible, in the *iglesia*; but bare heads—naughty, naughty!

Now uncertain, squealing and grunting cacophonies, now braying, coughing and snoring notes from the foot-pumped parlour-organ, proclaim that the obese Teuton has plunged into action. His frau prays, and fingers her beads, as I enter to find a seat. The Irishman comes in and sits with me. A small, spindly German girl, big-footed and toothy, gawks at me with a grin. All in all, sixteen worshippers crowd the temple, which was built to hold a hundred. The bin seems far too large for the harvest. Among the sixteen, I count several babes and sucklings. Of the devout, two are native men. The rest of the male element in this goodly town of Santa Caridad seem to prefer taking their spirit communion at the posada bar.

Alí, but behold two more worshippers; a woman and a little mouchacha. They genuflect and slide into their places. Now we've got eighteen.

"Awful small crowd," the Irishman confides. "None o' these here Spigs goes to church much, exceptin' for a marriage or a christenin'. Things ain't like they used to be, here."

The son of Erin is interrupted by the entrance of the padre, from a bare-walled little sacristy. Now in lace petticoat and purple stole, he makes a figure fit for any artist's brush. I see his squint is very pronounced; in fact, the worthy man is cross-eyed. Without his basin-hat, his hair reveals itself straight and black, growing low down on his forehead. Once on a time I saw a congenital idiot, a dwarf, in an asylum at Waverley, Massachusetts, with exactly that kind of a brow and hair.

"What a picture!" I realize. The padre's black brows beetle and twitch. His crimson neck swells. I love this holy man, and only wish I had the brush of a Sorolla.

Now he's started the service. He looks and speaks as if intoxicated; he slurs and murmurs. No word can I understand, except once in a while "*Orate, fratres!*" or "*Dominus vobiscum!*" Not one other single, solitary word, either in Latin or Spanish.

But anyhow, the service is on. It's distressingly poor. No stained-glass windows, coloured lights, Stations of the Cross, incense. No nothing. I feel aggrieved. No, sir, I won't put a *real* into the collection-basket; not even a *centavo*.

The patched little acolytes, without any laces or robes whatever, attend their priest. They wash his hands with water and spirochitæ from the vinegar-cruets, and dingle a little bell. It's a dejected lay-out, all in all. Only two candles, some cheap lace, a plain white altar with rather a large, starey-eyed Virgin at the top and an almost microscopic Jesus under a kind of little garage-thing, much lower down. Even some violent-hued paper flowers and gadgets

can't atone for the lamentable exiguity of the ecclesiastical gauds.

The holy office continues. The throng of eighteen worshippers get up and down, murmur, tell their beads, cross themselves and genuflect; and the padre keeps on with his rapid, unintelligible, slurring performance. I see he has the most beautiful hands imaginable. A grotesque, mask-like, bloated face, and the hands of an angel. As he manipulates the tools of his trade, and scatters benedictions, his hands fascinate me. Franz Hals' "Portrait of Himself" shows just such hands.

Children fidget, squirm and drool. The dogs stroll in. Their general attitude toward life seems a bit Rabelasian. The Irishman ejects both canine Casanovas. Now the organ plays in a desultory and nasal manner, with astonishing squawks and hiatuses. The holy man makes signs of the cross, reads from an open tome on the altar, handles napkins and wafers and wine with admirable dexterity. Over at the posada, another Spaniard is also handling wine and wafers and napkins, to a far more interested and inspired audience.

I note bowings, kissings of books, turnings around, raisings and lowerings of plates and cups, all done with neatness and despatch. I observe cross-eyed looks of seemingly minatory benediction. Bells jangle. Miracles happen. A lizard darts up the plain concrete wall, nabs a fly, and transubstantiates it into a lizard. One of the dogs saunters in again, lies down in the aisle and begins excavating for ticks. There's neither sermon nor address.

All at once the holy padre winds up his performance, and flaps out into sacristy, with immense boots creaking under his lace petticoat. Everything is *acabado*—finished.

The pious eighteen drift aimlessly out, gossiping a little but for the most part looking entirely vacant. The women and children head for home, while their men migrate toward the posada.

Now the most excellent padre pops out of his sacristy and barges down the aisle, between those devastatingly hard and narrow benches. He heads for the collection-basket, which stands on the organ, but I beat him in it. I want to see how liberally the Latin-American is moved to lend to the Lord. Not too liberally. As a harvest, it's one of the "lean years." Just a one-peso bill and a little chicken-feed. A suspicion fingers at the latchets of my mind that perhaps the good padre planted that peso, himself, as a hint. Well, never mind. Even chicken-feed is better than nothing.

With his lovely, Hals-ian hand, fine and delicate as a woman's, he scoops up the bill and everything. He hoists his cassock and crams the wad into his sacerdotal trousers. Then away he hastens to the waiting Potingo; and off he scoots in a cloud of brick-red dust.

I wander toward the door. There I peep into the little holy-water font. The font is completely bone-dry. At the bottom, with legs in air, amid the dust of several billion extinct bacteria, reposes a dead fly.

G. A. ENGLAND.

Isla de Pines, Cuba.

## National Guilt.

THE writer has just had an opportunity of reading a recent article by "Jix"—otherwise Lord Brentford—whose object apparently is to teach the people how to pray, firstly, as citizens, for forgiveness for the sins of the nation, and, secondly, as private indi-

viduals, for forgiveness for their own personal sins. The article opens with an attack upon the Archbishop of York for the form of National Prayer appointed for use in Churches at the New Year. Jix says Dr. Temple in this form of prayer prepared by him accuses the nation unjustly; and then he goes on to state wherein he differs from him as to what are national sins.

Well now, now, now, here is a puzzling situation! Edmund Burke in one of the great speeches demanded to know who could indict a whole nation. Of course in olden days it was not such a perplexing problem because when a nation sinned against God, God visited it with a plague or earthquake that killed off people like flies. Our forefathers knew at once what that meant, and filled the churches to overflowing confessing their sins, entreating God to forgive them and protesting that they would not do so any more. If God stayed the calamity, then that was a sign of his forgiveness; and the people continued to be very regular in their attendance upon Church ordinances; but gradually fell off until God found it necessary to send another reminder in the form of further evidence of his displeasure. If God did not stay the calamity when repeatedly entreated to do so, our forefathers concluded that there were some Jonahs on board the good old ship "Britannia," who must be got rid of. Scouts, detectives and enquiry agents were sent forth to spot the Jonahs, and the poor wretches had to walk the plank in order that the divine anger might be appeased.

But we have grown out of those old fashioned methods. Whether democratic government is established with us or not everybody now has the political vote and evidently political considerations cannot be kept out in the arrangement of National Prayer. Indeed "Jix" plumply tells us that Dr. Temple's formula assumed the Socialist view-point and, of course, "Jix" is a full-blooded Tory and Primrose Leaguer for whom the Church is the greatest bulwark of the Empire after the House of Lords. He says, "He (Dr. Temple) is not too particular in his indictment; but he has indicted England for the wrong sin." Dr. Temple said it was "national arrogance." "Jix" says it is "Indifference to the things of the next world," and that we lack confidence in the national cause. Though he sees "the Church rent asunder by quarrels going to the very root of our Christianity; many of the leaders of the Church taking vows one day and flagrantly breaking them the next; these same men struggling for more power over their flocks and striving to become in the bad old sense 'Princes of the Church.'" He still consoles himself with the thought that the national indifference "is founded not quite on unbelief." He is however vastly concerned about people who "have sapped the mainspring of life" (whatever that may mean—perhaps it is a misprint for "snapped") and who have thereby become deaf and blind through sheer indifference to the duties of service. He says he should be glad that on a day of prayer we asked for strength to serve. And he tells us that "when we pray to God that we must always regard ourselves as at the point of death—and after that the judgment"; and "If prayer is not the soul's out-pouring it is nothing. It is worse than nothing; it is an insult to the Divine Majesty."

There is a good old mid-Victorian ring about these emphatic words of Lord Brentford. But it is to be feared that they will not seriously move either of the Archbishops or men of the calibre of Dean Inge or Dr. Barnes. With all due respect to "Jix," though he complains of the want of particularity in as well as the context of Dr. Temple's indictment, he does not

himself show great definiteness in his description of the chief sins of which he believes the nation to be guilty. But who again is to indict a whole nation, and how?

The fact is that to condescend upon particulars is to land in a tangle that cannot be got out of. The guilt of a nation may be said to consist in the wrongous acts of its representatives who have the power to act for it. It is said that we get the kind of Government we deserve. But where are we supposed to be, when the God of the Christians is being assailed by contradictory prayers from his followers—one a Socialist asking one thing, and another a Tory asking something quite different? It is confusion worse confounded! But we can get hope and counsel upon occasion from men who were neither prominent politicians nor prominent Churchmen if we care to heed it and study it, and what is far better follow it. For example, this from Oliver Goldsmith:—

Ill fares the land to hastening ills a prey  
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay:  
Princes or Lords may flourish or may fade  
A breath can make them, as a breath has made:  
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride  
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.

Is the pride that we feel in the accumulation of great wealth not arrogant, and is it not a pride worthy of all condemnation? Men decay all around us because so many of them are now becoming the slaves and victims of the machine. What has Christian belief and practice of 2,000 years done to make the balance right adjusted? Nothing, worse than nothing; because the leaders of Christianity have as history proves, withstood the reformers who proposed more equitable distribution, fuller freedom and statutory relief of the burdened and oppressed and heavy laden. The measure of civilization that we now enjoy was achieved in spite of the opposition of the dignitaries of the Church of England and their wealthy supporters and constituents. No, my Lord Brentford, our trouble is not indifference to the next world, but indifference to the present. The unlettered labourer of other days was the unquestioning getter of wealth for his pastors and masters because he was doped with the promise that in heaven his hardships would all be removed and all his wrongs righted. National guilt? Ay, let us confess wherein we have erred by self-seeking and avarice, but not again—only from the truth outward—to a supposititious deity who absolves in exchange for providing a share of some ecclesiastical endowment; *but from the heart to those we have wronged and robbed*; kept in subjection and consigned to a sordid and empty existence. Let us concentrate on the problem of the emancipation and deliverance and well being of our own people and we shall have less occasion to concern ourselves with the squabbles of other natures. Let us seek peace and ensue it so that other nations may find in us an example of sincerity. And let us forsake the speculations of superstition which have for so long enslaved our minds and distorted our thoughts.

IGNOTUS.

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### The Book Shop.

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Your willing galley-slave has, for your delight and his own too, read Ovid, Stendhal, Sterne, and George Moore on Love; he has also read *On Love*, by A. R. Orage, a delightful and short essay published by The Unicorn Press, 321 High Holborn, W.C.1, price 2s. 6d. We are

told in this book that there are seven kinds of love, but this free adaptation from the Tibetan only takes three varieties for the essay's purpose. Wading through Ovid one encounters, what I may term very little but "vegetable" love, the kind that usually provokes brawling, fighting, intriguing and boasting. Entertainment may be had from Ovid and Sterne—the latter was without any credentials on the subject, which may be described, as viewed by Sterne, as deep as a street puddle. The keynote of Mr. Orage's book is found in the following extract: "I love you," said the man. "Strange that I feel none the better for it," said the woman. This may be a guide post to those who tread the dangerous paths of life knowing that without a little human affection the game is not worth the candle. In addition to it being a guide post, it may be one of those mental bombs that explode and open up a new and satisfying view of love. The three kinds of love are, instinctive, emotional and conscious. Mankind, more or less wallows in the first two varieties, but the third, to most individuals, is a fresh country, worth exploration, and the flashes from the reader's new lamp may send him again to Plato's "Banquet." Mr. George Moore, in his *Passing of the Essenes*, has a tip-tail to his play that is a talisman for any who has not said good-bye to effort ". . . it is better to love the good than to hate the wicked." This, if acted upon, will save a lot of energy. I recommend *On Love* to all gentle-minded men and women, whose banquet is good talk to be followed by good deeds, and who believe with Mr. Orage that "the gnosis of man is necessary to the gnosis of God, and God can well look after Himself and bide our time" for "religion without humanity is more dangerous than humanity without religion." There is a counsel of perfection in this little book; the will, even to try, will bring no small reward to those who have ceased to have illusions about the myriad of things in the world that do not matter.

It must have been a red-letter day in the history of the *Daily Express*, when it was really worth a penny. On February 24, an interview, with George Moore was reported by F. G. H. Salusbury. "We have lost belief in goodness," said this Grand Old Man of Letters. "We have even forgotten that London is a place to live in. We cut down trees. We build horrible blocks of flats without an acre of garden." Well, the diseased gospel of get on or get under which shallow-brained Englishmen caught from that paragon of countries, America, has never lacked supporters from Christianity. The late Lord Birkenhead, to my knowledge, never confessed in public that he was an Atheist or a Freethinker. He was a symbol of an age, with his aphorism about sharp swords and glittering prizes. I do not believe that it is altogether true that we have lost belief in goodness. A pair of observant eyes will note a multitude of human acts in the streets, at Railway terminuses, and in fact everywhere where people associate. A pair of observant eyes might have noticed one day in Oxford Street, a road-sweeper piloting an elderly woman across a groaning road. I have great admiration for Mr. George Moore, for his affirmations, for his lack of consent to current stupidities, for his beautiful ideas beautifully clothed, but he shall not include my consent to his "we." There is no loss of goodness in the world; there is, as yet, no proper vehicle for its record. Our newspapers, in this respect, are as far away from the subject as Mars. Now if you want details of a good murder . . . don't look in the *Freethinker* for them.

A wonderful and significant figure in history was Pico Della Mirandola (1463-1494). Pater, in his *Renaissance* has a fine essay on this philosopher, which will stand the test of time. Mirandola "attempted to reconcile Christianity with the religion of ancient Greece. He offered to defend nine hundred bold paradoxes, drawn from the most opposite sources, against all comers, and his greatest oration was the subject of dignity of human nature and the greatness of man. He believed that there was a spirit of order and beauty in knowledge which would unite what men's ignorance had divided." Messrs.

Grant Richards, Ltd., about 1913, published Mirandola *Upon Love*. It is a beautiful book, and the giver bestowed it on me for emerging from the Great War. Turning over its pages again, I came across the following: "there may be three Loves; one in the Intellect, Angelical; the second Humane; the third Sensual." These are the degrees reversed in order compared with the essay noted in the first paragraph. Adam Brede, whoever he may be, is on the track of something or other in his article "In Praise of Memory," and I trust he will take Pico Della Mirandola in his stride. Let him not boggle at the word angelical: there are still men in the world who have the power, either instinctively or acquired, of transferring to the listener who listens with his whole body, the property or quality of goodness. Many years of torturing a subject by myself was diagnosed and summarized by one of these men in about half a dozen words. The cure was defined. I am sorry to say that I stop, in counting these men, at the third finger, but other men may have been more fortunate. Esoteric names for these qualities may dishearten the student, but let him persevere. In my youth a man "had a thing on the brain"—it was a common saying with country folk. You now pay twelve shillings and sixpence to be told that it is a "complex"—which is simply white mice in a circular cage. And that is not the stuff on which to waste one's time.

Ingersoll, when writing on Shakespeare, stated that in approaching the subject, it was like trying to grasp the world with one hand. In a lesser measure I look on an attempt to praise G. W. Foote's *Defence of Free Speech*. The jewel that I chose from it is small in size, and not even what Foote said. It is a footnote on page 16; Lord Coleridge speaking of Foote the eloquent, says ". . . you do not find him pandering to the bad passions of mankind." This tradition has been well-carried on in the *Freethinker*; in it, lies its strength. I suggest that the Editor, if convenient, opens the columns to readers for an expression of their real reasons as to why they like the *Freethinker*. One little ray from my jewel shines like the light from a candle in a naughty world. Now then, you lads, what is it, in the paper that never put a shilling in your pocket, what is it, I again ask, that you like in the *Freethinker*, that found your mind in chains, and gave it the wings of a dove?

C-DE-B.

## The Moon-Maiden.

(A THRENODY).

THE pale moon-maiden lies beneath this shroud—  
Speak not so loud—  
She died because her star companions died  
When radiant Phœbus from the East did stride  
And with one blow scattered that shining crowd.

Moon-maidens, old folk tell,  
Possess no blood—  
Like to the nightly moth when crushed to death:  
And it is well  
That when she yielded up her breath  
There gushed forth no sanguine flood.

Bloodless and pale and fair,  
Intangible as ghost or dream  
When fire-flies gleam:  
Yet can my old blood stir,  
Yet must I weep,  
To see her lying there,  
Asleep,  
Beneath that spectral shroud;  
I weep—but not too loud.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

## Correspondence.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

### A CORRECTION.

SIR,—In my article on Toc H, which you published in November, 1931, I stated that the funds resulting from the appeal sponsored by the Prince of Wales were to be used for the endowment of chaplaincies.

I am now informed that it was never intended to use the funds for this purpose, and that none of the money has in fact been put to this use.

"ALPHA."

ROBERT TAYLOR.

SIR,—We have been greatly interested in the series of articles by Mr. H. Cutner running through the *Freethinker* entitled "The Masterpieces of Freethought," we went among some old books and dug *Diegesis* out. Forty-five years ago we read it thoroughly. It was at that time about the best work in existence dealing with the origin of Christianity. We have read most of the others written since.

Let us give our candid opinion of its merits. It was written one hundred and three years ago while the author was serving a term in jail for "blasphemy." A work of that age should never be implicitly relied upon as an authority without consulting others. Those who say it is not written in the best of temper however, should remember that no author is likely to use sugared words about an institution that slaps its critics in prison.

Taylor is sometimes superficial, and at others arrives at conclusions hastily, but he did the best he could at the time. For illustration, I cannot agree with him when he says, "Everything in Christianity is of Egyptian origin"; nor, when he says that the Essenes were the first Christians. Christianity was developed from many sources at different times. There are other similar errors. Then the book is somewhat awkward in its literary make-up, but we should remember that a jail makes a poor study.

Yet I do not know of another work that gives more facts about the origin of Christianity—honestly and in clear language—facts that are to-day indisputable. On all important points Taylor is sustained by modern writers, even by the higher critics. I have often thought if the *Diegesis* could be edited, revised and brought up to date in accordance with later investigations, a Freethought publisher might do much worse than to issue a new edition. It would be interesting as a history of hierology and Biblical criticism, besides proving, not what Christianity was in the Middle Ages, but what it was one hundred years ago. Let us not undervalue the work of our pioneers, who were not as well equipped as ourselves.

FRANK STEINER.

Secretary, American Rationalist Association.

## National Secular Society.



REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD APRIL 1, 1932.

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Quinton, Hornibrook, Rosetti (A. C.), Moss, Clifton, Le Maine, Silvester, Easterbrook, Ebury, Preece, McLaren, Sandys, Mrs. Venton, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting, also of special meeting, read and accepted. The monthly financial statement was presented. New members were admitted to Stockport, Birmingham, Brighton, Liverpool, N. London, Wembley Branches, and the Parent Society. Reports and communications concerning Birkenhead, Newcastle, Sunderland, Fulham, Plymouth, The International Federation, Messrs. Brighton and Clayton were dealt with. Active work in new areas and other matters of propaganda were discussed and suggestions made and accepted. Items in connexion with the Annual Conference were noted, and an Agenda Committee formed.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for April 22.

R. H. ROSETTI,

General Secretary.

## Obituary.

MR. SAMUEL PULMAN.

It is with a sense of loss that we chronicle the death of Mr. Samuel Pulman at his home in Eastbourne on March 26. Mr. Pulman, although for some years resident in Bournemouth, was a very old member of the Manchester Branch of the N.S.S. It was there we first made his acquaintance many years ago, and he and his wife were constant attendants at the meetings and a very earnest worker in the Branch. His interest in the Freethought movement was deep and sustained. He was a man of shrewd judgment, which expressed itself in relation to business and political matters. He published one or two collections of rhymes dealing with matters in general, marked by a good humoured tolerance and ready wit. Living as he did to the age of eighty-five a great many of his old Lancashire co-workers in the Freethought Party pre-deceased him, but there will be some of the younger ones who will recall their acquaintance with him with pleasure. We received occasional letters from him, and these all showed undiminished interest in the cause. He died as he lived, a staunch Freethinker. He leaves a widow, and to her we are sure will go out the warm sympathy of all who knew so devoted and so upright a couple. The body was cremated at Brighton on April 1. An address was delivered by Mr. R. H. Rosetti, who travelled to Brighton for that purpose.—C.C.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

### LONDON.

#### OUTDOOR.

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

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

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. R. Dimsdale Stocker—"Ourselves and Our Habits."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road): 7.0, Mr. A. D. Howell Smith, B.A.—"Dangerous Trends in Sexual Ethics." Questions Invited.

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

THE METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (City of London Hotel, 107 York Road, Camden Road, N.7, five minutes from the Brecknock): 7.20, Mr. E. G. Smith (Nat. Peace Council)—"Disarmament."

### COUNTRY.

STUDY CIRCLE (N.S.S. Office, 62 Farringdon Street, E.C.4): Monday, 11th inst, Mr. R. F. Turney will open a discussion on "Freedom in Will and Social Life."

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Rooms, Green Street): 7.0, Mr. F. Bradford, "Common Superstitions." Chairman, Mr. J. T. Brighton. Current *Freethinkers* on sale.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (City Hall, Albion Street, No. 2 Room, Annual General Meeting.

PERTH BRANCH N.S.S. (City Hall, Perth): 7.30, Debate, Affir.: Rev. R. V. Ferguson. Neg.: Mr. Jas. Wingate—"Belief in Christian God is Reasonable."

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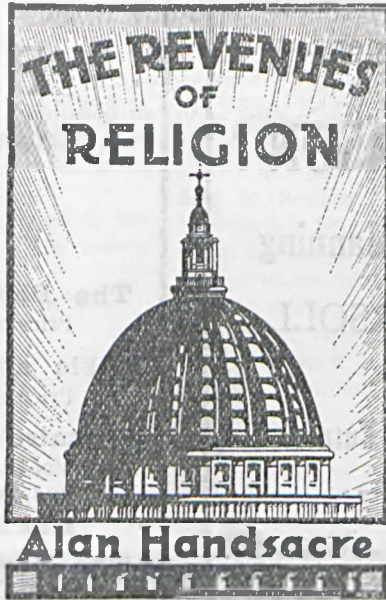
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