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Views and Opinions

Religion and the Stage

In a recent issue of the *Observer*, Mr. St. John Ervine deals with a Bournemouth parson, who very strongly objects to religious plays—that is, plays in which “sacred” persons and subjects are dealt with on the stage. The parson says it is “blasphemous” to stage these plays; Mr. Ervine says it is not, and wants to know why anyone should think it is. Mr. Ervine also reminds the parson that all drama has a religious origin, which statement, while open to some question, has enough truth about it to hit the parson where he lives, and really goes much deeper than appears in the course of Mr. Ervine’s article. For, without dealing with the very plausible theory that the whole story of the death and crucifixion of Jesus, as we have it, is no more than a rendering of an old “sacred” drama, there is no doubt whatever that a great deal of primitive religion does actually take the form of a dramatic-magical performance. In all sorts of primitive religious ceremonies performed before food is planted, or when rain is needed, or when a tribe goes forth to war, and in most of the attempted satisfaction of tribal needs we have religious performances, which are as much stage plays, although with an underlying magical purpose, as anything performed in a modern theatre. The solemn processions that are now carried on in connexion with religious ceremonies only fail to strike the observer—the believing observer—as truly stage performances, and as directly derived from the magico-religious performances of primitive people, because usage leads him to give a different significance to them. Although I quite agree generally with Mr. Ervine’s position, I still think that in objecting to religious plays, the parson showed a much truer appreciation of the nature and dangers of the practice than did his critic.

* * *

Art and Religion

But before I come to deal with what I conceive to be the real cause of the parson’s objection to “sacred” persons being portrayed on the stage, I must say a

word on a statement which is, if Mr. Ervine will not get angry with me for so describing it, just popular rubbish. He says:—

Do those who, like Mr. Gould, object to the representation of Christ by a man, object also to representations of Him in pictures or statues or stained glass. If they don’t, why do they not? I find it difficult to understand why Leonardo Da Vinci may, amid applause from the pious, paint a portrait of Christ in “The Last Supper,” and an actor may not, in his way, paint a portrait of Him on the stage. If Leonardo had been forbidden to paint His portrait, *if all artists were prohibited from expressing their vision of God on canvas, how grievously Art would have been reduced in its range.*

It is the words I have italicized to which I take exception as being simply an echo of common religious gush. I feel quite sure that on reflection Mr. Ervine would not seriously hold that imaginative art has more than an accidental—often a mere financial—association with religion, or that if religion had not been in existence that there is ground for assuming that the artistic development of human faculty would not have been quite as great as it is to-day. And as Leonardo was probably an Atheist, it can hardly be that his religious fervour contributed much to his art. The truth is, of course, that the artist works with whatever material he has at hand, and one may as well attribute the art of Murillo to the dirt of the beggars he painted as credit religion with the art displayed in painting ridiculous angels seated on impossible clouds. It is curious how readily able men will slip into nonsense when religion is on the carpet. Perhaps we may take it as an instance of how easily the pen of the literary artist is affected by the influence of his environment.

* * *

Other Times—!

Let me get back to Mr. Ervine’s question, the answer to which really does explain the situation. At one time religious plays were performed, in which all kinds of “sacred” subjects were staged, and all sorts of “sacred” persons were portrayed. In a play of the creation God is represented as an elderly gentleman with a long flowing beard, stumbling about in the dark before the creation of light. In another, the Garden of Eden is depicted, and the fixing of the fig leaves on a nude Adam and Eve excites no hostile comment. Those who are familiar with the miracle plays will recall a number of similar scenes which are simply unthinkable on the stage of to-day. And at another time, not merely do these things clash with a sense of decency, but a representation of the personel of the Holy Family, or of Jesus is taken as an equivalent of blasphemy. Mr. Ervine asks why is this? and although he does not supply the answer, it is not hard to find.

The answer is one in terms of environment. There was nothing either ludicrous or blasphemous in the days of the miracle plays in seeing a God on the stage who looked like a man, and who acted like a man. There was nothing in seeing a God doing things as a man would do them because that was the way they thought about God and "sacred" people. Religious belief could not be shocked by seeing "sacred" things on the stage because they were seeing what they actually believed, and their faith was confirmed and strengthened by what they saw. The pictorial representation was in harmony with the psychology of the spectators. The picture grew out of the belief, the belief gained renewed strength from the picture.

* * *

Environment and Belief

But the position is very different when religious beliefs, instead of being a reflection of the social and intellectual environment, is in conflict with it. A play of Shakespeare can be fully appreciated even though both the language and the dress are modernized. This is because the individual and the dress and the mode of speech is subordinate to the character displayed. Hamlet, or Lear, or Shylock, or Othello lives in any language or in any dress because the passions displayed are independent of a period, and are in their fundamentals characteristic of human nature. But religious incidents, the man-God, the sacrificial saviour, the miracle-working Messiah, are strictly related to a particular stage of culture, and unless that cultural environment can to some extent be recreated, or, conversely, unless the influence of the contemporary environment can be, to some extent minimized, the presentation of religious incidents falls flat, the onlooker is apt to see religion as it is.

Mr. Irvine asks why if a painter may paint Jesus in "The Last Supper," or an artist depict him in a stained glass window, why may not an actor depict him on the stage? The answer is found in the reaction of the spectators to the same incident in the two cases. Let a painter draw a picture of "The Last Supper" with Jesus and the disciples in modern clothing, sitting round a modern dining table, and the artist would be denounced as holding religion up to ridicule. To be effective Jesus must be dressed in the conventional style, he must wear the conventional dress, he must use the conventional language—even though the dress depicted is, in all probability, not that which a Judean peasant would have worn 2,000 years ago. So far as it is possible the spectator must be lifted out of his contemporary surroundings and placed in one that belongs to the past. Religion belongs to the past, and unless the mind of the spectator is unconsciously doped, he is apt to contrast the religious teaching of the past with the life and thought of the present. He must have the past presented in a setting that to a considerable extent shuts out the life he is actually living.

* * *

The Psychology of Belief

The truth is that beliefs, whatever be their nature, are the products of a particular environment, and are dependent upon its perpetuation for their vitality. Normally, and so far as ordinary beliefs are concerned, this adaptation takes place automatically and unconsciously. Our mental attitudes towards changes in mechanical contrivances, social institutions, modes of transportation, etc., go on without our being conscious of the process; so much is this the case that when a visitor from some remote village is

transported to a large city, his surprise at what is going on around him—in other words, his lack of adaptation—is a cause of merriment to onlookers. With religion the pressure of general education is in an opposite direction. Here there is a deliberate endeavour to minimize the influence of the present, and to maximize the influence of the past. We see this in the retention in all religious ceremonies of old forms of dress, the use of old forms of speech and ancient implements. It is seen in the demand of the Roman Catholic Church for a special Roman Catholic "atmosphere" in the education of children. Other subjects may wait till the child is old enough to understand them. Religion must be inculcated in early years, and before the child is able to experience the full force of a modern environment. It is indicated in the comparative segregation of religious sects, a segregation that is generally encouraged by religious leaders. The way in which religious believers are warned against reading non-religious books is a further illustration of the same fact. All may be summarized as so many endeavours to place a fence between the individual and the full force of a modern environment. If religion is to live at all it can adopt no other plan.

I quite agree with Mr. Irvine, that it is absurd to say that sacred things are degraded by being presented on the stage. Nothing can be made better or worse in that way. All the most valuable things in life—the love of man and woman, the affection of parent and child, the devotion of friend for friend, all these are displayed on the stage without their being either weakened or vulgarized. There is no profanation in a stage presentation; there is only an exposure. When Hamlet advised the players to hold up the mirror to nature, he was only putting into words what the stage cannot help doing in fact. Whether the player tears a passion to tatters or lays bare the sources of emotion in all their beauty or stark horror, he must be either holding a mirror to nature, or exposing the nature of a sham. In the whole sphere of life the stage is a great testing ground of reality.

So I think that if Mr. St. John Irvine looks more carefully into the question he has raised, he will not be long in finding the correct answer—although I do not think he will be allowed to publish it in the decorous pages of the *Observer*. And the answer may, I think, be formulated in this wise. When a belief is in touch with "reality," that is when it is in harmony with the general character of the environment, its presentation in a pictorial, a dramatic, or an exact verbal form excites no opposition and rouses no resentment. But as the environment changes a gap is created between belief and fact. From sheer habit men and women may go on repeating the old formulæ, and expressing devotion to the old belief. But when it is put fairly and squarely before them they are forced into some kind of a mental stock-taking and begin to see their beliefs as they are. The early religious drama put into concrete form the things that people actually believed; the modern stage, no matter how "reverently" the play is performed, makes the imbecility of the supernatural clear, and the humanity of the action plain; and therefore, to picture, in either words or painting, the essential quality of religion is to make it ridiculous in a modern environment. The Freethinker knows it is so and says it in so many words. The believer *feels* it is ridiculous, and vents his feeling in aimless talk about irreverence and blasphemy. The stage, I repeat, does not vulgarize, it exposes; and every sham dreads exposure.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Voltaire of Our Time

"It is the part of a wise man to have preferences, but no exclusions."—*Voltaire*.

"The art of the pen is to rouse the inward vision, instead of labouring with a drop-scene brush."—*Meredith*.

Of all the recent Continental writers who have had a vogue in England, Anatole France was the most Voltairean, for he carried on the same splendid literary tradition. As he himself wittily expressed it, he was a symbol, as the citizen Momoro represented the Goddess of Reason at the festivals of the French Revolution. The word Voltairean means also something of tone and character, something of an alert and indulgent regard, a delicacy of touch, a subtle irony, which immediately suggests the very ideal of the French intellect:—

"Ravishing as red wine in woman's form,
A splendid maenad, she of the delirious laugh,
Her body twisted flame with the smoke-cap crowned."

Not only was Anatole France known throughout the civilized world as a writer, but he was also a humanitarian. A convinced Freethinker, it was only natural that he should take up the brilliant sword of his wit by the side of the Atheist, Emile Zola, in the strenuous days of the Dreyfus struggle, when the heroic Zola championed truth and justice in the hour of danger. It was an abiding example of courage, and comparable to the similar actions of Voltaire, who used the sword of his genius on behalf of Jean Calas, La Barre, and other unfortunates. Honest to their own injury, brave against the enmity of tens of thousands, these Freethinkers helped to raise the world's opinion of human nature.

Anatole France's literary forefathers were Rabelais, Swift, and Voltaire, three of the most significant and virile names in literature. Yet he was no copyist, but original, modern, Parisian. The thing he had in common with these great predecessors was his hatred of injustice and his power over language. Although a master of the lash, he used his whip caressingly. He did not cut his subject to ribbons like Swift; nor, like Voltaire, sting like a thousand wasps. Rather was he like Rabelais, who shifted satire into the realm of imaginative comedy, and pitied while he smiled.

Rabelais was so much more tolerant than Swift, who, writing in the shadow of the Christian Superstition, found all the world a dunghill, and man the most loathsome creature that squatted upon it. But François Rabelais, out in the open air, with all the winds of the Renaissance blowing upon him, was so much more than a mere satirist. Under the motley of the jester beat a heart that throbbed in the service of humanity. This tolerant humour was shared by Anatole France.

Although Anatole France wrote a shelf-full of books, his works have a uniform excellence, and it is difficult to pick out any representative masterpieces. He wrote no *Candide*, no *Les Misérables*, no *Sartor Resartus*, those seminal masterpieces which do actually represent in one volume the quality of their author's genius. Like his illustrious countryman, Montaigne, he is not to be judged by a single essay. And, like Montaigne, he is a philosopher in disguise. He has used the novel as a medium of expression, personal and intellectual. In those charming pages of *La Vie Littéraire*, he has smilingly told his readers that he was not speaking pontifically, but only talking of himself, and only sending his mind adventuring among masterpieces. Similarly, in his novels, he is as personal and as intimate as Charles Lamb. Sometimes he uses a larger canvas. In his *Isle of the*

Penguins, he put modern society under the microscope, and in *The Gods Thirst*, he unfolds himself upon the subject of the French Revolution. With exquisite art and tender understanding, he gets to the root of the matter. With what sympathy does he show the rebel, Gamelin, starving himself that a poor mother might be fed, or apologizing to the nine-years-old child for his fanaticism:—

Child, you will grow up free and happy, and you will owe it to the infamous Gamelin. I am ferocious that you may be happy; I am cruel that you may be kind. I am pitiless that to-morrow the whole French people may embrace each other with tears of joy.

This genial satirist could, in another mood, give delightful pictures of his own boyhood. *My Friend's Book* is as charming as heart could desire, and in that perfect chapter, "The Hermitage of the Jardin des Plantes," he described a childish bent towards saintship with inimitable grace and irony:—

My sole idea was to live the life of an ascetic. In order to lose no time in putting my ideas into practice, I refused to eat my breakfast. My mother, who knew nothing of my new vocation, thought I was ill, and looked at me with an anxiety which pained me to behold. Nevertheless, I persevered with my fasting, and then, remembering the example of Saint Simeon Stylites, who spent his entire life on a pillar, I climbed up on the kitchen-cistern, but it was impossible to live there, for Julie, the cook, promptly dislodged me. Though I had been ousted from the cistern, I pursued with undiminished ardour the way of perfection, and next decided to imitate Saint-Nicholas of Patras, who is said to have given all his riches to the poor. My father's study window looked out on the quay, and from it I proceeded to fling down a dozen coppers or so which had been given to me, because they were new and bright. These I followed up with marbles, humming-tops, whip-top, and eelskin whip.

"The child is crazy," exclaimed my father as he shut the window.

I felt angry and mortified at hearing this judgment passed upon me, but I remembered that my father, not being a saint like myself, would not share with me in the glories of the blessed, a reflection from which I derived great consolation.

Of this delicate and delightful stuff was woven the golden fabric of his genius. So original, so modern, was this great writer, that among other names, he has been called the "Pope of Freethought."

Anatole France was born in a bookseller's shop, and it could almost be said of him that he had "ink in his blood." During the most impressionable years of his life he was surrounded by old folios, artistic missals, first editions, and illuminated manuscripts. At every pore of a sensitive nature he absorbed the love of literature, and splendid use he afterwards made of his intimate and peculiar knowledge. At the zenith of his fame he was the most cultured of European writers; a great scholar, a student of the by-ways of knowledge, psychologist, publicist, humorist, humanitarian, and wit. When, by a natural fitness of things, he became librarian to the French Senate, the environment was suitable for changing the bookworm into a delightful writer. Never a hustler, he was nearly forty years of age when his first notable story, *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*, was published, and proved a veritable triumph. Crowned by the French Academy, Anatole France took the tide at the flood, which led him to fortune. Book after book followed from his fertile brain until he had all Europe at his feet.

France has been one blaze of splendid scepticism from the days of Abelard to those of Anatole France

who valiantly stood for the liberation of the intellect no less than his illustrious predecessors. Yet not for an instant did he cease to be an artist. By his genius he has added a wondrous chamber to the House Beautiful of Art.

MIMNERMUS.

Blessed are the Poor

GOD is very hard on the rich. They have to take all the pleasures in this world. At times one would almost think He had forsaken them entirely and handed them over to Satan. Consider their many misfortunes: They are oppressed, as often as not through inheritance, and therefore no fault of their own, by a colossal spiritual burden—money. Its evils, like a pestilence, spread in all directions. Not only does the mere possession of it constrict the gates of Heaven, but it sets a trap here on earth for the wealthy by providing a host of opportunities for wrong-doing over and above the initial sin of affluence. It first degrades the appetites, then surfeits them. It tempts men to excesses, then teases them with disappointment. It gives them power, but only when it has taught them to abuse it. It gives them luxury, but deprives them of joy. Those with a truly generous heart give it away, and then they no longer have it. Those who keep it are denied the delight of spending it liberally. It is a cake you cannot have and eat. It is a Will o' the Wisp that fascinates at a distance and loses its magic even as you grasp it. It is a mirage that leads men onward and ever onward into the desert—The Mirage of More.

No wonder the rich seek the commiseration of the poor! No wonder that they envy their more fortunate brethren, who face life free from this intolerable curse, able to give themselves (since they have nought else to give) to the highest joys of penury. How ill does the brief and sensuous pleasure of wealth compensate for losing the eternal bliss which, after we are dead, waits on poverty with a crown of glory! Small wonder, then, that the rich have stubbornly resisted a philosophy that would embroil the poor in their own distress, namely, the philosophy of Atheism. Christianity has always kept its highest blessings for the poor, and as for the rich they have faced its austerity with fortitude. Though it offered them nothing but a grim struggle through the eye of a needle on the other side of the grave, made all the more arduous by the physical proportions which luxury induces, they have never rebelled against its teaching. But Atheism, whose doctrines would console them with all that they will not miss in the next world, they have put down fearlessly and resolutely whenever it has threatened the community, simply because it would have disturbed the minds of the poor with mercenary lusts, broken through their peaceful habits and thrown their serene lives into tumult, by exploding the belief in a dispensing Providence, and substituting a world in which there was no a priori reason why one man should be poorer than another. It is bad enough, in all conscience, when a rich man finds a neighbour engulfed in his own disaster. How much worse, then, if nine-tenths of the population (which we understand to be approximately the proportion of poor people) were threatened with a like fate! If nobody were poor, none would be blessed. Perish the thought! But lest the reader should think I am not sincere, let me refer him to history.

I have before me a book entitled *The Town*

Labourer, written by J. L. and Barbara Hammond. It is one of a small series by the same authors, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for their brilliant contribution to the history of the poor. I am arrested by a chapter on "The Conscience of the Rich." It seems that the French Revolution threatened to awaken in England a spirit similar to that in France, which, as we know, bore not only a revolutionary but an anti-religious complexion. This greatly perturbed the wealthy classes in England, to whom it was clear that the poor, once infected by French ideas, might become blinded to the great spiritual merits of poverty. The cry of Equality could be heard across the Channel, and it pained more than alarmed the delicate ears of wealthy folk. They must have felt somewhat as the generality of men felt during the much later campaign for women's suffrage. We can still remember how it pained the male population to think of women sacrificing that dependence out of which grew the fairest charms of femininity, and how we tried to persuade them that, in seeking an equality with men, they were really stepping downwards towards a sex inferior to themselves in every department of refined life. It must have been likewise with the rich at the beginning of the nineteenth century. How pathetic that the poor should covet a station in fact less enviable than their own! Their misguided outlook had to be corrected. They must be saved from themselves. The rich, then, became very solicitous of the poor, and two names appear prominently in the chapter before me. One is that of Wilberforce, and the other that of Paley. The former represented politics, the latter religion. Wilberforce met the crisis with a book published in 1798, and entitled *Practical View of the System of Christianity*. In it he explained how, to quote the words of Hammond's summary, "the poor have the advantage." But the rich politician was not alone in his solicitude. From the religious side he had already been joined by Paley, likewise bent on an errand of mercy. Paley produced a work entitled *Reasons for Contentment Addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public*. Hammond tells us that it is not among the best known of Paley's writings, but this is regrettable because, "according to Sir Leslie Stephen, Paley himself ranked it first." It was published in 1793, and was concerned to demonstrate that, again to quote the words of Hammond's summary, "there was scarce any respect in which the poor were not more fortunate than the rich." These writings must have influenced the rich towards a closer concern for the new spiritual dangers threatening the welfare of the poor; for the ruling classes, who happened by a historical coincidence to be also the wealthy classes, succeeded in passing the Combination Laws of 1799 and 1800, by which the temptation on the part of the poor to become less poor was resisted in their behoof by the authority of Parliament. But the activity of the rich was not confined to clerics and Parliamentarians. With a loyalty and a team-spirit that has always characterized their response to a national crisis, they joined in the campaign even down to the rank and file of private gentlemen, adopting a method at once the most sincere and the most efficacious. They set an example. The Annual Register for 1798 tells us that, "It was a wonder to the lower orders, throughout all parts of England, to see the avenues to the churches filled with carriages. This novel appearance prompted the simple country-people to inquire what was the matter." We presume that their inquiry was answered to the effect that the rich were coming to realize the hollowness of things material, and the importance of things spiritual, as also we presume that the answer was received in a spirit befitting simple country-people, namely with a doffing

of the cap, and a promise to go their ways and meditate upon the new truth.

But the rich were not disposed to leave anything to chance. The salvation of such a huge proportion of the population was a matter that demanded measures for security. Wilberforce again came to the rescue and succeeded in inspiring reforms in the direction of Puritanism, and the Law tightened its grip on the people by putting into practical effect a spirit which to-day we recognize under the name of Sabbatarianism. Thus the poor were protected by word and deed from the pitfalls into which the rich had fallen.

I feel sure, however, that the sight of the rich enjoying apparent happiness, continuing with seeming immunity in the ways of Satan, gay, unrepentant but unscathed, would in time have tricked the poor into an altered point of view, but for the inherent level-headedness which is bred by a life of hardship, and the intense realism attaching to their rigorous existence. God has undoubtedly blessed the poor. Not only has He allotted to them the highest spiritual station, but He has equipped them with the means of retaining it. He has given them an inspired book explaining in full the bliss of poverty, and has seen to it that their education fitted them to understand and appreciate it. Even when they could not read He "called" men to teach them the truth by word of mouth. Second only to the sublime resistance of Christ to Satan, when the Evil One tempted Him with riches, is the stand taken by the poor against the temptation to change their status. I work much among the poor and feel that I know them well. I will guarantee them against all comers. I will guarantee them against all argument, persuasion, reasoning. I will guarantee them against all speakers on platforms, against all libraries in all cities. I will guarantee them against the combined forces of science, history and common sense. Blessed are the poor. Praise the Lord!

MEDICUS.

A Modern Apologist

We sometimes hear religious apologists airily proclaim that the gulf between religion and science has been bridged, and that science now confirms religious belief. That is, of course, a quite unwarrantable assertion. If it were true, religion would have passed from faith to knowledge, and religion is just as much dependent on faith as ever it was. It is perfectly possible to interpret the universe from a non-theistic standpoint. (Kenneth Ingram: *Modern Thought on Trial*. p. 143.)

Our last article but one was concerned with a fundamentalist defender of the faith, a fossil survivor of what was the general belief one hundred years ago, and still obtains among uneducated believers among the dissenting sects, Roman Catholics, the Salvation Army, the whole of the large negro population of America, and the large number of Fundamentalists in the back blocks of the same country.

The work we deal with to-day is also the work of a Christian believer, but of a very different calibre. It is entitled *Modern Thought on Trial*, by Kenneth Ingram (published by Philip Allan). Mr. Ingram has made a study of the impact of modern thought on Christian belief. He accepts the teaching of modern science and evolution. No defence of Genesis is attempted. Jehovah and the Old Testament are completely ignored. It is also admitted that the intelligentsia, and the younger generation of to-day are completely alienated from religion.

Moreover, "it would be the greatest mistake to suppose that intelligent young men and women reject orthodox Christianity merely because they are lethargic. They reject it because they are mentally virile to a degree which has enabled them remorselessly to examine the claims. They have not been content to accept the tradition uncritically: the drift here is of a definitely intellectual character." (p. 65.) And after this critical examination: "The modern feels that he has seen through the traditional religious faith. The Personal God, His revelation, His Church, have gone. The modern must do his best to construct order out of chaos, courageously and candidly." (p. 66.)

Looking at religion to-day, what does the sceptic find, asks Mr. Ingram, and replies:—

In the main he sees that the average church-goer belongs to the conventional type which is not mentally virile enough to question the rule with which it has grown familiar. It remains placidly in the groove where it has been set. The definitely Church public is made up of those who have never faced up to the criticisms which can be advanced against their case: religion for them is primarily an emotional experience. The average intellectual standard of the orthodox Christian is lower than that of the convinced unorthodox.

And where the Christian is deeply religious, unpleasant characteristics frequently occur. Piety is only tolerable when it is tempered with humanitarian instincts, with a sense of humour, and with a generous nature. The difficulty which the Christian system has created for itself is that its devotees are usually deficient in these virtues. Christian practice seems to produce an imperfect type, judged by modern standards. The ardent believers, the regular communicant, the enthusiastic church-goer, are drawn, in the main, from that group of persons which possesses a parochial mind rather than a sympathy for the concerns of the unconverted, and which is intolerant rather than generous. The impression which is made on the outsider as he looks at the kernel of the average congregation, the severe maiden ladies, the pious young men, the hearty curate, plays an enormous part in his judgment as to the values of orthodoxy. He argues that if that is the fruit of regular Christian practice, there must be something wrong with the tree. (K. Ingram: *Modern Thought on Trial*. pp. 59-60.)

And yet the preachers of all denominations—from the Roman Catholic, down to the smallest dissenting Tin Tabernacle—are never tired of telling us that religion, and especially the Christian religion, is the foundation and guarantee of morality; without which society would deliquesce into a morass of iniquity! declaring at the same time, that no society has ever been able to establish itself for any length of time under Atheistic rule.

This argument no longer holds good. The Russian Government has firmly established itself, as Mr. Ingram points out; and our young intellectuals "can see that the Soviet State is functioning with comparative ease, and that the prophecies of early collapse, the rumours that this godless civilization would ensure its own retribution, have been entirely falsified." (p. 65.) And, like the old Russian priest cited by Mr. Ingram, there is a "realization that God can be defied and yet nothing happen."

Mr. Ingram suspects that the popular scepticism is influenced not a little by the depressing state of world affairs, which reinforce the older arguments based on the cruelty of nature, the cruelty of design, and the indifference and waste of life. "God has made such a mess of it all that there cannot be a God," is the crude expression of this type of conclusion. Nevertheless, admits Mr. Ingram:—

It may be crude, but we can hardly deny the strength of the evidence in its support. The evil and pain and wantonness, as we saw in a previous chapter, cannot be attributed wholly to man. The elements show no mercy when they sweep down on us with full strength: the tornado wrecks home and family, without any regard for individual merits. Many animals are a continual prey to suffering and fear. The very infinity of the stars suggests a reckless, useless extravagance. The fantastic shapes of the prehistoric creatures imply, if there is a design at all, an amateur experimenter. The physical universe as a whole supports a blind self-emerging entity, rather than the careful design of an intelligent mind. Whatever our final conclusions, we must admit that, if there is a God, He has left His creation very largely to work out its own evolution. (pp. 176-177.)

If there is a God, says Mr. Ingram, He lies beyond our comprehension, and his intelligence is beyond anything we can conceive, and "Even if the Second Law of Thermodynamics is to be vindicated and the whole physical universe is doomed to annihilation, God remains." If such a cosmic catastrophe is to occur, we should rather conceive of God as saying, "Well, this æon has been a useful experiment: now I will begin another." (pp. 186-187.) That is all very well, but in that case, how is the believer any better off than the unbeliever? It may be an amusing recreation for God, but where do we come in?

Of course the Christian believes that he is going to have another innings after this life is finished. Mr. Ingram believes this himself, and we suspect that this is the main thing he cares about in religion, and he declares that: "If there is no survival, Christianity is based on fraud." Christians believe in immortality on the strength of the Gospel records, which Mr. Ingram accepts in the usual emotional and uncritical way, although he admits that: "There has probably never been an age in which disbelief in human survival after death has been more widespread." (p. 187.) The Gospels may satisfy Mr. Ingram's critical sense and provide a foundation for his faith, but they do not satisfy the intelligent young people of to-day. He himself observes:—

Twenty years at least elapsed before the first Gospel was written. The documents of the New Testament, as they have come through to us, may have suffered profoundly by the careless or unscrupulous handling of innumerable scribes. The mass of apocryphal literature which had accumulated in the primitive Church is witness to the general unreliability of the written word. It may all be apocryphal. (p. 51.)

Added to this, the Gospels are unhistorical, and full of miracles that the modern critical spirit cannot believe in. The most surprising thing in the book is the fact that Mr. Ingram can accept the Gospels as historical records strong enough on which to base his faith.

W. MANN.

The Catholicizing of Christianity was the paganizing of it. The rapidity of this process is largely to be explained by the circumstance that the centuries during which it took place—the first four centuries of the Christian era—were an epoch of rapid intellectual decline. The deterioration of scientific thought in the ancient world before the Roman Empire was over-run was amazing. In medicine, for instance, superstitious credulity destroyed a system of accurate clinical observations whose level was only again reached during last century.—*Bishop Barnes.*

Religion and the League of Nations

I HAVE received a letter from a worker for the League, on the religious side, commenting on my article on the above subject in the *Freethinker* of June 3. Some of the points of the letter may be of interest to Secularists in general.

Though we who are in sympathy with the League and the Union have no sort of objection to the appeal by the religionists to members of the Christian or any other Church, so long as they do not obtrude their beliefs and practices to the annoyance of others, we may register our objection to some assumptions contained in their propaganda. Among these are the title of a body connected with the Union, viz., "*Religions and Ethics Committee*," and the pronouncement, said to be that of the Union, that all its policies shall be controlled by "*religious and ethical standards.*"

We should probably evoke criticism (or perhaps only smiles) if we proposed a "*Secular and Ethics Committee*," with "*secular and ethical standards.*" Yet we have a lively consciousness that religion in the West and near East has from the time of Elijah been extensively associated with war, massacre and other brutality, as well as with profound dissension and separatism. And lest it should be supposed that these are things of the past, we may adduce such a statement as the following. According to Prof. Flinders Petrie, "For 1500 years the Egyptians have been taught unity by Christianity and Islam, and no local difference of nature or belief remains, yet the people of every village will say that those of the next place are 'bad people,' and the men on one side of the Nile will always hold aloof from those on the other side."

And to this kind of thing we have to add the serious religious imbroglios which have recently taken place in Mexico, India, Malta and elsewhere. We also recall the attitude of many religionists to recent wars. It is on record that some Christian leaders said that the Great War was "a Christian War" (in spite of the fact that the killing was mainly by reputed Christians of one another); that the Bishop of London called it "a glorious war"; that Father Bernard Vaughan said, "God might have stopped the war; but it would take an eternity to thank God for not having stopped it"; and, worse than all, that Dean Farrar published a poem containing the following:—

"And as I see how nobly natures form
Under the warm red rain, I deem it true
That He who made the earthquake and the storm
Perchance made battles too."

And quite lately we have had at least one condemnation of pacifism from a church leader.

That such things should be after so many centuries of close training in the "religion of brotherhood," gives us furiously to think. And a little further inquiry shows that the development of social morality, including tolerance and, in a general way, social concord, have proceeded step by step with the growth of Secularism.

A like objection must be registered to a rather familiar phrase used by religionists, viz., "narrow nationalist and materialistic spirit." The latter adjective has a number of meanings; but probably none of them has any bearing on, nor should be associated with nationalism, any more than with internationalism. The real point at issue is one of *naturalism*, as opposed to something that is super-natural, extra-natural or transcendental. The latter we hold to be entirely unreal; and that therefore belief in and any kind of degree of reliance on it are quite fatuous, tend to distract attention from realities and to minimize rational effort.

It is true, of course, that good qualities (benevolence, etc.) as well as bad (jealousy, cruelty, treachery, irrational wrath and so on) came to be attributed to gods (though the devil and his myrmidons became and remained wholly bad). Hence the muddle caused by religion, and especially by the Bible. We get praise of liberty, peace, brotherhood and of other good things, but also (in the Old Testament) the first extreme religious persecution, with extensive war and massacre, presented as the will of Jahveh, the declaration that "the Lord is a man of war," and

in the New Testament the statement, "I come not to bring peace, but a sword" (which was evidently a chief excuse for the religious barbarity of the Middle Ages); and so on. And following the failure of Christianity to generate in 1500 years or so sufficient "brotherhood" to stop war, we now find that Christians (most of them we hope) have, like others, adopted the view that war, like other relics of primitive social and religious barbarity, must cease.

All this confirms our belief that men made gods in their own image, and that these improved as man improved; and, further, that the continuation in Christianity of the god of the ancient Hebrews (who, like the men themselves, was in the barbarian stage) was probably the greatest tragedy that ever befell the Western world.

Finally, it must be said that the tradition of narrow religious exclusiveness forms a counterpart of "narrow nationalism"; and the former, in conjunction with the long continued repression of opinion, of discussion and publication; the interference with education, and opposition to the progress of science, combined with the discouragement of "reality thinking," and the encouragement of "fantasy thinking," has doubtless been the main factor in the retardation of intellectual, moral and social improvement, including the idea of and the movement towards world peace, amity and co-operation.

J. REEVES.

Acid Drops

The International Union of Journalists Association has denounced the practice of wireless advertising. Apropos of this, a newspaper remarks: "The invention of wireless is a priceless blessing, and it is nothing short of monstrous that it should be degraded by the commercial spirit." This is a rather queer line of argument to take. To the listener who does not wish to hear advertisements they may be a nuisance. But as the advertising pays for the entertainment, and as the listener would not get the latter at all if there were no advertisers to pay for it, there is little point in objecting to the advertisements. After all, broadcasting and the newspaper fulfil somewhat similar functions. They both aim at providing entertainment and a certain amount of information. The newspaper is enabled to achieve its aim only by means of advertising revenue. But no newspaper protests against being "degraded by the commercial spirit." And so it looks as if the journalists' denunciation against wireless advertising is merely a professional one; they fear that the newspapers will get less advertising revenue.

The Lord Mayor of Leicester fully (and dolefully) realizes the difficulties which confront the Christian Church to-day—changed circumstances, the multiplication of inducements to break the Sabbath, games, motor-cars, cycling, hiking—all these leave little time for devoting to Sunday worship. In other words, he fully realizes that Christ cannot compete with Sunday amusements, and that very large numbers of people to-day have lost all interest in preparing for an alleged other world—of which there is no evidence, but only conjecture. Presumably, if the worthy mayor could have his own way he would prohibit all the aforesaid "inducements to break the Sabbath." If such is the case, Leicester has no particular reason to be proud of its Mayor.

A preacher who exhorted his hearers to move steadily and constantly towards the perfect life, added that they must not be determined by the standards of public opinion or by the age in which they lived or by the best people in it. Apparently his notion of the perfect life was one lived in accordance with the primitive fears and superstitions which were current in Anno Domini One, and which are related in Holy Writ. Searching for perfection by reverting to more primitive modes of thought seems a queer sort of business, but no one can say it isn't Christian.

A Methodist reporter refers to "the spirit of loving forbearance, which has been the wonderful characteristic of our re-united Church life." This sounds as if the united Methodists have really been trying very hard to overcome their natural Christian instinct to dislike any brother-in-Christ who differed from them. However, it is safe to say that they haven't any "loving forbearance" to spare for Romanists and Anglo-Catholics.

Mr. James Douglas has read the Marriage Service in the Book of Common Prayer for the first time, and is horrified at its "theological pre-Elizabethan jargon." He hastens to tell the multitude of Douglas fans that "it is to-day both offensive and unintelligible." Free-thinkers have for years proclaimed its offensiveness, but the pious Douglasites would not listen. As for its "unintelligibility," the truth is, it is far too plain. Mr. Douglas actually admits this when he declares, "it is so obsolete in its language and so repulsive in its brutality, that our parsons either gabble it or garble it in order to make it tolerated and tolerable." Christian Marriage is taught as a "sacrament" and the bride and bridegroom have to listen to language which makes even Mr. James Douglas feel ashamed! Perhaps, one day, he will find that there are dozens of other things in Christianity which are bound to make decent people ashamed and horrified. What about Christian miracles?

The Archdeacon of Liverpool, Canon How, Canon Bezzant and Canon Mitchell, have made a "dignified" protest against the invitations given to Unitarians to preach in Liverpool Cathedral. They have thoroughly sat upon the Dean for his temerity in inviting such "heretics" as Dr. Jacks and Mr. Redfern to preach there, and Anglo-Catholics are more than delighted. The whole episode is a magnificent example of "toleration," and gives proof of what would happen in an era of Anglo-Catholicism. The only thing we can think of as a little—not much—worse, would be if Roman Catholicism held the reins. Both sects are worthy followers of "gentle" Jesus.

A brilliant brain-wave has emanated from the Bishop of Exeter. He suggests that tramps and the destitute, instead of being forced into casual wards, should be formed into labour corps. There they could be "drilled under officers and, in the unhappy event of war, they could be mobilized with the rest of the troops." How sweetly Christian! And what magnificent soldiers, the poor, broken-down, out-of-works would make in the "unhappy event of war." Any more brain-waves from Bishops, please?

We note that the Rev. F. C. Spurr attacks Religious Persecution. We agree with him that persecution is "a return to the jungle; man slipping back to the animal." But when Mr. Spurr says "persecutors have appealed to the Old Testament, never to the New," he is going against facts. First of all, if the New Testament frankly repudiated the Old, or even if modern Christians did so, we could not then say as we do that Christ and Christianity must accept responsibility for ALL of the "inspired" Holy Book. Mark ix. 43-48 has often justified all manner of persecution. Besides, Mr. Spurr would make himself and all Atheists vastly superior to his God, for the New Testament is full of threats of "religious persecution," not mere killing, but torture for all eternity. Thanks, Mr. Spurr. If we must choose, we believe Torquemada wanted to torture our bodies for the space of this short life in order to save us from God's infernal never-ending persecution. Torquemada based his beliefs on the New Testament.

The *Church Times* is quite right in insisting that the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection "are part and parcel of the Faith which the English Church maintains." We are as violently opposed to the Modernism which defines Christianity without these two corner stones as is our Anglo-Catholic contemporary. We indeed go further—

we insist upon the whole of Our Lord's miracles as well as all those performed by the Apostles and Saints in addition, and we can see no reason to refuse the many miracles which have been performed by relics of saints. The only Christianity that is worth anything at all is the one vouched for by the Church when it was a well of Faith, not the emasculated shadow which the Modernist is trying to impose upon the timid waverers whose beliefs are shaken by fallible science. Why not do away with "Wayside Sayings," and put the full-blooded creed of Christ on the board instead?

"Reunion" is still in the air and likely, of course, to remain there. The Anglos are ready if the Romans forego their claim to the Pope as God's Viceregent on Earth, and the Romans are willing if the Anglos recognize the Pope's supreme authority and give in, in everything else. In the meantime, Fr. H. St. John, O.P., in the current number of *Blackfriars*, puts in a remarkable plea (coming from a Roman) for Rome's recognition of the Church of England as a genuine Church and not heretical, and that she is "a problem not squarely faced" by Roman Catholics. This has upset the *Tablet*, which goes for Fr. St. John in the well-known Roman way; and fortunately for him burning at the stake or torture on the rack cannot, in this country now be successfully accomplished—lucky man. As for "reunion"—well to use the *Tablet's* delightful phrase, "a miss is as good as a mile." We should say so.

The Rev. E. D. Merritt asked the question the other day, "Is your religion really the first thing in life?" Well, it may be with a few people, but we would wager any money that it is not the first thing by a very long way in most people's lives; or else why this terrible alarm at the rapid growth of Secularism? Mr. Merritt, we note, does not like Modernists; he wants the real genuine Christianity of the most primitive kind, Heaven Hell, Angels, the Devil, Sin, the Saviour, and so on, and he implores the Evangelicals to join the Anglo-Catholics in a "concordat" against the Modernists. But are not the Evangelicals themselves becoming Modernists? Do they believe in Mass and the Confessional? Would they fight to the bitter end to retain the Devil and Hell as part and parcel of Christianity? We suggest to Mr. Merritt there is only one Church in which *all* the primitive beliefs are championed and lots more. Why not join it?

"Moral Stories" very often carry the "moral" much farther than the teller intended. Unless the Rev. Mr. Belden has a hitherto unsuspected sense of humour, we must regard him as the most maladroit story teller we ever met. In his *Weekly Notes* on the Sunday School Lesson for July 29, he tells how once upon a time a Bandit descended on a Chinese village and terrorized the natives who heard of his tortures, murders, and general rapine. But as it happened, a villager possessed a Salvation Army Flag. On seeing this flag, the blood-thirsty bandit "ordered his army to pass on, leaving the village safe and happy." The fiend in human form apparently preferred to do his stuff in another village where no Salvation Army Band played raucous tunes what time he performed his vile tricks.

The Vice-President of the Methodists says that "what the Church suffers from to-day, is not any definite hostility to it or its teaching, so much as a growing apathy or indifference to that teaching, which gives rise to Secularism." The Vice-President is welcome to comfort his brethren by these vain explanations so long as he does admit the facts. If mankind is sufficiently apathetic or indifferent to religion to join the Secularist movement, the religious world will soon discover the existence of a very "definite hostility to it and its teaching." The Vice-President deceives nobody but himself.

The *Evening Standard* shows signs of a wonderful toleration. For instance, "Low" is allowed to satirize with his clever cartoons most of the principles for which

Lord Beaverbrook stands. The *Standard* allows its dramatic critic to make sensible remarks about Shaw's *Androcles*, which has been revived. He says: "The curious, who remember the first production, may find additional amusement in trying to seek out the passages which were considered shockingly blasphemous in those distant days." So true is it that blasphemy is a matter of chronology when it isn't a matter of geography (or as it has been wittily put, a matter of "latitude").

The Methodists want £500,000. General Booth wanted a million—and got it. Booth's method was to secure the best known journalist of his day, W. T. Stead, and between them to write *In Darkest England*. Booth found that while money was hard to get for crude religionism, the "social touch" made all the difference. Crude religionism, of course, got the profits, but "our submerged tenth" was the "touch" stone. The Methodists have learnt the lesson. Their President appeals for the money "to rescue men and women from war," and to "fight against drink, gambling and sexual licence," which, he said, "are eating like cancer into vast multitudes."

The Earl of Athlone is appealing for funds on behalf of religion, not in the slums this time, but in the South of France. He alludes to "the closing of Anglican Churches and disappearing congregations on the Riviera." How sad to think that even millionaires no longer attend church in the intervals of baccarat and pigeon-shooting. Or perhaps we should say that the millionaires prefer to support the Roman Catholic Church which does not treat them to cheap sermons against gambling while collecting its tithes of the winnings.

The religious world can scarcely boast of its contribution to the knowledge of the people. Even its own favourite doctrines have to be re-named apparently. An evening paper says that Tolstoy's story in film form is to be re-christened. The public no longer understand the word "Resurrection." It is to be called "We Live Again." It is possible that before long we shall be asked what "living" means. The "again" must sound queer to millions of our unemployed.

Is the union of the churches brought any nearer by the latest utterances of the Archbishop of Canterbury? The obvious advantages of "hanging together" instead of hanging separately must in time appeal to all believers. But just as the Pope wants all Christians to acknowledge his office, the Archbishop will not surrender the Anglican episcopacy. For our part we hope they will go down fighting—it is their historic attitude toward their "dearly beloved brethren."

"When Ye Pray" is the title of a Sermon by Rev. James Reid, D.D., who talks a lot about "our mother's knee," as if life did not consist mainly in getting over the mistakes we learnt in infancy. The joke too is that Dr. Reid spent all his time in telling us what we should "tell" our Heavenly Father, but nothing at all about what our Heavenly Father is going to do about it. "We can tell Him our struggles, our sins, weaknesses, failures, our uselessness . . . We need not be afraid, for He already knows it all." Of all the childishness and "uselessness" a lunatic ever conceived, commend us to this "modernist" idea of prayer. It would make a decent deity sick to listen to it.

The story of Christian Missions in Nigeria, we are told, is a romance of success, and a triumph of Christian statesmanship. We can quite believe it. Missionaries are excellent romancers. And as for the statesmanship, it was probably concerned with "pulling the strings" astutely in connexion with Governments, politicians, permanent officials, and local jacks-in-office; and also with taking advantage of the innocence and ignorance of the Nigerian native.

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE.

EDITORIAL:

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412

TO CORRESPONDENTS

CINE CERE.—Thanks for cutting. The best commentary upon Father Coleman blessing motor-cars is the appalling number of accidents on the road. The gross superstition illustrated in the practice is also staggering—or it would be, were it not so common.

C. HEMINGWAY (S.A.)—Very pleased to have your high appreciation of the *Freethinker*. We read your letter with a great deal of sympathy and agreement, but it is best not to re-open the matter just now.

FOR Distributing the *Freethinker*.—Cine Cere, 10s.

PHILIP CREES (T.6)—Thanks for booklet. We agree with your summing up of same.

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.

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

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

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

The "*Freethinker*" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—
One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.

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Sugar Plums

The Executive of the Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters in Secondary Schools has disturbed the religious dove-cote by declaring that:—

It is not the business of State-aided schools to teach the Christian or any other religion, or to inquire into the religious beliefs of teachers.

It is a clear declaration in favour of a policy of Secular Education. It has been a long time coming from teachers, and we hope it will encourage the N.U.T. to be equally bold. Teachers all over the country, who are in favour of Secular education, are afraid to say so from fear of victimization, and our educational system is never likely to achieve all it could achieve until teachers make a determined stand in the interests of their own manhood and womanhood, as well as in behalf of the children committed to their care. We suspect that the Association has been driven to this step because of the growing religious pressure, for the pronouncement is long over-due.

We have received from Mrs. D. M. Northcroft, editor of *The Coming Ministry*, "the organ of the Society for the Ministry of Women," a letter dealing with a paragraph which appeared in our issue for July 29. Mr. Cohen is away at present, on a brief and much needed holiday, and he will deal with Mrs. Northcroft's letter on his return.

The *Church Times* is wise—sometimes. It does not oppose the County Council's decision to allow competitive games to be played in the Parks on Sundays. It says "the Church has no real competitor; young men and women will not go to Church simply because the Cinema and lawn tennis are barred."

The *Universe* said, in a recent number that the *Freethinker* "forbids you to think God exists." Needless to say, we do nothing of the kind. What we try to do is to show that the arguments in proof of the existence of the Christian Deity, whether coming from Roman or Anglican Catholics, Methodists, or any Christian sects, or from Theists in general, are without any value whatever. We never "forbid" anybody to think as they like. For the rest, the Roman paper pokes fun at our description of "reverent" Rationalists. It doesn't think them funnier than we do.

The Rev. J. M. Thompson, just like Freethinkers, is not impressed by miracles. He says:—

The nearer we get to first hand evidence, the weaker becomes the evidence for miracles. . . . We know of no natural laws, and we can conceive of no power consistent with such laws, by which men could walk on water, or multiply bread, or restore the dead to life, in the way in which Jesus is stated to have done these things. . . . Either these events are miracles, or they never happened. The upshot of our inquiry is that they never happened.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

It was the frightfullest thing ever born of Time? One of the Frightfullest. This Convention, now grown Anti-Jacobin, did . . . publish lists of what the Reign of Terror had perpetrated: lists of persons Guillotined. They contain the names of, How many thinks the Reader? Two thousand, all but a few. There were above four thousand, cries Montgaillard; so many were guillotined, fusiladed, noyaded, done to dire death, of whom nine hundred were women. It is a horrible sum of lives, M. l'Abbé—some ten times as many shot rightly on any field of battle, and one might have had his glorious victory with *Te-Deum*. It is not far from the two-hundredth part of what perished during the entire Seven Year's War.

But what if History somewhere on this planet were to hear of a Nation, the third soul of whom had not, for thirty weeks each year as many third-rate potatoes as would sustain him? History in that case feels bound to consider that starvation is starvation, that starvation from age to age presupposes much; history ventures to assert that the French Sansculotte of Ninety-three, who roused from long death-sleep, could rush at once to the frontiers, and die for an immortal Hope and Faith and Deliverance for him and his was but the second miserablest of men.

History looking back over France through long times, back to Turgot's time, for instance, when dumb drudgery staggered up to its King's Palace, and in wide expanse of sallow faces, squalor and winged raggedness, presented its Petition of Grievances; and for answer gets hanged on a "new gallows" forty feet high, confesses mournfully that there is no period to be met with in which the general Twenty-five millions of France suffered less than in this period which they name the Reign of Terror! But it was not the Dumb Millions that suffered here; it was the Speaking Thousands, and Hundreds of Units; who shrieked and published, and made the world ring with their wail, as they could and should; that is the grand peculiarity. The frightfullest Births of Time are never the loud-speaking ones, for these soon die; they are the silent, which can live from century to century.

From "*The French Revolution*," by Thomas Carlyle.

On the Apocryphal Gospels

III.

It is not surprising that a Gospel or Gospels devoted to Mary, the "Mother" of God, should have joined the others, which were being composed in the interests of the new Church. Whether the *Gospel of the Birth of Mary* is a late production it is almost impossible to say, as it may have been founded, like the so-called Canonical Gospels, on an earlier document. It gives the names of Mary's father and mother, and is so full of absurd miracles, that one can well see why the later and more-instructed leaders of the Roman Church never classed it as the equal of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Yet its miracles are really no sillier than those believed in so ardently by the faithful. An angel of the Lord, "with a prodigious light," had a long conversation with Mary's father, which is just as true as the story of the other angel who had a talk with Mary's husband. The same angel also appears to Mary's mother, who is informed that she will give birth to a marvellous child, who, in turn, "without pollution or defilement," shall "bring forth the Lord." Naturally, Mary, when she was old enough, also conversed with angels, and received visitors from Heaven, culminating in a special visit from Gabriel, "who was sent to her from God." The Gospel ends with the birth of "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost lives and reigns to everlasting ages." This looks rather like an extra special miracle, as it makes Jesus live side-by-side with the "Son"—but almost every other miracle in this Gospel can be paralleled somewhere in the Bible.

Whether this *Gospel of Mary* or the Gospel of James, called the *Protevangelium*, was first, no one knows, but a good deal of the former is in the latter—not forgetting, of course, the angelic conversations. There are quite a number of interesting details, omitted from the canonical gospels, about Mary in the *Protevangelium*, including the age—fourteen—when she "conceived of the Holy Ghost," and the row the priest had with Joseph for having "privately married a Virgin of the Temple." In this Gospel Jesus is born in a cave like other saviour Gods, and there is no doubt that it enshrines many myths and legends current among the people who were converted to Christianity. It has undoubtedly been re-edited in the light of the four "true" gospels.

It is interesting to find that in the *Infancy of Jesus Christ*, the holy babe was able to speak to his mother from the cradle, insisting that he was "Jesus, the Son of God," whom his father "hath sent for the salvation of the world." Moreover, "angels stood around him, adoring him," and a chapter is devoted to the adventures of the Holy Family in Egypt. Miracles abound, and, instead of angels, the devil seems to have had a thoroughly good time. A multitude of them possessed the Egyptian priest's son, aged three, and made the poor little chap walk about naked, and throw stones at everybody, while an idol talked just as rationally as an angel.

Naturally, when the devil-possessed boy came into contact with the "Lord Christ," the devils flew out of his mouth in the shape of crows and serpents, and the talking-idol, with other false gods, fell down, and all were destroyed. This fulfilled the prophecy, "Out of Egypt I have called my Son."

These mighty events are not described so well as similar ones in the New Testament, which proves beyond all doubt that there could be only four true gospels, all the other ones being false; but it must be

admitted that for sheer entertainment this gospel of the *Infancy* would be hard to beat. The writer has the blunt picturesqueness of Defoe, and it is a pity that his imaginative attempt or his essay in gathering together many of the baby Jesus' marvels should have been frowned upon by the Church. After all, the "true" gospels give us no details of the childhood of the Saviour, and, as the Son of God, he is just as likely to have performed miracles as later on.

The beauty of this gospel consists in its frank avowal of the reality of devils in general, and Satan in particular. The Roman Catholic Church inculcates belief in these beings with all its power, and here surely was a gospel which could hardly be bettered for the purpose. In addition, Jesus cured all sorts of diseases quite as easily as he cured blindness in the "official" stories; and he made mud birds fly, and rectified the mistakes Joseph made in his carpenter's work, all by miracles. He even made the dead speak.

There are two gospels of the *Infancy*, the second unfortunately being only a fragment; but it contains enough to show that in the perpetuation of miraculous stories it is well up to the standard of others, inspired and uninspired.

But one of the most famous of the Apocrypha is the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, also called the *Acts of Pilate*. It is a most detailed account of Jesus before Pilate, full of minute particulars of the trial and crucifixion, written in a very vivid style. Nobody knows when it was written, or by whom, or which of the several manuscripts which have come down to us is the "genuine" one. It is found in Greek and in Latin, neither of which is, it is contended, "a translation nor an exact paraphrase of the other." It is very hostile to the Jews, who are more and more the villains of the piece; except, of course, some of them who are astonished at all the marvels attributed to Jesus. It is in this gospel that one gets a delightful account of Christ's descent into Hell, with vivid pictures of Satan and the Prince of Hell exactly as taught by Roman Catholics to this day. Jesus meets Beelzebub, and even Adam falls down and worships the "King of Glory."

It seems to me indisputable that "genuine" Christian teaching is formed more upon this kind of gospel than upon the "inspired" ones. Over and over again have I heard Christians, of the Roman, Anglican, Protestant and Bible varieties, declaim in almost the same language as is used in this *Gospel of Nicodemus*. I make bold to say, indeed, that taking the mass of Christians all over the world, what they believe can be proved far more easily from the Apocryphal Gospels than from the "canonical" ones. And it is strange, but true, that many of the incidents of the life of Jesus painted for the Church, three or four hundred years ago, by the great Italian masters, were actually taken from the Apocrypha.

The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is also a famous document, by no means to be airily dismissed as "apocryphal." The whole of Paul's Epistles are under suspicion; not even the "genuine" four, *Corinthians*, *Galatians*, and *Romans*, have escaped the ruthless analysis of modern critics. If, as Van Manen contends, all of Paul's Epistles are of second century origin, they are no more "genuine" documents than the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Even if the teaching part of the Epistles came from Paul, how much of the historical narrative can be classed as true? Most critics agree that *Paul and Thecla* is a very early document, but the story is full of marvellous events, and the Rev. Dr. Giles condemns it on that score as belonging "to the class of shameless fictions, by which the second and the following cen-

turies of our era are strongly marked." Shameless or not, it really is not more so than similar events described in the New Testament; and, as I have already intimated, had *Paul and Thecla* really been part of the "canon," Dr. Giles and other critics would have as vigorously defended it as they now condemn it. Space forbids giving extracts from its amusing recital, but these old writers certainly had the gift of narrative fiction. At the same time, I, for one, fail to see, if the story of Paul, as we know it, is true, why he should not have gone through the amazing adventures described with such gusto in this Apocryphal *Acts*.

Dr. Giles does not like the *Letters* which passed between Paul and Seneca; though he is by no means disinclined to believe these two did correspond. All he doubts is whether the *Letters* which we have are the genuine ones, as they seem to show "very low intellectual powers in the writers." But one might go right through the "inspired" and "uninspired" writings with much the same verdict. Is there a single Biblical critic at the present day prepared to claim that the New Testament as it stands is exactly as it came from its various authors' hands? Have the documents never been edited and re-edited? Never been tampered with?

Dr. Giles, in his *Christian Records*, carefully describes no fewer than seventy Apocryphal books, and he admits there are still a large number more. He mentions a contemporary Bishop, Dr. Browne, who said in one of his essays, when referring to the New Testament Apocrypha, "We know, *before we read them*, that they are weak, silly and profitless—that they are despicable monuments even of religious fiction." Dr. Giles' comment on this is that "it is a dangerous principle to admit, this judgment of books before they have been read, and only to be maintained, when others have read them, whose ability to discover and honestly to declare the truth, are acknowledged to be beyond a doubt." The truth is that Dr. Browne, like so many Christians, was clever enough to see it was very dangerous to put into the hands of the average Christian documents which were so uncomfortably like, and unlike, the New Testament. For the student of the origins of Christianity and the "inspired" gospels, there can be no more profitable way than a thorough examination of all the writings ascribed to the period of their foundation. Only in this way can it be seen under what surroundings and circumstances the history of the Christian Saviour God and his disciples came into being. And, in particular, should the "hostile" gospels, described by the Rev. S. Baring-Gould, be thoroughly studied. The simple, child-like story of "Our Lord," so easily understood by the veriest infant, will then look quite different.

Gradually the increasing pressure of the Free-thought attack has put the "scholarly" Christian on the defence. He is no longer pool-pooling it as ignorant. He is forced to make the most desperate efforts not only to save the "genuine" gospels, but even the historicity, not of the gospel, miracle-mongering Jesus, but of a "teaching" Jesus, of whom we know nothing, but who is the basis of the Saviour-God so long worshipped by credulous Christians.

The Roman Church long ago scented trouble when indiscriminate questioning of the Bible was permitted. It saw the disintegration of the "holy" documents, and the slow but sure sapping of credibility among the better-educated. That questioning of "divinity" was the beginning of the end; and the alarm is being spread over the whole of the Christian Church.

If the inevitable result of all this is a united Church against Free-thought, it behoves us all to keep our powder dry, and never to cease a relentless attack. And no better attack can be devised than one which destroys the very foundations of belief.

H. CUTNER.

Sedition

If any proof were needed that reaction is gaining rapidly in England, and that the results of Free-thought propaganda are not what they should be (if Free-thought has any relationship to everyday activity), it is to be found in the introduction of an "Incitement to Disaffection Bill" into the House of Commons.

The fact of such a Bill being able to come up for serious discussion, without the majority of English men and women being up in arms against it, is significant. It means that freedom of speech and action is not so secure in this "land of liberty" as so many upholders of democracy would have us believe. It means also that free speech exists mainly in abstraction, and such actual freedom of speech as we do possess can easily be taken away unless the "powers that be" are made to realize that the revolutionary spirit is not yet extinguished in England.

True, there have been numerous meetings called and held for the purpose of demanding the withdrawal of the Bill, and they have, in some respects, been well-attended. Taken, however, in relation to the population of a liberty-loving people, they have not been what they should be. There is still a great deal of work to be done if the Sedition Bill is soon to be dead and damned.

Obviously, the attempt to introduce such a Bill should be well nigh an impossibility if liberty were well and long established. The advent of Sir Thomas Inskip and his child of Fascism, should help Free-thinkers to realize the essential relationship between freedom of speech and action, and the general development of society, especially as regards industrial and commercial activity and economic power.

All the theoretical proof in the world for the right to liberty will not secure that liberty for everyone, while we support a system of society which depends upon the exploitation of the majority by the few. Such exploitation negates the attainment of the fullest possible liberty, and allows only as much as is required for Capitalist development. Hence a Sedition Bill to help to keep the reactionary section of the community in power. As a subtle means to oppression and repression, it would be hard to improve upon this Bill. It is at once definite and elusive in its terms.

It is definite inasmuch as there is no doubt concerning the power of the magistrates to convict on very slender evidence, or, indeed, on no evidence at all, unless the suspicion of a police officer not below the rank of an inspector is to be called evidence.

It is definite as to the right of magistrates to grant a search warrant on being "satisfied by information on oath, that there is reasonable ground for suspecting that an offence under this Act has been committed."

It is definite in its statement that any place mentioned in the warrant may be entered "if necessary by force," and at any time. No doubt a man returning from holiday may have the pleasure of finding his house has been broken into, seditious literature found therein, and the police ready to take him before the magistrates.

It is definite as to conviction, as a pair of magistrates who are capable of issuing a search warrant on suspicion are not likely to fail in the duty of convicting.

The Bill is elusive, as it does not define what "incitement to disaffection" means; nor does it define "maliciously and advisedly"; and "reasonable ground for suspecting" seems to mean nothing more than suspicion.

All these terms are left to be interpreted according to the tender mercy of the magistrates concerned. No indication is given as to what is seditious or seductive literature. Perhaps it would be easier to say what is not.

That there is no intention to make the Bill less elusive, from the standpoint of the possible victim, may be gathered from the remark of the Attorney-General on Mr. Dingle Foot's motion, that before they issue a warrant magistrates "shall be satisfied that one or more seditious documents has been sold, distributed or otherwise published."

This brought from the Attorney-General the profound statement that "the proposed safeguard would be no protection to anybody." (*News-Chronicle* report, June 27, 1934.)

From which we may form the conclusion that as far as the Attorney-General is concerned there is little likelihood of any safeguard being of any use to anybody. The Bill is intended to be a net that will catch as much as those who use it desire it to catch.

There is one very definite clause to which we may now revert. It is this: "the court dealing with the case may order any documents connected with the offence to be destroyed or dealt with in such other manner as may be specified in the order." (Sec. 3, sub-sec. iii.)

If there is anything that should cheer the heart of a Nazi we have it in this clause. From the destroying of literature away from the public sight, it is but a short distance to destruction by bon-fire in full view of the public. Surely those who took part in the burning of books, and pamphlets, etc., in Germany, will see, in the above quoted clause, an indication that their own methods will be copied in England. Sir Thomas Inskip, and his supporters, will be recognized as brethren of the Nazi fraternity.

It may be said that the operation of such a clause is bound to fail, so far as suppressing ideas is concerned, since it would have to be on too widespread a scale to be successful. Perhaps that is so, but the passing of such a clause in a modern Act of Parliament is an indication of the lengths to which our reactionary politicians and others will go, if once they get the opportunity.

Dealing with trials for treason and other political offences, in the time of Elizabeth, Hallam says: "I have found it impossible not to anticipate, in more places than one, some of those glaring transgressions of natural, as well as positive law, that rendered our courts of justice in cases of treason little better than the caverns of murderers; whoever was arraigned at the bar, was almost certain to meet a virulent prosecutor, a judge hardly distinguishable from the prosecutor except by his ermine, and a passive pusillanimous jury." (*Constitutional History of England*, Vol. I., p. 216, *Everyman* Ed.)

Are we not justified in concluding that, if the Incitement to Disaffection Bill becomes law, these words, written of the administration of law in the sixteenth century, will become applicable to the working of the sedition law of the present day? Once the downward track is taken in law, there is the possibility of barbarism being reached very rapidly,

unless a public opinion capable of acting as a sharp check is quickly created. This is true of English law, especially while we have a press that is only too prone to foster a panic-stricken state of mind in its readers.

(To be concluded.)

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.

A Hindu on Christianity and Mahomedanism

It is always good to read a new view of these religions, that is, a review of their merits and demerits by someone who is neither a follower of Jesus nor of Mahomed. Here are two books* by an Advocate of the High Court, Calcutta, and they show a wide and varied knowledge, not merely of these two religions, but generally of religion itself. Mr. Bose was seventy-eight years of age when he published his study of Christianity in 1929, and his other book followed two years later, and they both give evidence of deep pondering on the issues raised by Jesus and Mahomed in their respective religions. Mr. Bose, as befits an advocate, is always calm, cool, and dispassionate. He is severely analytical and does his best to be impartial, though he cannot refrain from comparing the claims of Christianity and Mahomedanism very often with those of Buddhism, Brahmanism, and Hinduism generally.

He is willing to accept the "official" records about Jesus as a base, and does not in his first book discuss much the question of the historicity of the so-called founder of Christianity. In his second book, however, he came across Edwin Johnson's *Rise of Christendom*—which he calls a "new" theory—and he also calls attention to another work by a Hindu, Chowdhurry's *In Search of Christianity*, in which the actual existence of Jesus was denied. Had he seen these two works when he wrote *Christianity*, Mr. Bose might have modified some of his statements.

But his books are both extremely valuable as a compendium of other authorities' opinions, and also as a very clear analysis of the Gospel narratives and the Koran. Mr. Bose does not hesitate to attack both Jesus and Mahomed when he feels they ought to be attacked, and he is equally fair in lavishing praise on their work or sayings when he thinks they deserve it. He admits that "religious bias, the strongest of all kinds of bias, makes men blind to truth and fairness," and works hard to avoid any bias on his own part. But Christianity as a whole appears a sorry mess when he has done with it.

Mr. Bose is also not blind to the good there is in Islam, and indeed, his book should be read by Freethinkers who know no more of this religion than they have picked up in works by Christian writers, the most bitterly hostile and prejudiced critics to whom one could go. Particularly should the chapter dealing with a comparison between the two religions be read.

Mr. Bose must be congratulated on the analysis of the two faiths, and the clear and coherent way in which he has carried out his work. It is no mean feat to write well in a foreign language, and it is a pity that both books cannot be sold in thousands among those "converts" in India who succumb to the wiles of missionaries. It is most unlikely that anyone, reading them, would ever believe either in Christianity or Mahomedanism.

H.C.

**Christianity. A Critical Study.* 3 Rs., *Mohamedanism*, 2.8 Rs., by Basanta Coomar Bose, M.A., B.L., Calcutta.

OUR TRAGEDY

The great tragedy of our age is that it finds so much merit in men whose chief virtue is opportunism, and whose principal aim is to flatter.

Fables for Freethinkers

I.—THE KING AND THE MAGIC ELIXIR

THERE was once a king who was always looking for some new thing, and whenever anyone came to his court with something quite new, that man was always sure of a cordial reception.

And one day there came a magician with a magic elixir which he had just made. It happened to be a Sunday, and the King was preparing to attend Church, where a great ceremony was to take place.

Nevertheless, he ordered the magician to be brought before him.

"What have you here?" said the King.

"An it please your Majesty," said the man, "I have a magic elixir."

"I have seen magic elixirs before," said the King, "and as a rule they are no use. They never do what their makers claim for them. What will your elixir do?"

"It will act so that whoever drinks it shall be able to tell whether those to whom he is speaking tell the truth or lies," said the magician.

"And how will it do that?" said the King.

"If a man tells a lie in your presence, after you have drunk of this elixir, your Majesty," said the magician, "he will at once become invisible."

"I will try your elixir," said the King. And he drank of it.

Then he summoned his Grand Vizier before him.

"Tell me," he said, "are my people happy?"

"Of course they are happy, your majesty," said the Grand Vizier, "how could they be aught else with you to rule over them?"

And the King looked again, and, lo, the Grand Vizier was nowhere to be seen. So he knew that the elixir was good.

But it was time for him to go to Church. The great edifice was full. All the great lords and ladies of the land were there, the bishops and clergy, and a mighty concourse of people. Soon there came the time for the Creed.

"I believe in God . . ." began the mighty congregation.

And the King rubbed his eyes. It seemed to him that he was alone in the Church!

JOHN ROWLAND.

Lines to a Catholic

SERENE and calm through all this world's mischances,
Smug, self-complacent, free from any doubt,
He goes his way rejoicing, and enhances
The fervour of his faith by words devout.
He talks of Truth, and Grace, and Revelation,
Of Heaven and an everlasting soul
Vouchsafed to us by that supreme oblation
Of self to Christ—this do, and be made whole.

Would that I had but half of his assurance
Of all the things which he proclaims are true;
What comfort in this brief material durance
To have eternal happiness in view;
To know that God exists—a personal Being
Supreme in power, all-merciful and wise;
To feel that all our troubles He is seeing—
A loving Father, who will heed our cries.

But no—to such as me it is not given
To understand the hidden springs of grace:
Did God give me my reason?—it has striven
In vain to see the light which shows His face.
Is it my own stupidity? I wonder,
Is it a kink that makes my brain connive?
Maybe 'tis so,—but still I sit and ponder;
One thing I know,—no more,—I am alive.

PETER TODD.

Correspondence

FREETHOUGHT IN POLITICS

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

A REJOINDER

SIR,—As I have been limited with regard to space, I cannot reply in detail to Mr. Taylor. Like many other Freethinkers, Mr. Taylor is greatly concerned about the Freethinker's task being that of defending "the natural right of free (*i.e.*, unrestrained) expression of opinion." This means we are to spend our time insisting that everyone shall have his say no matter what the changing conditions of society may demand in the way of action.

Except that as far as criticism is concerned we are to strive for a reasoned and, as far as possible, united front against religious teaching and activity as embodied in theological literature and church propaganda. Where social problems are concerned we must not aim at such a united front, in case it should lead to the formulation of any definite and scientific conclusions with regard to the building up of a new form of society which might upset certain members of the N.S.S.

All sorts of social theories are to be discussed, but if anyone insists that a certain scientific theory has been arrived at he must be told he has ceased to be a Freethinker. The Christian is to be shown that his theory of the universe is a fallacious one, and that the Atheistic interpretation is the only scientific one. That this latter view involves the fearless application of reason to social problems, even if it leads to Communism, is not to be mentioned.

In other words we must adopt a method—the application of reason or scientific thinking to everything—but we must be careful when we come to the question of reconstructing society. Then let us rationalize and put theories of reform which will enable us to keep the present form of society in existence.

Apply reason up to a point, then halt if you see that its full application by others results in the formulation of a revolutionary ideology. By all means let us have a method, but for god's sake do not apply it too much.

Tell the Christian that all his talk about the Christian way of living will never bring about a state of society in which everyone will be as happy as possible, but denounce the Communist if he points out that "Freethought" as advocated by the average Freethinker will never fundamentally alter society.

What, after all, is the value of Freethought if it is not going to lead to the adoption of a line of activity which will enable us to overthrow Capitalist society and build a better society? Must we go on Freethinking about social questions to no purpose?

I do not expect every Freethinker to become a Communist all at once. I ask him to take up the same critical attitude towards social reconstruction with a view to formulating a correct ideology for application, as he claims to do towards other problems.

I have *not* charged Freethinkers with being consciously reactionary just because they may not happen to be Communists but, (1) because of their uncritical attitude towards Communism, (2) because they talk of freedom as if it could be absolute, and (3) because they try to restrict the application of scientific thinking as far as social and economic questions are concerned, or (4) actually accept and propagate reactionary theories.

That I still claim to be a Freethinker while approving of the suppression of any attempts to counteract or destroy the work of building a Socialist (class-less) State by the Russian Proletarian Dictatorship, puzzles Mr. Taylor and others.

This is due to the habit of thinking of freedom of thought as an abstract proposition. If we had the conceivably fullest possible freedom of thought and action, under the present system of society, the question would be different.

Does a man cease to be a Freethinker on admitting the right of a proletarian dictatorship to suppress any attempt to put into action opinions directed against the construction of a Socialist state, if another man does

not cease to be a Freethinker when he advocates support of and the continuation of the present form of society with its concealed dictatorship?

Freedom to put thought into action will always have some restriction. It is the degree of restriction that matters; and merely discussing the question of freedom so as to give everybody a say will not bring about the *least possible restriction*. Under Capitalism the check upon activities in all walks of life has always been great, even when there has been considerable freedom of thought and speech.

We are fast losing all forms of freedom under Capitalism and will continue to do so. The process cannot be stopped by theoretical Freethought seeing that everyone has a chance to keep on speaking up. Capitalism came in by bourgeois revolution; there is every indication that it will only be destroyed by a proletarian revolution. That is why I plead with Freethinkers to take a fair but critical attitude towards Communism.

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.

[We regret that the editor's absence from London prevented Mr. Stafford's letter appearing in our last issue. The letter was sent to his private address, and was delayed in consequence.]

FREETHOUGHT AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

SIR,—With reference to Mr. Verney's letter published in the *Freethinker* of July 22, I have re-read my last letter with great care, and I am still at a loss to understand why he should think that I look upon him as wilfully blind or congenitally defective, especially as it is not my practice to hurl personalities at people merely because they do not happen to share my views. I have no objection to his wearing these unpleasant labels, if he insists, but I trust that he will not blame me for them.

I allow that he gave reasons for questioning Socialist principles, and I in turn gave reasons why I consider his arguments fallacious. These he has failed to answer.

In his letter he denies that he associates Labour policy with Bolshevism, and immediately does so in the next paragraph!

All Socialists agree that the workers throughout the world are fighting the same battle, that class barriers cut across national frontiers. Mr. Verney himself mentioned in his articles that a low standard of living among the workers of one country may adversely affect the standard in another country. But because Socialists feel that they should stand together against a common foe they do not infer that the same policy is applicable to Russia's uneducated peasantry, gripped for generations in the vice of a cruel autocracy, as is applicable in a country such as Britain, wherein democracy has been evolving for centuries. The Labour Party believes that it can achieve Socialism by appealing to the common sense of the electorate.

Mr. Verney's reference to the Socialist League's "policy of violence," shows the usual misunderstanding of S. L. resolutions. It is clearly necessary in formulating a policy to consider every possibility, and Mr. Verney will recognize that capitalism, with vast wealth at its disposal, may offer very determined resistance to the will of the electorate if the privileges which the capitalist class enjoys are threatened. Does he think that in this eventuality the majority should surrender to a militant minority?

Everybody who has heard Stafford Cripps speak knows that he has no ambitions as a dictator, and that it is because of his democratic principles that he so frequently attacks the "English Constitutional tradition"—with its class distinctions and anti-democratic Lords and Monarchy—which Mr. Verney holds sacred.

Socialists, like Freethinkers, have little respect for tradition. We judge things according to their value to society, not according to their antiquity. To us dictatorships of the left and of the right are almost equally intolerable, but Mr. Verney's tradition worship is even more obnoxious; it is a dictatorship of the dead.

H. T. BUCKLE.

Obituary

MAYNARD SHIPLEY

WE regret to report the death, in California, of Maynard Shipley, President of the Science League of America. He was born in 1873, and devoted his mature years to the teaching of Evolution, and to educating the public in the immediate implications of Science as opposed to the superstitions called religion. He was an outspoken Freethinker, and was cremated without any sort of ceremonial. His widow, the renowned writer, Miriam de Ford, believed as he did that "religion is the greatest enemy of human progress." Freethinkers in every land will sympathize with her in her (and our) great loss.

G.B.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN AND HACKNEY BRANCHES N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand) : 6.0, Mr. C. Tuson.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead) : Sunday, August 12, A Lecture. Highbury Corner, 8.0, A Lecture. Highbury Corner, Thursday, August 16, A Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Brockwell Park) : 7.30, Sunday, August 12, Mr. P. Goldman, Rushcroft Road, near Brixton Town Hall, 8.0, Tuesday, August 14, Mr. G. F. Green, Stonhouse Street, High Street, Clapham, 8.0, Wednesday, August 15, Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park) : 12.0, Sunday, Mr. W. B. Collins. 3.30, Platform No. 1, Messrs. Wood and Bryant. Platform No. 2, Messrs. Saphin and Tuson. 6.30, Platform No. 1, Messrs. Collins and Hyatt. Platform No. 2, Messrs. Saphin and others. Wednesday, 7.30, Two Lectures. Thursday, 7.30, Messrs. Wood and Saphin. Friday, 7.30, Two Lectures.

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

COUNTRY.

OUTDOOR.

BLYTH (Market Place) : 7.0, Monday, August 13, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

BOLTON BRANCH N.S.S. (Town Hall, Steps, Bolton) : 7.0, Mr. J. Clayton.

BURNLEY (Clifton Bowling Club) : 8.30, Friday, August 10, Mr. J. Clayton.

BURNLEY (Near Sports Ground, Barden Lane) : 8.30, Tuesday, August 14, Mr. J. Clayton.

CROOK (Market Place) : 7.0, Friday, August 14, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Dunne Square, Paisley) : 8.0, Saturday, August 11, Mrs. Whitefield—"Religion in Education." West Regent Street, 7.30, Sunday, August 12, Debate. Mrs. Whitefield and S. Bryson—"Is Religion a Human Asset?" "The Mound," Edinburgh : 7.30, Tuesday, August 14, Mrs. Whitefield—"The Evil Thou Doest." Excursion permitting). Literature on sale at all meetings.

RAMSBOTTOM MARKET : 3.30, Sunday, August 12, Mr. J. Clayton.

READ : 7.30, Monday, August 13, Mr. J. Clayton.

SEAHAM HARBOUR (Church Street) : 8.0, Saturday, August 11, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Would Have Memorial) : 7.0, Wednesday, August 15, Mr. A. Flanders.

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Gill Bridge Avenue, Sunderland) : 7.0, Mr. Allan Flanders—A Lecture.

TATFIELD (The Bridge) : 7.0, Sunday, August 12, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

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THE National Secular Society was founded in 1866 by Charles Bradlaugh. He remained its President until shortly before his death, and the N.S.S. has never ceased to live up to the tradition of "Thorough" which Bradlaugh by his life so brilliantly exemplified.

The N.S.S. is the only organization of militant Freethinkers in this country. It aims to bring into one body all those who believe the religions of the world to be based on error, and to be a source of injury to the best interests of Society. It claims that all political laws and moral rules should be based upon purely secular considerations. It is without sectarian aims or party affiliations.

If you appreciate the work that Bradlaugh did, if you admire the ideals for which he lived and fought, it is not enough merely to admire. The need for action and combined effort is as great to-day as ever. You can best help by filling up the attached form and joining the Society founded by Bradlaugh.

PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTS.

SECULARISM teaches that conduct should be based on reason and knowledge. It knows nothing of livine guidance or interference; it excludes super-natural hopes and fears; it regards happiness as man's proper aim, and utility as his moral guide.

Secularism affirms that Progress is only possible through Liberty, which is at once a right and a duty; and therefore seeks to remove every barrier to the fullest equal freedom of thought, action, and speech.

Secularism declares that theology is condemned by reason as superstitious, and by experience as mischievous, and assails it as the historic enemy of Progress.

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