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Views and Opinions.

Phrase Slavery.
 THE stereotyped reactions of men and women to ordinary phrases or situations are startling in their obviousness. Their minds are, so to speak, set to one pattern and admit of no variation. These reactions demand no reflection and anyone can count upon them with a considerable degree of certainty. Journalists, preachers and politicians all build upon this fact. If a Queen is the subject of an article, a sermon or a speech, she has always a "gracious" presence—even though she be as dumpy in form as the late Queen Victoria. As it would sound rather effeminate to speak of a King in that way he becomes "stately" despite an often obtrusive awkwardness or clumsiness. If a religious ceremony is being described it is always "solemn" even though the whole thing is worthy only of South Sea Islanders. An opening of Parliament—if the King is present—is always "impressive." A court ceremony with Cabinet Ministers dressed up in pantomime costumes which only need to be torn or dirty to be suitable for a fifth of November celebration, is glittering or picturesque. Even the parsonic drawl evokes that somnolence of the brain which does duty for religious reverence. No one ever appears to think of a King as getting up and grumbling over his morning bacon, a Queen looking at her husband with a wait-till-I-get-you-home kind of an expression, a Cabinet Minister looking like a clown in his fantastic costume, or an Archbishop as a sort of an understudy to a primitive medicine-man. To the mass of people words actually stand for things. They are things; and they respond to them as unthinkingly and as automatically as a well-drilled soldier responds to the orders of his sergeant.

* * *

Mere Puppets.
 I could find hundreds of illustrations of the truth of what has been said from everyday life. And I might even offer some sort of a defence of it by pointing out that this automatic responsiveness is characteristic of the animal organism, and the condition of its

persistence. In a thousand and one ways the organism must respond without reflection to certain aspects of its environment. Very few would survive a day in a busy city if each one had to stop and work out the details of a situation—say, in crossing a road—and to reflect upon all the attendant pros and cons. But the reactions I have in mind are those to which an automatic response represents a danger rather than a help. They hinder instead of assisting the organization of life. They stand for cases where reflective and not automatic reaction is required.

Let me take as a good illustration of what has been said the debate on the second reading of the Sunday Performances Bill. The real question at issue was a religious one. Now it is certain that if it had been a congress of Freethinkers discussing religion and its sociological implications, the general newspaper description of it would have been "Flippant," "Irreverent," if not "Blasphemous," and there would have been the customary reactions from the general public. The discussion might have been quite serious, and by men and women who had taken far more trouble to find out the truth about religion than ninety-nine out of every hundred believers. That would have made no difference; there is a set form of words used on such occasions and that settles the question.

But in the case of the Bill the discussion was conducted on the one side by men who based their speeches on the belief that the "Sabbath" was a divine institution, and on the other side by men who, if they do not believe in religion, mainly lack the courage to say so. So for several days following the debate the papers told the public that this was one of the occasions on which the "House of Commons bares its soul," there were "bursts of emotion," and the House is "always at its best when religion is in question," etc., all of which might well have been written before the debate took place. There was also an explanation that when members are allowed to vote as their conscience dictates, the discussion always reaches a higher level—which reflects rather curiously on the honesty of members when they vote on the orders of their leaders.

* * *

Our Representatives.

Now anyone who will sit down, free from that automatic reaction to which I have alluded, and critically read the discussion will be struck, not by the high level reached when religion is on the carpet, but to the depths to which it can sink. He would note the sincerity of some, but so would he—free from set reactions—admire the sincerity of a savage sacrificing to his joss or a mob of Africans killing a witch, or an Inquisitor roasting a Protestant, or the Russian Government trying to stamp out religion. But he would also have been struck by the downright dishonesty of many of these objectors to Sunday

entertainments who go out to play golf on Sunday, and which involves an amount of Sunday labour greater than that engaged in all the Cinemas in Britain. He would have marvelled at the mentality of men who could speak of Moses as having received the ten commandments direct from God Almighty, who could solemnly assert that the Christian Sunday was established by God, that the greatness of England was built on the Christian Sunday, or an Attorney-General who could describe Sunday as the only glimpse of heaven which Omnipotence has vouchsafed to us. I am sure that the prevailing impression of an intelligent spectator would have been that, when a country is governed by men who can be so doped and duped by mere words as to think they witnessed the House in one of its moments of exaltation, with that type of mind anything is possible, except an intelligent decision.

Let me take, in proof of what has been said, the closing passage of Mr. Stanley's speech in moving the second reading, and which is said to have moved the House as it has not been affected for a long time, which commanded the admiration of friends and enemies alike, and was praised in the press for its logic, its eloquence, and its restrained power. Speaking of what Sunday meant in thousands of working class homes he spoke of:—

A continuance of the terrible intimacy of overcrowded houses, of the round of household drudgery from which we are exempt, of the drab surroundings which they see every day of their lives, and to whom a visit to the cinema, however meretricious it may be, means at least privacy, warmth, colour, life; and if these people go to the cinema on Sunday evening, I, for one, will not admit that Christianity condemns their action until I am sure that Christianity approves their conditions.

This is said to have so aroused the emotion and admiration of the House that members rushed into the lobbies in order to discuss it. Even the *Observer* cited it as one of the most notable sayings of the week. But eliminate Christianity from this passage, and with it the unthinking reaction to the word, and what is there left that deserves more than a passing word of praise. Imagine the passage as having been written by a secondary schoolboy and submitted to a master who desired to turn out a pupil who should do him real credit. He would point out, first, that the speech was full of commonplaces. The plea for a brighter Sunday to relieve the drab home surroundings of the poor has been common talk with all reformers in the press, in the lecture hall and at street corners ever since, at least, Dickens wrote his *Sunday Under Three Heads*. A House stirred to its deepest emotions by that would be astounded on being told that when the home is not attractive, entertainment will be sought elsewhere.

Next the master would tell his pupil that the passage proceeds on an assumption that should have had no place therein, and ends with a very bad piece of logic, in which two statements are made as premiss and conclusion, but which actually have no relation to each other. The avowed question before the House was certainly not that of whether Christianity did or did not approve the Sunday entertainments. In that respect, and certainly so far as this country is concerned, the history of Christianity for about three centuries was dead against Mr. Stanley. He was not, however, concerned with whether Christianity condemned Cinemas or not. The real question before the House was whether those who wished to do so should be permitted to attend a Sunday entertainment—other than that of the Church or Chapel. That question has nothing whatever to do with what kind of a home people live in. The vast majority of people

who attend Cinemas on Sunday, or who would go to Theatres on Sunday, have quite comfortable homes, and it is either ignorance or hypocrisy to pretend otherwise. The people who pay up to 12s. 6d. for a Sunday performance are not collected from the slums of the East End. And even in the East End it is not those who live in the poorest houses who fill the Cinemas. An intelligent body of members might at least have crushed that piece of stupidity. The majority of people in this country want reasonable opportunities for entertainments on Sunday. An intolerant minority say they shall not have them, and a representative of a government that lacks both pluck and principle, says that if people had better homes he would agree that they should be made to spend their leisure as an intolerant minority thinks they ought to spend it.

* * *

The Slavery of Words.

Mr. Stanley does not admit that Christianity condemns slum-dwellers attending Cinemas, because he does not believe Christianity approves the slums. But the one thing has no necessary relation to the other. The premiss does not lead to the conclusion. Christianity might condemn housing conditions, and say that people should find their Sunday pleasure in some other direction—going to Church, for example. Or it might say, again, as it has said, that the earthly conditions under which people live is not so much the concern of Christianity as the faithful keeping of God's word. Christianity might condemn both, approve both, or condemn one and approve the other. I do not imagine that Mr. Stanley worked out the implications of his statement, but it might also mean that if he felt sure that Christianity approved the conditions under which people live then he would condemn Sunday entertainments. Finally even a government official might have remembered that the very worst conditions of slum life, the very creation of the slums we now lament, were the work of a generation that was fanatically Sabbatarian, and which actually brought into existence the Act which barred all Sunday entertainments so long as admission was by payment of money. And it is this mass of bad reasoning, false assumptions, and cheap commonplaces that roused the House of Commons to a state of admiration, and brought to its author the praise of the press! The House of Commons, in spite of all that has been said against it, and without regard to whatever its political complexion may be, really does represent the majority of the nation.

But all this is chiefly interesting because it shows us our legislative chamber reacting as unthinkingly to customary phrases as any man in the street. That is why I say that in strict truth the House of Commons is really representative of the average citizen. He, also, is largely at the mercy of mere words. One has only to take the kind of response one gets in public gatherings to such expressions as "Patriotism," "Love of Country," etc., to see how completely any intelligent perception of the significance of the expression used is lost in a purely mechanical reaction to them. For the real question at issue is when are we patriotic, when are we really loving our country best? And one may be quite certain that if one attempts to drive people to form some intelligent appreciation of the words used, he is certain to be told that one is quarrelling about words—and this when the whole stock in trade of the objector consists of nothing but the emptiest of words. Men have struggled against many forms of slavery. They have fought chattel slavery and now fight wage slavery. When they have liberated themselves from phrase slavery they will have dealt a death blow to many other forms of servitude.

CLAPMAN COHEN.

Shakespeare's Scepticism.

"There are but two powers in the world, the sword and the mind, and it is the mind that conquers."

Napoleon.

"The word sceptic properly means one who looks into a thing, and I have no objection to that kind of scepticism."—*Oliver Lodge.*

"Shakespeare was in the best and highest and widest meaning of the term, a Freethinker."—*Swinburne.*

GREAT writers are more talked of than read. Even in the case of so popular a poet as Shelley, too many people "chatter about Harriet," and have but slight knowledge of his verse. At one of the meetings of the now defunct Shelley Society, Bernard Shaw pointed out that the poet was, like himself, an Atheist and vegetarian, and nearly broke up the Society on the spot. At the Centenary Celebration at Horsham speaker after speaker emphasized Shelley's claim on the county families, worthy folks but not guilty of much culture. Burns, too, has been transformed out of all recognition by hiccoughing Highlanders.

Shakespeare has suffered even more than Shelley and Burns. Shakespearian commentators are adepts at bringing startling meanings out of the Master's text, as a conjuror brings eggs, birds, and rabbits from a hat. Cranks of all kinds wish to claim the greatest of all poets as one of themselves, and from time to time publish volumes of special pleading, which would have brought blushes to the hardened face of an Old Bailey advocate. Disquisitions, as numerous as "quills upon the fretful porcupine," have been issued to demonstrate that Shakespeare was a Puritan, a Spiritualist, an Evangelical Christian, a Roman Catholic, and other things beyond count. Baconians dispute Shakespeare's claim to his own writings. Other surprising people profess to find the Christian "God" in his plays. And Mr. Stanley Baldwin, an ex-Prime Minister, has claimed that Shakespeare was a typical John Bull, which is the most ironical of all compliments to an author whose genius has crossed all frontiers, and whose universality has earned for him the title of the poet of humanity.

The average Englishman possesses small culture. When he reads, which is seldom, he prefers "best-sellers" to high and serious literature. Edgar Wallace, Nat Gould, and Marie Corelli are more in his favour than Milton or Shakespeare. His devotion to sport is constant, his affection for culture slight. Brawn and not brains is his ideal. Living in an island, he suffers from provinciality in an acute form.

Shakespeare is the supreme genius in the world's literature. "Others abide our question, thou art free," said Matthew Arnold, who was anything but a hot-head in criticism. Shakespeare was cosmopolitan in the sense that he was the child of the Renaissance rather than that of the Reformation. In an age when religious wars and schisms were convulsing the old world, and in England Protestantism was engaged in a life and death struggle with the Romish faith, it is remarkable that Shakespeare was no partisan. He was no Catholic, neither was he Puritan. Throughout he seems to say "a plague on both your houses." In no sense was he a zealot, and he no more liked the idea of martyrdom than Rabelais. Withal, he had a gentle nature. Imagine how that plea for tolerance, "The quality of mercy is not strained," put into the mouth of Portia, must have sounded to audiences familiar with the horrors of the fires of Smithfield and the torments of the Tower of London. Moreover, Shakespeare had a shrewd head on his shoulders. He put many of his tilts at Orthodoxy in the mouths of clowns and jesters so as to disarm priestly opposi-

tion, but the barbed shafts went home. The caution was necessary, for young Marlowe, Shakespeare's contemporary, was accused of blasphemy, and would have been "butchered to make a Christian holiday," but for his death in a street fight at the hands of a "lawdy serving-man."

The two most important factors in the moulding of Shakespeare's genius were not the quarrels of rival creeds, nor the Spanish Armada, but the invention of printing, and the discovery of a new world across the Atlantic. These two things broadened men's minds, and Shakespeare's quick, live brain responded with enthusiasm to the new vision. So amazing was his gift of assimilation of ideas that critics have wondered that a countryman could have possessed so much culture. But genius is abnormal. Burns was but a labourer, but it never prevented him from becoming the national poet of Scotland. Shakespeare was more than twenty Burns. "The first page I read of Shakespeare," said Goethe, "made me his for life." What a tribute! It was more important than a thousand statues in a thousand cities.

Despite all the cranks of Christendom, there is a way of arriving at Shakespeare's opinions on religion. Mary Arden, the poet's mother, came of a Catholic family. The probability is that she was herself a Catholic, but there is no evidence either way. Shakespeare's father is not so doubtful. He was a member of the Stratford Corporation during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and must have conformed to the Protestant religion. The result seems that young Shakespeare was brought up under a probably Catholic mother, and a father who was, at least, a professing Protestant.

Shakespeare himself was not a Romanist. He was so ignorant of Catholic ritual that he makes Juliet ask the friar if she shall come "at evening mass." No Catholic could have made this mistake. "King John" is, obviously, not the work of a Romanist. The purport of "Love's Labour Lost" is to show the uselessness of vows. The Duke in "Measure for Measure," playing the part of a friar preparing a criminal for death, gives Claudio consolation. Not a word of Christian doctrine, not a syllable of sacrificial salvation and sacramental forgiveness is introduced. The omission is most significant. Moreover, Shakespeare's poems and plays are full of eloquent passages directed against the celibate ideals of the Catholic Church. In a wonderful line in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," he pictured the forsaken sisterhood of the cloister:—

"Chanting faint hymns to the cold, fruitless moon."

Elsewhere in a more Rabelaisian mood, he refers to something being as fit "as the nun's lips to the friar's mouth." And last, but not least, neither Queen Elizabeth nor King James could have publicly favoured Shakespeare if he were a Romanist. Nor could the Pembroke have given him their patronage. It was an age of hot fanaticisms. Even Shakespeare wore his rue, but with a difference.

Shakespeare was no Puritan, no conventional Reformation Protestant. He seems to have liked that brand of Nonconformity as little as Charles Dickens, who made his countrymen laugh at Chadband, Pecksniff, and Stiggins. Shakespeare's view of life is never ascetic nor religious. Throughout he seems to say, with Sir Toby Belch:—

Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?

Indeed, Shakespeare was known to be irreligious, and the epitaph on Mrs. Hall, his eldest daughter, clearly implies that his own life had not been of piety:—

"Witty above her sex, but that's not all,
Wise to salvation was good Mistris Hall;

Something of Shakespeare was in that, but this Wholly of Him with whom she's now in bliss."

She derived her powers of wit from her father, but none of the influences which conduced to her salvation.

In matters theological, Shakespeare was a sceptic. His mind was more in sympathy with old Montaigne or Giordano Bruno than with the narrow-minded Anglican and Romish priests. The supernatural element in his plays is mere stage machinery, and his finest play, "Hamlet," is as full of scepticism as an egg is full of meat. Death is "the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns." To die is "to go we know not where." "We are such stuff as dreams are made of; and our little life is rounded with a sleep." Hamlet's last words, "The rest is silence," are most significant. Equally impressive is Hamlet's description of man as "the paragon of animals," and "this quintessence of dust," the one saying forming an intelligent anticipation of Darwinism, and the other a striking comment on the Church's contention that man was a fallen angel. At a time when reason was trampled on by all the sects of Christendom, Shakespeare made his appeal on behalf of philosophical doubt.

In no sense was Shakespeare a bigot. He smiles behind his puppets. With equal interest and equal ease he portrays Hamlet's philosophisings, Shylock's fanaticism, and Falstaff's blasphemy. In his great tragedies he deals with the deepest issues of life and conduct, and his scepticism grows year by year, until in "King Lear" he denies divine justice in human affairs. "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, they kill us for their sport." It is remarkable that Shakespeare turned his back on Christianity. Not, observe from hostility, for he was too free from prejudice for that, it was from the knowledge that as a philosophy of life it threw no useful light on humanity. For Shakespeare was not only the greatest of all poets, but he was one of the deepest thinkers of his time. It all comes to this in the end. Noble thinking means noble writing, all else is as ephemeral as the snows of yesteryear. Shakespeare's genius dazzles us all so much that his own reputation has suffered to the extent of his being regarded rather as a singer than as a thinker also. He was the last of the great world-poets who dominated the imagination of all races. The lustre of his fame deepens with the progress of the years, and proves that really great literature is a great living possession.

MIMNERMUS.

COURAGE AND IDEAS.

The thing that gives people courage is ideas. The phrase might be expanded. For it is not only courage that comes from ideas; it is determination; it is the power to act, the power to go on acting coherently. For though it is true that most ideas are the rationalizations of feelings, that does not mean that feelings are more important in the world of action than ideas. Feeling provides the original supply of energy, but this supply of energy soon fails if the feelings are not rationalized. For the rationalization justifies the feelings and serves at the same time both as a substitute for feelings and as a stimulant for them when they are dormant. You cannot go on feeling violently all the time—the human organism does not allow of it. But an idea persists; once you have persuaded yourself of its truth, an idea justifies the continuance in cold blood of actions which emotion could only have dictated in the heat of the moment. Indeed, it does more than justify actions and feelings; it imposes them. If you accept an idea as true, then it becomes your duty to act on it even in cold blood as a matter not of momentary feeling, but of enduring principle.—Aldous Huxley ("Music at Night and Other Essays.")

Our Study Circle.

WE began our Study Circle on the first Monday in October last, and wound up the present session on the first Monday of this month. Except during December, when the attendances were rather poor, we have had good meetings and excellent discussions on subjects bearing directly or indirectly on the work of our movement. It would require considerable space to enumerate the papers read, and to mention the names of those whom we have to thank for contributing to the success of the Circle; but I may give the titles of five of these papers merely as indicating the nature of the subjects dealt with: "The Universality of Religion"; "The History of Elementary Education in England"; "Woman and Religion"; "The Psychology of Religious Experience"; and "The Theory of a Progressive Revelation." Two of these papers have appeared in the *Freethinker*.

"The modern world is asking questions," says a living Christian apologist, and the news will not be unwelcome to Freethinkers, who have a leaning in the direction of inquiry, often provokingly so to "the household of faith." If the best way to undermine superstition and its influence is to explain it, a study circle interested in the scientific and historical criticism of religious systems and beliefs should provide a useful training-ground for varied methods of attack. During the past half century developments in many departments of investigation have strengthened enormously the equipment of the modern Freethinker. Anthropology, comparative religion, psychology and rationalistic criticism in the domain of history have made great advances in this period, and a knowledge of the results reached is of the highest importance to our speakers. For the first piece of advice which an old Freethinker can give to a younger advocate of our cause is, "Have something to say and know what your opponents have to say."

Besides the help to be derived from these sources, however, we must never forget that Freethought has a long history, and some acquaintance with this history should interest our workers and be of use to them in their propaganda. It has not been possible to devote much time to this subject during the present session, but it will receive more attention later. The heroic days of the Freethinker may, or may not be over. In any case Collins, Woolston, Annet, Paine, Carlile and the fighting "infidels" of our own day should be more than a bare catalogue of names even to the rank-and-file of the Freethought movement. Not many of us subscribe to Thomas Carlyle's great-man theory of history; but as witnesses for the prosecution, those champions of the principle of free criticism struck at the very roots of religious authority, they thus represent an aspect of our work that is of permanent value apart from their actual arguments, and their spirit of revolt against the ideals of Christianity is always to be welcomed as a stimulus, not to virulence, but to more active work for the new humanism for which we stand. Mere scholarship will not end a system which has so many emoluments and vested interests to defend, a system under which the State continues to subsidize the teaching, in our elementary schools, of completely discredited doctrines to which the clergy have subscribed, but which many of them openly disavow.

To-day we hear again and again the assertion that the old conflict, "now happily forgotten," between religion and science has given place to a cordial understanding between them. We Freethinkers feel an interest in asking why the conflict should be "forgotten," especially those of us who remember the orthodox attitude to Darwin, Huxley and Haeckel, to

say nothing of the calumnies heaped upon Bradlaugh, Foote, and the popular exponents of science and rationalistic criticism in their bearing on the traditional religious beliefs. The history of Christian apologetic is in itself a veritable revelation of character, a chapter that stands in a class by itself in the evolution of European culture. Our Circle will stimulate Freethinkers to study this history, which is particularly interesting now when Protestantism is breaking up and Roman Catholics are working energetically to get a picking out of the fragments.

We have not thought only of the more advanced Freethinker. The younger recruits have been helped with advice in regard to books, and what is perhaps of equal importance, an effort has been made to put before them methods of reading and note-taking that will secure the best results. Next year I hope to make this a special feature of our work, and to organize, if possible, a separate class for our junior aspirants.

I have been asked so frequently about literature treating of the various aspects of Freethought that I will refer very briefly to this matter here, postponing for a later article more that I should like to say on the subject. In the first place, reading is easier than thinking, and this fact should be borne in mind as a corrective to the habit of skimming over page after page of print without assimilating anything that can be used to practical advantage. It is always necessary to select from large masses of fact what is relevant and most likely to impress those whom we wish to persuade. Secondly, in estimating the hold which Christianity still has on large numbers we must remember not only that many are under the sway of emotion of the "Mesopotamian" type, but also that the professional apologist is a past master in covering up fallacies with phrase and formula. A whole system of pseudo-philosophy has been built round "spiritual values," "religious instincts," and other phrases which, in their correspondence with reality, have as much significance as "phlogiston" and "aquosity" have in Chemistry. I would certainly urge the careful study of a good book on logic. There are so many that the choice is embarrassing, but I have found Alfred Sidgwick's *Elementary Logic and Use of Words in Reasoning* very helpful. I may mention that on April 18 I dealt at some length with securantism and the misuse of words, and the subject provoked an excellent discussion. It is also advisable for our speakers to know something of both the old and the modern apologists for Christianity, of such writings as Butler's *Analogy* and Fairbairn's *Philosophy of the Christian Religion*. I can strongly recommend the various answers to "infidel" attacks on the faith, but few of them are easily available now. Every Freethinker should, of course, read as many of the great classics of Freethought as he can, especially those that were meant to appeal to "the man in the street." To mention three which suggest themselves to the mind at once—Paine's *Age of Reason*, Winwood Reade's *Martyrdom of Man* and Draper's *Conflict* are now, I think, to be found in many local libraries. To these three I might add Strauss's *Life of Jesus*.

Finally, I invite any of our readers desiring more detailed information, or in any way interested in the Study Circle, to write to the *Freethinker*. I will gladly answer their inquiries to the best of my ability, or send them a few notes that may be serviceable.

A. D. McLAREN.

On Hebrew and Kindred Matters.

WHEN, incidentally, I gave my opinion the other day in these columns that I did not believe Biblical Hebrew was ever a spoken language I did not wish to enter into any controversy on the matter. First of all, I am no philologist, and I do not pretend for a moment that I have gone deeply into the study of language. Secondly, my opinion is the result of a great deal of reading, extending over many years, and I have not kept a commonplace book with quotations and authorities. Thirdly, I do not consider the question of sufficient importance to warrant a long thesis in which it could be thoroughly thrashed out and which, in addition, would act as a handbook of the subject for many years to come. After all, as far as Freethought is concerned, it does not matter a tinker's button whether any one of old spoke Hebrew or not. Our case does not depend on Hebrew at all.

A parallel example is the discussion on the myth of Jesus. Freethought would be just as true and just as necessary even if a genuine Jesus of the gospels really lived. I believe he and his mother and father (whether God or man) are all myths, but admitting for a moment that behind the Gospel figure there was a real man, would that make Christianity true? For the student of the origins of all religions, the growth and perpetuation of the gospel myths are a necessary study and so, in a way, is the question of the Hebrew language. It can be dispensed with in these troublous times of economic distress with more weighty things to be considered, but to any enquiring mind the problem has a certain fascination, if only from an academic point of view. At all events quite a number of my friends think some of the reasons for my conclusions regarding the Hebrew language would be worth reading, and I therefore hope these few notes will prove interesting, stimulating and provocative.

First of all let me point out how much easier it is to take the ordinary view. By doing so quite a deal of time and worry could be saved. Why bother to say or show that Hebrew was never a spoken language? The Jews say it was, so do the Christians, so do great philologists, so do certain scholarly Freethinkers, why pursue the matter further? I fear my incurable scepticism is to blame. I asked myself many years ago what exactly is the evidence that some people called Jews ever spoke Hebrew? I hunted up every article and book I could find on the subject and carefully read the information given; and I am sure it will astonish those eminent Freethinkers who so strongly disagree with me when I say that I found no evidence whatever; and by evidence I mean evidence.

Let us commence at the fountain head of all wisdom and knowledge—the Bible. It may surprise some readers if I tell them that the words "Hebrew language" do not occur once in the Old Testament. The word "Hebrew" does of course, but not "Hebrew language." The "Jews" language is mentioned and the point at issue could be whether the "Jews" (or Jewish) language is the same as the "Hebrew" language. It is for those who maintain that they are the same to prove it, and I claim they never have done so. They merely assert it or take it for granted and expect the reader to do the same.

The next question is if Hebrew was a spoken language, when and where and how did it originate? This is a vital point. On it I have found the most amusing examples of "it must be so" I have ever come across. Nearly all authorities take it for granted from the beginning that Hebrew was a spoken

What another man thinks of you is of small importance. It is the opinion that one has of oneself that is of final consequence.—Chapman Cohen.

language, and then try to prove when and where. When they can't prove it, they generally say, "of course" this or that is so. For example, Dr. Kenyon in his valuable *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, in talking about the Hebrew text of the Bible says: "The language in which the manuscripts we are examining are written is, of course, Hebrew, a branch of the great Semitic family of languages, which includes the Babylonian, Assyrian, Chaldean, Phœnician and other tongues spoken in Western Asia. It was the spoken language of Palestine down to the time of the exile." Does Dr. Kenyon mean he has proof of some kind that Hebrew was spoken by the inhabitants of Palestine "up to the time of the exile?" He gives no authority but "of course"—though it is fair to say he gives a list in his preface of those to whom he says he is indebted.

What then do we know in proof that Hebrew was a spoken language? We can dismiss the belief of those Jews who say that it was the language of God when he spoke to Adam and of those earnest and orthodox Christians who claim it to be the language of Eve and the serpent. Did the Patriarchs speak it? Well, it must be admitted that Abraham (if he lived) did speak some language, but there is no proof whatever that it was Hebrew. If it was, then it must have had a history before him, and there is no evidence that it existed at all in the time he is supposed to have lived. I say "supposed" for quite a large number of orthodox Christians are now willing to admit that not only Abraham, but Isaac and Jacob are myths. What then of Jacob's supposed descendants in Egypt—did they speak Hebrew? It is almost inconceivable that, if it was Hebrew, it should have been exactly like the Hebrew of the Old Testament. Living languages are bound to change and, during the 400 odd years the Israelites are said to have been in Egypt, it is quite impossible for Hebrew to have retained the pristine purity of the Bible. In any case, there are the gravest doubts as to the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt and their exodus and migration into Canaan. In fact many historians have definitely admitted that the *history* of the Jews does not really commence until after the exile. What is supposed to go before it is either legendary, myth, or pure conjecture.

That some people did invade Canaan, and that they spoke some language may be admitted. Did these people (whom we can call Jews for convenience) speak Hebrew? There is no evidence whatever about it. Did the natives of Canaan speak Hebrew? There is again not a scrap of evidence worth considering for that belief. That they spoke some Semitic dialect can be admitted, however, and so those historians and Biblical writers who never question that Hebrew was a spoken language tell you that it is a branch of the Semitic family of languages. Well, of course it is. It couldn't be anything else.

Supposing, as I claim, it is a literary and sacred language, it was bound to have some affinities with the languages surrounding it. Take Esperanto as an example. Its inventor drew on all European languages for his material. An Englishman can easily recognize many English roots. A Frenchman can see French in many words, and so on. The grammar is mostly English—in fact, no man can invent a language which has no similarity whatever to the language of his contemporaries. He is bound to go to familiar sounds *Danc* in Esperanto is the root of the verb to dance. *Mia* is my and mine, *Blua* is blue, *Pipo* is pipe. *Poeto* is poet and so on. I give these few words out of hundreds to show how a language could be invented and yet based on the living languages of the

countries surrounding the inventor. To say, therefore, that Hebrew belongs to the family of Semitic languages means nothing whatever to our inquiry. The fact that it does so belong does not prove it was a spoken language in the sense that English is a spoken language.

But if Hebrew was the spoken language of the invaders of Canaan, or the language of the original inhabitants of Canaan, are we to suppose that it was exactly like the Hebrew of the Old Testament and that it never changed in 1,000 years?

All languages change in 1,000 years or less. Look at the English of Chaucer or the French of Rabelais. No one knows how their languages were pronounced in their day. No one can fathom the tremendous influence local dialects can have in changing and modifying a living literary language. Look how, in our own day, the American "movies" are changing our own language. "Sez you," and hundreds of similar atrocities are now almost common-places here in England.

It is necessary to insist upon these things because the innocent and guileless phrase "belonging to the Semitic family of languages" simply has no bearing on our problem, though, when read in authoritative books like Dr. Kenyon's such a sentence seems unanswerable.

Not a single inscription in Biblical Hebrew has come down to us of any pre-exilic date—and even if it had, it would not prove that Hebrew was a spoken language in Palestine. Hundreds of inscriptions in Latin can be found here in England, but that does not prove Latin is a living and a spoken language in England. Inscriptions in a dialect supposedly similar to Hebrew is no proof whatever that Hebrew was a spoken language. They do not even prove that the language of the dialect was spoken. We don't know for whom or why certain inscriptions were ever made at all. Why is that the words "Hebrew language" never occur once in the Old Testament? The omission cannot be accidental, and it would be interesting to know what eminent philologists have to say about it.

What about the word Hebrew itself? The discussion on the etymology of this word is interminable. The way the "authorities" settle the matter, first in one way, then another, and if these two are challenged, then still another, ought to show how ignorantly stupid is the glib statement, "of course Hebrew was a spoken language." The problem is one of the most intricate and baffling in the whole range of Biblical difficulties. But no longer is the theory held that Hebrew is the oldest of the Semitic dialects. It may have been "like" the dialects of Moab or Ammon or Edom. In fact "authorities" would like to prove that, after all, Hebrew was the original language of Canaan, and the "Hebrews" originally spoke Aramaic. But the actual origin of Hebrew is lost either way, whether the Jews brought it with them to Canaan or the inhabitants of Canaan always spoke it. And if anyone doubts the uncertainty of anything regarding our knowledge of Hebrew, I invite him to read the article on the Hebrew language in the *Encyclopedia Biblica*. It is a masterpiece of conjecture.

H. CUTNER.

(To be continued.)

A sound mind in a sound body is a short but full description of a happy state in this world; he that has these two has little more to wish for, and he that wants either of them will be but little the better for anything else.

Locke.

Acid Drops.

The King and Queen have never had a fight in public, they have never turned their children out to starve, they have never been seen entering Buckingham Palace in a state of intoxication; they have won the affection of their subjects by opening innumerable institutions, entering many homes of the poor and shaking hands with wounded soldiers. Why, then, why did they so far disgrace themselves and the country by driving in full publicity to look at an exhibition of pictures on Sunday? Were there not six other days during the week on which they could visit the Academy? Do they not know that the greatness of the country over which they rule has been built up on the Christian Sunday, and that one of their principal law officers, the Attorney-General, has informed the world that it is the one glimpse of heaven we possess? In these days of tumbling thrones and trembling dynasties it would be well for them to remember that there are limits to what the most loyal of their subjects can stand. This desecration of the Sabbath cannot be passed by unnoticed or without condemnation. Perhaps the Coronation Oath ought to be altered. The State already picks out what kind of a religion the King must have; it would be quite easy to insert a clause enforcing adherence to the Christian Sunday of the early days of Queen Victoria. The King and Queen by their act have simply strengthened the hands of those who would destroy the peace and beauty of our Christian Sunday. The King and Queen at a picture exhibition on Sunday! Scandalous!

There are plenty of rows going on about the payment of tithes, and a very curious one occurred the other day at Iden, Sussex. A man attempted to collect 130 sheep in connexion with tithe arrears. The Church bells were tolled to call the farmers together, the tyres of the collector's car was punctured, and a dead sheep was placed in the car with a message to the parson that it was all he would get. That was all the collector got for his trouble, and in the end the dead sheep was buried and a wooden cross erected over the grave, with the inscription "Queen Anne's Bounty R.I.P." We suggest that the parsons should now try the power of prayer. It is curious that a day of prayer has not been set on one side for the payment of tithes. We are quite sure that tithes is a question in which the Church of England parsons are much more interested than they are in either the weather or disarmament.

It is rarely that the important work done in Standing Committee in the House of Commons reaches the public ear. The Reports are published, but mostly read only by M.P.'s or parties interested in particular measures. On March 23 the following paragraph, reprinted from the *Star* appeared in the press:—

Contending that his object was "to counteract the unholy trinity of Atheists, cranks, and prohibitionists," Mr. C. W. H. Glossop (Con., Penistone) moved at today's session of the House of Commons Standing Committee considering the Town and County Planning Bill, an amendment that no restriction should be imposed which conflicted, in the case of any church, educational establishment, or licensed premises, with directions given by any ecclesiastical or educational authority, or by licensing justices.

By the courtesy of a Member of Standing Committee A, which is dealing with the Town and Country Planning Bill we are able to throw some light on this paragraph, and, in passing, to observe that the headline "atheists and cranks" is, at least in the *Star*, neither accurate nor courteous. Mr. Glossop moved an amendment to provide that the authority for Town Planning should not impose any restrictions "which conflict with any directions given by any ecclesiastical educational or licensing authority." He said "if the Amendment is rejected it will mean that a local authority will be able to determine whether the people on a new housing estate are to be Roman Catholics, Wesleyans or Salvationists." He also argued that if the members of the authority were of one denomination they might object

to the building of a Roman Catholic Church on a particular site because they thought it would take away funds and members from their congregations." What would happen if the majority were Roman Catholics did not enter into the hon. member's calculations, and, as the first suggestion, its absurdity was obvious for this precious measure provides in explicit terms for the consultation of and with ecclesiastical interests by the authority.

The debate afforded a most telling example of the futility of that "local option" which is advocated not only in respect of drink but now in regard to Sunday performances. Capt Waterhouse gave the following case

of a large housing estate in a city in the Midlands. There was a good deal of controversy on the local authority as to whether or not licensed premises should be allowed on the estate. A brewer had obtained a licence—there was no difficulty with the licensing justices—but there was such a division of opinion on the housing committee that they decided to take a plebiscite. The vote resulted in a rather narrow majority in favour of a licence. The committee decided that it was not a sufficient majority, and after six months took another vote, which showed 70 per cent in favour of the licence. In the interval there had been some local elections and the personnel of the housing committee had changed, and then they decided that even 70 per cent in favour was not enough, and, as far as I know that area is still dry.

The people of Assuncion, Paraguay, mistook an angry-blood-red sky, and earth tremors, for indications of the end of the world. Awe-stricken crowds thronged the churches—Christian Churches be it noted—and the priests, "recognizing the natural causes of these phenomena, strived to calm the populace." A New York correspondent of *Reynolds Illustrated News*, describing the scene, points out that the most famous of all end-of-the-world scares was produced, in the eighteenth century, by a Cardinal, Nicolas de Cusa, who said that the Deluge occurred at the 34th jubilee of the Creation, and that the world would end on the 34th jubilee of the Christian era. The Cardinal's prediction and his arithmetic were not superior to those of Mother Shipton and the Rev. "Profit" Baxter; and, undeterred by the exposure of their numerous predecessors, the Seventh Day Adventists now predict the end of the world for the sixth thousand year after Creation, namely—in their reckoning—1996. The venerable Old Moore, who, more wise than these pious folks, contents himself with prophesying from year to year, will doubtless be relieved to hear that he has more than sixty years yet in which to hatch out his horological prognostications.

Mr. William Owen Roberts of Blaenau-Festiniog, a quarreyman, won a prize in the last Irish Sweep, and the local Welsh Calvinistic Minister barred him from Holy Communion. When Judas committed suicide they cast lots for a successor for him among the twelve apostles, "and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven." Apparently the Rev. W. F. Evans and the assembly at the Calvinistic Methodist Chapel aforesaid are more particular than their apostolic predecessors. It is true that people are said to have cast lots for the garments of Jesus after he was crucified, but Mr. Evans ought not to blame them for that for it is recorded that they only did it "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet!" If taking a chance was good enough to vindicate a divine prophecy it ought not to be fatal to participating in the public worship of the same deity in Wales.

Dr. John R. Mott, who is an authority on Christian missions, says, according to the *Methodist Times*, that "the cinema can do more in one night to inculcate moral degeneracy than all the missionaries can do to counteract it in a week." We never had a high opinion of the powers of missionaries, but unless we are mistaken it was found, long before the days of the cinema, that the missionary and the mission station were much more

successful in circulating the white man's vices than in the propagation of his religion. Even a native would laugh at pictures which, under clerical censorship, revealed Christian countries and Christian people as the immaculate characters their religion is supposed to produce. Mr. Mott says that while the Jesuits "speak out straight on this question," i.e., of "demoralizing" films, there is "a lack of united thinking among the English and American Christians. If they would only think together and plan together and act together they would be a tremendous force." When did these two lots of Christians act together? The last occasion we can think of are the "great" War—and the defence of slavery.

In a solemn journal a parson has been explaining the difficulty of "placing" Jesus. He says:—

The person of our Lord Jesus Christ is undoubtedly the most perplexing problem in history. Throughout the ages great thinkers have striven to understand him. Some theory about him, some interpretation of him, was necessary for their personal salvation and for the enlightenment of the generation in which they lived.

After this, one presumably should meditate on the great wisdom of a God who dumped a mystery on the world without any reliable key to it, although man's happiness both in this world and another depended on a proper understanding of the mystery. Of course, in these days there is no mystery about Jesus and the ideas he stands for. The key has been found, not in the Holy Bible, but through the sciences of anthropology and mythology. We know now what kind of mentality it was that hatched ideas of the supernatural, and messiahs, etc. That the same kind of primitive mentality exists to a vast extent in the world to-day is one of the bad legacies which the world has inherited from the past.

Lumb-in-Rossendale, the Parish which attained an unenviable notoriety for a prolonged dispute between the parson and his parishioners, must, we think, be a little puzzled by the Report of the Findings of the Commissioners who, sitting with powers bestowed by a recent Act (Benefices Ecclesiastical (Duties) Act, 1926), sought to adjudge the blame as between the contending persons and factions. The incumbent, they found, had been guilty of "wilful default in the performance of the duty which he is bound by law to perform," and had been guilty of "wilful default" in "the non-observance of certain promises made by him on ordination as deacon and priest"; yet, they affirmed, that the incumbent is "a Christian and a moral man," and a "hard-working and zealous priest," and there is "not the slightest blemish upon his personal character."

It is not necessary to obey the law, or to keep your promises, in order to be "a moral man and a Christian." This will be a convenient finding for the thousands of clergymen who break the law of the land every time they officiate, and who never seem to have remembered since they made them the "promises" made on their ordinations as priests and deacons." The outsider may notice with interest that a clergyman has duties which he is "bound by law to perform," and if there was ever a case of bringing the law into contempt it is not this solitary case of Lumb and its noisy quarrels, but the general lawlessness which pervades the whole of the Establishment with regard both to marriage and ritual.

Lord Stanley states that the chaplains in the Navy number: Anglican 67, Roman Catholic 10, and Nonconformist 9—a total of 86.

The total of their salaries is £42,000 approximately, exclusive of the Chaplain of the Fleet, who received an inclusive salary of £1,335 per annum.

In addition to their salaries, chaplains, except the Chaplain of the Fleet, are accommodated and victualled at the expense of the Crown, or receive appropriate allowances in lieu.

An average of £487 a year, with full board and lodging, to say nothing of probable "pickings" is not so bad for the Church that does not receive a penny of public

money. And this is for the Navy only. Each of the other services preaches the gospel that is without money and without price.

We have often had occasion to point out that when dealing with anything that affects their religion the majority of the clergy do not bother about the truth, and their congregations do not expect them to. Politics appear to be going the same way. In a discussion in a daily paper over the failure of the Conservative candidate at a recent by-election the statement is made quite plainly that if the Candidate had stood as a "National" candidate instead of as a Conservative he would certainly have been elected. You see, it does not matter what a man is, it is what he calls himself. It is not a question of what a man believes, it is what fools the voters best. Parsons and Politicians!

The case of Mr. Montalk which was mentioned here, when he was sentenced to six months imprisonment for "publishing" some verse which he had only taken to a printer for estimate, is still a subject of protest. We like the plucky action of Mr. R. W. Postgate, who has made six copies of "a rude Limerick," and sent them through the post, and also confesses to owning a copy of Juvenal and to having shown the Sixth Satire to his wife, and who now challenges the Public Prosecutor to take action. It is, however, too much to expect that this challenge will be accepted. *Time and Tide*, which publishes his challenge is a respectable and substantial weekly, and Mr. Postgate is a well-known writer whose house cannot be invaded by inspectorial policemen without raising more dust than nosey officials and oratorical magistrates care for.

Mr. Herbert Morrison says that "if youth desires to be taken seriously it must take itself seriously." Reading between the lines, we are inclined to the opinion that the real grievance of the elder brethren is that youth refuses to treat seriously the traditions, customs, conventions, and ideas of the older generation or to accept them as the finality of wisdom. Youth's real offence is that youth is inclined to do its own thinking. Age refuses to take the results of such thinking seriously, and regards the independence of youth as particularly exasperating.

Fifty Years Ago.

CHRISTIANS make a great boast of humility, but no people have more "cheek." They strut about the world as God's elect, who know all the truth, and need no further enlightenment. To doubt their creed is a sin, to deny it is blasphemy. They do not feel bound to give any reasons why their faith should be embraced; they just put it before you and say, Take it or be damned. Very naturally they want the law to make everybody believe as they do. Rejection of their creed is not simply an intellectual offence, but a moral crime, which ought to be punished like robbery and murder. It is not only a sin against God, but an insult to them; for, when you say their creed is untrue, you say that they are mistaken, and that is more than they can stand.

There is no impudence greater than the bigot's. He is not satisfied with thinking as he pleases, and worshipping God in his own way; he claims the right of compelling other men to think and worship after his fashion. He might as well ask that all men should eat and drink exactly what he does and at precisely the same hours, that they should go to bed and rise at the moment which suits him, and that they should all cut their clothes according to his pattern. If his vanity expressed itself in such insane demands, it would be laughed at and defied; but when it assumes the aspect of religious bigotry, it is considered very laudable, and passes as zeal in the service of God.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

F. BRADFORD (Sunderland).—Figures are significant and useful. Thanks.

S. FALCONER.—Hope to meet you at the N.S.S. Conference. The business meetings of the Conference are open to members only.

A. LANGWAY.—All that is true in the statement that the Church does not receive public money is that there is no direct Parliamentary grant voted yearly. But there are, as a matter of fact, many millions of public money taken by the Churches in one direction and another. And the cry is always for more.

P. MONKS (Barking).—Mr. Birrell. "An illogical opinion only requires enough rope to hang itself."

E. B. MANDIR.—The book about which you enquire has been out of print for many years.

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

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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.

To-day (May 15) the Annual Conference meets in the Victoria Hotel, Deansgate, Manchester. The morning session of the Conference is at 10.30 sharp, and the afternoon session at 2.30. The Conference is open to members only, who should have their cards with them. A luncheon will be served in the hotel at one o'clock at a charge of 3s. In the evening a public demonstration will be held in the Hulme Town Hall at 7. There will be a number of speakers. The President will take the chair at each meeting.

There will be a Reception in the Victoria Hotel on Saturday evening at 7.0, the President, Secretary and Members of the Executive will be present, and as we learn also, a goodly number of friends from various parts. Those present will have the privilege, and the pleasure, of listening to Mr. Philip Hecht, a young violinist, who has attracted considerable attention as a soloist on both the wireless and the concert platform. Mr. Hecht is only twenty-three, and we believe and hope is at the beginning of a splendid career. Mr. Hecht was a pupil of the late Dr. Brodsky.

We see it is highly probable the Government will withdraw its present Sunday Performances Bill, and will bring forward another one which will legalize the holding of Sunday Cinema entertainments wherever they have been previously given. The proposal deserves the fate

that the present one is meeting. It perpetuates the idea that there must be one law for Sunday amusements and another for week-days, it gives local bigotry a legal standing which it at present lacks, and it enunciates the perfectly iniquitous principle that profits made in the pursuit of a legitimate occupation must be confiscated in the name of religion. We hope that all who appreciate honesty in politics or principle in the conduct of life will do what they can to kill the new Bill whenever it is put forward—that is if it is on the lines suggested. Freethinkers who know what they are after will never accept this re-enactment of Sabbatarianism, however watered down it may be. It is a cowardly, an unjust, and a contemptible measure, and should be fought to the end. The man who does not appreciate the distinction between a Sabbatarianism based on a law of 150 years ago and one based on a current piece of legislation, ought to lose his vote. Our best wishes—this time—is for the success of the Lord's Day Observance Society. Bigoted they may be, but they are at least fighting for a clearly conceived principle.

Meanwhile we advise all concerned—particularly Cinema proprietors—to open their houses on Sunday. There is a large and wealthy association, and can fight for its rights. If they have free admission, they can under the existing law charge for reserved seats, and there will be no profits to give away because the profits are made on Sunday. No large Cinema would under such conditions lose by admitting fifty people free. If this were done all over England, we venture to prophecy that the 1781 Act would be repealed, not amended in the wrong direction. The Government which is trembling in fear of the Lord's Day Observance Society would certainly not have the courage to stand against a movement of the extent of this one.

We are glad to say that our new publication *The Revenues of Religion* is selling very well. The facts, figures and arguments are such as to form a veritable armoury for all engaged in public work. The work is issued in two forms, in paper at 1s. 6d., and cloth 2s. 6d., postage extra. Quite a number of appreciative reviews of the work have appeared in the general press.

Several Branches of the N.S.S. start open-air work to-day (Sunday), Mr. G. Whitehead will be in Manchester for the week, details in the Lecture Notices column. Brighton Branch has Messrs. Byrne and de Lacy at the Level, and Mr. R. H. Rosetti opens for the West Ham Branch, outside the Technical College, Romford, E.

The *St. Pancras Gazette* reports at length a racy and interesting speech delivered by Mr. F. A. Hornibrook on "The Restrictions on Sunday Enjoyment," before the Metropolitan Secular Society. Mr. Hornibrook was unsparing in his criticism of the proposals before Parliament, and in his denunciation of the hypocrisy manifested in connexion with the debate on the second reading. We quite endorse Mr. Hornibrook's summary of the situation that "the so-called moral disciplining of the community meant robbing others of their natural and well-won rights and liberties."

Quite the biggest gathering of members and guests up to date attended the Annual Dinner and Reunion of the Rationalist Press Association, at the Trocadero Restaurant, on May 7 last. The proceedings were perfectly organized and many excellent speeches by Professor Laski, Professor G. Elliot Smith, Mr. John M. Robertson, Mrs. Naomi Mitchison and others were made.

Mr. George Whitehead is undertaking a week's open-air lecturing in Stockport from May 17 to 20. On a previous visit a number of Christians created a disturbance at his meetings. We hope, therefore, that as many Freethinkers as possible will make it their business to attend. There is nothing that can so effectually keep a crowd of would-be hooligans in order.

Here Is Wisdom.

EVERY now and again, if we are to believe our law-makers and journalists, an occasion arises when typically English characteristics come into prominence and are displayed against their best possible background. It might perhaps be more useful if the evaluation of these traits were left to those who are not English, but this, it is to be supposed, would involve a rather unnecessary element of risk. As we constitute ourselves Judge and Jury, it is not surprising that the qualities we show are wholly admirable. An example of our virtue is considered to show itself whenever a religious matter comes up for discussion in the House of Commons. Then we are told the debate always takes on the quality of strength and sincerity. The debate on the New Prayer Book, a year or two ago, was a case in point, and in his opening speech recently on the Sunday Performances (Regulation) Bill, these exact terms were used prophetically by Mr. Oliver Stanley, and the closing speaker, Earl Winterton, in reviewing the speeches appeared also to believe that these terms in some way fitted the facts. Remembering that such appraisements are necessarily relative and that both these gentlemen know the standards usually reached in the House, an outsider can only conclude that the usual standard is much below that shown on April 13 last—a peculiarly depressing reflection.

What does run through the Debate is that other very charming English characteristic, the love of compromise, and its corollary, the dislike of logic and principle. It is here we are told that the genius of this island finds a commodious exercise-ground. Compromise has become in fact not an emergency contrivance but an excellent thing in itself. The new comer unsophisticated enough to seek a logical line or apply a high principle to any question that arises is marked off as a tyro, knowing nothing of that smoother road, that highly elaborate system of accommodation, which distinguishes English politics. On a religious matter the expression of hopelessly fossilized ideas, even if accompanied by much Pharisaical attitudinizing, can always be sure of the congratulations of its hearers (if for nothing else than "sincerity"), but he who talks of principle, will not be long before he hears that damning adjective "unpractical." It would be foolish to deny that compromise is frequently essential on political issues, but it is only legislation that has principle running through it that has any lasting and dynamic quality. Questions arranged on a compromise basis are unfortunately never settled but return inevitably to the wash.

Earl Winterton's winding-up speech in favour of the Bill was quite exceptional, being a praiseworthy and in the main successful attempt to disentangle the issue from a crowd of irrelevancies. The speech of Mr. Boothby (Aberdeen E) showed as a good deed in a naughty world because of the single strand of equal liberty for all running through it from end to end. One can sympathize with the quandary in which this member found himself in supporting a Bill, one of the provisions of which would put the expression of any unpopular opinion on Sunday to the throw of Local Option. His speech could have been followed with perhaps equal effectiveness by a vote against the Bill. He seemed afraid of a deadlock, but out of that deadlock better things could hardly fail to come than the Government's measure. But a prejudice against appearing in the same lobby with Mr. Magnay (Gateshead) and Sir John Haslam (Bolton) is very human. These members evidently think that the form of Government in this country is a Theocracy, which can fix all people's Sunday behaviour because of some text or other in Habbakuk or Ezekiel,

In times of National Distress the electorate's choice falls for the most part on what are considered "safe" members. In the presence of Mr. Magnay and Sir John one feels however anything but safe. One is charged by them of being in league with the satanic powers, and one knows that one's reward at their hands would be something lingering, probably with boiling oil in it. Let us follow Sir John Haslam, even if only for the sake of those who consider the work of militant Freethought accomplished.

"I looked up yesterday the words, which impressed me very forcibly at the time, used on the occasion of the Coronation of our Beloved King. Part of the law of the land is that the Archbishop of Canterbury, before he places the Crown on the head of the King, presents him with a Bible—which, I would point out, contains these Ten Commandments—and says:—

"We present you with this Book. It is the most valuable thing that this world offers. Here is wisdom. This is the Royal Law. These are the living oracles of God."

One admits being impressed also.

Now, says Sir John, there are ten commandments and all the ten are of equal importance. For whosoever shall offend on one point of the law and keep the rest is guilty of breaking the whole. "Parliament no more than individuals can pick and choose."

This is the Fourth Commandment:—

Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God, in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made Heaven and Earth, the sea and all that in them is and rested the seventh day, wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

This may be Wisdom. It may be the Oracle of God, but why, oh why, if Oracles can be tampered with so easily, can Parliament not alter them a little more. For, here it is plain that at some time or other some one or other has moved and got carried *nem con* that "For the word 'seventh' in the above clause, read 'first.'" *One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law.* It is also clear that the Divine allowance for work of six days has been considered excessive, and has been altered to five and a half days. (This fact alone reduces all the fear of Christians submitting to a seven-day work week to absurdity). As for clause three, one can safely here put oneself in the hands of Lord Winterton.

"I assume, and to assume anything else would be insulting—that they themselves are rigid observers of Sunday, and never go in for tennis or golf or motor-ing on Sundays, involving at any rate the service of a chauffeur, but that generally they set a very fine and consistent example."

As for the reasons given in Clause 4 for the institution of the Sabbath, if a cleric such as the Dean of St. Pauls were instructed to repeat them as his own, one feels sure he would faint.

Sir John Haslam's remarks are only important because they represent typical Sabbatarian advocacy, and typical of the crossing of T's and dotting of I's of the lines taken by the Lord's Day Observance Society, which body, by the circulation of a few thousand postcards, can make the average Member of Parliament quake in his shoes. Are we justified in saying that such speeches and arguments reach a high level of strength and sincerity. Is there not everything to be gained by telling the plain truth, even in the House of Commons, about such utterances? We are, as Ruskin said in his day, "utterly oppressed by our courtesies and considerations and compliances

and proprieties." Sunday in England so far from giving us "one of the few glimpses vouchsafed to us of the heavenly city" (I hope Sir Thomas Inskip is not allowed to forget that remark) is to hundreds of thousands of us, one of the ugliest blots on our national life. Its most unpleasant features do not come from antiquity, but are comparatively modern. It sprung from a horrible belief which had no place for laughter, and in which Hell was the active ingredient. It took potential decent citizens, intent on the business of life, and taught them that this life was but a preparation for eternity. It packed their minds with gloomy and demented dogmas and demanded one of the days of the week to attend to the prolongation of the sessions of sweet silent thought; there was heavy concentration on one matter only, the salvation of souls and the saving of them from the Pit.

If these be the sources from which we must seek Wisdom, then let us seek Beauty in Cesspools and Truth in the Thieves' Kitchen. Yet we would grant the liberty to teach such doctrines much as we dislike them. And so do we demand like facilities so that every agency for the amusement, edification and inspiration of the people is given an extra day per week in which to do its work.

T. H. ILSTOB.

May Day and Whitsuntide.

"Im wunderschönen Monat Mai
Als alle Knospen sprangen
Da ist in meinem Herzen
Die Liebe aufgegangen."—HEINE.

"Or è di maggio, e fiorito è il limone;
Noi salutiamo di casa il padrone.
Or è di maggio, e gli è fiorito i rami;
Salutiam le ragazze co' suoi dami.
Or è di maggio, che fiorito è i fiori;
Salutiam le ragazze co' suoi amori."

ANCIENT ITALIAN MAGGIO.

The decoration of horses with rosettes, or an occasional "Jack in the Green," and girls with paper feathers dancing round a barrel organ, are all that remain to remind the Londoner of the old festival of May Day. When I was a youth, it was the custom to trip out early in the country to get the May dew and gather hawthorn. This old Pagan practice is now quite extinct. Shakespeare, in his *Henry the Eighth*, alludes to it, saying it is impossible to make people sleep on May morning. And who does not remember that passage in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, where Lysander appoints to meet Hermia.

"—In that wood, a league without the town,
Where I did meet thee once with Helena
To do observance to a morn of May?"

Chaucer, in his "Court of Love," tells us that early on May morning "forth goeth all the court to fetch the flowers fresh, and branch, and bloom."

To this custom of early rising Herrick alludes, in his fine pastoral on "Corinna's Going a Maying":—

"Get up, get up, for shame; the blooming morn
Upon her wings presents the god unshorn.
See how Aurora throws her fair,
Fresh-quilted colours through the air;
Get up, sweet slug-a-bed, and see
The dew bespangling herb and tree.

"There's not a budding boy or girl, this day,
But is got up, and gone to bring in May.
A deal of youth, ere this, is come
Back, and with white-thorn laden, home."

And in Tennyson's "May Queen"—
"You must wake and call me early, call me early, mother dear,"

Early rising was but a survival of a vigil in which the fun was kept up through the night. Stubbes, a Puritan writer of Queen Elizabeth's time, in his "Anatomie of Abuses," published in 1585, says: "Against May. Whit-Sunday, or other time, all the yung men and maides, old men and wives, run gadding about over night to the woods, groves, hills, and mountains, where they spend all the night in pleasant pastimes; and in the morning they return, bringing with them birch and branches of trees, to deck their assemblies withall; and no meruaile for there is a great Lord present amongst them as superintendent and Lord of their sports—namely, Sathan, prince of hel. But the chiefest jewel they bring from thence is their May-pole (say rather their stinking poole), which they bring home with great veneration." This interesting passage lets us know that the old Pagan rites were confounded with witchcraft, and confirms the evidence that the persecution of witches was the last act in the tragic suppression of Paganism. The rites of May Day are in reality a continuation of the rites of Dionysus Sabazios. Mr. W. W. Story says: "Scarcely does the sun drop behind St. Peter's on the first day of May, before bonfires begin to blaze from all the country towns on the mountainsides, showing like great beacons. This is a custom founded in great antiquity, and common to the North and South. The first of May is the Festival of the Holy Apostles in Italy; but in Germany, and still farther North, in Sweden and Norway, it is *Walpurgisnacht*, when goblins, witches, hags, and devils hold high holiday, mounting on their brooms for the Brocken."

In the Neapolitan towns great fires are built on this festival, around which the people dance, jumping through the flames, and flinging themselves about in every wild and fantastic attitude. Similar bonfires may also be seen blazing everywhere over the hills, and on the Campagna on the eve of the day of San Giovanni, which occurs on the 24th June. These are relics of the old Pagan custom alluded to by Ovid,¹ and particularly described by Varro, when the

¹ "Moxque per ardentis stipulae crepitanis acervos,
Trajicias celeri strenua membra pede."—*Fasti*, lib. 4.

peasants made huge bon-fires of straw, hay, and other inflammable materials, called "*Palilia*," and men, women and children danced round them and leaped through them in order to obtain expiation and free themselves from evil influences—the mothers holding out over the flames those children who were too young to take an active part in this rite.

The chief feature of May Day was the setting up the may-pole. This being the time when the sap rises in the oak, the priests, joining with the people, used to go in procession to some adjoining wood on the May morning, and return in triumph with the much-prized pole, adorned with boughs, flowers, and other tokens of the spring season. Besides the principal maypole, others of less dimensions were likewise erected in our villages, to mark the places where refreshments were to be obtained: hence the name of *ale stake* is frequently to be met with in old authors, as signifying a maypole. Bishop Grosseteste (d. 1253) suppressed the May games in the diocese of Lincoln, because partaking of heathen vanity; and from that period and example the practices of the day have gradually altered from their original mode of celebration. Stubbes remarks that when the maypole was reared, "they fall to banquet and feast, to leape and dance about it, as the heathen people did at the dedication of their idolles, whereof this is a perfect pattern, or, rather, the thing itself." The acrid old Puritan was quite right. The maypole was an emblem of the life and generation manifest in the flowering of vegetation. It was the symbol of the renewal of life,

as was also Flora, or our Maid Marian, or the Queen of the May; while Jack-i'-the-Green represents the tree spirit, whose *role* is so important in all the old religions.

The last maypole in London was taken down in 1718. It was set up in Wanstead Park, Essex, as a support to Sir Isaac Newton's large telescope. Pope thus perpetuates its remembrance:—

"Amidst the area wide they took their stand,
Where the tall maypole o'erlook'd the Strand."

"The Mayings," says Strutt, in his *Sports and Pastimes*, 1801, "are in some sort yet kept up by the milkmaids at London, who go about the streets with their garlands and music, dancing." But the milkmaids gave place to the chimney-sweeps, as Maid Marian had to Malkin, a clown dressed in woman's clothes; and even the sooty sweeps have almost entirely abandoned the festival. Our country largely owned its title of "Merrie England" to its remnants of Paganism. Puritanism did much towards stamping these out, but Puritanism has in turn itself become almost as effete as Paganism.

Had the Puritans known the *Pervigilium Veneris*, a Latin poem ascribed by Erasmus to Catullus, but certainly later, it would have afforded them an additional text for invective against the Pagan superstitions which the May games were denounced as representing. The poem shows that the Romans, like our English ancestors, celebrated the season by betaking themselves to the woods for three nights, where they kept vigil in honour of Venus, to whom the month of April was dedicated, as being the universal generating and producing power. The poem seems to have been composed with a view to its being sung by a choir of maidens in their nocturnal rambles beneath the soft light of an Italian moon. All the signs of spring whisper of love, and the constant refrain comes in, *Cras amet, qui nunquam amavit; quique amavit, cras amet*. Students of peasant customs and mythology will not be surprised at the suggestion that the three nights of vigil arose from watching the seeds which were expected to sprout at this season within three days.

May is the month of Mary, the mother of God, as it formerly was of Cybele, mother of the gods, the Bona Dea of the ancient Romans, whose feast at this period naturally associated itself with that of Flora. A remnant of the Floralia is preserved in the *Infiorata* or flower festival, dedicated now to the Madonna dei Fiori, celebrated every May at Genzano, which lies over the old crater now filled by the still waters of Lake Nemi. All the people are gaily dressed, and fun and flowers prevail, and as night comes on the young people dance the salterello in the very groves where the *Rex Nemorensis* obtained his office by slaying his predecessor.

(The late) J. M. WHEELER.

TO ONE ESPOUSING UNPOPULAR TRUTH.

Not yet, dejected though thy cause, despair,
Nor doubt of Dawn for all her laggard wing.
In shrewdest March the earth was mellowing,
And had conceived the summer unaware.
With delicate ministration, like the air,
The sovereign forces that conspire to bring
Light out of darkness, out of Winter, Spring
Perform unseen their tasks benign and fair.
The sower soweth seed or vale and hill,
And long the folded life waits to be born;
Yet hath it never slept, nor once been still:
And clouds and suns have served it night and morn;
The winds are of its secret council sworn;
And Time and nurturing Silence work its will.

Sir William Watson.

Elijah—Once Again.

It is several years now since "Elijah" was performed at Easter at "The Old Vic," and then it was in its Operatic form; but this year we had "Elijah" as an "Oratorio in Action," with Mendelssohn's charming music. Most Freethinkers are as well acquainted with the trials and troubles in the career of Elijah as narrated in the Book of Kings as Christians, because, for the most part, Freethinkers are diligent students of the Bible.

Consequently it will not be necessary to go minutely into all the details of the Oratorio. But we are early introduced to the widow who had lost her young son, and eagerly besought the Holy Man Elijah to restore the life of her beloved boy. Elijah as a miracle worker cheerfully undertook the task, and in a few moments the boy was brought on to the stage as lively and as active as though nothing had been the matter with him.

This occurred by the Brook Cherith, whither Elijah had gone because he had prophesied against Ahab. While there he was fed by the ravens. A famine takes place, and the people are in dreadful straits and at last Elijah goes to meet Ahab. Here he meets Obadiah, a zealous young man of God, who brings him in the presence of Ahab. Elijah tells Ahab that he has forsaken God's commands and has followed Baalim. He then commands his followers to gather the whole of Israel unto Mount Carmel, and to summon the prophets of Baal to meet, and there he issues a challenge to show whose God is really God. They are to select and slay a bullock, but put no fire under it; they are to call upon their God and the God who by fire shall answer, he shall be acknowledged as God indeed! Then occurs the great contest. The Baalites cry unto their God, but there is no response. And then Elijah becomes positively sarcastic. He asks them first to call louder. But still there is no response. Then he jeeringly says: "Call him louder, for he is a God. Perhaps he is talking, or he is pursuing, or is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth so awaken him, call louder."

But let the Baalites call never so loud there is no reply. They dance round in fury and cut themselves with knives. But still there is no response. As soon, however, as Elijah calls upon his God Jahveh—or Jehovah—the light comes down from the wings and burns up the carcass. And so the Hebrew God gets a decided victory. But see what follows. Elijah was not satisfied with his triumph over the Baalites. He said unto his followers: "Take the prophets of Baal and let not one of them escape. And they took them and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and slew them there." That, however, is invariably the way believers in one God have treated others who believed in another God, or those who believed in none at all. But after this there is a famine in the land, and the people turn upon Elijah, and threaten to kill him. So at last he goes into the wilderness and calls upon his God to take away his life "for I am no better than my fathers." But he says: "I go on my way in the strength of the Lord. My heart is therefore glad, my glory rejoiceth and my flesh shall also rest in hope."

With regard to the rendering of this Oratorio there is only one word to describe it—it was superb.

Mr. Tudor Davies as Obadiah sang the air "If with all your hearts ye truly seek me, ye shall ever surely find me. Thus saith our God" with touching beauty of expression. He was in the top of his form and sang all his airs with consummate art. Miss Hilda Richard, as the angel, sang the air "O rest in the Lord," with admirable beauty of tone and execu-

tion. Miss Nora Sabini and Rose Morris were equally good, and Miss Joan Cross thrilled the audience with her wonderful top notes as "The Widow" and lastly we had Sumner Austin, that versatile actor and vocalist, as Elijah. He not only gave us a fine study of the character, but he used his rich baritone voice to great effect in all the arias. Altogether the whole performance including the many choruses, was one of the most satisfying rendering of "an oratorio in action," we have had the pleasure of hearing. It is worth while remembering that this beautiful oratorio, based upon old Jewish superstitions, and wedded to the charming music of Mendelssohn affords a delightful entertainment to ardent lovers of dramatic art.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

The B.B.C. and World History.

HAVING been familiarized with the abounding religiosity of the B.B.C., we are hardly surprised that an attempt was made to give support to this archaic feature in a series of talks recently given to schools on World History. The course was based on a pamphlet which lies before me; and it is a very curious production.

The fundamental obsession of the author appears on pp. 5 and 6 of the pamphlet: "It is to Greece, Rome and Israel that we owe our greatest debt, since the Scriptures of the Jews became part of the Bible of the Christians. To understand the contribution of Israel to our modern civilization, we must set the Hebrew people back into the world of the great empires, of Babylon, of Egypt, of Assyria and Persia. That is the conception of Ancient History which dominates these six talks."

The inclusion of Israel in and the exclusion of Egypt and Sumeria-Babylonia from a list of the three greatest contributors to modern civilization is preposterous, as may be seen by glancing at any authoritative work on ancient history, such as Breasted's *Ancient Times* (the second book in a list on pp. 6 and 7 of the pamphlet). The old Hebrews contributed practically nothing but literature, of which an abundance of essentially the same kinds—legendary, quasi-historical, romantic, etc.—had been produced by the Sumerians, Egyptians and Babylonians during the two thousand years or so before the Hebrews dribbled into Palestine as nomad barbarians.

The pamphlet gives little indication of the rise, early development and spread over the near East of the main features of civilization, such as organized government, written law and its administration, art, science, invention, and education. Instead of this we find an inordinate quantity of Hebrew and other religion, and of trifling things connected with it—"the going down into Egypt and the flight through the Red Sea . . . the stay in the desert . . . the glory of Solomon . . . the cruelty of Assyria and of its Empire . . . the taking captive of the people of Judah and Jerusalem, and how they were carried away to Babylon . . . the way the Christians were persecuted . . ."

After the writer of the pamphlet has thus revealed his obsession we do not expect that he will follow the practice of a competent and rational historian by mentioning that cruelty towards and the enslavement of conquered peoples was a common early feature; that the admitted cruelty of the Assyrians was rather closely paralleled by that of the old Hebrews, as shown by the record in 2 *Samuel*: "And he (David) put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon." Nor do we find any reference to the "laws of war" set forth in *Deuteronomy* xx., which include the utter destruction of Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites and others whose "cities . . . the Lord doth give thee for an inheritance"; nor that the persecution of the early Christians by the Romans (which was done at least partly on grounds of State) was far exceeded by the persecution by Christians of non-Christians and of one another on account solely of

trifling differences of doctrine. Nor is there any hint of the series of atrocities which the judicial historian incidentally refers to as "bloody butchery like that practised by Elijah's followers" (Breasted, *Ancient Times*, p. 208).

Of about 10½ pages of letterpress, including "interludes," on the various states and peoples mentioned, a page and a half are occupied by quotations from the Bible, one of which expresses the exploded belief that the Babylonians were especially "wicked," and another the archaic notion that the fall of Babylonian was a miraculous or supernatural event. But the most amazing thing in the pamphlet is the following item in "Notes for Teachers": ". . . the 'Second Isaiah' and the prophecy that Cyrus, the Lord's Anointed, would restore the (Hebrew) exiles to Jerusalem."

Following a page on Rome and one on Hannibal there are two pages headed respectively, "The Roman Empire and the Triumph of Christianity," and "In Constantine's Camp," both dealing mainly with religion, and containing puerile references to Constantine's vision and of his statue "with the cross in his hand set up in Rome to symbolize the triumph of Christianity," and also to the fact that "the birthday of the Roman Empire and the birthday of Christianity came very close together."

In view of all this it is not surprising that in a list of names headed "For Teachers," we find a great overplus of names of Hebrews and of others more particularly connected with them. Though there is no Egyptian name (not even Akhnaton of religious fame) and only one Babylonian name, we find the names of Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Jerusalem, "Nahum the prophet," and Maxentius. These, with the names of a few monarchs, military commanders and battlefields make up the main part of the list; and the only two dates given on the page are those of Nebuchadnezzar and the Battle of Salamis.

There is no mention of the fact that while the "triumph of Christianity," accompanied by the fall to a condition of gross ignorance and superstition, was proceeding in the West, the Chinese were making some supremely important advances, including the invention of printing and real paper, and were issuing the first true books.

From all this it will be gathered that the outline of early history given in the pamphlet is not only dominated by the persisting vestiges of ancient superstition; but owing to the plentiful lack of perspective, balance and impartiality the presentation is in large measure the very antithesis of true "scientific" history.

J. REEVES.

Correspondence.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I was interested in Messrs. McHattie and Kerr's letters on "the population question."

Mr. McHatti asserts "there is no overpopulation" and he is right. Mr. Kerr is merely contradictory; but gives Sir Daniel Hall and Professor East as supporting him. Perhaps it would surprise Mr. Kerr to know that for the last thirty years I have been getting a decent living for four or five adults from 1 acre (or less) of land, maintaining a standard of comfort rather higher than the ordinary (in addition to which my wife was a confirmed invalid for twenty years, which was a serious drawback). It will further surprise Mr. Kerr, if I assert that this acre of land could have been made to produce double or even treble what it has produced. There may be a limit to the productivity of land, but I have not yet discovered it, nor has, Sir D. Hall or Prof. East—or Mr. Kerr.

D. DAWSON.

PROPAGANDA.

SIR,—A Student correspondent recently suggested that some step should be taken to counter the efforts of the various Students Christian Unions in our Universities. The proper counter is to let each new student have at least one copy of the *Freethinker* on his or her

admission to a University. Taken in general all students are natural Freethinkers. It does not need much to make active Freethinkers of these. There are surely enough active Freethinkers now in Universities to supply the names of the new entries each term and to send names and addresses to the office. As far as the office is concerned it would entail some work and expense. This is where timid supporters of the movement would come in. It would be our duty to supply the sinews of war. There must be some publication which would give the number of new students enrolled each year. At 3d. per head the *Freethinker* could be sent for six weeks. The printing expense and increased office work could be guessed at and perhaps a member of the staff of the *Freethinker* appointed to look after the business. I must confess that I have not the most vague idea what the cost would be. Further, the scheme would be dependant on finding enough active students to send up the names. I give the idea for what it is worth. I will be prepared to start a fund off with a £5 subscription. I quite recognize that it is a simple matter for anyone to sit in comfort and invent work for others. Further, that some danger would be incurred by any student who assisted, but movements thrive on opposition; for myself I only heard of the *Freethinker* some twenty years after I left a University. Anyhow, if any student likes I will be prepared to ask the Editor to supply up to £5 worth of *Freethinkers* and postage if he will forward some names. E.

SIR,—I read your remarks with interest on the Lord's Day business. I do not think you have quite realized the hypocrisy of the whole business. The Cinema people are making a very bold show. What is not so apparent is that the fact of these people accepting the gift of charity part is only to make it impossible for a theatre to open on Sundays. You will have noticed that there is no emphatic protest against this blackmail by the Cinemas. I enclose a copy of a letter I sent to the *Guardian* on this subject, which as you might know was not published. I think if you read theatres for Zoos in my letter you will see what I mean. I take it that the theatre for the moment is a kind of back number compared to the pictures. I also take it that by agreeing to the present Bill the cinemas hope to keep the theatres in the background for a while longer. Unfortunately Zoos have been added to the Bill as a kind of makeweight, and we will be compelled to either close down or give up some of our hardearned takings to something with which we are not in sympathy. Whatever hardships the Cinemas may claim over this they will cheerfully submit if it is a sure thing that all other amusements are forced to shut up either by economic stress or prejudice. If you know of any paper which would publish this point of view I would be glad to ventilate it a trifle.

W. I. ENGLISH.

[The writer of the above letter is interested in the maintenance of a small Zoo, not for financial, but for educational purposes. As matters stand, as he points out in the letter to which reference is made, Sunday is the chief day of the week for producing anything substantial towards the cost of the enterprise. The charge for entrance is very small. If the Sunday Bill goes through, even if permission is given to open the Zoo on Sunday, the only day on which it is any use for the district, all the profits must be given away. That is, as we said in our criticism of the Bill, a compulsory confiscation of profits made in the course of a legitimate and beneficial undertaking.—ED. *Freethinker*.]

Obituary.

MRS. MARTHA GLASSBROOK.

THE death occurred on April 28, of Mrs. Martha Glassbrook, wife of Mr. J. Glassbrook, of Blackburn. She had been in failing health for some time. The interment took place at Blackburn Cemetery on May 3, and there were many manifestations of the affection and esteem in which she was held as wife and mother and neighbour. A Secular Service was read by Mr. Clayton.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON.

OUTDOOR.

FULHAM AND CHELSEA BRANCH N.S.S. (corner of Walham Grove): Saturday, May 14, 7.30, Messrs. Burns and Tuson. *Freethinkers* on sale.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.30, Sunday, May 15, Mr. L. Ebury, A Lecture. Monday, May 16, South Hill Park, Hampstead, 8.0, A Lecture. Thursday, May 19, Leighton Road, Kentish Town, 8.0, Mr. L. Ebury, A Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Cock Pond, Clapham Old Town): 7.30, Mr. L. Ebury. Wednesday, May 18, Canal Head, Peckham (opposite Rye Lane): 8.0, Mr. F. P. Corrigan. Friday, May 20, Camberwell Gate, Mr. C. Tuson.

THE METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY.—Ramble on Whit-Sunday. Meet Surrey side of Kew Bridge at 12.0 sharp. Non-members welcomed.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): Whit Monday, 3.0, Messrs. Wood, Tuson, Le Maine and Hyatt. 6.30, Messrs. Wood, Tuson, Le Maine and Hyatt.

WOOLWICH BRANCH N.S.S. (Beresford Square): 7.45, Mr. S. Burke—"Christians Awake."

INDOOR.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.1): No Service.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road): 7.0, Gwendoline Buckler—"Liberty's Champion—The League of Nations." Questions invited.

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S.—No Meeting.

COUNTRY.

OUTDOOR.

LIVERPOOL (Merseyside) BRANCH N.S.S.—Tuesday, May 17, Edge Hill Lamp, A Lecture. Thursday, May 19, corner High Park Street and Park Road, A Lecture. Sunday, May 22, Queens Drive (opposite Walton Baths), A Lecture. All at 7.30.

NEWCASTLE BRANCH N.S.S. (Bigg Market): 7.30, Sunday, May 15, Mr. J. T. Brighton, A Lecture. Wednesday, May 18, 8.0, Mr. J. T. Brighton, A Lecture.

STOCKPORT BRANCH N.S.S.—Mr. George Whitehead lectures on Armoury Square, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, May 17, 18, 19 and 20, at 7.30. Will local "Saints" roll up and assist literature sales, etc.

STENDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S.—Tuesday, May 17, 7.30, Mr. J. T. Brighton, A Lecture.

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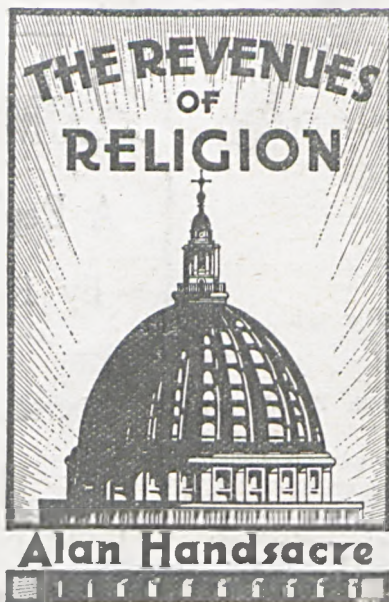
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