

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED *by* CHAPMAN COHEN •
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Views and Opinions

The National Secular Society and its Work

FOR the nineteenth time the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society did me the honour of electing me its President for the next twelve months. I deeply appreciate the honour, although in justice to myself I may say that it is a post I did not seek. I remember that once when proposing the re-election of G. W. Foote to the position, I said that the Presidency was a post that no man who loved ease would seek, and no man with a sense of duty would refuse. It involves much work, great responsibility, a liability to be misunderstood, and offers very little of what most people value in exchange. So long as someone was there fitted for the work and willing to do it, I was quite content to serve in a subordinate capacity, and in playing a part in one of the most important movements in this country. And I like an easy life, although I have not had much chance of gratifying my liking. But I *dislike* most of all seeing something I either strongly like or dislike without giving the one a helping hand and the other a helpful and well-deserved kick.

But if I never sought the honour of being President of the N.S.S. I value it very highly. It is the chief official honour the Society can bestow, and it comes from a body of men and women who have never made the mistake of converting a leader into a master, nor do I think they are ever likely to do so. If they ever do, and whenever they do, the honour of being their President will have vanished. There is no great credit in leading a crowd, whether that crowd be a religious or a political one. The Freethinker is one who should talk not bleat. He should voice opinions, not ejaculate prejudices. So, when the honour of the Presidency was offered me I accepted it, because it was one way of carrying on a work which had occupied practically my whole life, because it gave me the opportunity of dodging the bricks that would be sure to be thrown, because I love an enjoyable time, and could think of nothing more enjoyable than doing day after day just the work one wishes to do, and to note

the discomforture of the "enemy" when one does it. And finally, I have always lacked the energy to do nothing continuously, and have never possessed the self-control that would enable me to stand idly by and see a good cause needing help.

* * *

The Past and the Present

I do not wish to talk about myself in these notes, but about *ourselves*, or more definitely, about the Society to which we belong and the movement we represent. The National Secular Society has been in existence for nearly seventy years, the Secular movement for a longer time, and the movement in favour of Freethought for a still longer period. The Secular Society was formed by an amalgamation of those separate bodies which owed their existence to the combined influence of the writings of Paine, and the teaching and societies formed by Robert Owen and the Richard Carlile group. These people had to fight vicious laws, the tyranny of strongly entrenched vested interests, and a narrow, unenlightened religious belief such as the present generation would find it very hard to conceive. The times were hard, but they were stimulating. The opposition was bitter, but it was open, and when opposition is open it is less unnerving than when it is concealed under a pretence of liberalism, undermines character by professed concern for the social amenities, and so makes a disguised appeal to self-interest. So it happens that the testing-time for men and women—and women have played a great part in the history of modern Freethought—is not when the air is full of the cries and smoke of battle. That comes when the form of the fight has changed and the enemy seeks conquest by compromise. Each of us is then thrown back upon stark principle, and the response, when it is made, comes from those of a rather finer and more idealistic character than was demanded when the fight was open and no terms were held out by the enemy.

I do not, therefore, agree with those who talk at large about the heroic ages of Freethought, and who speak as though present-day Freethinkers were unworthy of their forbears. Military leaders have often said that it is not difficult to control men in war when the actual fighting is on. The task is to keep them with their nerves steady and their courage undiminished during the time of waiting before the attack. And in the case of the higher Freethought war that is always in being the same generalization holds good. Direct opposition and persecution rouses to resistance. It is the recognition of principle when it is no longer fiercely opposed, and no longer openly opposed, that is the real test of character; and if many professed Freethinkers yield to social bribery, it is not that they are of poorer stuff than was their immediate predecessors, but because all are subjected to a much severer test of character than was formerly the case.

Danger

I have written thus because I feel very strongly that unless those who have a genuine concern for real intellectual freedom are more alert and more energetic than they are, there is great danger of losing what has been so dearly bought. As was pointed out in the Executive's Report, Freethought is now being attacked openly as an outworn principle, to use cant expressions, as "bourgeois" on the one side and "anti-patriotic" on the other. This attack has been made possible first because of an economic and industrial development that has not been kept pace with by an ethical and intellectual growth, and also because we are dealing with a new generation—a war generation—that has grown up. This generation began with an established belief of the right to individual freedom around it. But before it had arrived at an age to appreciate this freedom the war came. Its extreme youth was lived under war-time regulations which negated the rights of the individual—as war always does—and accustomed all to the imposition of order after order, the questioning of which was an offence. Accompanying this has been the very much delayed attempt to control social and economic forces in the interests of society as a whole. If there had been a general step-by-step criticism this latter development would have meant nothing but good, but, again, the influence of the war-mind! Orders came to have something of a sacred character to this new generation, and a great many of the older ones were not slow to avail themselves of the opportunity. Legislation was imposed, such as no political party would have dared attempt fifty years ago. Government by official decree is becoming the order of the day, the police are being militarized, and bid fair to become the nearest equivalent we can get to a foreign army of occupation, the Incitement to Seditious Bill—a measure which no pre-war Government would have dared to introduce—may soon become law, and the Mosley-Hitler-Mussolini movement is being boomed by very powerful vested interests, while its supporters among the new generation are, apparently, pleased to belong to a movement where no questions are permitted, where blind obedience is demanded, and a chain is worn with all the pride of an honourable decoration. And, so far as our movement is concerned there is the fact that the *direct* aggression of the Churches is not so strong, and the more revolting forms of Christian doctrine are disowned by Christian leaders, and too many Freethinkers are inclined to take their present position as secure in perpetuity. They do not properly appreciate the freedom that has been given them because they have not known what it was to be without it.

* * *

What May be Done

Translated into terms that directly affect ourselves, this means that an attempt is being made to destroy the Freethought tradition, of which the National Secular Society is the hereditary custodian. It is not altogether a question of maintaining our own right to criticize religious teachings—the issue that is raised to-day is of a wider application. It is the general right of free expression, which once lost, the right to criticize religion will speedily follow. And this defence of the larger right of freedom of expression is no mere debating society issue; it is not moved by the desire to turn the world into an arena for mere dialectical display. Only those with mental incapacity for appreciating logical processes, and a want of understanding of the situation, can thus conclude. A very little more general passion for both might easily have saved the world getting into its present state. The belief in freedom is based on the perception of the historical evidence that however great may be the

danger to which intellectual freedom exposes a society, the dangers that are certain to occur where it is denied are far greater.

Now it seems to me that in this situation the National Secular Society has a clear task before it; and it is *its* task in a sense that it is hardly that of any other organization in the country. And I must again point out that our task—as an organization—is really two-fold. First, it is to destroy the belief in supernaturalism in all its forms, and so divert the energy given to theology to useful social work. Second, to work for that freedom of thought and speech which can alone ensure the greatest measure of social justice. We have been doing this for nearly seventy years, and it has contributed greatly to reform movements as a whole, but there is much more we can do now, and the need for the doing was never more urgent. As a Freethought organization the N.S.S. is in a stronger position than it has ever been, certainly stronger than at any time during my own forty-four year's connexion with it. We should have a much larger membership, and we should have a much greater extensive and intensive propaganda. There should also be a much larger circulation of our literature, particularly of the *Freethinker*. The motion carried at the Conference, that of setting up corresponding members, ought to lead to the formation of more branches, with the result of our exerting a greater influence on those outside our movement. Somehow or the other we must get hold of a larger proportion of those who have lost touch with all the Churches, but who continue to help the Churches by their continued passivity. Above all, if we are to retain our present freedom—setting aside the question of its extension—we must fight for it. We can mark this determination by raising *our* questions and stating our views wherever and whenever possible. We can insist on our full legal privileges. We can mark our attitude by withdrawing our children from religious instruction in the schools. We can, within whatever party or movement we belong, protest against the introduction of religion—a practice before which so many Freethinkers remain silent. In other words, we must prove that we know what we want and are willing to work to get it. Hitherto we have not gained all we ought to have gained. And we have not gained because we have not insisted on having. If genuine freedom of thought is worth having, it is surely worth doing something to get. I invite every reader of this paper seriously to consider what he or she can do. Otherwise they may wake up one day and find it is too late. We must not be beaten back because one section of the people appear to be losing their courage, and another section increasing in impudence.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Silent Friends

NIGHT comes apace; the last gold clouds are fading,
 And I must make unwillingly for home;
 Forsake the trees that were so kindly shading
 My head from Phœbus in the sky's blue dome.
 'Twas good to prop my back against the beech
 And gaze upon the still more ancient oak,
 To muse, and wonder, had these giants speech,
 Would they not call mankind an evil joke.
 Long have I listened in a silence tense
 For whispered words, but oak and beech are dumb;
 Yet, somehow, I their ancient wisdom sense;
 I would stay more, but now the night has come.
 Good night, dear trees, I leave you in the dark,
 But you will greet the morning with the lark.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

"Robert the Devil"

"General opinion is no proof of truth, for the generality of men are ignorant."—Clifford.

"Camels and Christians receive their burdens kneeling."—Ambrose Bierce.

ROBERT BUCHANAN always bulked largely upon the literary horizon of his own time. Cradled in poverty, he fought his way at the pen's point to an enviable position in the world of literature. Much of his tenacity he owed to his father, who was a Chartist and militant Freethinker in those days when it was dangerous to hold advanced views in politics or religion. Young Buchanan came to London and commenced that struggle with fortune in which he was ultimately victorious, although his early privations left a lasting impress on his sensitive nature.

The privations were real enough. His close friend, David Gray, died broken-hearted. Once, while waiting in a publisher's office, Buchanan himself fainted from want of food. Nor was this an isolated instance. Christie Murray has told us that, in those bad old days, when pressmen had not ceased to be pariahs, in a group of well-known journalists, himself included, each admitted having had, at one time or the other, to sleep in the open air, or at "The Hotel of the Beautiful Star," as he wittily phrased it. Henry Murray, his brother, also recounted that he was compelled to share a room with another man, and, money being short, they had only one suit of clothes between them. Since the other man was the bigger, and that suit was his, it was a case of Shallow in Falstaff's clothes.

Even during the most strenuous part of his career, Buchanan never forgot his high aims, and he always put good work into what he did. Once, perhaps, in one of his articles, he uttered something like a cry of despair. He quoted the biting lines of De Musset, "the dead young poet whom the man survives." This pregnant line would apply to so many writers who have started on their careers full of enthusiasms, but who have outlived their early ideals. Buchanan, notwithstanding his privations, retained his youthfulness to the last. In Browning's expressive phrase, Buchanan was "ever a fighter," but he won the fight unaided against most terrible odds.

A literary Ishmael, every man's hand was against him. This position has its advantages, and its drawbacks. One publisher said: "I can't stand that young fellow. He talked to me as if he were Omnipotence, and I was a cockroach." Buchanan always kept his sword sharp, and he struck hard. His appearance in the literary arena always meant real fighting. His attacks on Christianity were in no half-hearted fashion. He threw himself against the personality of the Nazarene, and penned in "The Wandering Jew" the most tremendous indictment of the figure of Christ in the whole of English literature. His impeachment is as impassioned as language can make it:—

"With all the woes of earth upon thy head,
Uplift thy cross and go! Thy doom is said."

This poem caused an uproar in Victorian times, and in the dialectical encounters which followed, Buchanan laid about him stoutly, and his opponents left the arena with more hurry than dignity. Always a most humane and sensitive man, his objections to the Christian Superstition were startling in their sincerity. He often got astonishing effects in his writings by the union of intellect and emotion. Listen to this striking sonnet addressed to "Our Father in Heaven":—

"Oh, Thou art pitiless! They call Thee Light,
Law, Justice, Love, but Thou art pitiless."

What thing of earth is precious in Thy sight
But weary waiting on and soul's distress?
When dost Thou come with glorious hands to bless
The good man that dies cold for lack of Thee?
Where bringest thou garlands for our happiness?
Whom dost Thou send but Death to set us free?
Blood runs like wine—foul spirits sit and rule;
The weak are crushed in every street and lane.
He who is generous becomes the fool
Of all the world, and gives his life in vain.
Wert Thou as good as Thou art beautiful,
Thou could'st not bear to look upon such pain."

This mocking attitude annoyed the Christians exceedingly. They saw quite clearly that the underlying ethical appeal would be a more dangerous weapon in his hands than any purely academical objections and criticisms. Here is another example:—

"Oh, what have sickly children done to share
Thy cup of sorrows? Yet their dull, sad pain
Makes the earth awful; on the tomb's dark stair
Moan idiots, with no glimmer on the brain;
No shrill priest with his hangman's cord can beat
Thy mercy into these—ah nay, ah nay!
The angels Thou hast sent to haunt the street,
Are hunger and distortion and decay.
Lord that mad'st man, and send'st him foes so fleet,
Who shall judge Thee upon Thy judgment day?"

Buchanan was always outspoken, and particularly so in his verse. His lines, "God in Piccadilly" are Voltairean in their bitterness:—

"Smiling like spectres, we gather bereaven,
Leprosy's taint on us, ghost-like we pass,
Watched by the eyes of yon pitiless heaven!
Let the stars stare at us! God, too, may glare at us
Out of the void where He hideth so well.
Sisters of midnight, He damned us by making us,
Cast us like carrion to men, then forsaking us,
Smiles from His Throne on these markets of Hell."

In rating his poems more highly than any of his other work, Buchanan did wisely. Certainly his vivid personality came out in his verse more clearly than in his prose, and he often showed unexpected depth and tenderness. He had a Pagan sense of the joy of life. His passion for nature, his joy of existence, was at the very root of his objection to the ascetic Orientalism of the Christian Religion, and he voiced his joy and his passion in most melodious language. He was not only a poet, but an accomplished novelist, a successful dramatist, and a powerful critic. His masterly articles on "The Failure of Christianity" are well worth reprinting in pamphlet form. On their original appearance in a leading London newspaper they made a great sensation, and age has not staled their applicability.

Brave-hearted Buchanan was buried at Southend-on-Sea in the loveliest month of the year, while the fragrance of the June roses was in the air. The lilacs were still lingering and waving their white and purple plumes, the laburnums dropping their golden chains, the may perfuming the ways, and the thrushes singing in the tree-tops. The poet lies there, always within sound of the sea he loved so well. As the queen of the months returns, our thoughts go to the grave of one of the most romantic and striking personalities of our time, who, to use the beautiful words of Shakespeare carved upon his tomb:—

"After life's fitful fever, sleeps well."

Buchanan's Freethought was not unusual, for so many poets had ceased to gain inspiration from Christianity. Byron was a thorough sceptic, Shelley a convinced Atheist. Keats was as Pagan as a Greek of the Classic era; and Edward Fitzgerald as Epicurean as old Omar Khayyam himself. Tennyson was Heterodox, and Matthew Arnold was as Secularistic as Bradlaugh. James Thomson was a militant Freethinker, and George Meredith and William Morris were both sceptics. Thomas Hardy was militant in his Free-

thought, and Swinburne flamed his anti-religious views over Europe. Watson, our greatest living poet, is Agnostic. The highest poetic genius of modern times is enkindled at the altar of Humanity, which was standing before any other was built, and will endure when every other has crumbled into dust and nothingness.

MIMNERMUS.

The Latest Revival

(Concluded from p. 309.)

"If the multitudes have turned in hope to political and social ideals, and sneer at religion as dope, one reason is that religion has been presented to them in a form so emasculated that it is bound to excite derision. What degrading exhibitions one has seen in Hyde Park, what nauseating verbiage one has read in books and pamphlets." (Rev. M. C. D'Arcy, S.J., in "Oxford and the Groups," p. 178.)

THE work from which we quoted in our last article, and with which our present article is concerned, namely, *Oxford and the Groups* (Basil Blackwell, 5s.) consists of twelve essays, nine of which are contributed by representatives of different Oxford Colleges which, along with others, constitute the University; most of the contributors are College tutors. Professor Grensted, himself a Grouper—who winds up the discussion in the concluding essay—observes: "As these essays stand they have the value of independent impressions made by the Oxford Group upon a number of competent, and not unfriendly senior members of the University." (p. 192.)

The impression made upon some of these "not unfriendly" critics—probably chosen because they are not unfriendly—is highly unfavourable, and surprisingly outspoken. We should like to see another dozen essays, written by members of the University, who disagree with, and dislike, the Group Movement.

The young Grouper, in his newborn enthusiasm, barges in on his friends, like another John the Baptist, declaring: "One thing I know: I have been changed, and you must be changed too." But as Mr. John Maud of University College, in his essay, observes:—

No one can live in organized society (or even out of it) without making himself an infernal nuisance to his neighbours, unless he shows enough consideration for other people's convenience to make up his mind in advance on a number of comparatively unimportant matters (such as the date of his visit and the length of his stay), and stick to his plans. The Grouper, on the other hand, glories in having no idea what he will be doing, or where he will be next year, or even next week, and claims for himself a special standard of unreliability and inconsiderateness, on the ground that he is doing "whole time work for God." (p. 51.)

Miss B. E. Gwyer, who is Principal of St. Hugh's College, goes further than Mr. Maud, and shows that in some instances the enthusiastic pertinacity of these new gossellers amounts to actual persecution, and observes: "The exciting pursuit of some eager or half-reluctant soul, the exaltation of being in at the death of some long watched-for, and now publicly declared 'surrender,' can be destructive not of time only, but of that equally precious thing reverence." Miss Gwyer gives instances of what a nuisance some of these Groupers make of themselves; in one case she had to interfere:—

"These bishops and people who write to the papers, they ought to live in the same house with a Group person," was a reminiscent young M.A.'s *cri de cœur* in my hearing, "then they'd know what it was like!" Nor is the persecution to which she alluded confined

to domiciled neighbours. Another undergraduate, of less robust nerves than the above, I was obliged to send out of residence for a period as the sole means of escape from an older woman, not connected with the University, who could not be induced to leave her alone: remonstrance, whether of victim or parent, falls on deaf ears, when "Dictatorship" (significant term) from an unimpeachable source has assumed undivided possession of them. (pp. 66-67.)

They look upon themselves as divinely inspired and above mere worldly considerations. Nevertheless Dr. Buchman is a sound man of business, and notwithstanding the financial collapse in America, he is able to rake in the shekels in a way that is calculated to make the average Missionary green with envy. As Mr. Crossman, in his essay, observes, without Dr. Buchman the movement would soon fall to pieces: "and would certainly not have the money to spend that it now has. There are at least thirty whole-time workers living, and living comfortably, on contributions. It has been calculated that the last American tour must, on a conservative estimate, have cost more than £25,000." The publicity of splendid unearned living may be an inevitable adjunct of American revivalism, adds Mr. Crossman: "but in England its effect is unfortunate upon the Grouper no less than on his audience. The remark was made by one young evangelist, 'I always wanted this kind of life: big hotels, comfort, powerful cars, and the best people—and as soon as I get changed, God gives them all to me!'" (p. 114.) This is a case indeed, in which "Godliness is great gain!" There are many who would gladly be "changed" on the same terms.

These revivals are always followed by a relapse; enthusiasm cannot be kept continually on the stretch, and the more easily and quickly the subject is converted by the new methods, the sooner fervour burns out. In their recent American tour, says Mr. Crossman, they "found the work of conversion far harder in towns where they had previously worked . . . at Louisville, where two years previously hundreds had made their surrender, they found only eleven who had remained in any sense active members." (p. 105.) And further, remarks the same writer:—

The irresistible temptation to collect conversions, and to magnify past sins for the sake of the effect they create. It cannot be healthy for a student month after month to rehearse "the story of his life B.C." [Before conversion] before large audiences. Truth in the end is bound to be sacrificed to effect, and, on off-days, acting must be substituted for sincerity. (p. 105.)

Just as in the Salvation Army it has been noted how converts tend to depict their past life as a good deal more lurid than it really has been. Again, consider the position of the Group Movement in regard to politics and social reform. It takes part in neither. The Groupers argue that when we have all joined the Groups, the economic and social difficulties will automatically solve themselves. Does this mean, asks Mr. Morris, in his essay dealing with "The Group Movement and Social Problems," "if a woman pleads that she cannot live the good life if she is brought up from childhood in an overcrowded house, ought we to tell her that if she were 'changed' she would live a good life anywhere, and if she is not 'changed' she will not live a good life anywhere? Or ought we to try to improve the housing conditions? Or ought we to do both?" There is no doubt, continues Mr. Morris, some precedent for reading the teaching of Christianity in accordance with the first view, but it will not "commend itself as moral teaching to the common man in what is on the whole a humanitarian age." And further:—

It is difficult to see how in a twentieth-century world it can be maintained that, with our social and

material conditions, neighbourly treatment as between individuals will accomplish all that is necessary. To-day it is clear to everyone that nothing but organized action can prevent starvation and want from raising their heads from time to time in one part or another of the community. But if so, what organization? And how is it to be brought into being when so many of the nation are indifferent to the need? (p. 87.)

Many people will think, continues Mr. Morris, "that the Group does not exert an influence in social and political matters, but rather that it is a positive hindrance, in that it creates a new fund of energy to be added to the forces which are arrayed against social and political change of any kind. And this criticism is worthy of serious reflection." (p. 80.) The effect of large revivals is always to sidetrack social reform. This constitutes the real poison of Christianity; it is the foe of earthly welfare in favour of the heavenly.

W. MANN.

At the N.S.S. Conference

(Strictly unofficial.)

This year the Conference was near enough to my home to enable me to go by road, but the huge industrial district of Lancashire is so interwoven with roads that I took a wrong turning when nearing the end of the journey. I was saved, however, by the fact that it commenced to rain, and I immediately knew I must be heading for Manchester instead of Bolton. I stopped and asked my way of a pedestrian who confirmed my suspicions. Pointing to a grey-black mass on the horizon he said that it was called Manchester by the local folk, though he admitted that there were alternative names used by aliens from the Southern Counties. I was to bear to the left towards a paler grey mass, which he assured me was Bolton.

Once arrived on the outskirts of Bolton, which were not clearly differentiated from the outskirts of everywhere else within a radius of twenty miles, I made my way to the Swan Hotel. It proved to be a place of historic interest, dating back to the seventeenth century. I could not help thinking, as I turned the nose of my car in at the narrow porch leading to what had obviously been extensive stables, how the times had changed. Here I was driving a mechanically-propelled vehicle under the old porch, through which it seemed more fitting that horses' hoofs should clatter and coach-wheels rumble, and I was going to a Conference of Atheists. With what horror and amazement would not the passengers in the old coach have looked upon a man who did not believe in God! To those old-world folk, wrapped in their travelling capes and regaling themselves with pinches of snuff, one might as soon disbelieve in God as doubt the authenticity of London Town. At the same time as honouring these picturesque ghosts in my thoughts, I was proud to belong to a Movement that had done so much to change the outlook of their descendants, as we believe for the better. I stood for a moment in the low-roofed stable with its manger gone and its floor concreted to receive the motor vehicle, and hoped that the future would be still in a forward direction; but who knows?

From inside the hotel I could already catch the buzz of voices, though I could not yet distinguish the many accents which were soon to greet me in the smoke-room upstairs. A moment after, I was shaking hands with old members, and recognizing familiar faces. That evening was just a social re-union preparatory to the sterner business of the morrow. Soon most of us went through into the lounge, and clinking glasses

and bursts of laughter testified to our high spirits. Whatever the future might bring we were clearly alive and well. Sitting near us was a lady of more than tender years, who became so interested in us as to ask me who we were, for we seemed, as she put it, "such a jolly lot." I told her that we were Mr. G. K. Chesterton's Dismal Atheists, and her interest in the anomaly became such that she turned up at the Demonstration on the following evening. After a little music on a tolerable piano, with singing that increased in gusto as the evening wore on, we all went to bed tired but happy.

The Conference next day was, I thought, a particularly cheery one. We kept up our reputation for originality by talking most about the items that were least expected to lead to discussion, and it was soon apparent that the delegates had minds of their own. Sometimes, when discussion became a little dull, I could not prevent my mind from drifting on to other aspects of the meeting. Its æsthetic features were not negligible. The room in which we sat was cosy but ample, plainly but tastefully decorated. Wood-panelling, formed by broadish beams enclosing squares of a yellow tint, gave it a quiet colourfulness. The President, as he stood backgrounded by one of the panels, yet correctly placed a little to one side of it, would have proved an irresistible temptation to a portrait painter. His becoming grey suit perfectly matched his now greying hair, and the soft yellow and brown of the wall set him off to an effect of which he was entirely unconscious; in fact, when taxed with the matter afterwards he disclaimed all responsibility and blamed the suit on his wife (but not the grey hair).

Then, as I looked more intently, something vaguely familiar about the scene suggested itself. Mr. Rosetti was leaning towards the Chair; Mr. Cutner was posed before his notes with a solemn expression. Further towards the periphery, sat Mr. Easterbrook, his form following a line that blended subtly in the low pyramid ascending to Mr. Cohen, who formed the apex as he stood. Still further towards the sides of the imagined canvas other members straggled out, tapering gently at the table ends in lines still harmonizing with the central theme. Then it came to me all of a sudden. Of course! The Last Supper! For all the world there it was. Then, quite without warning, Mr. Easterbrook Senior spoilt it all. Unexpectedly placing a big kind-hearted hand on an exposed part of his head, he commenced abstractedly to massage his scalp. The oscillating movement disturbed the equilibrium of the picture. The illusion had vanished. If we had not been in Conference I should have rolled up my Agenda into a tight ball and thrown it at Mr. Easterbrook. Angrily I turned my attention back to someone who was seconding a resolution.

How different the weather to that of the last Conference! It became so chilly that we had to get the radiators turned on, while, last year, I remember having to go out frequently during the session to have iced water with Mr. Hornibrook, whom we regretfully missed this year. Before long, discussion was in full swing, but never rose to an emotional heat that could not be quelled by a jest from the Presidential Chair. The President was in great form, and piloted the meeting with as sure a touch as ever. But sometimes our enthusiasm would get the better of us, and a point would be driven home by a clenched fist banged down upon the Agenda of one's next door neighbour, but no one ever got so excited as to miss the Agenda and strike the man. The personal touch always came to the rescue, once to its happiest effect when Mr. Hall terminated a dispute amid laughter by referring to the President of the Manchester Branch as "Sammy." In the intervals, of course, we all tried to monopolize

Mr. Chapman Cohen, with the result that he became a communal affair. He can still keep up his unflagging raillery, and was never more characteristic than when he told a group of Bolton friends that the great geographical virtue of Lancashire consisted in the fact that it was so easy for the inhabitants to get into Cheshire.

The Demonstration in the evening was a great success. The Spinners' Hall is not specially large, but it had ample seating accommodation, and the acoustics were good. The speeches went off well, and the audience were obviously gratified by the meeting. There was more than the usual amount of humour from the platform, and special mention has to be made of Mr. Brighton's delightful and perfectly balanced little speech, in which he showed a gift of genuine wit that was not lost upon an audience which applauded him long after he was seated. At the finish Mr. Chapman Cohen gathered together the many skeins which the speakers had provided, and wove them into a pattern that mixed its wisdom with its wit in a way that few can emulate. Then back to the Swan Hotel for the final pow-wow. Once again we were in a large circle in the lounge, and laughter mixed itself with earnest conversation. We all went to bed rather earlier (those who were staying in the Hotel) because we had to be up betimes on the following morning. On Monday, even though it was a public holiday, I was wakened very early by the sound of unusually loud footsteps in the street below. After listening a moment the explanation came to me in a flash. Clogs!

Clogs. It was the first time I had heard them. So these were the clogs! What a history of those clogs! I had only read it, never lived it; but the reading was enough. More than a hundred years ago people had been wakened, even as I had been, by the sound of clogs; but it had been a lighter sound and a quicker rhythm than that to which I had listened. It had been the patter, patter, pattering of little children's feet, as they went to a fourteen-hour day's work in the mills. The mites were too poor to buy watches and too frightened to risk being late, so that it had started at two or three o'clock in the morning. Then it came to me that our Demonstration had been in the Spinners' Hall. So the Spinners had built a hall! Bravo for the Spinners! Yes, that was the place for a Demonstration. I don't know the history of the Spinners' Hall, but I guess they must have built it because they were sick of something, and were determined to have no more of it. So they built a hall where people could speak and others could listen. I felt proud to have spoken in the Spinners' Hall. Their work is not done yet, but they've got a hall and the right to speak in it. Good old spinners! But they must keep the right they have so dearly won. If the Demonstration reminded them of what it means to have that hall, and that right to speak in it without a policeman taking notes, if the Demonstration did only that it would have been worth while. I hope many of our Demonstrations in the future will be held in places like the Spinners' Hall, in places built by or for people who once had no rights and no fairplay; for it will remind them that the right to speak out is fundamental to all change for the better. That is something we can only forget at our peril.

MEDICUS.

DO IT NOW

"Procrastination is the Thief of Time"—and not only time. A favour, long delayed, looks like alms flung in the face of a leper; and the thanks we openly bestow is compensated by the grudge we inwardly conceal.

Religion and The League of Nation's Union

We may take it for granted that practically all Secularists are in agreement with the peace movement. But some of them who attend the Union meetings must (like the present writer) be occasionally if not frequently irritated by references to religion. Some speakers say that the success of the cause necessitates a "change of heart" (which seems to suggest religious "conversion" or other mystic influence). Others indicate, if they do not plainly state, that the establishment of permanent international peace depends upon the spread of a "true Christian spirit," or the like. And they quote from the Bible, omitting, of course, the numerous, fiercely belligerent passages. And so on.

In addition to this there seems to be in some quarters a persistent attempt to establish religious observance, viz., prayer, as a normal and regular part of all meetings. Recently this was advocated in a long letter, written by a parson, to *Headway*. But a reply I sent to the Editor, pointing out that the practice would probably work harm to the Union by offending Freethinkers and other Rationalists, and possibly also Unitarians, Jews and other non-Christians, was not printed.

The Chairman of our local Branch of the Union is a fervent religionist, and has adopted the method of calling on any parson who may be present "to say a few words of prayer." Most of the active members are, like the Chairman, adherents of the "Free Churches." The result is that the Branch has been described as a "little Free Church affair." I pointed this out at a Committee meeting; also the fact that we get extremely little support from the political party to which I belong (all of whose members probably agree with the policy and procedure of the League); and that when I approached the Chairman, in the hope of securing his support and inducing him to give a lead to his fellow members, he rather contemptuously made the statement just quoted. And exactly the same notion was expressed (in the hearing of a relative of mine) by a master of the Grammar School when the teachers were talking about the League and the Union in the staff-room.

Again, at a recent meeting of the London Federation of the Union (on which I act as a delegate) the agenda included a resolution which called for prayer at the opening of each meeting. This was rejected. But at a subsequent meeting a modified resolution from the same source, calling for "two minutes of silent prayer to the Architect of the Universe," was passed. One argument of the religionists was that the League Assembly goes to a church service. But the obvious answer to this is that the members can stay away from the church without penalty, while secularist members of the Union cannot absent themselves from the meetings unless they relinquish their active membership. And if they are not prepared to do that, they are practically forced to acquiesce in a ritual they regard as not only irrelevant and useless, but harmful, because it wastes time and distracts attention from things that are real and important.

Of course, people who do not read secularist literature may be unacquainted with the facts that in the League of Nations Union of the various countries of the world the number of non-Christian members probably exceeds that of Christians (until lately, if not now, the Japanese Union was one of the largest); that a considerable proportion of members are known to be Secularists; that these include a good number of the most eminent workers for the League—e.g., Nansen, who did so much repatriation and other work, F. J. Gould, who has long edited *League News*, F. S. Marvin, whose *Unity History School* and his historical and other writings and lectures have contributed much to the cause; while others, who are not known to be entirely without religious belief, are Ethicists or other unorthodox people.

Reference may also be made here to the International Conference for the Teaching of History, the object of which is to promote international amity by the writing and teaching of suitable history, more especially in school books. Of this body a British Committee has just been formed, consisting of eleven of us who are interested in history, education and internationalism, and

most or all of whom have written on these subjects. The President is a famous historian and President of the Ethical Union; four (including H. G. Wells) are members or associates of the Rationalist Press Association; one (as well as two of the foregoing) is a Positivist; and another is, as I have heard him state, an Agnostic. Thus a clear majority reject traditional religious belief, and probably not less than five all theological belief whatever.

Again, we may well suppose that most religionist members of the League of Nations Union are ignorant of the fact that supernatural and obscurantist doctrines, such as their own, have throughout the course of history commonly been associated with war, murder, massacre and other brutality—from the days when the Hebrews adopted the notion that they were the "chosen people," and that others who would not accept their particular system of superstition must, at the command of Yahweh, be exterminated; on to the dreadful events accompanying the establishment of Christianity; and then on to the still greater horrors of organized ecclesiastical torture, burning and butchery of medieval and earlier modern times; with a further extension in the riots and other political, moral and social disorder brought about by the religious dissensions of our own day.

In view of these facts and considerations, I am making a silent protest against the procedure in question at meetings by taking a paper from my pocket (which always contains a supply) and openly reading it until the prayer-period is over.

J. REEVES.

Acid Drops

Mussolini has declared that he does not believe in perpetual peace. He does not mean by this that it is not likely to exist, but that war is desirable every now and then in order to keep a people up to the mark. That is also the teaching of German Fascism, and it would be that of English Fascism if it felt it safe to express itself openly. One need not be surprised, for robbed of all its empty phrases Fascism is the philosophy of brute force, and a return in practice to the worst forms of barbarism.

But Mussolini's policy also means that if war does not come "naturally," it must be provided artificially. And there are only about three ways in which it can be brought about—in order to keep people healthy. The one is to pick a quarrel with one stronger than oneself. The other is to pick a quarrel with someone weaker than oneself. The other is to fall upon some unarmed, or poorly armed native race and rob them of what they may happen to possess. But your fire-eating militarist never picks a quarrel with one stronger than himself. Fundamentally his policy is a sublimation of cowardice—covering the bully with a cloak of national aspiration or ethical endeavour. So he is, perforce, reduced to the latter possibilities. The military history of any nation will fully bear this out. We Britishers have, at the present juncture much to learn from Mussolini and Hitler. It will help us to understand their spiritual brethren in this country.

Lord Beaverbrook is going ahead with his Empire crusade. In the *Evening Standard* for May 24, he announces that his latest convert is God Almighty. At least we gather this from his explaining his policy in an article of two columns length, which winds up with "And now, O God, what we wait for is Thee? Our hope is in Thee." So having explained to God what he means, and what he wants, the rest is left to God. And we do not believe that Lord Beaverbrook believes that God will let him down. If he does, we suggest that Low chips in with one his inimitable cartoons explaining the situation.

The Rev. G. T. Peet, of Worthing, tells *Daily Herald* readers that although the Holy Bible is an infallible guide, yet it doesn't seem of much use when the question has to be settled among Christians, whether war is

wrong. Mr. Peet doesn't put the matter quite like that, but anyone can catch his drift. He says:—

Unfortunately, the signatories to the protest against renewed armaments cannot insist on anything; for the Pugilists in every Church rule the roost, and the Pacifists take a back seat. The time is now ripe for every Church to say that all war is wrong.

The time, you will note, is only just ripe—although the Christian religion has been about for nineteen centuries or so, and Christian Churches have existed most of that time. If Christians have been unable to decide that "all war is wrong" during those many hundreds of years, what hope is there now of coming to a decision one way or the other? Perhaps the quickest way of deciding the question would be to ignore the Bible and God as sources of inspiration in the matter, and rely only on the common sense and experience of mankind.

A missionary from India recently told a pious gathering about a new leper hospital run by his Church. A report of his speech says that "A new remedy has been discovered, and frequently patients are now sent home with all signs of leprosy gone. Although there are Government hospitals, the sufferers come to the Methodists because they prefer a 'Christian injection.' Jesus touched a leper (surprising fact) and the Methodist doctors and nurses are doing every day just what Jesus did." Nevertheless, we may add, the Methodist doctors can do nothing by prayer alone; they rely solely on the resources placed in their hands by materialistic medical science. They can achieve no more than the Government doctors. But we don't suppose for a moment that the missionaries go out of their way to undecieve the Indian patient. We daresay native ignorance and superstitious fancy can be usefully exploited "for Christ's sake," and the missionaries render thanks unto God for a heaven-sent opportunity.

Mr. Norman Birkett, K.C., has been relating one of his early misfortunes, and we cannot help commiserating with him. He says that "A Methodist assembly is like home to me because the most formative influence that came into my life, excluding home, school, university, Inns of Court, was a country chapel." Reared in such a shocking environment, he never really had a chance to be anything but a "good Methodist." Let us charitably remember that he is a case of more sinned against than sinning. We daresay he still believes how wonderful it was that, when he "found Jesus," Jesus was more like a Methodist than like any other sectarian Christian.

The Epping Forest air is so bracing that we must excuse the Rev. Mr. Ellis, a missionary from Hyderabad (India), who rivalled Baron Munchausen in his "tall" stories of whole tribes in India "becoming Christians *en masse*." The *Methodist Times* report says "Mr. Ellis gave the startling figure of *eighty thousand* persons in the mass movement in Hyderabad alone. He told of this mighty crowd moving towards Christ." He added that "in Dharapuram twenty years ago there were no Christians at all, to-day there are at least twenty thousand Methodists alone." Mr. Ellis is a highly successful missionary—if we can believe so incredible a narrative. His "at least" is a stroke of genius . . . but not of statistics.

In the chemical trade there is a distinction between drugs of unadulterated quality, and drugs of "commercial" quality. It is quite necessary to keep clearly in mind the difference between common qualities and Christian species of the same or nominally the same thing. The Vicar of St. Peter's Streatham calls himself a "Pacifist." But his congregation is of redder blood. Its officials have taken umbrage at sitting under a Pacifist. The Vicar has reassured them. "I am a Pacifist," he says, "but I wish you to understand I am not a political Pacifist. I am a Christian Pacifist." That explains everything.

The Bishop of Southwark, in raising funds for more Churches, said, "I am very proud to belong to Southwark myself." "One thing I dread," said another

speaker at the same meeting, "is that they will build beautiful arterial roads and no church set amongst them." The Bishop probably would be "very proud" anyhow. Southwark is as good as any other place to draw a big income from. Let us add that the Bishop lives at Kennington Park, and his Assistant bishop at Carshalton, in palaces which many of the Tabard Street section of their Lordships' diocese might also be "very proud" to occupy.

In the *Sunday Times* an example is given of Spurgeon's "power of expressing old thoughts in new and striking words that would appeal to everyone." The instance given is not a very happy one: "God's dearest love-letters are often enclosed in black-edged envelopes." For sheer bad taste this is quite equal to the Chicago gangsters' method of sending wreaths to the funerals of their victims.

Whit-Sunday, or Pentecost, has troubled the Christian press to explain the meaning, if any, of the "Holy Spirit." This used to be a very easy task. The Holy Spirit was the "Third" of God. He was a "Person," just as much as the other Gods, Jehovah and Jesus. Jesus has now become the fashionable Deity, and the other two thirds are relegated to the back benches, "accompanied by the Devil" as the concert-programmes would say. The Rev. George Jackson, one of the most thoughtful of Methodist writers, quotes several authorities amongst the present-day divines who fail to see any kind of individuality or personality in this Holy Ghost. Prof. Humphries says plainly that "to me the Holy Spirit and the living Christ are but two names for the same reality." Professor James Mackinnon plumps for "Binitarianism" instead of trinitarianism. He says St. Paul was a Binitarian.

The *Modern Churchman* says that "for some years past, Church promotions have been surely but silently separating the sheep from the goats," meaning that vacancies have been systematically filled with modernist clergy like Dr. Barnes. It continues, "When the hour of crisis comes in the not distant future, it will be seen that the Church of England is on the side of comprehensiveness, moral evolution, dogmatic re-interpretation and re-statement. With the rapid ascendancy of the Roman Church in England, and the not less significant advances of Secularism, this is the only sound policy open to her." We acknowledge the tribute to our work and its victory.

The Actors' Church Union is a "Church" union right enough, but "Actors" seem, as the Americans say, not so hot about it. At the recent Annual Meeting, Mr. Gillie Potter told the world "Our Chaplains are a splendid body of men, but we must have actors in the A.C.U. as well as clergy."

The British and Foreign Bible Society's Annual Meeting, boasting of its 453,000,000 copies of God's Word distributed to an unappreciative world, was addressed by the pessimistic Sir Josiah Stamp. Sir Josiah assured the astonished pietists that "The truth is we know more ABOUT the Bible to-day, but we know much less of it. I doubt whether the treasures of the Bible are the personal possession, the comfort, the guide they were fifty years ago."

The *Christian Herald* appeals to its readers in Kilsyth to write to a local paper protesting against the admission of an article (letter?) in its columns, in which there are "eight statements challenging the divine truth of the Bible narrative." That is quite a Christian attitude, and a wise one. For the only way in which one can retain intact "divine truth," is to see that no one is ever allowed to question it. We have never heard yet of a divine truth that could withstand criticism.

New Britain has lost its head if it ever had one. It has some excellent contributors like Mr. S. G. Hobson, and at one time we thought it had some sort of reasoned

policy. But what can we make of Sir Patrick Geddes's remark (in boxed block large type), "The Churches have their duty," and in italics, "We need a spiritual power independent of the temporal." We utterly despair of getting a grain of intelligent meaning out of the Editorial big-typed nonsense: "To realize Christianity and Socialism, Imperially and Socially, is the world-task of Britain." Nor are we enlightened as to the editor's meaning, when he says: "For the sake of our human gratitude to the Grace and Providence of God it should be done."

The Rev. T. T. James, M.A., Chairman of the Congregational Union, thinks that "the Church of God must be endowed with courage, initiative, imagination and passion." What a pity God has only "endowed" it with imagination.

Another Congregationalist, Dr. James Black, says, "The Church needs a sacred ingenuity." His prayer is answered. Unlike the prayer asking God "to endow the Lords of the Council and all the nobility with grace, wisdom and understanding," which prayer Bradlaugh's colleague, Labouchere, used to quote as being unanswered, although prayed daily in every Episcopal Church. Labouchere thought it proved that God was in favour of abolishing the House of Lords.

A Catechism of Christian Faith, issued by the Catholic Literature Society, has at least one good conundrum properly answered. The Question is, "Has God made known to us How He created things?" Unexpectedly wisely comes the "Answer": "God has not. He is leading men little by little to learn for themselves." Who says the "Catholics" are not progressing? A few centuries ago, the "Answer" would have been: "God HAS. And if you try to learn any more than He has revealed you will be burnt here and then burnt again in hell." Let us add that this is the only lapse into sense discoverable in this "Catechism."

The *People* announcing an unfortunate catastrophe in the United States, which it describes as a "black drought," destroying millions of bushels of grain, describes it as "Retribution." It heads its article "Nature Turns the Table on U.S.A. Farmers." All this merely proves that "popular" journalism is still in the backwoods stage of religion. It is only another way of saying, "An Act of God." It illustrates our frequent reminder that many people are ashamed to use the old words, but are still unashamed of the discredited ideas represented by the God idea.

Fifty Years Ago

TO THE CLERGY

ALL for Jesus! Oh yes, of course. But, gentlemen, of all the cash you ever collected for the Lord can you aver that a single halfpenny ever reached him? Have you not intercepted it all, from the annual tithes to last Sunday's collections? You have a society for converting Jews. Well, I will show you more than one Jew converted to Freethought by this paper. Can you show one? I doubt it. In London you talk of a Jew who was converted in Paris, and in Paris of a Jew who was converted in Berlin. Show us a single Jew converted *here*. Our demand is moderate. Show us one, only one.

The truth is, gentlemen, "all for Jesus" means all for yourselves. My private belief is that your religion is chiefly a trade, and that, sooner than forfeit your livings, you would preach any other gospel to-morrow. All for Jesus! Why you have nothing in common with the revolutionist of Nazareth except his bigotry; and if he were alive again he would say to you, in language which he and you would consider divine, "Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

The "Freethinker," June 7, 1884.

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE.

EDITORIAL:

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Telephone No. : CENTRAL 2412

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- "TAB CAN."—Thanks. Your appreciation is valued.
- A. R. F. HILL.—Mr. Cohen hopes to resume the articles on reasoning in a week or so.
- G. B. MALKINSON.—Books sent on May 28, hope they have reached you safely.
- J. L. ORTON.—Sorry, but we do not see any use in further prolonging the correspondence.
- I. MOSLEY.—Bishop Talbot shows at least that he has discretion in refraining from a debate with a known Freethinker. We quite agree that, so far as Christianity, and the standing of a Christian parson, no useful object would be served.
- A. FORBES.—Very pleased to have your report of the successful meeting held by Mr. Brighton. We hope local Freethinkers will give Mr. Brighton the support he deserves.
- J. W. POYNTER.—It is really useless publishing letters asking Freethinkers to investigate the claims of religion with an open mind, as though that had not been done. You do not pay attention to the plain fact that religion does *not* serve "a real human need," but lives only by misinterpreting human qualities which have an explanation quite apart from religion.
- S. NEWTON.—You are quite right; it was completely irrelevant to anything we said or intended. But the religious spirit dies hard, and it is not uncommon to find those who imagine they are free from religion, exhibiting some of its worst tendencies when their own particular idol is said to be less than perfect. But we never like to suppress criticism of ourself.
- The "Freethinker" is supplied to the trade on sale or return. Any difficulty in securing copies should be at once reported to this office.*
- The offices of the National Secular Society and the Secular Society Limited, are now at 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Telephone: Central 1367.*
- 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.
- Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.*
- All Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to "The Pioneer Press," and crossed "Midland Bank, Ltd., Clerkenwell Branch."*

Sugar Plums

Quite a number of newspaper notices of the N.S.S. Conference appeared in the provincial press. Even the *News-Chronicle* gave a brief notice in its Northern edition. Several leading articles dealing with the Conference were also published

Somehow or the other we omitted to mention in the account of the N.S.S. Conference proceedings, the Monday excursion which took place. Southport was the place selected, and Mr. Collins, Secretary of the Manchester Branch, was responsible for the arrangements, which procured for those who attended a very pleasing day. The weather was very gracious, and everyone appeared thoroughly to enjoy themselves. The "dismal Atheists" were obligingly dismal—in their usual fashion.

The Secular Society Limited is issuing, almost directly, an interesting and scholarly pamphlet by Mr. C. Clayton Dove, under the title of *The Miracles of St. Martin*, with an introduction extending to six pages by Mr. Cohen. The pamphlet will be published at sixpence, by post sevenpence, and in view of the manner in which the miraculous has come into the limelight recently, should prove of interest.

We are glad to see that the campaign which is being carried on by N.S.S. speakers in Durham and Northumberland has been successful enough to cause a number of the clergy to hold a meeting in the Market Place at Blyth, to proclaim their faith, and to administer what a local paper calls a "gentle reproof to Atheism." That is all very nice, but it would have been more impressive had the "reproof" been administered under conditions that would have given the Atheists a chance gently to express their appreciation of the "reproof." It would certainly have been more interesting to the audience.

The Manchester Branch N.S.S. will hold fortnightly open-air meetings during the summer at Platt Fields and Alexandra Park Gates alternately. Mr. J. Clayton of Burnley will be the speaker to-day (June 3rd) at 6.30 p.m., in Platt Fields. Members are, of course, expected to support the meetings, and Branch officials will be pleased to give information concerning membership to unattached Freethinkers.

Mr. G. Whitehead will be lecturing in the Burnley and Nelson districts this week from June 3 until June 8 inclusive. There is a Branch of the N.S.S. in each place containing keen Freethinkers, and with their co-operation, some good meetings are sure to follow. Details will be found in the Lecture Notice column, and details of membership can be had at all the meetings.

We regret to learn that Mr. A. B. Le Maine, who has for many years been indefatigable in the open-air work in Hyde Park, has been ill for some weeks. We have warned him several times of the risks run by holding out-door meetings during the winter, and he is now paying the price. We hope to hear of his speedy recovery, and hope also that he will in the future temper zeal with a little discretion where his own health is concerned.

Mr. J. T. Brighton has been holding some successful meetings at Stockton-on-Tees. From reports to hand we note that his audiences have been large and appreciative. He will be holding another meeting there at the Market Cross at 7 p.m. on June 5. We hope that local Freethinkers will make it a point of attending. There should be a Branch of the Society in the town.

Few social questions have caused greater controversy than the problem of Over-Population. From the day Malthus published his famous *Essay*, a constant stream of books have poured from the press, either in defence of his thesis, or violently attacking it. Whether one agrees with him or not on the dangers of over-population, it is always good to read the other side. Dr. Enid Charles' carefully documented work *The Twilight of Parenthood* (Watts & Co., Ltd., 7s. 6d. net), is not merely an attack on the Malthusian position, but also a grave warning on the menace of under-population. Dr. Charles calls to her aid the latest discoveries in food production and food preservation, and also the statistical studies of Kuczynski. Whether Malthusians will agree with many of her assertions or deductions is quite another question. Malthus himself was a very careful writer and anticipated many points subsequently raised against him.

For the rest, Dr. Charles devotes many pages to the question of mechanical contraceptive devices, and the part they played, or are supposed to have played, in determining the declining populations in some of the largest civilized countries. She claims that contraceptive practice "cannot be a correct explanation of why fertility started to decline at a particular period of modern history." One thing, she adds, is certain: "The psychological characteristics of sex and parenthood are changing for both men and women." The discussion on fertility in man will prove interesting, but she points out that "the sterility of the more distinguished could not be used to show that superior ability encourages sterility, or that any selective process affecting the survival of intelligence is at work." In the last chapter the whole question is discussed in relation to Soviet Russia. *The Twilight of Parenthood* should cause some very acute discussion.

National Secular Society

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

MORNING SESSION

PROMPTLY at 10.30 a.m., on May 20, at the Swan Hotel, Bolton, the President took the chair for the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society. The Secretary called the roll, and the following delegates answered to their names:—Mr. H. Bayford, Ashington; T. H. Elstob, Birmingham; H. S. Wishart, Bethnal Green; B. L. Bowers, Mrs. Revitt, Bradford; H. Hankin, W. H. Sissons, Bolton; J. Sharples, Blackburn; J. Spann, Birkenhead; Miss L. R. Holland, Brighton; A. Lawson, Burnley; J. T. Brighton, Chester-le-Street; J. E. Edmundson, Cardiff; A. D. Hodgkinson, Chester; J. Crook, Derby; F. Unsworth, Dublin; W. A. Atkinson, Fulham & Chelsea; J. Farrand, Glasgow; L. M. Werrey-Easterbrook, Hants & Dorset; S.R.A. Ready, W. Ll. Owen, J. V. Shortt, Liverpool; S. Cohen, Miss Brockenhurst, W. Collins, Manchester; A. Flanders, Newcastle; R. Hartley, Nelson; A. D. McLaren, North London; H. P. Turner, North Shields; F. E. Monks, Oxford; W. J. W. Easterbrook, H. H. Hick, Plymouth; T. Ingham, Perth; Mrs. H. Grant, South London; G. Whitehead, South Shields; G. F. Green, Sunderland; L. R. Boyle, H. Roberts, J. Hyde, Stockport; J. Clayton, Seaham; H. S. Wishart, West Ham.

There were also present a large number of members.

The minutes of the last Conference were taken as read, and at the suggestion of the President the meeting agreed to adjourn the discussion on the Report of the Committee on the Society's Principles and Objects until the afternoon.

The President then read the Executive's Annual Report. Mr. Shortt moved and Mr. Spann seconded that the Report be adopted. A lively and interesting discussion then took place on some of the statements, commencing with Mr. Egerton Stafford, who wanted to know whether it was right to saddle the Disaffection and Seditious Bill as being based on religious feeling when its objects were purely political. The President in reply thought it was just as well to realize that its implications reached deeper than political actions. Mr. Maughan (Bolton) asked what was our position in regard to Fascism? The President explained that our position against Fascism was the same as it was against all movements attacking freedom of thought. Fascism was a close and immediate danger, but it must be clearly understood we opposed all movements which aimed at suppressing freedom of expression. Mr. Shortt wanted to know why Communism was not coupled with Fascism. He proposed an amendment that "Communism" should be bracketed with "Fascism."

Dr. Carmichael (Liverpool) asked whether it was fair to Communism to place it on the same plane as Fascism. He thought Fascism overwhelmingly more reactionary, as apart from other things, it specially attacked freedom of intellectual conviction.

The President again called attention to the fact that the National Secular Society was opposed to any form of Government which oppressed opinion, and he resented any attempt to prevent even Roman Catholics from speaking.

Mr. Fisher also objected to any form of government interference with expression of opinion, and Dr. Carmichael added that Fascism was notoriously against international peace. The President again called attention to the fact that it was not the business of the Conference to discuss the relative merits of Fascism and Communism.

Mr. Sissons opposed Fascism, and Mr. Hick said he saw no more freedom from Communism than from

Fascism. Mr. Owen spoke against the Amendment because he thought any danger from Communism was a little further off, and Mr. Whitehead supported the Amendment. He thought we should not include any specific reference to either Communism or Fascism.

Mr. Flanders opposed the Amendment, and Miss Holland pointed out that we were really non-political. Mr. Wishart agreed, and Mr. Shortt, trying to sum up the discussion, said he was more concerned with our essential agreements than with our differences. He strongly deprecated any attempt to suppress opinion, whether from Communism or Fascism.

The President said that the Amendment was to remove from the Report any specific mention of Fascism, but to include a reference which would cover all kinds of opposition to freedom of thought. He was glad to note so much independence of opinion in the meeting.

A vote was then taken on the Amendment. Lost by three votes. Mr. Shortt was not satisfied, and moved that a Poll should be taken. Mr. Whitehead seconded, but the motion was again lost. The Report was then adopted.

Mr. Werrey-Easterbrook then moved the adoption of the Financial Report, and Mr. Farrand seconded. Questions relating to several items in the Report were asked by Mr. Monks, Mr. Collins, Mr. Sam Cohen, and others, and were satisfactorily answered by the President, after which the Report was unanimously accepted by the Conference.

The election of the President for the coming year then took place. Mr. Rosetti formally took the chair, and Mrs. Grant moved on behalf of the South London, Manchester, Liverpool, West Ham, Wembley, Chester-le-Street, Birkenhead, Bradford, Burnley, Swansea, and North London Branches:—

"That Mr. Chapman Cohen be re-elected President of the N.S.S."

Mr. Werrey-Easterbrook seconded and Mr. Sissons spoke strongly in support.

Mr. Chapman Cohen was then unanimously and enthusiastically elected.

He thanked the Conference in a few well-chosen words, and added that this was the nineteenth time it had done him the honour of electing him President—two years only from his "coming-of-age," in that capacity. He continued by pointing out that he always invited vigorous criticism, and it was for the members to act as vigilant critics. He did not want to be the head of a flock of "sheep." The Society was far stronger than when he first took over his duties, and since then, the N.S.S. had followed the main stream of Freethought, putting, as far as possible, political entanglements on one side.

The President, for the Executive, then moved the re-election of Mr. R. H. Rosetti as Secretary in a warm eulogy of his work. Mr. Egerton Stafford seconded. Mr. Brighton added a fine tribute to Mr. Rosetti's unfailing courtesy and attention in everything appertaining to the Society, and the motion was carried.

Mr. Hick moved for the Swansea, North London, and West Ham Branches:—

"That Mr. C. G. Quinton be re-elected Treasurer."

Mr. W. J. W. Easterbrook seconded, and the motion was carried.

Mr. Burgess then proposed Messrs. H. Theobald & Co. as Auditors to be re-elected. Mr. Elstob seconded and the motion was carried.

Mr. Egerton Stafford proposed and Mr. Swan seconded the election of representatives on the Executive as set forth in the Agenda, which was carried without dissent.

For the Stockport and Bradford Branches, Mr. Boyle moved:—

"That this Conference strongly protests against the declared policy of the British Broadcasting Company in exercising a censorship and boycott, and suggests that this protest be given practical form by subscribers informing the Corporation of their determination not to renew their wireless licence until freedom of expression is given to all forms of opinion."

Mr. Boyle attacked the censorship policy of the B.B.C. and explained how the Stockport Branch had organized its strong protest with the help of the local bodies and trade unions. He was prepared to accept any amendment which would add strength to the resolution. Mr. Green seconded, and was supported by Mr. Bowers. Mr. Brighton pointed out that even if we did not renew our subscriptions we still could listen. Mr. Green thought we ought to make the issue a practical one, and suggested preparing petition sheets to be signed at meetings all over the country.

Mr. Ready insisted that we had to pay for licences if we had sets, whether they were or were not used.

Mr. Werrey-Easterbrook proposed an Amendment, the latter part of the resolution to read (after the word boycott) ". . . and that the Conference devise a campaign to give effect to this resolution." Mr. Ready seconded. Mr. Shortt opposed the amendment, Mr. Flanders supported it and it was carried. The Conference then adjourned for lunch.

AFTERNOON SESSION

On resumption, motion 2 (the Committee's Report on the Aims and Objects of the Society) on the Agenda, was proposed by Mr. Werrey-Easterbrook and seconded by Mr. Bayford. Mr. Ready at once challenged the right of the Conference to discuss it without having the Report circulated among all the members.

The President said that the Conference had full power to discuss it—all members can attend, but, of course, Mr. Ready could move an amendment to the effect that the Report be circulated among the members before adoption.

Mr. Wishart pointed out that members were requested to send in suggestions to the Committee though he thought this recommendation was omitted from the Report of last year's Conference.

Mr. Shortt proposed an amendment to the effect that members should have every opportunity to study the newly proposed Aims and Objects, and Mr. Owen warmly seconded.

The President then carefully explained the work of the Committee, and the little time there had been to circularize all members, and Messrs. Collins, Black, Easterbrook, Shortt, Wishart, Ready, and Mrs. Grant joined in the further discussion. Finally, the President suggested the terms of the Amendment as:—

"That while expressing its appreciation of the work of the Committee appointed to consider and redraft the Principles and Objects of the Society, is of opinion that sufficient opportunity should be given to all members to receive copies of the Report and comment thereon, and adjourn its further consideration until the 1935 Conference."

Mr. Blake wished to know whether we could still improve on the Report, and Messrs. Black, Sissons and Monks wanted to know why the matter could not be decided at once.

Mr. Green (who formed one of the original Committee dealing with the Report) suggested that the trouble was really due to the Committee not having completed the report six months ago. He wanted now to make sure that the delegates would be in a position next year to discuss fully the Principles and Objects, and also any reports from individual members.

Mr. Wishart was very anxious that members should send in their opinions, though for his part, he thought

the Report met our requirements very well. It cut out a lot of old and useless lumber.

Mr. Flanders thought we should pass a resolution of approval to the Committee for their excellent work. It was a great satisfaction to read something new, and he considered the Report a change for the better.

Mr. Fisher—as an anarchist—took exception to the words "Secularism demands the complete secularization of the State"—he objected to the word "State" altogether.

The President summed up the discussion by summarizing the points raised. He thought that, generally, good was done in overhauling the verbal expression of one's principles, even though those principles remained unchanged.

The Amendment was then put to the vote and carried.

Mr. Lawson then proposed for the Burnley Branch:—

"That a small pamphlet be prepared for distribution, setting forth the legal position of Freethinkers with respect to the right of affirmation, and of the withdrawal of children from religious instruction in State-supported schools."

and Mr. Werrey-Easterbrook seconded. Mr. Lawson spoke in detail as to the general lack of knowledge on these points by the majority of the public, and felt it was time a pamphlet should be prepared for free distribution.

The President pointed out that such a pamphlet was already in existence, entitled *General Information for Freethinkers*, and suggested its being reprinted for distribution. It dealt with the legal position of other Freethinkers including parents.

Mr. Lawson wanted one to deal only with the question of affirmation and religious instruction in schools, but the President thought the present pamphlet would better fill all requirements. Mr. Lawson then proposed an Amendment to include all the questions in this pamphlet. Mr. Shortt opposed its free distribution, while Mr. Black expressed his opinion that it was time something was really done in the matter of asserting our right to affirm and getting some courage into parents.

Mr. Egerton Stafford then proposed the Amendment, and Mr. Spann seconded. Carried.

Mrs. Grant then proposed on behalf of the South London Branch:—

"That this Conference reaffirms its adherence to a non-political propaganda."

Mr. Stafford suggested the introduction of "party" before "non-political," which was accepted and the resolution carried.

Mr. Ready moved for the Liverpool Branch:—

"That Section 17 of the Society's Constitution be amended so as to arrange (a) that each of the existing areas shall have the Conference held within that area in rotation; (b) that a vote of the Branches shall decide in which area the Conference is to be held, and connexion with which Branch; (c) for the purpose of fixing the Conference, London shall be reckoned as part of the South-Eastern group."

He thought the idea an excellent one—it would give many districts the chance of having a Conference, as it was obvious that if voting only was used, Plymouth, Scotland and Wales were definitely out of the running.

Mr. Owen seconded the proposal.

The President showed the difficulties members would be placed in getting to a Conference if it were held in a part of the country that was not central to a number of Branches. It was necessary to consider the situation of the town selected as much as possible, to ensure a good attendance of members, for obviously, a poor attendance would not do the movement much

good. Members could not be expected to pay big fares to towns and other incidental expenses.

Mr. Sissons thought that a new district should be chosen as often as possible, and Mr. Flanders expressed his opinion that the whole matter could be safely left in the Executive's hands.

Mr. Werrey-Easterbrook asked the Conference to permit No. 18 to be next taken, in order to allow time for discussion. This was agreed to and Mr. Boyle moved for the Stockport Branch:—

"That in the interests of public economy and justice, this Conference is of opinion that all places of religious worship should be upon the same footing as property belonging to non-religious associations, and thus would abolish what is in effect a tax upon the whole community for the maintenance of religion."

He objected to paying taxes when these were used for subsidizing religious buildings. He also dealt with the refusal of many of the public libraries to place the *Freethinker* in their reading rooms.

Mr. Werrey-Easterbrook seconded, and gave some astounding figures showing the amount of money lost to the State through not taxing Churches and other religious buildings.

After further discussion, Mr. Black thought it was time we did something practicable about it, and Mr. Egerton Stafford wanted to know what exactly would happen even if the resolution were passed.

The President explained that all resolutions went to the responsible people concerned, and one would have to await events. The Motion was then passed.

The Conference then reverted to Motion 13 (b):—

(b) "That Membership Forms shall in the future exhibit a clear explanation of what is meant by the terms 'Active or passive' as printed thereon."

Mr. Owen said that the words were very confusing to newcomers, and hoped the Conference would adopt the motion. Mr. Black thought that no man who was a member of the N.S.S. should object to having his membership made public. The resolution was adopted.

Mr. Shortt moved Motion 13 (c):—

(c) "That this Conference considers that the interests of Freethought can be well served by Freethinkers securing election on public bodies, which will provide greater scope for the application of those principles for which the National Secular Society stands, and that it be part of the duties of Branch Secretaries to supply copies of the *Freethinker* to those engaged in public work in their districts."

Mr. Shortt said he felt very strongly on this subject. Freethinkers, in his opinion, did not do all they might to be properly represented on public bodies. On the other hand religious people took good care to see that their interests were well represented. The result was that Freethinkers were ignored, while religious folk ruled. Mr. Black said he also felt strongly with regard to this motion. The difficulty as he saw it was that if a man were active with his Freethought he did not get elected; if he was elected, partly because he kept his Freethought in the background, he was not likely to speak out afterwards.

Mr. Boyle said he thought the religious opposition could be exaggerated. He had secured public recognition in Stockport, in spite of his known opinions, and in many other places he did not think experience would be very different.

The President said he would not like the impression to go forth, as a result of what had been said, that Freethinkers held themselves aloof from local or other political and social movements. They did not, and, as a matter of fact, the Freethought movement had supplied some of the most ardent, social and political workers in the social and political world for the past hundred years. The Motion was then carried.

Motion 14

"That in view of the many attempts being made to curtail or destroy the propaganda of advanced opinion, and in view of the threat to individual liberty offered by the Incitement to Disaffection Bill at present before Parliament, this Conference urges upon all lovers of freedom to do whatever lies in their power to maintain the limited freedom that has been won for us at so great a cost."

was moved by the President on behalf of the Executive. He said the matter had been dealt with in the Executive's Report, and he would not say more upon it at this juncture. The Motion was seconded by Mr. Hick, and carried.

Motion 15

"That this Conference, recognizing that the existence in Statute and Common Law of the priest-made offence of "Blasphemy" gives encouragement to the passing of other measures intended to restrict freedom of thought, calls upon Freethinkers to make the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws a test question at all parliamentary elections."

was moved by Mr. Wishart, and after a brief discussion, carried.

Motion 16

(a) "That in view of the general attack made upon freedom of thought in many parts of Europe, and the increasing danger facing Freethought in this country, this Conference reminds all concerned of the great fight that has been waged to secure the limited freedom we possess, and urges all concerned to intensify their efforts to preserve freedom of thought, speech and publication."

was formally moved by the President, and seconded by Mr. Easterbrook, junior. Carried.

Motion 16

(b) "That recognizing the retrogressive influence of organized religion, and the way in which its representatives on public bodies use their influence to strengthen the position of the Churches, this Conference calls on all Freethinkers, whether engaged in administrative work or not, to do whatever lies in their power to secure the complete secularization of local government in law and in fact."

was next carried after a brief discussion.

Motion 17

"That in towns where no Branch of the N.S.S. exists corresponding members be appointed whose duty it shall be to acquaint headquarters with all local proceedings that are of interest to the Movement."

was proposed by the President, in the absence of a West London delegate, and seconded by Mr. Easterbrook, Junior.

Motion 19

"That this Conference is of opinion that the setting aside of a column in the *Freethinker* for Branch news would be of assistance to the Society's propaganda."

was moved by Mr. Farrand. The President pointed out that Branches already received notice of their work, when it was sent, in one of the best read portions of the paper. When advisable, a separate column, or part of a column was made up. But he thought that a weekly column of branch notices would be a warning to many readers to skip it. At present, so long as it was mixed with other matter, it was read by most who saw the paper. It was decided to leave the matter to the discretion of the editor.

Motion No. 20, recommending that a speaker be appointed for work in the Birkenhead district, was negatived, owing to the present difficulties in the way of the experiment being tried.

The last Motion on the Agenda

"That this Annual Conference of the National Secular Society affirms its sincere sympathy to our brethren in Germany, Italy and Austria, whose

organizations have been destroyed, and their funds sequestrated, and promises whatever assistance it is within its power to give."

was moved by Mr. A. D. McLaren. He said that he feared there was a section of the British public that was not in the least interested in what was occurring in other countries, but they carried many lessons, and also warnings. In many countries open Freethought propaganda had been completely suppressed, and we were not merely called upon to express our sympathy, but to watch similar attempts that were being made upon our freedom.

Mr. Egerton Stafford seconded the motion. Mr. Whitehead proposed as an amendment, that in place of the words, "Germany, Italy and Austria," the motion should read, "with victims of tyranny in all parts of the world." The amendment was put and seconded by Mr. Shortt, but on being put to the vote was declared lost. The original motion was then carried.

In bringing the meetings to a close the President congratulated the Conference on its unmistakable success, in both point of numbers and in the spirit in which the business had been conducted. All had shown that differences of opinion could exist without disturbing tempers, and with a complete appreciation of each other's devotion to a common cause. The independence of opinion manifested, the readiness to see other points of view argued well for the future of our movement. The proportion of young people present, with their interest in the Cause was another feature of the Conference that could not be too highly valued. He had also to thank the Bolton Branch on behalf of all present for the labour it had put into preparing for the Conference, and the success which had attended their efforts.

Get to the Roots!

THE call to examine critically the foundations of the Christian Faith is addressed with equal force to the individualist and to the altruist. The special impudence of clericalism is that it presumes, with supernatural sanctions, to interfere with ME—to dictate MY way of living—to say how MY time shall be apportioned and utilized—to prescribe what I shall eat and drink and wherewithal I shall be clothed—to choose MY recreations for me, and to direct what I may read and what I may not. Every intelligent human being is first of all essentially an individualist. He is required in the present welter of existence (as the first and essential thing) to devise means of securing for himself clothing, food and shelter. In this sorry scramble, the weak must still go to the wall. The strong and lucky ones patronize the parsons and the parsons patronize the underdogs. "The poor ye have always with you." "It takes all sorts and conditions of people to make a world." "No Cross, no Crown." "There is no pleasure without pain," and "the Devil take the hindmost." A disorganized world this, in which the vast majority of human beings have their thinking done for them and whose "opinions" are all borrowed or second hand!

Some time since we discussed the parable in Luke known everywhere by the familiar title of "The Prodigal Son." The crazy ethics and economics and the grotesque law of the story were revealed. If you take away the Prodigal Son, you deprive the evangelist of his most vital asset, the most important item of his stock-in-trade. Yet a little impartial, dispassionate and independent thought cannot fail to show the sheer sentimentality and injustice of the narrative. It is chiefly intended to

prove the loving fatherhood of God, who we are asked to believe yearns over and ardently seeks the well-being of all his creatures. But the "stuff" that is put over by the preachers who love the "Prodigal Son," as their special text can only have any effect upon maudlin and illiterate minds, which are always predisposed to sentimentality and even hysteria. It can have no effect upon minds stored with the lessons of experience and history. No doubt we find men of high cultural attainments identified with some church. But they are so identified for some reason or interest unconnected with an absorbing personal faith in the supernatural. Who can deny that in dealing with the set of circumstances disclosed in the "Prodigal Son," the humanistic method is infinitely to be preferred to the divine? The clerics profess to define for us, with their usual presumption and arrogance, what "sin" is—though we very well know that what is sin here is not sin there; and what was sin then is not sin now. The Westminster Assembly defined sin with convenient vagueness as "any want of conformity unto or transgression of the Law of God." The Law of God is the Decalogue; and the self-elected interpreters of the Decalogue themselves do not by any means show unanimity in their interpretations.

Day by day, we are furnished with proofs that men who are really entitled to be called altruists, are being convinced of the inadequacy, ineffectiveness and actual failure of Christianity. Humanity is growing out of the shoddy clothes of its boyhood. It is enlarging its horizons and becoming more and more conscious of the magnificence of the universe and the dignity of Man.

At every turn, we encounter shallow busybodies with "missions"—in form perhaps differing from the Victorian nuisances satirized by Dickens for example, in essentials very much the same. The present-day Chadbands, Stigginses, Jellybys and Pardiggles may not dress the same as their predecessors; but they are the same in impudence, in assurance, in intrusiveness. These be thy altruists, oh Israel! To them, more than to any others, is the frustration of the efforts of the real regenerators of society due. The homes of the poor are their happy hunting ground. But they are nauseously and obsequiously submissive to the "great," the wealthy and powerful. Oh, the poor and disregarded Trotty Vecks of the twentieth century!

Professedly—if not sincerely—all the big losses, blackguards and tyrants in history have been religious men. They certainly have found a "use" for religion. The exploiters of the masses have ever been convinced of the necessity of religious controls for their inferiors. Supernatural terrorism they have found to be a potent weapon. Conviction of sin keeps the ordinary, common, illiterate worker in such concern about his personal salvation, that his attention is diverted from the glaring economic injustices under which he lives. IGNORUS.

(To be concluded.)

Correspondence

BRADLAUGH AND THE OATH

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In your issue of May 20, on page 314, you publish a paragraph implying that I had made a misstatement with regard to Bradlaugh and the oath.

I am not aware of any misstatement in the course of my lecture at the North End Hall, Croydon, on April 20. In the course of describing the introduction of Members I made a passing remark, reported as following in the *Croydon Advertiser*:—

Since Bradlaugh refused to take the oath new members were allowed, if they chose, to make an affirmation instead of taking the oath.

While this is, of course, a very incomplete account of the conflict between Bradlaugh and the House of Commons, which went on for several years, nevertheless it makes it quite clear that as a result of Bradlaugh's action the practice was altered.

Under these circumstances I trust that you will in your next issue express regret for the unkindly comment on myself, which does not seem to have been called for.

HERBERT G. WILLIAMS.

[We cannot see that we misrepresented Mr. Williams, nor that our comment was unkind. Bradlaugh never "refused" the oath; he claimed to affirm, because he believed he had the legal right to do so. The "refusal" was invented by Christians to give the impression that Bradlaugh retreated from his original position. His stand was the same throughout. It is this that we Freethinkers wish to make quite clear.—EDITOR.]

THE MONGOLS

SIR,—The truth would appear partly to embrace both the views of Mr. Mann and Mr. Bailey.

"The Spirit of Conquest," says Gibbon Ch. LXIV., "breathed in the law that peace should never be granted unless to a vanquished and suppliant enemy." No wholesale massacre occurred where the people paid tribute without question. The *Outline History of the World* (J. A. Hammerton Ed.) p. 421, says: "Wherever resistance was offered, the conqueror smote without mercy, slaughtering by thousands and tens of thousands; instant submission was rewarded with practical immunity."

In *Through Khiva to Golden Samarkand*, p. 36, Ella Christie, F.R.G.S., says that Ginghiz Khan "captured Merv and, it is said, put over a million of the inhabitants to death. This may possibly be an exaggeration, though the Mongol method of numbering the slain should have made for accuracy—every thousandth corpse was buried head downwards with the feet sticking up"; and continuing (*ib.* p. 59)—"The right bank (of the Oxus) is an absolute desert, though remnants of mud houses are still to be seen, bearing out the tradition that before the devastating raids of Ginghiz took place, that side was so thickly populated that a cat could leap from house to house along that now desolate shore."

On the other hand, the *Universal Encyclopedia* says, "Ginghiz was famous for his extremely enlightened legal code and the skilful administration of his far spread possessions," and Gibbon says (*op. cit.*) "The Catholic Inquisitors of Europe, who defended nonsense by cruelty, might have been confounded by the example of a barbarian, who anticipated the lessons of philosophy, and established by his laws a system of pure theism and perfect toleration."

It would appear that the Mongol conquest was certainly most bloody, but that Mongol administration, *under strong rulers*, such as Ginghiz, Ogdai, and Kublai, was, compared to the contemporary European administration, quite enlightened, but whether, "so mild were their manners that Europe had hopes of converting them" (*Freethinker*, April 22), seems doubtful. The latter statement is probably founded on the legend of Prester John, and indeed, there are evidences of Nestorian penetration into Turkestan, in various religious rites, and litanies (Skrine: *Chinese Central Asia*, p. 217), but when Kublai despatched the Polo Brothers to Europe for teachers, "it was not believed at the Court of the Pope, or indeed throughout Italy generally, that there would be much chance of safety for Europeans endeavouring to act, in the realm of the barbarous Mongols, as promoters of Christianity and European Civilization" (Justin McCarthy), and they were unsuccessful in their quest.

Williamson says (*Freethinker*, April 22), that the Mongol conquest "was all done without elaborate armament or novel engines of war," but H. G. Wells (*Short History of the World*, p. 193), says "they had with them a Chinese invention, gunpowder, which they used in small field guns," and this is supported by De Bloch. (Perris: *War and Peace*, p. 105.)

JOHN H. SHAW (JUNR.)

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON.

INDOOR.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, Joseph McCabe—"The Blood-Price of Democracy."

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 3.15, Mr. P. Goldman—A Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.30, Sunday, June 3, Mr. L. Ebury. Highbury Corner, 8.0, Mr. L. Ebury. South Hill Park, Hampstead, 8.0, Monday, June 4, Mr. L. Ebury. Highbury Corner, 8.0, Thursday, June 7, Mr. L. Ebury.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH (Brockwell Park): 7.0, Sunday, June 3, Mr. P. Goldman. Rushcroft Road, near Brixton Town Hall, 8.0, Tuesday, June 5, Mr. P. Goldman. Cock Pond, Clapham Old Town, 8.0, Wednesday, June 6, Mr. E. C. Smith. Aliwall Road, Clapham Junction, Friday, June 8, Mrs. E. Grout.

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Corner of Deanery Road, opposite the Library, Water Lane, Stratford, E.): 7.0, Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12.0, Sunday, A Lecture. 3.30, Platform N. 1, Messrs. Collins and Wood. Platform No. 2, Mr. Hyatt. 6.30, Messrs. Hyatt, Bryant and others. Wednesday, 7.0, Messrs. Collins and W. P. Campbell Everden. Thursday, 7.30, Messrs. Wood and Saphin.

WOOLWICH (Beresford Square): 8.0, Sunday, June 3, Messrs. S. Burke and F. W. Smith. Plumstead Common, "The Ship," 8.0, Tuesday, June 5, Mr. S. Burke. Plumstead Common, "The Ship," 8.0, Thursday, June 7, Mr. S. Burke.

COUNTRY.

OUTDOOR.

ASHINGTON (Grand Corner): 7.0, Friday, June 8, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. A grand combined Rail and Coach Tour through the High Peak of Derbyshire will take place on Sunday, June 17. Train leaves New Street, L.M.S. 10.0 a.m. Fare 9s. Further particulars, P. Terry, 9 Middle Park Road, Selly Oak.

BLYTH (Market Place): 7.0, Monday, June 4, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

BURNLEY AND NELSON BRANCHES N.S.S. (Market Place, Burnley): 7.30, Sunday, June 3, Mr. G. Whitehead. Chapel Street, Nelson, 7.30, Monday, June 4, Mr. G. Whitehead. Burnley Market, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 7.30, Mr. G. Whitehead. Accrington, 7.30, Wednesday, June 6, Mr. G. Whitehead.

CRAWSHAWBOOTH: 7.30, Monday, June 4, Mr. J. Clayton.

CROOK (Market Place): 7.0, Wednesday, June 6, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Dunne Square, Paisley): 8.0, Saturday, June 2, Mr. J. Quinn and Mrs. Whitefield. West Regent Street, 7.30, Sunday, June 3, Mrs. Whitefield—A Lecture. Literature on sale.

HIGHAM: 7.30, Friday, June 1, Mr. J. Clayton.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Queen's Drive, opposite Walton Baths): 8.0, Sunday, June 3, Messrs. C. McKelvie and J. V. Shortt. Corner of High Park Street and Park Road, 8.0, Thursday, June 7, Messrs. A. Jackson and D. Robinson.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. Platt Fields, Rusholme): 6.30, Mr. J. Clayton (Burnley)—A Lecture.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Would Have Memorial): 7.0, Wednesday, June 6—A Lecture.

SUNDERLAND (Gill Bridge Avenue): 7.0, Mr. J. Brighton—A Lecture.

TODMORDEN: 7.45, Wednesday, June 6, Mr. J. Clayton.

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This mingling of flippancy and seriousness is characteristic. In some of his lighter verses it is agreeable enough, and he handles such verse-forms as the rondeau, villanelle, and triolet quite deftly.—*Times Literary Supplement*.

The very versatile author of the recently-issued "Minerva's Owl."—*Sunday Referee*.

Mr. Simmons' verses are slight in content, but reveal an unusual command of metrical schemes. Rondeaux, villanelles and triolets are his ordinary media and he handles them all with skill.—*Birmingham Gazette*.

Mr. Bayard Simmons gives us the quality of wit with clever versification, particularly in the title poem.—*Poetry Review*.

Modern ballades of excellence have been written by W. E. Henley, Swinburne, Wilde, G. K. Chesterton, Bayard Simmons, Paul Selver, Hilaire Belloc, and others.—*Everyman's Encyclopædia*.

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